A Benedictine Moment

A 30-Day Resource for Reflecting on Benedictine Values as Contained in
The Rule of St. Benedict

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LISTENING

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Listen carefully to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”

RB Prologue: 1

The Rule of Benedict opens with the word “listen.” This word is key to understanding the approach the Rule takes relative to a spiritual life. Every Christian should be a listener, attending with the “inner ear of the heart.” This means that listening is more than an activity that I do in my head. The “ear of my heart” means listening with all my being.

REFLECTION:

When did you last listen to a person, a talk, or a reading that seemed to say something profound to you? Did you trust “the ear of your heart?” What stops you from listening? Where and how would you like to hear God speak? Have you been listening? Do you expect to hear God? Will you try to keep the “ear of your heart” attuned to the people you meet today? Will you try to be attuned to what you read, see, hear, and touch?

PRAYER:

Holy God, I believe there are masters of vision, masters of peace, masters of wisdom and joy and love for me to hear. Sometimes I believe my inward ear has been dulled by all the nonsense it hears and by the many loud sounds of my world. I do not know where or how to start, but I ask you through your Spirit to teach me to listen and help me to believe that I can actually hear you through the brothers and sisters who surround me. Amen.
Day 2

PRAYER

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to God most earnestly to bring it to perfection. . . Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: If you hear his voice today, harden not your hearts (Psalm 94 [95]:8).”

RB Prologue: 4-10

“Prayer should therefore be short and pure, unless perhaps it is prolonged under the inspiration of divine grace.”

RB 20:4-5

REFLECTION:

How often do you pray? What hinders you from praying. Even if you do not pray regularly now, commit yourself to pray for a short time every day for a week. After that week, see if you notice how easily prayer comes to you.

Commit yourself to morning and evening prayer. This might seem ambitious to you, so start small. Pray for a few minutes when you get out of bed and for a few minutes before you fall asleep. It takes twenty-one days to form a habit. It might be valuable to talk to a spiritual guide about your progress in prayer once you have started and are praying regularly.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me to be reminded of what matters most: to offer myself to your service in whatever opportunities you give me this day. Help me to rest in your love and to know you as the one true God who truly loves me. Help me to have your love be a strength as I work to form community here during my college days. Help me know you through friends and through the love I receive from others. Amen.
ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading... When they live by the labor of their hands, then they are truly monks. Yet all things are to be done with moderation on account of the fainthearted.”

RB 48: 1, 8-9

Benedict treated the human body and human work as fundamental parts for a holy life. In his view, work was not only dignified, but conducive to holiness. Prayer is more likely to take root in our lives when it is anchored in practical work.

REFLECTION:

As you cross paths with your friends today, think about how what they do may be important to you and to others. What would happen if each person here today really believed that what she or he is doing is important for building community and making contributions to the lives of others.

Offer a short prayer before you start to study. How about a short prayer before your meals? How does your work at home and your study time influence the person you are becoming? What skills are you acquiring? What important lessons are you learning? How are you changing?

PRAYER:

God, you care about us, and our work and our studies are important to you. You love all of us so much that there is true dignity in the work of our lives. Remind us that with you we work together to form a loving world. Help us to see the value of the work we do and to cooperate heartily with others. Amen.
STABILITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset.”

RB Prologue: 48

AND HE ALSO WRITES: “The workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community.”

RB 4:78

REFLECTION:

There is a well-known test to measure stress that many people have seen and used. This test lists the various events that cause stress (e.g., being fired from a job, moving into a new house, having a new baby). The more changes—whether positive or negative—that you have experienced in a single year, the higher is your score and the higher is the possibility of stress taking its toll in your life.

Are you considering change? If you were to look to the Benedictine value of stability, how would that affect your decision? How would you adjust if you took seriously the advice “BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED?” What is most stable in your life? What are your anchors?

PRAYER: Stable and all-loving God, change and upheaval sometimes seem to be the rule. I know that I crave some things that do not change: love, friendship, dignity, and security. If I am going to know this kind of stability, it will have to begin with me. Anchor me deeply. Hold me fast. Teach me to stay put, to be courageous, and to outlast doubts that assail me. Amen.
**CHASTITY**

**ST. BENEDICT WRITES:** "No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and human love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us together to everlasting life."

