

THE WAY OF BENEDICT

There are many legendary stories about St. Benedict of Nursia, and one of my favorites is the one about an encounter between Benedict and twin sister Scholastica one stormy night.

As the story goes ... (Tell the story)

As I mentioned, there are many legendary stories about the life of Benedict, a man who developed a monastic Rule of Life that has endured for over fifteen hundred years and has been a primary source of inspiration for western monasticism since it was first written. Our own Rule of Life at Community of Divine Love is inspired by Benedict.

Benedict's original Rule contains 73 short chapters. Most of these directives concern that day-to-day details of monastic life in a 5th century monastery yet remains surprisingly relevant today. Benedict gives a great deal attention to the importance of developing and cultivating humility. So much so, that Chapter Seven contains twelve sections on the degrees of humility, the longest of any chapter in the Rule. Other topics such as stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, prayers, and psychological development offer timeless spiritual direction.

"A simple rule for beginners" Benedict says, and he frames this way of spiritual living as *Ora et Labora* – meaning to "Pray and Work." The beauty of the Rule lies in its simplicity and approachability by anyone truly seeking a design for living that has spiritual intention.

The Prologue of the Rule begins in this way. *"Listen carefully, my child, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from one who loves you; welcome it and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to God from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your will once and for all."* The Prologue ends with *"Therefore, we intend to establish a school for God's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome."*

Benedict was clearly influenced by scripture. Throughout the Rule, he anchors his teaching in scriptural reference. The Prologue clearly echoes the verses we heard today from the Book of Proverbs:

"My child, if you accept my words and treasure them within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures – then you will understand what it's like to be awed by God."

A loving father. A simple message. A design for living that gives high importance to community, humility, spiritual and personal growth – all offered in the framework of a simple Rule for beginners. It's no wonder that Benedict's Rule has endured through the ages. And it is a great honor and pleasure to be here with you to celebrate his feast day in the parish that bears the name of our holy father Benedict.

Benedict developed his Rule and established several monasteries during the Fall of Rome and the early years of the dark ages. With wars, famines, and disease. It was a frightening time. Five-hundred years later, The Black Plague would claim the lives of between 100-200 million people. The warring between European Christians and Muslims of the Arab world during the Crusades would claim their own death toll.

Through it all, when the world seemed so unstable, dreadful, and hopeless – when people needed to somehow make sense of it all and reclaim stability in their lives – they turned to the Benedictine monasteries. These monastic communities offered the gift of stability, obedience to God, and hope for conversion of life. To this day I still hear stories of people whose lives were uncertain and in need of a compass to guide and ground them,

and they turned to the monasteries of our own time, just as it was in the Middle Ages. This is why monastic communities and church communities that offer monastic teaching and charism are so important.

We live in a turbulent time now. People are searching for answers to the chaos and confusion brought on by war, vitriolic politics, unhinged violence, racism, and all forms for discrimination. The world needs spiritual communities that sit in the center of it all as safe harbor, healing, and prophetic witness. St. Benedict's is such a place.

The commitment to creating community, spiritual growth, inclusivity, and outreach such as the Abundance Shop and the dedication to social justice teaching and activism – all of this is the *Ora et Labora* of this community.

The world needs us now. It needs the example of the monastic way – the sharing of resources, simple living detached from addictive consumerism, mindful care of our fragile mother earth, caring for the weak and those with special needs. Benedict says that we are to welcome all who come to us as Jesus himself. Lets do that! And Opus Dei – to gather in daily prayer for the world. This is the work of God.

The Benedictine Rule of Life lived in monasteries, and the spiritual and practical design for living adapted by communities inspired by it can be a survival guide for those looking for a spiritual compass to lead us all not only to safety, but to a way of flourishing. St Benedict's here in Los Osos is such a place, and I thank God for you.

We are all a Community of Divine Love, and I'm not just talking about Sister Greta, Sister Lisa, and myself. I'm talking about all of us here – together – we are all the community of God's Divine Love.

Lord, by your grace, our holy Father Benedict became a great teacher and inspiration to follow the monastic way of life. Give us hearts that yearn for you in this way. Grant that, if it is your will, we follow this simple Rule for beginners, and lead us as one community in the school of your love and through the doorway of your heart. We pray in the name of your Son, the poor one from Nazareth. Amen.

Brother Dennis