



## ***Exploring Benedictine Values***

Featured in *Ministry of Mothers Sharing* monthly e-newsletter

### **May 2010**

Three legs support the spiritual foundation of Benedictinism: prayer, work, and holy leisure. Prayer is being conscious of the presence of God. Work involves being a co-creator of the kingdom of God. Holy leisure provides time to reflect and thus make prayer real.

In our next issue we will begin to explore these concepts more in depth.

### **June 2010**

In our last issue, we talked about *Ministry of Mothers Sharing* being rooted in Benedictine Values and the three legs that support the spiritual foundation of Benedictinism: prayer, work, and holy leisure.

**Prayer** is being conscious of the presence of God. Venture to pray and you are acknowledging the presence of God in the moment. The *Center and Centrifuge of Life*, Benedictine prayer is Scriptural, regular, and reflective, designed to enable people to realize that God is in the world around them. We are invited to see our world through the eyes of God.

St. Benedict called for prayer at regular intervals of each day. In doing so, the message is clear: remember why you are here, remember the purpose of life. Prayer in the midst of your day connects you to the holiness of that day, the importance of the work, the child-rearing, the care-giving, whatever you are about.

We pray to see life as it is, to understand it, and to make it better than it was. We pray to understand things as they are, not to ignore and avoid and deny them. We pray in order that we still see the world as holy. On the quietest and the busiest of days.

### **July 2010**

*Ministry of Mothers Sharing* is rooted in Benedictine Values. The three legs that support the spiritual foundation of Benedictinism are prayer, work, and holy leisure. Last month we discussed **prayer** as acknowledgement of the conscious presence of God in our lives and in a particular moment.

**Work**, by definition, is to exert oneself by doing something mental or physical for a purpose or out of necessity. For too many, the concept of work carries with it a negative sense. The struggle to simply 'get the job done' comes from the 'out of necessity' aspect of the definition. In the monastic tradition, work is considered a privilege, a gift to be given. It is participation in creation—purposeful, perfecting, and valuable. Work is what we do to continue what God wants done. It is a commitment to God's service.

Work in the Benedictine vision is also meant to build community. It leads to self-fulfillment as we use the gifts and talents we have, and it calls on gifts in us of which we are unaware. As we grow into our fuller, wiser selves, we become open to new dimensions of our own personalities and talents yet to be discovered. Rather than comparing ourselves to others, we search within them for gifts they hold.

Work, then, can be a calling, a vocation. It is a call to be a steward of the earth. With the realization that we are co-creators with God, work becomes a friend of the soul.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **August 2010**

Our discussion moves to **holy leisure**. This, along with **prayer** (acknowledgement of the conscious presence of God in our lives) and **work** (a call to be a steward of the earth and co-creator with God) makes up the spiritual foundation of Benedictinism.

In today's culture, we are often trained to be doers and makers, not dreamers and seers. Benedictine spirituality, on the other hand, sets out to develop people who reflect on what they are doing, people for whom the gospel is the filter through which they see their world. Prayer, community, and personal development are as essential to the good life as work. This takes a sense of **holy leisure**.

Holy leisure is leisure that makes the human more human by engaging the heart, broadening the vision, deepening the insight, and stretching the soul. Leisure has two dimensions; play and rest. The balance of work and real play—activities done for no other purpose than the release and recapture of energy—is essential. *“No matter how valuable your work, remember that the empty vessel must be filled.”* If we stretch ourselves beyond measure, our souls, not our bodies, grow tired, and we will break.

Holy leisure allows us to look at life in fresh, new ways and to seek a life rhythm that allows time to be thoughtful as well as productive. It is the foundation of contemplation, which is the pursuit of meaning, finding the will of God everywhere and feeling the presence of God anywhere. It is an awareness of God within us and in the people around us. Inner vision and direction come from keeping the heart centered on God and the mind open. Contemplation brings depth and fullness to daily activities and is as concerned with the way a thing is done as it is with what is done.