RB 72: 7-12

**A CONTEMPORARY WRITER SUGGESTS:** The whole concept of chastity or purity is not much in favor in today's world. So often in the past, the whole discussion of chastity brought with it a whole bag of guilt. Rather than a spirit of generosity, there was a lot of dread! The monastic emphasis on purity of heart has a great deal to do with being true to one's essential nature. A pure heart is one fully alive with its energies directed toward a single end: God.

Adapted from Michael Casey's *The Undivided Heart*

**REFLECTION:**

Think about the times you have given and have received genuine love. Did you find that true love was easy to recognize? Have you ever been treated as a “commodity” by someone who claimed to love you? How did you feel? What might Benedict's point of "preferring nothing whatever to Christ" mean to you in a practical sense? How might you live this ideal? What would be the characteristics of such a life?

**PRAYER:**

Holy God, I am not sure that I have loved with my whole heart. Teach me to love and to be loved. Help me to recognize the call of the empty place in me that is reserved for your love. Amen.
**HOSPITALITY**

**ST. BENEDICT WRITES:** "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Mt 25:35). Proper honor must be shown to all, *especially to those who share our faith* (Gal 6:10) and to pilgrims. . . . Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received. . . ."

RB 53: 1-2, 15.

**A CONTEMPORARY WRITER SUGGESTS:** People who come into our lives are representatives of the great mystery at work in creation. These people should always be treated with respect and should be welcomed into our lives.

Adapted from *Always We Begin Again* by John McQuiston

**REFLECTION:**

We often encounter opportunities to make room in our schedules for other people. How can you be consciously aware when someone needs you, when someone needs a moment of kindness, a little attention, a gracious gesture? If hospitality means making room for another person, what will you do differently in your life to express hospitality? How would you do this on campus during your school day?

**PRAYER:**

Holy God, hospitality does not always come easily. There are so many things to do, important things. I have so many responsibilities and pressures that get in the way of my best intentions. Give me eyes to see the possibilities and a heart big enough to make room for someone else. Amen.
HUMILITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “The Word of God—in the Bible—tells us: Whoever exalts self shall be humbled and whoever humbles self shall be exalted (Lk 14:11).”

RB 7:1

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: Humility is the habitual quality whereby we live in the truth of all things: the truth that we are creatures and not the Creator; the truth that our lives are composites of good and evil, light and darkness; the truth that in our littleness we have been given extravagant dignity.

Bishop Robert F. Morneau in Humility: 31 Reflections on Christian Virtue

REFLECTION:

Humility is a virtue that embraces the contradictions and the glories of being human. We may see ourselves as the lost, the poor, and the weak. However, in Christ we are the found, the rich, and the strong.

PRAYER:

O God, save me from the temptation of trying to impress others. Help me to enjoy the praise I receive for a life well lived, for work well-done. Help me, at the same time, to empty what I receive into the ocean of your love. Teach me to learn from fair criticism, to hear it with a clear head, and to resist the urge to defend myself against it immediately. Give me the good sense to remember that I am not at the center of the universe! Lord, have mercy and help me. Amen.
SERVICE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “The brothers should serve one another. Consequently, no one will be excused from kitchen service unless he is sick or engaged in some important business of the monastery, for such service increases reward and fosters love. Let those who are not strong have help so that they may serve without distress.”

RB 35:1-3

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER SUGGESTS: When we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge. There is great freedom in this. When we choose to be a servant, we surrender the right to decide who we will serve and when we will serve. We become available and vulnerable.

Richard Foster in
Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth

REFLECTION:

Pay close attention today for opportunities to serve others in subtle ways. Think how you felt the last time you made a conscious effort to serve others. You can always find opportunities to serve the members of your family, your friends, and your neighbors. Watch for subtle opportunities to do what someone has called “random acts of kindness.”

