

# **C**HAPTER 50: *The Brothers Who Are At Work Far From The Oratory Or Are On A Journey*

*Those brothers who are working at a great distance and cannot get to the oratory at the proper time -- the Abbot judging that such is the case -- shall perform the Work of God in the place where they are working, bending their knees in reverence before God.*

*Likewise those who have been sent on a journey shall not let the appointed Hours pass by, but shall say the Office by themselves as well as they can and not neglect to render the task of their service.*

## **PREFERRING CHRIST – Norvene Vest**

The mental picture of monks away from home reminds me of a couple of my favorite paintings... One is *The Angelus*, with the farmers stopped in the fields, heads bowed at dusk as the church bells ring, joining their prayers – and their lives – to the whole community. The other is a sketch of a friar, sitting alongside the road beside his donkey, saying his rosary as he rests.

Whether we are in a monastery or not, it is true for each one of us Christians that we have a particular place of belonging in the whole Christian community. That particular place has an incarnated given-ness, a specific and limited context, while it also transcends any limitations of space and time. Benedict is insisting on the central role of this community/family life in affirming and building the consecrated life of each member. The Rule's emphasis here is an invitation for each one of us to pay attention to what community and/or family has been given to us to nurture our growth in Christ, and to practice living in fidelity to that family.

## **READING SAINT BENEDICT – Adalbert deVogüé**

As for travellers, Benedict brings his forerunner's (Rule of the Master) detailed norms down to one simple principle: the brothers are to do what they can; the essential objective is to celebrate the hour. For the office not only a community action to which a monk is bound when present within the community. It is a personal obligation flowing from his aim: to pray without ceasing.

## **LISTEN MY SON – ST. BENEDICT FOR FATHERS – Dwight Longenecker**

Benedict wants his monks to observe seven points of prayer during the day even if their work keeps them from the oratory, or they are away on a journey. He recognizes that those on a journey would not have had an accurate timepiece and so asks them to 'do their best' to keep the prayer points during the day.

In our fast-paced society we may find keeping our seven prayer points almost impossible. On the other hand, we all have watches and clocks, so to keep our appointments with God should be much easier. In chapter 16, it was suggested that seven points of prayer might be: 1. on getting out of bed; 2. at breakfast; 3. at our mid-morning break; 4. at lunch; 5. at our mid-afternoon break; 6. at the evening meal; 7. at bedtime. These prayer points might simply consist of a brief prayer of blessing over the meal or a short time of reflection taken from a pocket sized prayer book, Bible, or devotional book. An excellent resource for such prayer is the Divine Office. The full version includes an Office of readings, morning prayer,

midday prayer, evening prayer, and a night Office. Shorter versions are available. Any of them might be suitable for our particular timetable and routine.

In all of this Benedict's exhortation to 'do our best' is both a challenge and a gentle reminder that we must not drive ourselves too hard. Prayer is to be integrated with our whole life, and our particular rule of life is to keep that wholeness as its end goal. Strict legalism shifts our attention from the final goal to the particular rule. All it does is increase guilt and lay more burdens on us. This will encourage us and challenge us at the same time.

The Christian family must keep the same ideal. There is a delicate balance to be maintained between our religious duties and the demands of ordinary life. We must get our priorities right, but we mustn't be so demanding about little religious rules that we lose the wider perspective and maintaining our religious obligations is necessary, even when we are on holiday. But when circumstances demand it, the religious observations must sometimes give way to the demands of love and sacrifice. As Benedict says, 'we must do our best' and let God do the rest.

### **THE RULE OF BENEDICT - INSIGHTS FOR THE AGES - Joan Chittister, OSB**

In Sanskrit it is written: Necessity changes a course but never a goal. Benedictine spirituality –flexible, sensible realistic at all times – sets loud, clear goals but models a number of ways to achieve them. Perhaps there is no surer proof of Benedict's awareness that spirituality is neither a formula nor a straightjacket than this chapter. Benedict values nothing more than community prayer, the Opus Dei. In other chapters he organizes it minutely and schedules it for seven times a day. "Nothing," he writes "is to be preferred to the Work of God." And yet, when the ideal is confronted by the real, Benedict opts for the sanctification of the real rather than the idealization of the holy.

### **DAY BY DAY WITH SAINT BENEDICT - Terrence G. Kardong**

In this little chapter, Benedict enunciates a fairly important principle: prayer is not tied to place or circumstance. Just because the sister finds herself outside of the usual parameters of her life, this does not excuse her from prayer....The religious who declines to wear the habit on a plane may avoid some uncomfortable questions, but she also loses a chance to witness to her vocation.

### **A SHARE IN THE KINGDOM – Br. Benet Tvedten**

Prayer is an obligation and an occupation that St. Benedict wants fulfilled even when the monks are away from the monastery, in the field bringing in the harvest, or on the road. We all need to be reminded not to neglect our prayer.

### **THE FAMILY CLOISTER – David Robinson**

Before I leave on an overnight trip I hug my kids and tell them that I will pray for them at nighttime, and I ask them to pray for me before they go to sleep. This simple act of faith unites our hearts even though miles separate us. Prayer is a gift from God to knit the family together, regardless of schedule and place. When we set aside time in the evening to pray for one another, God weaves our hearts together. Within the family cloister, ask God for blessings and protection for the family while apart. The family cloister is not merely the house or property where the family dwells, but a spiritual enclosure formed by God within which the family enjoys God's care and provision.

## **OBLATION – MEDITATIONS ON ST. BENEDICT’S RULE – Rachel M. Srubas**

I know you’re here  
ever available,  
ever receptive to my prayer.  
Not you but I am the busy one  
with the crowded calendar,  
inclined to fit you in mainly when  
I have a cancellation, as though  
your mercy were my last priority, a rare luxury.

My preoccupied hours and days  
go by, and I relegate you to a corner of my mind  
until I feel free to grant you full attention.  
But I have no fullness to offer.  
I give you a hollow stare and feel I’ve become  
a passing acquaintance of my Creator.  
I speak a few stiff sentences,  
then lapse into embarrassed silence.

There – if I dare to linger in the discomfort –  
dwells the potential for the prayer I need,  
an honest encounter between my hectic heart  
and your uncomplicated patience.  
I face you for the thousandth time and find  
I’m a beginner,  
a sinner not in some spectacular act of evil,  
but in a collection of petty forgettings  
that summon my repentance  
in remembrance of you.

Gradually, a miracle flows into me, a stilling  
and filling of my anxious, empty self.  
Now calmed, now capable of reverence,  
I pour my awareness into you,  
only to receive much more than I give:  
the prayer I pray, the very life I live.

## **ST. BENEDICT’S TOOLBOX – Jane Tomaine**

In Benedictine spirituality everything is holy... Our work and our prayer meld together so that work becomes prayer and prayer becomes less work.

In the Rule, Benedict gives us two directives that indicate flexibility: Christians should pray daily and participate in corporate prayer. So at the very least, if we don’t have any form of regular prayer today, we can establish private prayer as a new and ongoing priority. We can find moments throughout our day to conscientiously and lovingly recall our Creator. ...No matter how busy we are or how impossible we think it is to do, Benedictine spirituality says, Stop. Now. A spiritual life without a regular prayer life and an integrated community consciousness is pure illusion.