We must look at the distinction between purpose and meaning in life. Purpose has to do with being productive, setting goals, knowing what needs to be done, and doing it. Meaning depends on asking who will care, who will profit, who will be touched, and who will be forgotten, hurt, or affected by my doing those things. Purpose determines what I will do with this part of my life. Meaning demands to know why I'm doing it and with what global results. It is through holy leisure that we find time for contemplation, time to bring forth the kind of energy necessary to make our work not only possible, but worthwhile.

Our souls seek harmony, a sense of peace that comes through prayer, work, and holy leisure. With that harmony comes a grace-filled life well-lived.

### **September 2010**

Our souls seek harmony and a sense of peace that comes with a grace-filled life well-lived. Benedictine Spirituality offers an invitation to live within that harmony. We have discussed prayer, work, and holy leisure as the three legs that support Benedictine Spirituality. We move to **hospitality**, another foundational value in which *Ministry of Mothers Sharing* is grounded.

*“All guests welcomed as Christ”* (RB 53)

These words greet all who enter the grounds of the high school adjacent to St. Paul's Monastery. Founded by the Benedictine Sisters decades ago, the school answered a call to create a learning environment in which spiritual growth and social development were valued along with academic excellence. The words offer an invitation to students and guests alike to reflect on the presence of Christ in each person. They also introduce the core Benedictine value of **hospitality**.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **September 2010** continued

Benedictine hospitality involves more than an act of social grace such as a smile or warm welcome to an expected guest. Benedict believed that everyone we encounter—the poor, the unexpected, the curious, those not of our religion, social standing or education—should be received with genuine acceptance, whatever their current situation. Hospitality is a spiritual act, a holy event. It matters not so much *what* we share of ourselves, but *that* we are sharing—*real sharing*. That is, giving from our whole selves, not just our ‘extras’.

Hospitality involves not only sharing, but listening as well. When we let others into our lives, we stretch our vision of the world. With open minds and hearts, we are called to ask what honesty and insight might come into our lives through our various encounters. We can discover opportunities to get through the barriers of our own fears and prejudices and both understand and care about the situations of others.

A Benedictine heart is to be a place without boundaries, a point where all the differences of the world meet and melt. Benedictine hospitality is the way we come out of ourselves, with our minds, hearts, lives, talents, and hands open. Done well, it is to be practiced daily with a *recklessly generous heart*. Benedictine hospitality—hospitality of the heart—can change a world of potential enemies into a world of potential friends.

***“God may have sent that one for that very reason”*** (RB 61)

Concepts for the previous articles taken from *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* by Joan Chittister, OSB

### **October 2010**

***Community:*** *Members of all ages are committed to one another in living out the monastic way of life according to the Rule of St. Benedict.*

- Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Paul’s Monastery

Another season has begun and new relationships are forming as groups resume activities and schedules fall into place. This is an opportune time to reflect on the value of community. While relatively few of us live in a Monastery, we all live in a community, the place where we shop, eat, work, go to church, socialize, and most of all our own family unit. Looking at community from the Benedictine perspective, we acknowledge the ‘relational’ need we all have.

**Community** is the basis of human relationships, offering a sense of belonging. Benedictine Spirituality goes deeper, inviting a sense of purpose. ‘Living in community’ is being bonded together in Christ, sharing a common vision, and genuinely wanting good for one another. Members are part of ‘we’. With that realization—that we are in this together, that one is not alone—comes opportunities to grow.

To ‘live in community’ is to share more than time and space. It is to support, empower and learn from one another, no matter one’s age or place in life. With a shared vision and foundation based on Christ, life becomes more than what is convenient and best for me, how I can further myself and/or career. It is an understanding that each is unique, with gifts to give in order that the entire community/family is richer. We learn to trust our gifts, not just for their own sake, but as something to be given away in order that the whole human community is richer for our having been here.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **October 2010** continued

While all have lives of their own, there is a realization that life without others is only half a life. Within community, growth—not perfection—is expected. Each person has a right to be listened to and given help when the tasks are too much to manage. A strong foundation depends on stability, on seeing things through and working challenges out. There is also an acceptance that everything in life cannot be cured or resolved or eliminated. Some things must simply be accepted. Community and relationships enable us to do that. They are meant to hold us up on the days when we are very, very down.

