

St. Benedict

Overview of Benedictine Spirituality

Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, and all people are welcomed as Christ according to Benedictine hospitality under the Rule of St. Benedict.

The Rule of St. Benedict is a set of rules and principles for monks living together in monasteries, but it can apply to all those who are not monks who feel the need to seek God and to become closer to the sovereign God of the universe. A safe harbor.

Benedictine spirituality is what first attracts many to the Rule of St. Benedict even as they 'keep their day job.' The reason people from all backgrounds including non-Catholic ones find deep spirituality in the Divine Office and the other Benedictine practices in the Rule such as the emphasis on work and *lectio divina* (slow prayerful reading), is difficult to state briefly. However, it may involve the following characteristics:

Antiquity of 3,000 and 1,500 years. Benedictine practices of daily singing of the psalms (songs) are based on ancient traditions dating back nearly 3,000 years to King Solomon and the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Benedict wrote and compiled the Rule in the year 530. For the 1,500 years since, monks have been conducting the Divine Office several times a day, each day. This makes the Benedictine Divine Office one of the oldest, daily observances of any kind anywhere in the world.

Before the Divisions. The use of the Psalms has continued in an unbroken chain of tradition from the days of antiquity before any division between Jews and Christians. Protestants can quickly feel an affinity with St. Benedict and an era which is about a 1,000 years prior to Martin Luther's publication of his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517 which led to the Reformation and a split in Christianity. For major parts of the Divine Office, the texts are taken from times when those who acknowledged the unity of God's people were in greatest unity.

From the Human Ancestors of Jesus. The personal accounts of the struggles and unbending faith of those in the human lineage of Jesus (the Jewish authors of the Psalms) makes it easier for us to feel a kinship with these most ancient songs to God.

Presence of the Holy Spirit. There are no unique elements in the Benedictine Divine Office. Most everyone has sung a hymn and read the Psalms. But in some way, the balance of the Divine Office or the filling of those elements by the Holy Spirit makes participation in the Divine Office either with monks or privately something different in kind from just the sum of its parts.

Purity of Message. In the Divine Office the participants sing or recite the psalms and meditate upon them. There is no sermon; it is God that interprets the message within you. Silence and quiet reflection are important parts of this form of worship.

Structure and Completeness. The Benedictine lifestyle instills a strong sense of fullness and participation in practices that return to the earliest days of a life-filling Christianity.

Under the Rule of St. Benedict, between 4 and 7 times a day monks sing a hymn, sing and read several psalms responsively (two alternating choirs), read from the Bible and early church fathers, and pray. These sessions are called the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, or the Work of God (*Opus Dei*). Those who are not monks read and pray the Divine Office individually or in small groups as often as their lifestyle permits.

Not an Advanced Theological Degree. The Benedictine Way is not an intellectual education. Perhaps because of its extensive reliance on Biblical texts, Benedictine practices might be seen best as a pathway, well traveled by the ancient feet of spiritual pilgrims and by those who are still on the pathway today.