



# Oblate Letter

## The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31

By Sr. Christine Ereiser, O.S.B. (from a talk addressed to the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women)

As we are gathered here today to honor our Women of Achievement, I thought it might be an appropriate time to reflect on the characteristics of the Virtuous Woman as she is presented in Proverbs 31: 10 – 31, The New American Bible.

As the text is written, it refers to a worthy wife, which was the goal and ideal state for women in the Hebrew Scriptures. As you read the text, think about how some of these characteristics can be interpreted to fit our day. As you read the passage, stop when a word or phrase catches your imagination and stay with that. Take a short time of silence following the reading for you to reflect on how the passage speaks to your heart.

What came to your mind as you read? Which words or phrases captured your attention or imagination?

Who comes to your mind as you think about the virtuous woman? Your mother? Sister? Neighbor? Yourself? I think we each know someone who was for us an ideal virtuous woman. Someone who maybe mentored us or who we held as a role model for ourselves... Keep those words and women in mind as we move on.

I would like to spend some time with a few of the characteristics from this rather long passage and to present some virtuous women whose lives illustrate these characteristics or virtues. (Virtuous, according to the dictionary, means "having or exhibiting virtue, morally excellent.")

Of course as we think about virtuous women, we think first of our Blessed Mother. She embodied all the traits, characteristics and virtues of the woman in Proverbs. Because we know her and her life so well, we can think immediately of the many ways she lived this passage. As we look at various holy women, we keep her uppermost in our minds as the most virtuous and holy of women.

In preparing for this presentation, I referenced The Amplified Bible's translation of the Proverbs text. This translation is not approved for liturgical use in the Church, but it does give shades of meanings of the original text which can be helpful for those of us who haven't learned ancient biblical languages.

In the beginning verse (verse 10) we read, "When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls." The Amplified gives us these words: "A capable, intelligent, and virtuous woman—who is he who can find her? She is far more precious than jewels and her value is far above rubies or pearls."

"A worthy wife: capable, intelligent and virtuous."

Saint Paula lived from 347 – 404. She was from a wealthy Roman family. Her husband died when she was 32. She was bereft, as you can imagine. She committed herself to Christ and to serving Him. She and another widow, St. Marcella, developed a sort of early religious community – women of means who were free to study and pray daily. They made the acquaintance of St. Jerome. I don't know how many of you are familiar with Jerome – he translated the original Scripture into Latin. He had quite a difficult personality, according to most all accounts. He left Rome for the Holy Land and Paula and her daughter followed him to Bethlehem. Paula used her money to establish two early monastic communities with Jerome – one for men, one for women. Paula oversaw the women's community, but her primary work was assisting Jerome with his work of translation.

St. Melainia the Younger (383 -439) was also the daughter of a wealthy Roman family. She was to have many roles in her life: wife, mother; monk and hermit; pilgrim and spiritual director. After the death of two babies, Melainia and her husband divested themselves of their holdings and Melainia convinced her husband and her widowed mother to follow a life of prayer and good works. When Rome was invaded by the Goths in

406, the three of them fled to North Africa, where they came to know St. Augustine. Melainia also founded two monasteries and lived with the women's community, supporting herself by transcribing manuscripts with her knowledge of Latin and Greek. Still Later Melainia and her husband and mother moved to Jerusalem. She became acquainted with St. Paula and St. Jerome. St. Paula died in 404 and Melainia in 439.

Capable. Intelligent. Virtuous.

The next characteristic we'll look at is from verse 12 of our text: "She brings [him] good, and not evil, all the days of her life." And, "She comforts, encourages, and does [him] only good as long as there is life within her."

Comforts and encourages.