In community/family, we work out our connectedness to God, to one another, to ourselves. It is where we find out who we really are. Life with someone else doesn't show me nearly as much about his or her shortcomings as it does about my own.

In relationship, I learn how to soften my hard spots and how to reconcile and how to care for someone besides myself.

**Relationships show me where holiness is for me. Alone, I am what I am.  
In community, I have a chance to become everything that I can be.**

### **November 2010**

*Silence: A personal yearning for the presence of the Holy.  
A commitment to listening through the gift of a quiet internal spirit  
nourished by a peaceful environment.*

- Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Paul's Monastery

I will come to you in the silence,  
I will lift you from all your fear.  
You will hear my voice,  
I claim you as my choice,  
Be still and know I am here.

*You Are Mine* by David Haas

November brings with it joyful anticipation that the 'holiday season' is upon us. While these days that stretch from Thanksgiving through the New Year can be a time of blessing and grace, they all too often become a source of stress and anxiety. Silence is a must to maintain a sense of the sacred during the secular 'holiday season'.

**Silence**, a yearning for the presence of the Holy, brings with it the opportunity to enter more and more into God's plan for us. Yet a quiet internal spirit can be difficult to hold in our world of chaos and busy schedules. How can we bring a sense of quiet into our hearts when the external is so full of 'noise'?

The secular world bombards us. We have to be intentional in seeking silence if we are to move to a quiet internal spirit. We can create a quiet space—a corner or even a shelf—that we go to as a physical reminder of the external silence we need. Items placed here can trigger a reminder of the internal silence we long for. Setting aside time daily—yes, daily, even if only a moment or two—is part of this journey toward a quiet, peaceful heart. When we pause long enough to sense our quiet internal spirit, we begin to see the world through renewed and peaceful eyes.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

**November 2010** continued

It is in the silence that we hear God the loudest. We quiet our minds and open our hearts to listen, *truly listen*. As we practice, we move closer to that quiet internal spirit which lends itself to a sense of peace and presence of the Holy.

*Be still and know that I am God.* Psalm 46:10

**December 2010**

### *Six Ways to Get a Little Balance in Your Life*

by Sr. Mary White, OSB

*Six ways to put St. Benedict's basic ideas of spirituality into practice:*

- 1** *Take time each day to reflect and breathe.* Push away from your desk, sit with a cup of coffee or tea, take a walk or go to a quiet place. Detach. Breathe. Pay attention to sensations in your body. With all the static and noise around us, it's hard to listen to the deep wisdom of God within us. Find break times in the day; even five minutes a day is a good start.
- 2** *Learn to be a good listener.* Listening is central to Benedictine spirituality – in fact, it is the first word in the Rule. Benedict urges readers to “listen with the ear of your heart.” Real listening is more than the physical act of hearing, or even comprehending. It's about being open and receptive to other points of view. To really listen is to be so open that whatever you tell me can become a part of my broader view of life.
- 3** *Face your impulse to run away when life gets tough.* The Benedictine idea of stability means staying in the present moment through its inevitable pains and joys. That means staying in a relationship and working out conflicts. It means riding out a rough week or month on the job. We tend to run away from any situation that gets to be difficult. Stability is knowing that we have the strength to work through those problems.
- 4** *Be open to the ways God works in your life.* That means being open to possibilities for change, to anything that calls you to a fuller life. It means recognizing opportunities for broader vision and greater purity of heart. Maybe it's something as routine as accepting praise – or criticism – from a co-worker or friend. Try to shed habits of rigid, static thinking and prejudice.
- 5** *Don't expect a quick fix.* It takes discipline and time to develop new habits. Getting spiritual balance is a spiritual maintenance program, in a way that exercise is a physical maintenance program. Don't be turned away by fear or the difficulty. Stay with it. It's over time that you learn that the practice works.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

