

THIRD WORLD CONGRESS of BENEDICTINE OBLATES

Of every tongue, color and nation, 156 delegates attended the "Third World Congress of Oblates of St. Benedict." They represented 50 different countries and met from October 4-10, 2013 at the Salesianum, a place run by the Don Bosco Fathers.

At the opening, the National Coordinator of Oblates in Italy, Romina Urbanetti, warmly welcomed the Delegates to her country. This was followed by the official opening of the Congress by Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, OSB who has been the moving spirit behind this Congress and the past ones.



with Fr. Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, OSB

The aim of the Congress, in this age of inter-connectedness, is to deepen the contacts among the Oblates worldwide in a spirit of mutual exchange and encounter -- amidst the cultural differences and the rich Benedictine experience as laymen and women in the world today. Early on, the Abbot Primate spoke of the idea to "streamline the world of Oblates and "to make Oblates living bridges of spirituality and culture".

THE MAIN TALKS

The two main speakers, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB of the Philippines and Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO of Tarrawara Abbey of Victoria, Australia dealt with the theme of the Congress: "OBSULTA – Oblates Listening in the World."



Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, Speaker

Here, briefly a few points. Sr. Mary John, whose input was on "Listen with the Ear of Your Heart", spoke on touched on the attitude of listening in prayer, "we listen with the ear

of our heart to the message that God may be sending us through the words" when we read the Scriptures or the Holy Rule. She shared with the delegates the factors conducive to listening in prayer such as silence and solitude. The kind of listening: not a passive one but an active engagement with the words we read. Quoting J. Grosse, she pointed out "one of the major obstacles to such listening is either the conscious or unconscious aversion that many people have to silence. We live in an age where we are bombarded by constant noise"

True listening will lead to conversion, and this conversion of heart will enable us to listen to and hear the voices of the people of God: the poor; migrants and refugees; women; indigenous people; the aged and the physically challenged; the ostracized; the "groaning of mother earth", etc. How to respond to these various challenges of our times? Engage in prophetic action for ecological education and conscientization, solidarity with the IPs in their struggle for their rights to land, belief, culture; work for the empowerment of women; avoid forms of discrimination, etc.

In conclusion to her rousing talk, Sr. Mary John came up with this meaning of our Benedictine ORA ET LABORA: "Mystics are prophets in contemplation and prophets are mystics in action."

In FR. MICHAEL CASEY, OCSO's talk "The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us", he explained how, "in a certain sense the Word became text and dwelt among us. For by the power of the Holy Spirit a potent remembrance of the Word was created which could be handed on from generation to generation -- first orally and then in writing.



The Philippine Oblates with Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO, Speaker

God's life-giving Word underwent a further emptying (or kenosis) and presents itself through marks on a page; sacred words received, handed on, interpreted, translated ... but still mysteriously mediating the power of the HS to bring dead letters and dead souls to life."

The reading of these words becomes *lectio divina* through the operation of the HS experience in us as the gift of

faith....This fundamental gift of grace passes through 5 stages before it becomes complete:

1. **Experience** – we experience the affective power in these written words and it has a powerful impact on us;
2. **Enlightenment** – our eyes are opened and we catch a glimpse of the glory of the spiritual world;
3. **Assent** – we say "Amen" to God, and to all that God's providence has arranged. *This is the central and essential moment of faith.*
4. **Practice** – we try to translate what we have seen on the mountain into everyday action. We become what we read. Enlightened and accepted faith becomes practice.
5. **Perseverance** – faith means fidelity; only that faith is authentic that is characterized by perseverance.

Further, Fr. Casey pointed out how the faith-filled reading of God's Word (*Lectio Divina*) is the foundation and support of our whole spiritual life. The practice of *lectio divina* is a signature activity emanating from the Rule of Benedict. *Lectio* is the heart and soul of Benedictine spirituality, though not exclusively so.

There is a quasi-sacramental aspect to *lectio divina* -- it is a salvific encounter with the Word, in which God is the principal agent. When we enter the sacred space of *lectio divina*, the Word becomes flesh again, our Emmanuel, dwelling with us in our space and time, speaking to us, energising us.

The attitude we need in *lectio*: Benedictine tradition speaks of diligence, (*diligentia*), solicitude (*solicitude*), etc. We need to be alert and attentive to catch every nuance of the inspired word.... Listen! Allow ourselves to be surprised so that our lives can be transformed and "evangelized."

A challenge in our technological age: become prophetic by reversing the most serious problem of our time, the "globalization of superficiality." (A. Nicolas)... compare the hours spent each week with radio, TV, internet, and social networking with the hours spent weekly in *lectio divina*. Which of these sources of formation has the greater influence on our thoughts and conduct? *Lectio divina* does not merely **inform**; it seeks to **reform** so as to **conform** to Christ.

For their part, the Oblates worked on 4 topics in groups: 1) the Rule of Benedict with focus on silence and the Benedictine principle of *ora et labora*; 2) the Oblates' relationship with the Monastery; 3) Living Our Oblation – modelled on Christ's self-giving and making one's oblation fruitful in family life, at work, in the parish, in the socio-political-inter-religious spheres; 4) "Obsculta" (listening) – silence as a prerequisite for listening – we need to listen to others, to life, to the word of God.

Fr. Pambo Martin's thoughts on listening further enriched the topic of the congress. He spoke of the need to *Listening* in order to fruitfully fulfill one's mission as an Oblate. He

challenged the delegates to infuse our social, economic, political and entire human life with Gospel / spiritual values. Using imagery, he described listening as the key to obedience; mutual understanding; mutual respect and tolerance. "Obsculta!" We need to listen in silence to God's will, to the Word of God, to the world around us and respond to the sufferings and cries of people. This listening which opens a door to the practice of all other virtues, should lead to the Oblates' prophetic / concrete action in the world they live in.

The Congress came to a happy conclusion with the Coordinators of the different countries meeting with the Abbot Primate regarding the planning of the next World Congress of Oblates.

By: Sr. Pia Lansang, OSB