*Maura Clarke and Companions, Martyrs of El Salvador*

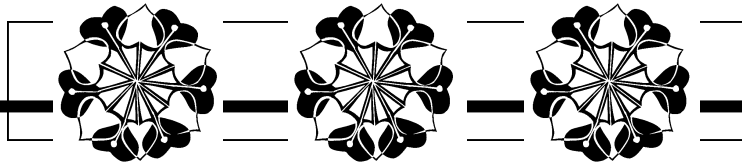
Most of us probably remember the names of Sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and laywoman Jean Donovan. They were martyred in 1980 in El Salvador during that country's brutal civil war. While politics was obviously the main factor in their deaths, they themselves were not activists in the way we might typically think. They were working to support the local Salvadoran Church: ministering to refugees, assisting priests who were on the run, offering solace to catechists who were often afraid in isolated and remote areas.

Their deaths were and are shocking. Theirs was a different kind of martyrdom – their murderers called themselves Christian. The women died as not only martyrs for the faith but also as martyrs of the poor – for living with and clinging to the poor, as Jesus did.

Now from verse 18: "She enjoys the success of her dealings; at night her lamp is undimmed." And, "She tastes and sees that her gain from work [with and for God] is good; her lamp goes not out, but it burns on continually through the night [of trouble, privation, or

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**April 8th**  
**Feast of**  
**St. Julia Billiard**  
Feast day of  
Sr. Julia Marie Roy

**April 18th**  
**Oblate Retreat with**  
**Abbot Marcel Rooney**

**April 23rd**  
**Feast of St. Adelbert,**  
**Bishop and Martyr**

**April 29th**  
**Feast of St. Catherine**  
**of Siena**  
Feast day of  
Sr. Catherine Martinez



*Please keep all of the Sisters  
in your prayers  
as they do for you.*



## No Oblate Meeting in April

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming  
**Oblate Retreat** conducted by **Abbot Marcel Rooney:**  
**"Prayer and the Rule of Benedict"**

*Benedictine Spirituality and the Spirit of Prayer,*  
*both Liturgical and Private*  
to be held on

**Saturday, April 18th**  
from 9:00 a.m.—3:00 pm  
at

**St. Joseph Monastery**  
2200 South Lewis Avenue  
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74114

**Registration is due by Friday, April 10th.** The cost is **\$15.00** which  
includes lunch. Please make checks payable to:  
**Benedictine Sisters.** Dress is casual.  
Please call **Vicky at 918-746-4223** to register.



### *Benedictine Spirituality Classes*

*Thursday, April 16th—7:00 pm*

*Thursday, April 23rd—7:00 pm*

*Thursday, April 30th—7:00 pm*

*Thursday, May 7th—7:00 pm*

*The topic for all classes will be, The*  
*Tools of Good Works, from the*  
*chapter in The Rule of Benedict.*

*This will enable us to go*  
*into more depth.*

*In the St. Joseph Monastery Library*

*2200 S. Lewis Ave.,*

*Tulsa, OK 74114*

*There is no charge for these classes*

*but registration is required by calling*

*Vicky O'Neil at 918-746-4223*



**\*\*There will be no Oblate meetings in**  
**April or May due to Easter and**  
**Mother's Day. There will be no news-**  
**letter in May. The next Oblate meeting**  
**will be Sunday, June 14th.\*\***

### **Institute for Benedictine** **Oblates** **July 16-19, 2009**

The second annual **Institute for**  
**Benedictine Oblates** will be held at  
Sophia Center, a ministry of the  
Benedictine Sisters of  
Mount St. Scholastica in  
Atchison, KS.

Along with keynote speaker  
**Abbot Jerome Kodell**

of Subiaco, AR, there will be other  
presentations and activities and an  
opportunity for Oblates to network  
with one another and enrich their  
monastic formation. More information  
will be forthcoming at:

[www.mountosb.org/sophia.html](http://www.mountosb.org/sophia.html).

To be placed on the mailing list for  
the program, contact:

**sophia @ mountosb.org**  
or call (913) 360-6173.



## Prayer Intentions:

**We pray for the repose of the soul of:**

Virginia Casebeer, Oblate

**We pray for abundant healing of:**

Cathy Carter, Oblate, and her son

Bob Sokolosky,  
*brother of Sr. Veronica Sokolosky*

Rachael Vincent,  
*daughter of Dean Wersal, Oblate*



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sorrow, warning away fear, doubt, and distrust].”