December 2010 continued

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*Find spiritual reading that feeds your soul.* See list for suggestions:

- **The Order of St. Benedict**, Web site <http://www.osb.org> run by St. John's Abbey
- **Columba Cary-Elwes**, "Work and Prayer: The Rule of St. Benedict for Lay People"
- **Joan Chittister**, "The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages" and "Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of Benedict Today"
- **Esther deWaal**, "Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict"
- **Norvene Vest**, "No Moment Too Small," "Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict," and "Friend of the Soul: A Benedictine Spirituality of Work"
- **Lonni Collins Pratt and Daniel Homan**, "Benedict's Way: An Ancient Monk's Insights for a Balanced Life"

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January 2011

January is a month when nature seems to rest. The world outside has extended periods of stillness. Darker evenings lead into long nights. This added external darkness lends itself to internal reflection.

### *Change – Grow – Be Transformed by the Spirit*

Change often happens from the inside out. To be open to **change** and the **growth** that naturally follows requires us to be willing to look at ourselves and to be challenged by God and others. Benedictine Spirituality encourages a positive and constructive response to change. Instead of fighting it, we look to see what we can learn.

*Benedictines try to face every situation and person thinking "how is God revealing God's love for me and asking me to change my thinking or feeling about this person, situation or issue?"*

*—Sr. Paula Hagen, OSB*

To be alive is to face constant change. Instead of following our old patterns, we must be willing to look at each situation and ask where God is calling us now. As we seek change, we ask: "Is my desire for this change an 'escape from' something or a 'path to' God. Christians are called to transcend ourselves and put our faith in God. Letting go of what we cling to, we are free to respond to the Lord.

Interacting with other people exposes who we are and often calls us to change.

*We are called to grow and change daily, to be open to the change that God's grace gives us without giving up our values. This also applies to our relationships. To be in right relationship with others—family, friends, coworkers—is to be open to their ideas, feelings, and wisdom about how God is working in their lives. We live with change and growth at a very practical level."*

*—Sr. Paula Hagen, OSB*

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **January 2011** continued

Just how does one become open to the grace that can be found in change?

- Turn to God throughout the day. Ask God to help you.
- Talk to God at all times; instead of mumbling to yourself, talk to God!
- Establish a constant connection through prayer, Scripture, worship with a faith community.
- Practice an awareness of the presence of God in daily life.
- Be patient with yourself.

When we seek to follow Christ—to live as a Christian—we have a touchstone for all our thoughts, actions, and decisions. It takes a long time and lots of practice to be good at practicing the presence of God. Over time, you will find yourself growing more and more aware of this presence. You'll be better able to listen for God each day and in each situation and you will be open to the transforming touch of your loving Creator.

Concepts taken from *St. Benedict's Toolbox* by Jane Tomaine

### **February 2011**

*"It will be OK. And if it isn't, you will be OK. Whatever happens, you have me."*

Imagine hearing this statement from God. If you heard it from someone, you heard it from God. There is a reason why friendship is considered sacred and not taken lightly by Benedictines. Through true friendship and **respect for others**, we grow to understand in a special way that we are not alone. God's love is revealed to us in many earthly ways. Through relationships, we are shown that holiness lies within us and within each person uniquely created by God.

*They should try to be the first to show respect to the other (Rom 12:10, RB) supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body, or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another (RB 72.4-6)*

Benedictines have deep **respect for others** and a reverence for uniqueness. It is easy to talk about the love of God, another thing to practice it. God's love, after all, reminds us that each person has the right to be listened to and given help when life's tasks are too much for them to manage without help. Benedictine Spirituality calls us to a greater understanding of God's love revealed through other people. We learn much about ourselves by learning to focus on being more present, more aware of the people we meet in the ordinary encounters of our daily lives.