PRAYER:

Servant God, you know that there is an awful lot of work to be done to make this a beautiful world. I know that I can be overwhelmed and intimidated by all the good causes there are, by all the hurting and needy people in our world. If I keep my eyes as well as my heart open, I will be able to see things that I can do with my talents and abilities. Make my heart open to others. Give me the sight to see the needs of others and the strength to serve. Amen.
LEARNING / SPIRIT OF DOCILITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Therefore, we intend to establish a school for the Lord’s service.”

RB Prologue: 45

A MODERN WRITER REFLECTS: A teachable spirit indicates that present in the human heart are some important elements for spiritual growth. It demonstrates that we don’t think we know it all. It exposes us to thoughts that are new and not our own. Learning reveals our desires, the deepest hungers we have. A contemporary monastic commentator, Jean Leclercq, links the desire for learning and the desire for God.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

If someone were to measure your “teachability,” would you be average, above average, or below average? What really is “learning” for you? Do you recognize time spent in school as more than time spent memorizing facts and giving them back on tests? Is your “desire for learning” a real attitude of looking for what counts in life? Do you see your time in school as time that can be associated with a desire for God?

PRAYER:

Loving God, please grant to us teachable spirits, minds and hearts open wide to life’s possibilities and eager to embrace knowledge. Make us hungry to learn and humble enough to enjoy learning. We do not know everything. Don’t let us forget that. Give us the grace to be open to what school and what life have to teach us. Amen.
REVERENCE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: "Let the tools of the monastery and its whole property be regarded as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar." RB 31:10

"Allow no one to treat the monastery's tools and implements in a slovenly or careless way." RB 32:4

REFLECTION:

As you pick up the tools of your schoolwork today—your books and other school supplies—be aware how these feel in your hands. How are you affected by your school day and the things you use?

Have you ever thought of prayer with your schoolbooks and supplies in your hands? Is your attitude one of reverence for the many good things in your life that enable you to create and to give to others? If you drive to school, what is your attitude toward the automobile that gets you to school?

PRAYER:

Loving God, with all the books and school supplies that I have for my use each day, empower me to do work that will be for your honor and glory. When I reverence the material things I have, I reverence myself and I give myself worth and value. There are many people who will try to rip away portions of my self-worth. When I hold my schoolbooks and supplies, remind me that I matter and that my education matters. Amen.
**POSESSIONS**

**ST. BENEDICT WRITES:** “Above all, this poisoning practice, possession, must be uprooted and removed from the monastery. We insist that without the abbot’s permission, no one may presume to give, accept, or keep any personal property. . . . All things should be in the common possession of all. . . . so that no one presumes to call anything his own.”

RB 33:1-3,6

**A CONTEMPORARY COMMENTATOR SUGGESTS:** We have been brainwashed to believe that bigger houses, more prosperous businesses, more luxurious gadgets, are worthy goals in life. As a result, we are caught in an absurd materialistic spiral. Somehow we have to break the cycle because it makes us sin against our needy brothers and sisters and, therefore, against the Lord. And it also destroys us. Sharing with others is the way to real joy.

Ron Sider in his book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*

**REFLECTION:**
Consider your relationship to ownership. Do you find yourself defending your right to own just any thing possible? There is such a thing as responsible ownership. What does “responsible ownership” mean? Talk to someone you trust about this. Is there anything that you can do to cut down on the “stuff” that you possess?

**PRAYER:**

Lord of the enough, help me to understand moderation in my life not so much as self-denial but as a celebration of all that I already possess. It is hard to resist the cultural voices around us compelling us to spend and accumulate. Help us to focus on the abundance that is around us. Teach us to enjoy what we have. Teach us to know when enough is enough. Amen.
RESPONSIBILITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: "If the community is large, a few brothers should be chosen on account of their good reputations and holy life, and they should be made deans. They will take care of their groups of ten, managing all affairs according to the commandments of God and the orders of their abbot."

RB 21:1-2

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER SUGGESTS: Accountability and responsibility—these two words express crucial aspects of being human. No person is an island. We are a part of all whom we meet. Once we recognize accountability, we will accept responsibility to order our lives in a manner which will make our decisions fit our roles and positions in life. Our conscience will not allow us to play games.

