

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Some of you may know that I am a Benedictine Oblate—an oblate is part of the extended family of Benedictine monks and nuns. Like third order Franciscans and Dominicans, a Benedictine oblate seeks to follow the Lord in the path of their preferred religious founder. I was inspired by the life and witness of St Benedict and his monks a long time ago and have sought to follow in his path of spirituality for many years. Part of this calling is to make an annual retreat at the monastery or convent where one has their oblation, and to further the work and witness of the Benedictines in the world. As a married priest it is also part of this call to live out the Benedictine vows in an informal way in my pattern of life.

Over the years I have found the three Benedictine vows to be a great source of strength and guidance in the spiritual life, and over the next couple of weeks in my pastor's letter I would like to share these three vows with you in hopes that they might also be a source to strengthen and deepen your spiritual life and that of your families.

Many people are familiar with the vows taken by Franciscans. They are vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The Benedictine vows are drawn from St Benedict's famous Rule and are somewhat different. Benedictines take solemn vows of obedience, stability and conversion of life—and while lay people and oblates do not take solemn vows as such, the vows do serve to enlighten and guide our spiritual lives.

The first vow is that of obedience. Obedience is not a popular idea in our age of individualism, but for any serious Christian obedience is paramount. The monk or nun vows obedience to their superior—an abbot or abbess, so who should we obey? First, we obey the Lord and follow his teachings revealed through the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of our Catholic Church.

I should stress that we are *not* called to blind or robotic obedience. The root word of "obedience" is the Latin *obedere* which means "to listen". Real obedience means first of all, listening closely to the command in order to understand it so we can obey with a pure heart and fully engaged will. Obedience is vital for a spiritual life because so often the Lord's commands run counter to our natural inclinations. Only when we've learned obedience can we truly say to the Lord, "Thy will be done."

Obedience filters down to our families by the example parents set. You have heard me recount many times how the obedience of my Christian parents in the area of stewardship has set an example for my own life. If Dad put his money where his mouth was and was a faithful, generous giver to the Lord's work, it was possible for me to walk in the ways of obedience too. When children see their parents and elders taking the call to obedience seriously, they learn the same virtue because guess what? Your kids will do what you do—even if they don't do what you say!

Next week we will consider the vow of stability.

PS: Two of my books are on the Benedictine Way: *Listen My Son: St. Benedict for Fathers* applies the Rule of St. Benedict to family life and *St. Benedict and St. Therese—The Little Rule and the Little Way* is a look at St. Benedict and his rule compared to St. Therese of Lisieux. Remember all my books are available at the parish office at a special OLR parishioner rate.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker