

# Seeking God - The Way of St. Benedict

*Esther de Waal*

- 1) Submission is difficult
- 2) Goal is love of Christ
- 3) What is truest story of my life - live into that story
- 4) Adapt life to rule rather than rule to life - allow rule to change desires
- 5) **Frame day with prayer**
- 6) Role of ambition - can see things can be different.
- 7) In community of listening, mutual submission
- 8) Ritual - candles, thankfulness, journal where did God show up, feast day, sabbath

## Forward

- 1) The way a parent treats a child in the ordinary will teach more about the holy dignity of the body than any lecture
- 2) **God's presence is everywhere. It is up to us to seek him wherever we are**
- 3) Spirituality - struggle between freedom and obedience, listening and assenting oneself, possessing and letting go, clinging and stability and embracing change
- 4) **God does not demand the unusual or spectacular or heroic but rather that I do the most ordinary, dreary and humdrum things and allow them to be my immediate way to God**

## Preface

- 1) St Benedict 480-549
- 2) Obedience - obedience and listening intently
- 3) No separation of prayer and life
- 4) Listen intently, respond with a yes, run to God fervently

## St Benedict

- 1) Dialogues of St Gregory the Great (593)
- 2) Vir dei - man of God
- 3) Subacio - 12 monasteries of 12 monks
- 4) Monte Cassino
- 5) Replace teaching of abbot with interrelationships of monks. Emphasize love instead of learning
- 6) Opus dei - work of God
- 7) 7 times in oratory (small private chapel)
- 8) Vigils - night prayer, lauds - morning prayer, compline - completion of day
- 9) Cruce, libro, et atro - cross, book and plough
- 10) Monasteries became center of light and learning
- 11) Black monks - landowners, administrators, bishops, writers, artists
- 12) 10th cent. Monastic renewals - Cluny (order, worship), Citeaux (austerity, work)
- 13) 50 monasteries in 1066 grew to 300 monasteries by 1200
- 14) Office - work, service of prayer
- 15) Matins - morning prayer, evensong (vesper, evening star)
- 16) Benedictine - moderation, balance
- 17) Changed rule of master to emphasize monks relating to each other as brothers bound in love, strive with each other for the good of others
- 18) Monks used to go out to desert, now they became centers of light and learning
- 19) Church of England – Cramner condensed offices into 2: matins and evensong

## The Invitation

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- 1) "Now is the hour to rise ... open eyes ... hear ... run while you have the light of life"
- 2) 3 vows - obedience, stability, conversatio morum
- 3) Rule: roots, belonging, community, fulfillment, sharing, space, listening, silence
- 4) Paradox: freedom & authority, marketplace & desert, stability & change
- 5) Ordinary folk with extraordinary value
- 6) See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life ... basis for individual to grow and develop
- 7) Make Scripture a living experience
- 8) Monks sought strength instead of knowledge
- 9) Word is the point of reference
- 10) "We are hastening to our heavenly home (hand to the plough)
- 11) Sons, workers, soldiers
- 12) Bonhoeffer - meditation allows Word to do its' work without our being aware of it (re: don't study ... listen and meditate)
- 13) Writing the Rule with a community of laymen in mind
- 14) Rule makes allowances for human weaknesses, ordinary people
- 15) Thomas Merton 'that concern for doing ordinary things quietly and perfectly for the glory of God which is the beauty of the pure Benedictine life'
- 16) Rule avoids over legislating ... more interested in educating the individual to recognize the need of the moment and respond to it appropriately
- 17) From Prologue "It is high time for us to arise from sleep" to confront us with Gospel and its demands
- 18) PS94 – If you hear his voice today do not harden your hearts
- 19) Rule is the means, not the ends – points beyond itself

## Listening

- 1) If I respond, it must be here and now, with action as well as faith
- 2) Obscura - humble way of listening, listen and obey - Word, Rule, abbot, brethren, our bodies
- 3) Schooling - acquire info and experience
- 4) Listening requires love as well as assent
- 5) Re: nursing home - requests and reminiscences repeated endlessly points to Orthodox liturgy - repetitions again and again, time outside of time
- 6) If we stop listening to what find hard to take - we're likely to pass God by without noticing Him (Abbot of St Benoit-sur-Loire)
- 7) Obedience - from Latin oboedire, audire - to hear - loving response to God- 2 Cor 9:7 obedience with a glad heart
- 8) Labor of obedience vs sloth of disobedience
- 9) Humility - humus (earth) - profoundly earthed
- 10) Renounce will - not free will but self-interest - rather serve others
- 11) Conquest of self - ladder, 12 rungs - interior disposition, exterior conduct - never forget the omnipresence of God, place all that I am before God
- 12) If I want to grow - openness and interaction with others is imperative ... grow with other's gifts, recognize my own limitations
- 13) Extreme mortification - does not necessarily mean giving up one's will
- 14) Rule - help discover how great is the freedom to which you are called - to do what your heart wants to do, discerning God's will - not "finding solution to a crossword puzzle" but rather what can be done with building blocks
- 15) Chapter 7 - 2<sup>nd</sup> step in humility 'a man loves not his desires but rather he shall imitate by his actions the saying of the Lord: I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me (Jn 6:38)
- 16) How aware am I that anything I do in my life is a part of the working out of God's will?
- 17) Goal of humility – free from self-seeking, self-sufficiency, self-deceptions "to be able to do what in the depths of your heart what you really want to do"
- 18) Model for seeking God's will. We are given building blocks and have to see what can be done with them using in the task all our intelligence, sensitivity and love
- 19) At the root of obedience is the free, humble, loving surrender to the will of the Lord