Myron Augsburger in The Christ-Shaped Conscience

REFLECTION:

Which responsibilities do you take most seriously? Which ones are the hardest for you? To be responsible is to be given a trust by God to care for something or someone. How would your attitudes toward responsibility change if you thought of it in this way? What can you do to make your responsibilities more joyful?

PRAYER:

Loving God, it is not easy to be clear about what I am responsible for and when it is time to let go. I want control, and yet I want to escape responsibility at times. When I hear the words "Be responsible!" from my parents or teachers, there are times when I want to escape. Show me, dear God, where and when I run away from the task of being responsible. Amen.
REASONABLE BALANCE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “The abbot should regulate and arrange all things so that souls might be saved and the monks may go about their activities without justifiable grumbling.”

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER COMMENTS: As a result of living with the Rule, Benedictines end up being delightfully sensible people living simple and balanced lives. In our own age, there are a lot of unreasonable expectations crowding us. We hear the echo of Jesus in Benedict’s words, telling us that his burden is light and his yoke easy.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

Are you unreasonable with yourself relative to the things you think you “have to do?” What happens when unreasonable expectations lead to complications and you feel that your life is not being lived in balance? How can you change this situation and have time for every element of your life: the academic, recreational, social, familial, and spiritual?

PRAYER:

Jesus, you always expected the best of others, but you never tried to make them into something they were not. You were gentle and strong, reasonable at all times, and you made time for each important aspect of life. I want to accept myself, others, and the life I have with realistic expectations. Teach me gentle sanity and quiet delight in God, myself, and others. Amen.
CONVERSION OF LIFE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: "Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you, wherever you may be."

RB 4:46-49

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: Monks vow themselves to conversion of life. They promise that whatever happens, they will keep themselves on the hard course of becoming more authentically human. That is conversion. Shut the door to yesterday and start over, every single day of your life.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict's Way

REFLECTION:

What if today were the last day of your life? Perhaps we have heard this question so often that it sounds trite. The power of conversion comes across strongly when we recognize our mortality. Benedict tells us to remember that one day we will die. So what are you going to do with your life today? Tomorrow?

PRAYER:

Loving God, "conversion" is a pretty scary word. I don't quite understand how conversion happens or even what I have to do to "be converted." I know I need to make changes in my life, but I know I can't make them on my own. Please give me the help I need to make changes in my life. Make me more aware of how your help makes changes possible. Remind me to begin again, no matter how I get sidetracked or lose my way. Remind me that I can't do it alone. I will always need you. Amen.
**CONFLICT**

**ST. BENEDICT WRITES:** "Lauds and Vespers must never conclude without the superior's reciting the entire Lord's Prayer at the end for everyone to hear, because thorns of discord are likely to spring up. Therein warned by the pledge they make to one another in this prayer: *Forgive us as we forgive* (Mt 6:12), they may rid themselves of this failing."

RB 13:12-13

"Respect the elders and love the young. . . . If you have a disagreement with someone, make peace with them before the sun goes down. Finally, and importantly, never lose hope in God's mercy."

RB 4:70-74

**REFLECTION:**

Pay close attention to the little moments of God's grace that are extended to you by others today. Look for opportunities to do the same. Don't pound the horn when someone pulls in front of you. Be patient with the person who is short-tempered. Cultivate a forgiving attitude for the lapses of inconsiderate people on the campus. Think about the times that others may have had to forgive you. Pray the Lord's Prayer before falling asleep.

**PRAYER:**

Our Father in heaven, forgive my sins as I forgive those who sin against me, and those who sin against all of us. Wipe up the messes we make and don't let us get so full of ourselves that we forget our own contributions to the messes. Teach us always to forgive. Remind us of our individual needs to be forgiven. Lord, have mercy. Amen.
FRIENDSHIP

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers.”

