

Crowland Abbey

REVD MARK WILLIAMS

PRIEST IN CHARGE

This month (as I write this – 1st July to be specific) is the Silver Jubilee of my ordination as Deacon. The word comes from the Greek for 'servant', and is usually the first stage of becoming a priest – most going on to be ordained priest a year later. But there was also another anniversary for me this year. This time, 13 years ago, I was on retreat at Alton Abbey, having become an 'oblate' earlier in the year.

Anyone who has read the 'Brother Cadfael' books or similar might be a bit puzzled. In medieval times, an oblate was a child given to an Abbey, who then spent the rest of their life in that calling – no choice. That is not the case today!

In the modern Benedictine tradition, an oblate is someone who commits to living out the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict in their everyday life. At its heart, the call of an oblate is to stability and order – a commitment to living out a disciplined personal and spiritual life in whatever context they find themselves in.

I find this invaluable, though it must be said that it mirrors quite closely the expectations upon me as a vicar. I am already expected to say the offices (the CofE services of Morning & Evening Prayer) daily, to read the bible and to pray regularly, to attend communion regularly, and to give an account of my faith when called upon. The Rule encourages me to examine and take seriously a proper balance in life between work, family and leisure.

Sometimes I wonder how accountable we feel ourselves to be – or whether we let life get along without thinking about it, blaming circumstances supposedly beyond our control when it doesn't work out. It is said that, when people are faced with their own mortality, for example if they are diagnosed with a terminal illness, one of their biggest regrets is that their work-life balance was not what they would have wished.

I would encourage everyone to have some sort of rule of life – not in a legalistic way in which they rigidly set out their life, denying spontaneity and fun, and berating anyone, including themselves, who gets in the way of this ideal; but rather to take seriously all our obligations, commitments and responsibilities – especially to family and to a fulfilling leisure-life. That is a true calling!

Revd Mark Williams
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