Kathe Kollwitz lived in Berlin most of her life (1867 – 1945). She was an artist and she married a doctor who practiced in a working-class area of the city. She used her husband’s patients and their life experiences as models for her drawings. Many of her pieces depicted mothers and children – aspects of maternal love – as well as protection of the young from harm. Her son, Peter, was killed in the First World War and his death crippled her ability to work for a long time. Her grief was eventually transformed into a commitment to peace and a struggle against all causes of war. She became a “resolute pacifist.” Kathe resumed her art work, but it now depicted her conscience. She designed a war memorial statue entitled “Mourning Parents” which clearly showed her own grief and her husband’s, as well.

Her work was banned as the Nazis came to power, but she continued to draw. Her grandson was killed in the Second World War. When asked if she was a pacifist, she replied, “Yes, if you understand by pacifism more than just antiwar. It is a new idea – that of the brotherhood of man.”

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini was born in 1850 in Italy. Not accepted by religious communities due to health problems, Frances founded her own community, open to women, like herself, who were not accepted by other communities. The Pope (Pope Leo XIII) was impressed with her skill and her zeal and sent Frances and seven of her sisters to the U.S. to minister

to Italian immigrants who spoke no English and could not communicate with their pastors (either Irish or German) and had no means for religious education for their children.

Frances and her sisters arrived in New York only to be told by the priest who met them that he had no funding for them and that they should return to Italy immediately. Frances was undaunted and she went begging until she could open a house for her sisters. They went to great lengths to minister to the Italian people in this country – by hitching rides on vegetable carts to get to them, by going down into the coal mines to visit the miners and bring them news of their families. Food and money would appear miraculously when needed.

“...her lamp goes not out, but it burns on continually through the night [of trouble, privation, or sorrow, warning away fear, doubt, and distrust].”

From verse 20, “She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy.” “She opens her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her filled hands to the needy [whether in body, mind, or spirit].”

While Mev Puleo (born in 1963) was a college student at St. Louis University, she worked at the St. Louis Catholic Worker House, where she was touched by the suffering of the poor. In her study of theology, she realized the need for a theology that would touch hearts as well as intellects. Using her gift of photography, she documented the life of the poor in Brazil, Haiti, El Salvador and other Third World countries. She said, “The camera lens is the eye of my soul, through which I touch the world and the world touches me.” Her photographs were widely published in the religious press.

Mev died at the age of 32, in 1996. Her good friend, Father John Kavanaugh said of her, “She had wanted to give the poor a face, a voice. She always wanted to be identified with them. And so it came to pass: by the time of her last days, you could see them all in her face – the poor of Bosnia, the hungry of Haiti, the powerless of Brazil. She who gave them voice, lost hers. She, who helped us see their faces, could finally see no more... She became the poor she loved.”

Margaret, Queen of Scotland, (1046 – 1093) was famous for her love of the poor. She spent much of her own time attending personally to the poor who were sick. Each night she invited several dozen beggars to her table and she always served her guests and washed their feet before taking her own meal. During Advent and Lent the royal dining hall was filled with 300 poor men and women.

St. Margaret died at the age of 47, shortly after learning that her husband and son were killed in battle. When she learned of their deaths she exclaimed, “I thank thee, Almighty God, that in sending me so great an affliction in the last hour of my life, thou wouldst purify me from my sins, as I hope, by thy mercy.”

“She opens her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her filled hands to the needy [whether in body, mind, or spirit].”

Verse 26 “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and on her tongue is kindly counsel.” “She opens her mouth in skillful and godly Wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness [giving counsel and instruction].”

