

Daily Prayer

Benedict of Nursia

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer to God our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we remember Benedict of Nursia, Abbot of Monte Cassino and Father of Western Monasticism, c. 547

We begin by saying

Pray at all times in the Spirit in every prayer and supplication.

Ephesians 6.18

The Psalm

Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 34.1-8

The Gospel Reading

We continue with the gospel reading and the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the readings have to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

John 15.12-17

The Reflection

Steven Mackison

Benedict of Nursia (480 – 550) was the founder of Western monasticism and the author of the most famous work on living in community in the history of Christianity: the Rule of St. Benedict. It influenced not only cloistered communities, but Christianity throughout Europe and thereby Western Civilization itself. Because of this, Benedict is the patron saint of Europe.

He was born at Nursia in central Italy. Even in his early years, he was studious and a person of deep faith who described himself as being “in the world, but not of it.” In fact, he studied for a time in Rome but abandoned his life there, being plagued by what he perceived

as the decadence of Roman culture. This prompted him to abandon “the world” and retreat to Subiaco, where he devoted himself to a life of prayer and simple living. Word of Benedict’s spiritual wisdom, pious practices, and powers of healing spread and he was soon joined by a group of disciples who also sought relief and release from the world in a disciplined intentional life in community.

At first, Benedict rejected those who wanted to follow him, arguing that they already had Jesus, and thus needed no other “teacher” to guide them. However, he soon realized that going deeper in faith was not something that anyone could do alone, including Benedict himself, so he organized those who came to him into communities of ten, who would live, work and pray together. Eventually Benedict established 12 such communities which became the first Benedictine monasteries.

Benedict remained at Subiaco for about twenty-five years. He left there after an attempt was made on his life. The story goes that some of the monks who had become tired of Benedict’s rule plotted to kill him by poisoning a chalice of wine. Dramatically, just as Benedict lifted the cup to his lips, it miraculously shattered, harmlessly spilling its deadly contents, and saving Benedict’s life.

Benedict left Subiaco with a small band of loyal monks and settled at Monte Cassino, which is where he wrote the final version of his Rule, borrowing from other monastic rules that had previously been written. However, unlike previous rules, Benedict’s emphasized stability (i.e., monks staying in one place and committing to one community) manual labour alongside prayer, and flexibility. Several times in his rule Benedict makes clear that he doesn’t want to set down anything harsh or too difficult. His aim was not to punish the body as much as to discipline the spirit.

Benedict remained in Monte Cassino the rest of his life. He never became a priest and never intended to found a new religious order. Yet through their widely spread network on monasteries, Benedictines have had an enormous influence on European civilization, including the arts, education, health care, and agriculture.

Benedict died on March 21, 550 and was buried in his monastery. Although his feast is celebrated on July 11, because that was the day his remains were transferred to another site within the monastery of Monte Cassino.

While Benedict developed a “rule” of community life, work and devotion that influences intentional community living to this day, what is often overlooked is the most important rule of all: Jesus’ commandment in the gospel appointed for this feast. It is the famous *Mandatum Novum* (new commandment) which forms the climax of Jesus’ last supper discourse. It is the time where, gathered with his own intentional community of disciples, he commands them to love one another as he has loved them. This, of course, is said in the context of Jesus’ imminent sacrificial offering of himself – prompting him to follow this new commandment with the words: “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

While Benedict did not sacrifice his life, in the immediate sense, he no less laid his life down, following Jesus’ new commandment by offering his entire life in service to his Lord by gathering his own disciples into a life of ceaseless service, prayer, and praise. Thus it is not so much for making a rule, but following the new commandment that we honour him and the continued witness of those lay down their lives in the world to live an intentional life in community.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of Pilgrimage

While I was still young, ♦
I sought Wisdom openly in my prayer.
Before the temple I asked for her, ♦
and I will search for her until the end.
From the first blossom to the ripening grape, ♦
my heart delighted in her.
My foot walked on the straight path, ♦
from my youth I followed her steps.
I inclined my ear a little and received her, ♦
I found for myself much instruction.
I made progress in Wisdom; ♦
to the One who sent her, I will give glory.
I directed my soul to Wisdom, ♦
and in purity have I found her.
With her, I gained understanding from the first, ♦
therefore will I never be forsaken.
My heart was stirred to seek her, ♦
with my tongue will I sing God's praise.

Ecclesiasticus 51.13a, 13c-17, 21, 21a, 22b

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us pray to the Lord, saying, **Lord, have mercy.**

For the whole People of God, that each one may be a true and faithful servant of Christ, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those drawing near to the light of faith, that the Lord will bring them to true knowledge of himself, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For our families and friends, that the Lord will give them joy and satisfaction in all that they do, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who are lonely, sick, hungry, persecuted, or ignored, that the Lord will comfort and sustain them, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For our country, that the Lord will help us to contribute to its true growth and well-being, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the whole human family, that we may live together in justice and peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

We conclude our prayers

Eternal God,

you endowed your holy servant Benedict

with gifts of discernment and power

to be a true and faithful guide

in the way of Christian perfection.

Instill in our hearts the virtues of stability and concord,

that our prayers may be fixed on you

and our judgements may be formed

according to your great commandment of love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace. Amen.
Alleluia.

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