RB 72:8

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER SUGGESTS: All of us want to be accepted and known. This is most true in our most intimate relationships. But we need something more than strictly business from the people who inhabit our everyday world. Benedict’s way has a great deal to do with sharing joys, works, and celebrations. Benedict thinks that life should be doing things together in a “festive” way. We will get better with our friendships when we recognize that people are God’s gifts to us.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

Think about the people you see every day. Also think about the fact that you can be fully present to these people or you can be distant, even while standing next to them. Concentrate on being more present to people. Think about how Benedict’s point of “listening” can be very upbuilding for friendship. In what ways do you care about your friends? What will you do for one of them today? Tomorrow? Next week? Every day of your life?

PRAYER:

Holy Friend, there is not really enough time in our lives to be everyone’s best friend. We all need the ability to see the little and simple ways we can reach out to the familiar people with whom we live and deal daily. Help us notice when someone needs a kind word. Stop us when we are tempted to ignore others or take others for granted. Help each of us be a true friend to others near and dear to us. Amen.
Day 17

LEADERSHIP

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Whoever is abbot is to lead. .by a twofold method: he must point out to those he leads all that is good and holy more by his own example than by words. . . . He is not to love one more than another. . for God shows no partiality among persons (Rom 2:11).”

RB 2:11-12, 17, 20

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: All of us have roles of leadership. We need to remember that we are servants, not lords. Our roles of leadership might at times call us to act or make choices on behalf of others. No matter what the situation, we can always fulfill our leadership tasks with the heart of a servant. Servant leadership is the model for Jesus, and thus it is Benedict’s model. Jesus did tell his apostles, “The greatest among you must be one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

Fr. Daniel Homan, O.S.B., in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

No matter what your “official positions” may be, there are times when you have a leadership role. What is your personal style? Are you willing to be a servant leader? If you recognize people who model servant leadership well, talk to them about it. Learn how it is done well. Express your appreciation for what they do.

PRAYER:

Loving God, there are various ways in which I am called to lead and many times when I am called to follow. Servant leadership is a lofty ideal. Many times leadership is misunderstood, and I ask your help that I may always respond to leadership tasks with tenderness, strength, and love. Help me always to do just that. Amen.
COMMUNITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “The workshop where we toil faithfully... is the shelter of the monastery and stability in the community.”

RB 4:78

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: Something happens to us in our living together that could not happen if we chose isolation. What we give and get in community makes us stronger people. “I come away stronger,” said one friend when speaking of her community of faith.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

How are you involved in your communities: home, school, neighborhood, church? What actions do you need to take to strengthen those ties? In what circumstances did your involvement with one of your communities make you “come away stronger?”

Who are the people that have most influenced your spiritual formation? How about those who may have helped you develop your own abilities to be a “person in community?” Find a way to tell one of these people about their impact in your life. Do it soon!

PRAYER:

Dear God, relationships with others seem like a mixed bag for me. Deep down, I know I want the strength, power, and companionship of community. Help me see how other people can help me get through hard times. Remind me how others have shaped me into the person I am and the person I am becoming. Let me be more conscious of the power of my relationships. Teach me to engage myself fully with the significant people in my life. Let me always be grateful for the true friends I have. Amen.
PERSEVERANCE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Those who are patient while enduring difficulty and injustice are fulfilling the Lord's command.”

RB 7:42

“And finally, never lose hope.”

RB 4:74

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: Often perseverance simply means outlasting whatever is getting in the way.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict's Way

REFLECTION:

What are some of the circumstances in your life that call for perseverance, really sticking with what is there and not giving up? What steps do you need to take to strengthen your own spirit of perseverance and get obstacles out of the way? Think about a time when you really gritted your teeth and persevered in a difficult situation. Why did you do it? What did you learn about yourself and about other people? Are there situations that now exist that call for a real spirit of perseverance in your life? What will it take to keep you from giving up?

PRAYER:

Dear God, I do not want to give up. We don't hear the word "perseverance" very often, but I want to develop this virtue in myself. Give me the perseverance that St. Benedict talks about. Hold me up during those times I might want to collapse and give up. I put my trust in you, my God, to keep me persevering in all life's tasks before me. Amen.
Day 20

**LIFE LIVED IN BALANCE**

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Arrange all things so that the strong have something to yearn after and the weak nothing to run from.”

