

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last week I was on retreat at St. Joseph Abbey in Covington, Louisiana. Many of you will remember our young Facilities Manager, Philip Gordy who is now a monk of St. Joseph Abbey with the new name Brother Lazarus.

Brother Lazarus is in charge of the Oblate program at the abbey and he invited me to deliver two talks to the oblates. I took the opportunity to talk about the balance of the Benedictine life which is rooted in St. Benedict's key principles. Benedict's principles for a good and balanced life are enshrined in the three vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life.

Stability means being rooted. The Benedictine monk or nun promises to stay committed to his or her monastic community for life. We need this kind of commitment in our marriages and in our communities. Too often people are not willing to persevere. When things get rough, people bail. Stability means getting stuck in and not giving up on a particular community or commitment. Stability means we find God and happiness right where we are, and if we can't find him there, we won't find him anywhere.

Obedience seems a harsh word in a society where individualism rules and the pursuit of pleasure seems to be the only guiding principle. However, the root of the word "obey" means "to listen." True obedience means listening to others with patience and a deep level of understanding. The obedient person is always alert to the spoken and unspoken needs of those around them. Obedience builds peace and understanding in communities. Obedience is vital for the virtuous life to prosper, and it is absolutely vital for the spiritual life to prosper.

Conversion of Life is the dynamic vow. The person who seeks conversion of life is always looking for a new way to experience life. This principle does not just mean being converted in the religious sense. It is a way of looking at life that is creative, optimistic, and positive. It sees possibilities, not problems. It gives people the benefit of the doubt. It is always seeking to convert the difficulties of life into opportunities for growth. The person who vows to follow conversion of life wants not only religious conversion. He wants to be totally converted as a person and then to convert the whole world from death and despair to new life and hope.

These three principles are not just for monks and nuns. They can be applied to our families, our businesses, our schools, parishes and local communities for our blessing, our prosperity and our growth in grace.

Your pastor,
Fr. Longenecker