Sister Thea Bowman (1937 – 1990) was the first African American woman to join her community, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. She earned a doctorate in English and then returned to her native South to work with the church in Mississippi and Louisiana. She helped to found the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. She entered into a ministry of speaking and evangelizing. Thea was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1984 and continued to travel and speak, even when confined to a wheelchair. She said, “When I first found out I had cancer, I didn’t know what to pray for. I didn’t know if I should pray for healing or life or death. Then I found peace in praying for what my folks call “God’s perfect will.” As it evolved, my prayer has become, “Lord, let me live until I die.” by that I mean I want to live, love and serve fully until death comes. If that prayer is answered...how long really doesn’t matter. Whether it’s just a few months or a few years is really immaterial.”

In speaking to women in the Church, she would say, “God has called to us to speak the word that is Christ, that is truth, that is salvation. And if we speak that word in love and faith, with patience and prayer and perseverance, it will take root. It does have power to save us. Call one another! Testify! Act on the Word! Witness!”

St. Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582), the first woman to be named a Doctor of the Church, founded numerous Carmelite houses in Spain, as a part of a reform of Carmel. Her accomplishments are more than can be recounted in this presentation. Remember these words she left for her Sisters: “Remember that you have only one soul; that you have only one death to die; that you have only one life, which is short and has to be lived by you alone; and that there is only one glory, which is eternal. If you do this, there will be many things about which you care nothing.”

“Skillful and godly Wisdom.”

Now to verse 27: “She watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness.” “She looks well to how things go in her household, and the bread of idleness (gossip, discontent, and self-pity) she will not eat.”

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St. Zita lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Italy. At the age of twelve, she was sent to work as a domestic for a wealthy family. She was a devout girl, staying up at night to say her prayers and going out to find the first Mass of the day. Her goodness and piety were a thorn to those with whom she worked and they went out of their way to ill-treat her and bring accusations against her.

Over time she overcame the malice employers and co-workers and was promoted to oversee the household staff. She did not use this as an opportunity to “repay” those who had mistreated her. She treated all with kindness and respect.

“The bread of idle gossip she will not eat....”

We come now to verse 30, “Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” “Charm and grace are deceptive, and beauty is vain [because it is not lasting], but a woman who reverently and worshipfully fears the Lord, she shall be praised!”

For this final verse I want to share the story of St. Scholastica, who is the twin sister of St. Benedict. Together they established the Benedictine monastic way of religious life. Scholastica lived in a convent not far from Benedict’s abbey and once a year they would meet at a midway point in a small house to spend a day talking together about holy things.

This particular day, Scholastica asked her brother to please stay with her through the night and continue their holy conversation, it was so pleasing to her. Benedict was horrified and possibly angry that she would suggest he not return to his abbey that night. (After all, rules are rules!).

Scholastica listened to Benedict, then bent her head in prayer. As she lifted her eyes to heaven from her prayer, there was a great clap of thunder, a flash of lightning and a downpour of rain which made it impossible for Benedict to leave.

Benedict said, “God forgive you! What have you done?” Scholastica replied, “I asked you for a favor and you refused. I asked my God and he has heard me.” The author who wrote this story, Pope Gregory the Great, concluded by saying that Scholastica received more from the Lord because she loved more.

“Reverently and worshipfully fears (is in awe of) the Lord.”

Scholastica’s prayer was a sincere and earnest prayer from her heart. This is the kind of prayer God wants from us: heartfelt and pure. As we’ve looked at the text of the Virtuous Woman and explored some examples of that woman, I hope you each recognized yourselves in at least one of the stories. We may not any of us be canonized by the Church, but we are each striving to follow God’s path and will for our lives. Striving to bring our families to God; striving to help those in need in our parishes and our neighborhoods. Giving wise and holy counsel to one another and those we meet, keeping our faith alive and intact in a world that seldom affirms that faith.

The women we’ve talked about today are not much different than we are: they lived in different times and in different circumstances, but they each desired to seek and serve God in their own ways. May God continue to bless you as you endeavor to seek and serve God in your own way.