RB 64:19

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: St. Benedict clearly understood the matter of balance. He carefully states in his Rule that there must be a time for everything: work, prayer, reading, food, solitude, silence, noise, companionship, and more—all in a single day! We get out-of-balance when we spend too much time in one activity. The person who can’t shut the door to work will soon burn out. Too much solitude may make one quite self-absorbed. Too much play or television watching may prevent some good things from happening.

Fr. Daniel Homan, O.S.B. in *Benedict's Way*

REFLECTION:

Do you ever worry that you spend too much time, energy, and resources on something not really that important for your life? Are there times when you may tend to extremes in some aspect of your daily life? Think of a situation today where you might want to strike a better sense of balance. What specific steps will you take toward that goal?

PRAYER:

Lord, I bring to you my extremes and all that I may lack. There may be some deeper motivations for my obsessions and my complacency than I know or understand. However, you can be present in the depths of my heart and you can even show me things that I can hardly name or even understand as being a part of me. Please help me bring my life into balance. Amen.
JOY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “As we journey in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”

RB Prologue: 49

CONTEMPORARY WRITERS COMMENT: Joy isn’t something that simply happens to us. Joy is a decision we have to make—or not make for that matter! We are responsible for whether or not we experience joy. Joy is not going to happen if we pamper ourselves and somehow prevent joy. A lot of things can choke joy: fear, cynicism, boredom, low self-esteem, taking life too seriously, loss of awe and wonder, greed, guilt, and even bitterness.

Lonni Collins Pratt & Fr. Daniel Homan, O.S.B. in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

Review the list of joy-chokers. Are any yours? How can genuine love of self and others relieve fear and make space for joy?

PRAYER:

Faithful God, you have seen the depths of me. There is no reason to hide anything from you, or to pretend that I am what I am not, or that I have no fears. The antidote to fear is genuine love. Make me more loving that I may be a person of genuine joy, bringing that spirit into the lives of all those around me. I continue to ask your help that I will carry an infectious spirit of joy every moment of my day. Amen.
SIMPLE AUTHENTICITY

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way.”

RB 4:20

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR COMMENTS: Seldom or never do we hear anything about simplicity as an essential discipline of the spiritual life. Most of us have only a vague idea of the meaning of the word. Simplicity means an “absence of artificial ornamentation or pretentious styles...lack of cunning or duplicity.” Where there is simplicity, words can be taken at their face value. Where there is simplicity, there is no artificiality.

Albert Day in Discipline and Discovery

REFLECTION:

Sometimes we can become quite adept at rationalizing word or behaviors that are not authentic. Can you pay attention and recognize when you are not authentic? Do you try to masquerade? The first and most important step is to pay attention to what we say and do. Don’t let any moment pass without trying to begin the tough process of living authentically and simply.

PRAYER:

Loving God, I want to give you all my masks and my disguises. That is not to say that I won’t be tempted to snatch one back now and then. But at this moment, and with my heart filled with the right intentions, I hand over this box of pretenses and receive back from you the full dignity of authenticity. I know there is a lot for me to learn about being real. I want to start now. Amen.
LECTIO DIVINA (SACRED READING)

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “The Lord says in the Gospel: Whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house upon rock; the floods came and the winds blew and beat against the house, but it did not fall: it was founded on rock (Matt 7:24-25). . . . The Lord waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, his holy teachings.”

RB Prologue: 33-35

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR REFLECTS: The Repeated encounters with the Word of God [a daily period with Holy Scripture] will bring about a gradual transformation as my thinking and willing become progressively harmonized with God’s will. Slowly I grow in interior freedom and lose my innate orientation towards comfort and security.

Fr. Charles Cummings, O.C.S.O. in Monastic Practices

REFLECTION:

A daily encounter with the Word of God does not need to cover a lot of the Scriptures. Sometimes a sentence or two is enough to get in touch with God and with what God has to say to your heart. Try to commit yourself to a daily encounter with God’s word for the next month. Begin with a Gospel, go over it slowly. Then take one of Paul’s letters. Keep a notebook of what is happening as a result.

