

Monthly Oblate Reflection – December 2011

Crossroads

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Do not wish to be called holy before you are; first be holy that you more truly be said to be so. RB 4:62

As I begin this writing with a quote of what Benedict says about holiness, I find this to be a daily reflection that reminds me of the importance of becoming holy. What seems very relevant in our monastic life each day is the position we hold at the crossroad of monasticism and society. Benedict advises us to make ourselves “strangers to the city.” How are we to live morally and spiritually apart from a society whose lifestyles, choices, politics or theology is separate from ours?

Michael Casey writes that Benedict calls us to first and foremost become what we are meant to be. To embrace our Benedictine identity, and to assert our distinctiveness in respect of “this age” as we journey along the edge of society. For the most part we do not choose those among whom we live.

I think St. Aelred provides a reflective perspective of how we live as Benedictines in this age, taking as his starting point the text of Isa. 11:6, about the wolf and the lamb.

“Consider how God has gathered us together from vastly different regions and from different lifestyles. One of you was like a lion, which despised others and thought himself better than them because of his pride and riches. Another was like a wolf, which lived from robbery, whose only interest was to steal the property of others. A leopard is an animal marked by variety; such were some who lived by their wits, through deception and fraud. Furthermore, there were many in this world who were foul because of their sexual sins. Such as these were like goats-because goats are foul animals. There were some who lived innocent lives; they may well be compared to lambs. There were others who were like sheep because they lived a simple life. Look now and see with how much harmony and peace God has gathered all these into one common life. Here the wolf lives with the lamb; he eats and drinks with the lamb and does him no harm, but loves him greatly.”

Unity does not derive from a common background, it comes from an act of will by which each renounces individualism and strives to live in peace. It would be most desirable to live amid a cloud of holy witnesses, but too often familiarity breeds contempt. It takes a simple eye and a pure heart to perceive the holiness of the rough diamonds among whom we live. At the same time we have a need for models. Meeting the great figures of our tradition and learning from their writings can be a great source of inspiration and encouragement; sometimes we can get to the point of feeling a certain friendship with them and a reliance on their intercession for us as we still struggle on the same road that led them, by God’s grace, to glory.

*Excerpts taken from Michael Casey's "Stranger to the City"; Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict.