

Oblates of St Gregory the Great and St Frances of Rome.

Meeting Saturday 20th May 2023

On a glorious Spring morning we convened at the Downside Visitor Centre for coffee, ably brewed by our Oblate Master, Dom James Hood OSB. Twelve of us were in person and one online for the morning.

Gathered into plenary meeting we started with prayer, moving directly into a brief catch-up. Our first session was *Lectio Divina*, using the Gospel for the 7th Sunday of Easter – John 17: 1-11. Oblates contributed many general and personal insights to compliment Dom James's exegesis. A truly uplifting liturgy and discussion.

We then turned to the Rule and took turns to read Chapter 4, verses 22-43 of the Rule of St Benedict – *Christian and Monastic Guidelines*. These challenging aphorisms draw on more ancient texts and look back to the Ten Commandments. They provide a framework for Oblate life and have been adopted by some secular institutions. One Oblate mused informally on the effect they could have on the body politic. They range from the most daunting: love your enemies to what appears to be the mundane: don't be a murmurer. However, excessive murmuring might breed enmity.

We moved to the monks' cemetery to pray for the souls of departed brethren, former Oblate Masters especially, The previous Monday, 15th, was the 80th anniversary of the aeroplane crash on the cricket field. A ceremony of remembrance for the boys and pilot had just finished. Some survivors of that terrible afternoon had been present. We prayed for them all.

Midday Office was said and sung by us in the Abbey Church.

Lunch was then taken – alfresco for some.

Our afternoon session comprised a meditation on the Psalms and their incorporation into prayer; indeed, they are prayers themselves. The theme was *Desire for God*. The final period was receiving homework: scripture pieces chosen by Dom James for us to meditate on between Ascension and Pentecost.

After a short spell of planning, and a report on the Community (which included the challenging issue of artificial intelligence and possible impacts on monastic and priestly life, not to mention education) we closed with final prayers. We sensed that the Holy Spirit had been, and was still, among us.

Our thanks to Dom James for his assiduous preparation and to Mrs Allyson Jones for keeping us in order by her careful administration.

Timothy Chambers

St Rita of Cascia 2023