PRAYER:

Loving God, open the ears of my heart. Give me the faith to believe that I am fully equipped to hear you. Quiet me enough to notice your stirring in the depth of my heart. Teach me always to listen to you, especially in what you tell me through your word.
WISDOM

SAINT BENEDICT WRITES: “As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course.”

RB 3:1-2

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR REFLECTS: It is important that we understand that information by itself does not make anyone wise. To be clever is not to be wise; to be informed or educated is not to be wise. Wisdom doesn’t show off what it knows. It gives itself away in those enchanted, graceful moments when we need it most. It is life-giving.

Lonni Collins Pratt in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

Who is the wisest person you know? What makes that person wise? How is it that you recognize that wisdom? Think about ways through which you may grow in wisdom. Here are a few areas to think about: (1) prayer, (2) experience, (3) observation and attention, (4) application of truth, (5) faith, (6) spiritual disciplines, (7) lectio divina (i.e., a meditative encounter with Holy Scripture), (8) service to others, (9) relationships.

PRAYER:

Holy Spirit of Wisdom, come to me. Leak through the cracks and bind up the wounds in my life and personality. Turn on the light in my darkness that I may truly be a child of the light. Fill me with the Spirit of wisdom that I may make you known and bring fullness of life to others. Amen.
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “We must run and do now what will profit us forever.”

RB Prologue: 44

A CONTEMPORARY AUTHOR SUGGESTS: Saint Paul, Saint Benedict, and many others have told us that we need to live lives worthy of our inheritance and our call as children of God. Thus our “yes” to prayer is a “no” to distractions. Our “yes” to service is a “no” to selfishness. Our “yes” to fidelity is a “no” to duplicity. Spiritual disciplines have little to do with will power and everything to do with self-worth. Whether we follow a discipline of prayer, fasting, giving alms, or serving others with kindness, we do it because we are the children of God and because our worth in the eyes of God comes to us with a hardy responsibility.

Father Daniel Homan, O.S.B., in Benedict’s Way

REFLECTION:

Richard Foster categorizes the spiritual disciplines in this way: (1) the “inward” disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; (2) the “outward” disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; (3) the “corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Which of these do you see as offering a challenge in your life? What would happen if you adopted one or more of these and practiced it for the next three months? What would happen if you did one a month?

PRAYER:

God, you know me better than I know myself. I am sure there are things I need to say “no” to and things I need to learn to say “yes” to. I really do not know where to begin! If I look at the big picture, I can get discouraged easily. I need your help. Direct me, please. Amen.
OBEDIENCE

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “We must prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions. What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace.”

RB Prologue: 40-41

“The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience.”

RB 5:1

REFLECTION:

What is your initial reaction to the word “obedience.” Why do you think you have such a reaction? How do you think St. Benedict’s monastic vision of obedience applies to you?

If you would think of obedience as “love in action,” you might come to be aware of opportunities and situations in which you can “obey.” However, you might at the same time give thought to the idea that the Latin root for this word, obaudire, really means to listen. What happens if you start to think of obedience as sensitive listening to others, to the needs of a community, to your teachers, your classmates?

Look for an opportunity to help another person by being a sensitive listener and thus truly “obedient.”

PRAYER:

Jesus, St. Paul says that you obeyed to the point of death. You held nothing back but gave everything. I need to rethink my ideas about obedience. The word makes me uneasy. But I am learning to listen, so if obedience means listening to you and to others, I can do that. Listening was very important to St. Benedict. Let me listen with the ear of my heart. Give me that listening heart that will never resist obedience. Amen.
WORDS

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “There are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence.”

RB 6:2

“Never offer a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love. Bind yourself to no oath lest it prove false, but speak the truth with heart and tongue. . . . Do not grumble or speak ill of others.”

RB: 4:25-28, 39-40

REFLECTION:

Beginning with yourself, select one person each day, for a week, and observe his or her use of words. Remember that your purpose is not to critique but to observe the power in the words, the reactions that the words elicit, and the person’s awareness of this power.

