The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

COMMUNITY IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

Sr. Hilda Frost OSB - "Reflections"

Dear Benedictine Oblates, novices and friends,

Greetings and best wishes to all of you for this New Year. May 2003 be filled with blessings for each one of you.

COMMUNITY IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

For Benedict, everything takes place within the context of community. Whether he is talking about prayer, relationships, work, or whatever it may be, the disciple is reminded that he or she is part of a community.

This is particularly so in the case of Benedictine Oblates of the World Community for Christian Meditation. Benedict makes no reference to a specific place or location, but rather a way of life, based on the teaching of Jesus. Whether we live in a 'monastery without walls' or with other monastics, we are truly a part of a community and are united to one another. I will briefly mention three aspects of community that we find in the Rule: prayer, relationships, and work.

There are others, which I hope to comment on later.

Prayer.

Benedict puts prayer at the centre of everything. He devotes no less than 12 chapters of the Rule to what he calls the 'Opus Dei', or 'Work of God'.(RB 8-19) The psalms obviously meant a lot to him, since he includes psalmody in every part of the Divine Office - psalms for morning, midday, evening, Sundays, feasts etc. and how they are to be arranged according to the liturgical seasons. Similarly the reading of Scripture is recommended for the Office,

together with other prayers including the 'Our Father' at every Office. However, with typical flexibility Benedict concludes with the words "we have no hesitation in urging that, if any are dissatisfied with this distribution of psalms they should re-arrange them in whatever way seems better." (RB 19). So we are all invited to adapt the Office according to our own needs and the circumstances of our lives.

By way of contrast Benedict says very little about contemplative prayer. He knew Cassian (RB 73) and advocated his teaching. Like him he insists on silence (RB 52) and using few words: 'we must know that God regards our purity of heart and tears of compunction, not our many words'.(RB 20). The 'Opus Dei' and silent personal prayer go together of course; we need both for a fruitful spiritual life.

John Main makes this clear: 'We urge you to begin your day with morning prayer and your morning meditation and to end the day with evening prayer and your evening meditation' (Joy of Being. p. 54)

Relationships

In all his teaching Benedict keeps coming back to one essential truth: Christ is really present in each person we encounter - within our community, family, workplace or elsewhere. Everyone is to be loved, respected, honoured, (RB 4) listened to (RB 3) and welcomed as Christ (RB 53) Everyone without exception, is to be treated with gentleness and compassion (RB 64: 36). It is a matter of accepting ourselves and one another as we really are: forgiving each other, encouraging and supporting one another. This is not an easy path, and we will probably struggle with it all our lives.

John Main has this to say: 'The essence of the life of a monastic is to love Christ as you love your neighbour. That is the importance of the Rule for all of us. That openness to the divine mystery is the basis of our daily lives. ....When Benedict tells us to revere everyone, what he is telling us is to be aware of the mystery that another person is....'(Community of Love p. 48)

Work

Benedict always teaches the importance of a balanced life-style. 'Community members should have specified periods for manual labour as well as for prayerful reading'. (RB 48) He calls moderation 'the mother of all virtues'. (RB 64 and 48). Benedict recognizes the dangers of overwork, stress and fatigue, and what that can do to family life, prayer, and so on. He makes provision for additional help to be given whenever it is needed (RB 31, 53). As well as that he recognises the giftedness of individuals and wants them to use their talents for the benefit of the community (RB 57). Balance and moderation are not easily achieved in our busy world of today, even within a monastery. It is often something we have to work at, and at times make decisions about, so that we work within our limitations and do not take on more than we can manage.

John Main has this to say: 'Monastic work.....leads the monk to find Christ everywhere and in everyone. Hence the spirit of love and perfection he brings to it.' (Community of Love p. 133)

These three elements of community are a part of the lives of all of us. At times we may think we are alone in the struggle, but that is not so. We are always part of a community. Whenever we meditate, we are part of the World Community. There is always someone, somewhere, meditating at the same time. The same is true of the life of Oblates of the World Community.

There are others who may live near or far away, who are walking the same spiritual path. In a mysterious way we are all connected with one another. This gives us a sense of support, encouragement, and hope to persevere in the way of Benedict.

Let us then 'prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life' (RB 72). With much love to you all,

Hilda OSB

Sr. Hilda is a Benedictine Sister at St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg Canada. She comes from a very ecumenical background: with a Methodist father, a Congregationalist mother, who attended the Anglican Church in England. After attending a convent school Sr. Hilda became a Catholic, and entered the cloistered Benedictines in England. When the community became diminished and eventually had to close she came to Canada in l981. Sr. Hilda has a background in Scripture, monastic history etc. and has been a meditator for more than 20 years. She has given retreats and workshops on the Rule of Benedict, the mystics, as well as on Christian meditation. She is coordiantor of the WCCM Oblates in Canada, and also leads a meditation group in her own monastery.

Oblates

Source URL: http://www.wccm.org/content/community-rule-benedict