

Oblates of St Gregory the Great and St Frances of Rome Meeting Saturday 9th December 2023

Our Advent meeting took place in St Benedict's Church and Hall, starting at 10.00 with mass in the Church. The mass was celebrated by Fr James, with Fr Duncan concelebrating; Deacon Richard preached. We were reminded of our mission as Christians, Catholics and Oblates to evangelize and not to be afraid to wear our faith on our sleeves: to be proud to be oblates.

After coffee in the hall, we began with *lectio divina*, meditating on the gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent- Mark 1:1 -8. John the Baptist is one of the special characters of Advent. We see him preparing a community for the Messiah. At a point by the River Jordan, John button-holes merchants, travellers and tourists and warns them to change their ways before it's too late. John wanted a community that was determined to change, to take a different direction.

We read and discussed Chapter 57 of the Rule of St Benedict – *Members of the Community with creative gifts*. St Benedict recognizes that each person brings to the Community his / her gifts: these gifts are to be used with generosity and love: they are for the good of the whole community.

Tina had attended the International Congress of Oblates at Sant Anselmo College in Rome; she shared her experiences. The English Benedictine monasteries were represented by Fr Chad Bolton from Ampleforth Abbey accompanied by two oblates, two oblates from Douai Abbey, and Tina, an Oblate of St Gregory's.

Tina shared her positive experience and emphasized Abbot Primate Gregory Polan's warm and caring hospitality. During the week he found time to speak individually with all the participants. The week was planned carefully: the watch word being balance. There were three days out: visits to Monte Cassino, Subiaco and the City of Rome that gave the participants the chance to relax between the days with the keynote talks and the workshops:

- *Exploring Formation needs for the future*
- *Living out our Oblate calling*
- *Expanding the mission of the monasteries that we serve*

Tina summarized some of the important points from the talks and workshops, looking at the different models of formation and the four pillars of oblate formation. On one of the outings, the oblates enjoyed a private audience with the Pope. We were all particularly appreciative of Tina's presentation. In the coming months, we hope to use the materials during our discussions, focussing on *Formation and Mission*.

At the end of the morning, we broke off to pray the Midday Office in the Church and all renewed their Oblation; we welcomed Anthony and admitted him as a candidate into his probationary year.

A convivial lunch was enjoyed by all – thanks to all who helped. In our afternoon season we reflected briefly on the season of Advent and arranged to meet again on 10th February before Lent. Some visited the Monks' Cemetery and tried to visit the Abbey Church.

Dom James Hood
Oblate Master