For one day, try to use half the number of words you would normally use. By doing this, you will begin to think that every word should “count.” You don’t want to use words simply to use them up.

Try to speak encouraging and positive words to three people with whom you have relatively casual relationships.

How aware are you with authors who are especially gifted with words? Take as examples: Madeleine L’Engle, Walker Percy, Flannery O’Connor, Garrison Keillor.

PRAYER:

Eternal Word, you are the giver of all words. You have shaped us in such a way that we can grant life to one another and we can destroy one another with the words we speak. Make me a life-giver. Teach me to understand what my words are meant to achieve. Amen.
**PLEASURE**

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: "Just as there is a wicked zeal of bitterness which separates from God...so there is a good zeal which separates from evil and leads to God...This, then, is the good kind of zeal which monks must foster with fervent love."

RB 72:1-2

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER ASKS: Why is eating pleasurable? Plants and lower animals manage to obtain their quota of nutrients without the luxury of taste buds. Why can’t we? Some people get along fine without the ability to detect color... Somehow Christians have gotten a reputation as anti-pleasure, and this despite the fact that they believe pleasure was an invention of the Creator.

Philip Yancey in *I Was Just Wondering*

REFLECTION: What gives you the most pleasure? Pay attention to the simple tasks of your day. What makes you feel good about yourself? What makes you laugh? When are you content? Do you associate guilt with pleasure?

What gives pleasure to the people with whom you are closest? Do something today that will please someone else.

Look for opportunities to enlighten others about having a Christian perspective on pleasure. Pleasure does not need to be associated with guilt!

PRAYER: Lord, my world drips with pleasures I take for granted. I am grateful for color, for loving touches, for music that reminds me of what is good and what is important. You, Lord, look up at me from the eyes of a child, and you look down on me from the falling snow. One lifetime is hardly enough time to taste and see how good it all is. Give me the vigor to enjoy and to enjoy well. Amen.
Day 29

**MARKING TIME**

**ST. BENEDICT WRITES:** “We believe that the divine presence is everywhere.”

RB 19:1

**IN THE BIBLE, THE TEACHER EXPLAINS:** For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- a time to be born and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- a time to kill and a time to heal;
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- a time to weep and a time to laugh;
- a time to keep silence and a time to speak;
- a time to love and a time to hate;

... That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 15

**REFLECTION:** Bells toll the passing of time; lights are turned off; gates are shut; shades are drawn as night arrives. Marking time can be as simple as being aware that turning on the light in the morning is saying “yes” to another day and saying “yes” to God. We enter into the sacred every day. We are often not aware of the ways we do this!

How are you “marking time”? How do you identify the various times of the day and your relationship to God at each moment of each day? Do you need to change the ways in which you “mark time?”

**PRAYER:** Good Lord, today I say “yes” to another day with all its opportunities. I am in a cycle of seasons that seem to be taking me somewhere. Help me remember that time is an ally and not an enemy. These seasons that come and go are taking me to you. Give me faith to hold on to that knowledge. Amen.
Day 30

LISTENING AGAIN

ST. BENEDICT WRITES: “Let us get up then, at last, for the Scriptures rouse us... Let us open our eyes to the light... and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out. If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts (Psalm 95:8).”

RB Prologue:8-10

THE PSALMIST EXPLAINS: “Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.”

Psalm 19:2

REFLECTION: Before going to sleep tonight, review the day’s events, the people with whom you spoke, the places you visited, and all the sights and sounds of them. In what events did God speak? How did you sense it, or why did you fail to sense it at the time? Make a habit of reminding yourself several times a day to try to be more attentive. It might be as simple as writing “LISTEN” into some of the empty lines in your date book or calendar or class notes. It is often between the lines and in the empty spaces where we hear God.

PRAYER: Loving God, every day does indeed pour forth speech. You are present in all the moment, in the smallest details of my world, in the person to whom I am least inclined to listen. Take this life I give back to you and keep me always aware of your presence in all the times and places of my life. Amen.