## Stability

- 1) Novice spends 4 days knocking, warned about hardships, Rule is read, if accepted then the rule is read again 6 months and 4 months later
- 2) Stability - accept this community, this place, this people as the way to God "anchor in the sea"

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- 3) Inserted into the mystery of Christ through this particular **Stability allows individual to have the time/space to enter into dialogue with God**
- 4) **Persevering in love allows others to grow**
- 5) body
- 6) Endure (be steadfast) wait for the Lord
- 7) Persevere with patience
- 8) Not accepting situation makes it a trap
- 9) Accepting limits leads to creativity
- 10) Accept reality of situation, listen to demands of task at hand
- 11) Hear and now is what counts for God wants me here at this time
- 12) **Submit to time to transcend it - the eternal present where we meet God**
- 13) If I can't find God here, then I can't find him anywhere because the kingdom is within us
- 14) Poustinia - sparsely furnished cabin to meet God in
- 15) Accept myself, my circumstances to bring me to cross and new life
- 16) Without roots we can't discover where we belong, nor can we grow

## Change

- 1) Obedience, stability and conversio morum – recognized God's complete faithfulness and reliability
- 2) Conversatio morum - implies change; open, free response to challenges; commitment to inner transformation
- 3) [church is the body, office is the service -- church gathers for the office, church officer is a member of the body who does the service]
- 4) Metanoia
- 5) Office - drama of God dealing with his people, death leads to life
- 6) Re: chapter 4 - toils for good works - goal is Christ
- 7) **Constantly letting go recognizes God's unpredictability, no security here**
- 8) Run while you have the light of life
- 9) Goal of changes is not self-fulfillment but Christ – deeds not words
- 10) Seeking God – making prayers by depending on grace, opus Dei, with the help of God
- 11) Brothers and nonnus
- 12) **I must live in the moment, I am what I am here, here is where I grow**

## Balance

- 1) Balance mind body spirit make the individual - prayer, study, work lead to God
- 2) Moderation - even Lent - small reduction is food, little addition to prayer
- 3) Balance moderation so that each element of life can be enjoyed
- 4) **All events are significant**
- 5) **All items are sacred**

## Material Things

- 1) Each one should have what is necessary, each of a steward of communities/God's property
- 2) Belongings (all things) are good, holy, meant to be enjoyed
- 3) Find Christ in people
- 4) No division between sacred and secular
- 5) All goods belong to God and are treated according
- 6) Clothing – modesty, serviceable, practical
- 7) Moderation – neither poverty nor affluence is desirable
- 8) All goods are in common
- 9) All goods are holy, meant to be enjoyed, be thankful for
- 10) **People come to God through wholeness of life, things natural and manmade**
- 11) Bring all senses to life. Look, touch, listen, smell, taste
- 12) Re: tea ceremony, all things cause worship of the one who provides
- 13) No manual labor on Sunday – work is not and end in itself
- 14) God's glory in the ordinary

## People

- 1) Being real about yourself and accepting of yourself allows you be real about and accept others
- 2) All are equal - to be treated with respect
- 3) Love self, others, God
- 4) Authority
- 5) Authority with love
- 6) Inner (peace, forgiveness, grace) yields external (peace, forgiveness, grace)
- 7) Each person handled according to ability/uniqueness
- 8) Solidarity, pluralism, authority, subsidiarity - responsibility for each other, worth of each other's gifts exercised with care, no unnecessary delegation of tasks
- 9) Make room for individual to grow in holiness at own rate
- 10) Rule is for people, community is for individual
- 11) All tasks are equal
- 12) Stability – do not run from self, see others as they are and allow them to be
- 13) Obedience - lay aside idols, each out to others
- 14) Treat others with dignity, respect
- 15) Listen, discover gifts of other people

## Authority

1. Gentleness with firmness, not permissive or repressive
2. Teach and lead by example
3. Forgiveness, peace
4. Love others and self
5. Distribute gifts and discipline according to needs
6. 4 principles
  - a. Solidarity – each member is equally concerned and responsible
  - b. Pluralism – ultimate worth of individual, gifts
  - c. Authority – exercise power without detracting from subsidiarity
  - d. Subsidiarity – what someone can do themselves should not be entrusted to another, balance interdependence

## Prayer

- 1) Prayer - sustains other activities, express of love to God, time for relationship with God, need to be silent to listen
- 2) Silence - watch wait listen
- 3) 4 hours/day - lectio divina - prayerful reading, meditation, memorization, repetition
- 4) Daily office in community, hear Word, listen
- 5) Whole body engaged, read out loud, understood by intelligence fixed by memory, put into practice
- 6) Psalms - cover depth of human experience
- 7) Prayer for all routine tasks
- 8) Pray is opus dei
- 9) Be alert and listen, cease outer and inner noise
- 10) Listen in liturgy and psalms, readings, study, meditation, lectio divina, memorization
- 11) Prayer in all tasks