

Oblates of St Gregory the Great and St Frances of Rome Meeting Saturday 10th February 2024

Following the success of the December meeting, we once again gathered in St Benedict's Church and Hall, starting our day with mass. The meeting appropriately coincided with the feast of St Scholastica, the sister of St Benedict. What we know of St Scholastica is drawn from the Dialogues of St Gregory the Great where we read of the meeting of brother and sister a few days before Scholastica's death. The mass was celebrated by Fr James, with Fr Duncan concelebrating and preaching, and with Deacon Richard acting as deacon. We were moved by Fr Duncan's powerful words on love as we reflected on the short reading from the Song of Songs and on prayer and hospitality from St Luke's gospel on Martha and Mary.

After coffee, the meeting began with *lectio divina*, praying and meditating on Sunday's gospel reading from St Mark, the Cure of the Leper. We encountered a compassionate Jesus who was prepared to break all taboos and reach out, touch and cure the sick man.

Following on from Tina's participation at the Oblates' Congress in Rome and the hospitality she encountered from the Abbot Primate and others, our theme for our meeting was Hospitality. Parts of chapters 5 and 6 from St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, alongside with parts of Chapter 53 from the Rule – The Reception of Guests and Chapter 66 – The Porter of the Monastery, guided our deliberations. As disciples of Jesus, we're called to bring to others with joy God's gift of love. St Benedict tells us that any guest who arrives in the monastery should be received as Christ himself. He emphasizes the warm reception that should be given to the poor and pilgrims as well as suggesting a particular ritual that the abbot and community should follow in the welcome of guests, namely washing the hands and feet of guests, as a way of seeing Christ in all. A mature and wise monk should be available at the door of the monastery to welcome those who arrive.

Before lunch we gathered in the church to pray the Midday Prayer. Once again, we enjoyed a relaxed and convivial lunch. Thanks to all who assisted in purchasing the food and preparing it. During the break some oblates wandered up to the cemetery to pray for the dead of the monastic community. In the final part of the meeting we discussed events over the coming months, as well as the liturgical season of Lent. Fr James distributed a sheet with some notes and the list of the readings for the Sundays in Lent.

May the Sacred season of Lent be a time of renewal for all.

Dom James Hood
Oblate Master