It is through knowing others that we get to know our own true self. Being in relationship with someone most often shows us more about our own shortcomings than it does about theirs. Being in relationship helps us learn to soften our hard spots, to reconcile and care for someone besides ourselves. We learn that human love costs—in the daily 'little things'—and makes demands—that we use our gifts for those close to us as well as for others. Being in relationship is about being something greater than yourself. It is about learning to respect others as the unique and beautiful creations they are. We learn that we cannot expect perfection, but rather growth, both in ourselves and in the other.

By respectfully being there for one another, we see with certainty that God's love is radiant and endless. By building loving, stable relationships, we come to appreciate the beauty and rich terrain that exists in each person we meet, whether for a moment or for a lifetime.

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **March 2011**

**Peace.** We all want it. We wish it to others. We sing about it. Yet somehow in our restless, unsettled world, it remains an elusive value, a seemingly unachievable goal. Lent is an excellent time to reflect on what ‘peace’ means to you and, if necessary, take steps to revise your thinking.

Our world defines peace as being able to escape stress or assure superiority. It is often described as something external. Benedictine Spirituality invites us to look internally, to consider peace as the power from within to face life with the serenity of faith and the courage of hope, with assurances that good can come from evil and the belief that good will triumph. It is an understanding that life is not meant to be perfect. For people who have been led to believe that peace is the absence of conflict or control by force, this is a difficult concept to grasp.

Peace comes with not needing to control everything, have everything, surpass everyone, know everything, and to have everyone like me. It comes from seeking God in the present and seeing the world as a whole. Peace comes when we end the war within ourselves. We cannot expect life to be without struggle. But we can expect to see life come from death, to see morning after night. We can expect that acceptance of the struggle will result in a greater sense of inner calm. As we confront the chaos that often exists in our minds, we find the energy that love always brings.

Benedictine peace comes from living the Paschal mystery well—the process of suffering, dying and rising to new life. It is a consistent commitment—through good times and bad, struggle and doubt, suffering and hope—to knowing in our hearts that the struggle is worth it. A sense of internal peace comes from seeking, not from getting; from the inside, not the outside; from right-heartedness, not self centeredness. It comes from the way we look at life, not from the way we control it. It is from the attitude we bring, not the power.

With peace comes the desire to live every part of life in a reverent way. As we reshape our understanding, we realize that relationships are not what I do when I have time left over. Family is not something I pay attention to only when the other parts of my life—the laundry, cleaning, work report, parties, neighbors, clubs, career, hobbies—are finished. Reading is not something I do when life calms down. Prayer is not something I do when I feel like it. Relationships, family, reading, and prayer are all channels of hope and growth. They must be given time and energy and all will move me toward a sense of peace.

St. Benedict knew that the process of seeking peace is not easy. It comes from trying over and over again to find our place in the universe without violence, without selfishness, without demands. Be soft with others and *you will have peace in your heart*. Be simple in your needs and *you will have peace in your heart*. Be humble in what you demand of life and *you will have peace in your heart*. Be giving in what you take to life and *you will have peace in your heart*.

And ultimately, peace comes with truly believing that *God works everything to the good*.

Concepts taken from *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* by Joan Chittister, OSB

## *Exploring Benedictine Values* (continued)

### **April 2011**

God sent us Jesus to tell us and show us how to live and how to 'be'. Jesus did this by his very words, teachings, ways of being, and most definitely by how he related with others. He lived with true compassion, 'being with' others. He hurt when others hurt; scripture tells us that 'Jesus wept' with Martha and Mary when they told him of the death of their brother Lazarus. Although we move through challenges in our lives, and there are difficulties that bring us pain, Jesus rose from the dead in order to call us to live in joy, live in God's light, live with celebration. We are called to live as '**Easter**' people, rising from the challenges and bring forth the new life of light and joy that trusting in God gives us. *Blessed are those who believe and do not see.* John 20:29

Living as Easter people means to live the joy, trust, love, and witness that Jesus brought to us; have that shine over the challenges, difficulties, pain that life can give us. Jesus said, *'I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.'* John 10:10

Let us live the 'full' that Jesus came to give us.

