

Oblates of St Gregory the Great and St Frances of Rome Meeting Saturday 22nd July 2023

Despite the inclement weather, twelve of us gathered and were warmly welcomed by our oblate master, Dom James Hood, at the Visitor Centre. We welcomed Harry from St Benedict's Parish who joined us for the first time to observe. We received apologies from Carlotta, Tim and Duncan; Duncan and Edward tried to join us online. We prayed for our absent brethren.

Our meeting began in prayer; Fr James then led us in Lectio Divina, listening to the Gospel for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary time, Matthew 13: 24-43, and reflecting and discussing the parables of the darnel and the wheat, the mustard seed and the yeast. We spoke about the challenges of recognising the darnel in our own lives and our responsibility to grow alongside others who are struggling in life but at the same time recognising that it is God alone who judges at the harvest and the end of time.

The remainder of the morning was spent reflecting on some chapters and key themes in the Rule of St Benedict.

In the *Prologue* St Benedict sets out the themes that run through the Rule: responding to God's call, listening, prayer, being a workman for the Lord, and having the Gospel as our guide in following Christ.

In the penultimate chapter, *The Good Zeal that Monks ought to have*, St Benedict summarizes the key themes of the rule: patience, respect for others, mutual obedience, not aiming for one's own good but the good of others.

Chapter 4 – *The Tools of Good Works*- is a long chapter that can seem to be just a list of Dos and Don'ts, but it's a guide for Christian living that can be usefully used for sacramental examination of conscience.

Chapter 7 on *Humility* is the longest chapter. Here St Benedict sets out his teaching: the monk's relationship with God – a sense of awe- and living in the presence of God. The final steps of humility are about the relationship the monk is called to have with his brethren.

Chapter 3 – *Calling the Brethren for Consultation*- we see the heart of St Benedict's teaching of the importance of listening to one another. Fr James spoke about Pope Francis and synodality.

Chapters on Prayer – 8 -to 20. In Chapters 8 to 18 St Benedict lays out the ordering of the Divine Office. In the two chapters, 19 and 20, that conclude this section on prayer, we're told of the importance of reverence and being in the presence of God.

The Abbot. There are two specific chapters, 2 and 64 on the Abbot, but we reflected on chapter 27 – *The Abbot's care for the Excommunicated*. The Abbot discreetly enlists the assistance of a wise monk – *senpectae*- to assist him. At the same time he uses the skills of a physician and a shepherd.

Chapter 31 – *What Kind of Man the Cellarer of the Monastery should be*. St Benedict gives us the job description of the monk who is in charge of the temporalities of the monastery but at the same it is a picture of the mature wise monk: responsible, not proud, caring for others, not someone who puts others down.

We broke off for Midday Prayer in the Abbey Church and a sandwich lunch.

Future meetings – Retreat at Buckfast Abbey with the Buckfast Oblates – Thursday 28th September to Saturday 30th.

Meeting at the end of November or early December.

It was suggested that we might start our next meeting at 9.45 with the mass in the Abbey Church.

Tina reminded us that she would be attending the International Oblates' Congress at Sant' Anselmo, Rome in September.

We concluded our meeting with a prayer.

Tina Quinn
Oblate