



THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

Volume 1. No. 3

September, 2009

Welcome to the “The Cyber Toolbox!” a monthly E-Newsletter with practical suggestions and ideas for bringing the teachings of St. Benedict alive in your daily life.

As Benedict requests the porter say to all who come to the monastery, “Your blessing, please!”

“The Second Fruit of the Spirit: Joy”

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Galatians 5:22-23

What is joy and how do we find it? One evening on a vacation in northern New Hampshire I was cozy in bed on a chilly summer night when suddenly my husband John burst into the room with excitement and said, “You’ve GOT to come out and look at the stars. It’s AMAZING!” My only desire at that moment was the warmth of bed and comforter, but not wanting to hurt his feelings, I gave a weak, “Thanks. I’ll take a look.”

Throwing back the covers, I put on sweats and shoes, clumped down the stairs and ventured out into the chilly night. After walking a short way beyond the door I stopped and looked up. I was stunned! Never before had I seen so many stars. My mouth dropped open as I looked in wonder, seeing for the first time in my life the Milky Way spilling across the sky, surrounded by hundreds of twinkling lights that weren’t human-made. Taking in the absolute WONDER of what I had never seen before, spontaneous joyful laughter began to bubble up from within me. As I gazed a surprise thought came into my head—I’m looking at the stars for God! Not knowing quite what THAT was all about I just looked well for God and for me and laughed in joyful delight at what God had spilled across the sky.

Does Benedict instruct us to go out and look at the stars to experience joy? Well...he does tell us in the Prologue to “open our eyes to the light that comes from God,” and the stars are surely that! But let’s look at where he actually uses the word “joy.”

The Latin word *gaudium* that we translate as “joy” is appears only four times in the Rule. Here they are:

1. Chapter 49 – The Observance of Lent: The monastics are to add additional private prayer or abstinence so that each will “have something above the assigned measure to offer God of his own will *with the joy of the Holy Spirit*” (I Thess 1:6). RB 49.5-6
2. Chapter 49: For the Lenten discipline, “...let each one deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.” RB 49.7
3. Chapter 7 on humility: Benedict instructs the monastic to be obedient under difficult circumstances, enduring everything for the Lord’s sake, “so confident in their expectation of reward from God that they continue joyfully...” RB 7.39
4. Chapter 2 – Qualities of the Abbot: The abbot is to accommodate himself to the various temperaments within the monastery so that, instead of driving people away, he can “rejoice in the increase of a good flock.” RB 2.32

As we look more closely at these four instances of “joy,” we first see that the Lenten discipline is a gift to God made with the *joy of the Holy Spirit*. The Lenten discipline is to be offered

joyfully in love; not grudgingly with a moan or groan. "What is necessary," Terence Kardong O.S.B. explains of Benedict's thought, "is to purify one's motives so that the Spirit can work freely in one's heart...All of monastic life depends on a willing and spontaneous spirit of joyful love." Even in Lent the monk is to be joyful. Spiritual longing is to be a part of this Lenten joy as the monastic looks toward Easter. "This is the equivalent of saying that for Christians there is no time of sadness," Kardong explains. "How can we be sad when we know that Christ has conquered sin and death?"¹

In asking the monastic to be obedient even if it is difficult, Benedict links joy with trust in God. We can be joyful because we are confident of and trust in the promises of God to be with us in this life and the next. Lastly, Benedict is concerned about building up the community and not losing a single soul. By treating each person with respect and flexibility, the abbot or abbess can enjoy an increase in monastery that is an occasion for joy.

When we look at grief, *tristitia*, the opposite of joy, we find in the Rule that the monastics are not to act in ways that could block the flow of joy within the monastery. They are not to cause one another grief or to grieve over their personal circumstances. In his translation of the Rule, Timothy Fry uses the word "distressed." The cellarer, for example, is to distribute goods "at the proper times, so that no one may be disquieted or distressed (*tristitia*) in the house of God." RB 31.19. And, monks "must not become distressed" if they must do the harvest themselves or when they see the abbot giving a gift they received to another monk. RB 48.7; 54.4.

What does this mean for us? Benedictine joy is about offering oneself to God in purity of heart so that the Spirit can shape us. It is about the discipline of spiritual longing and about trusting in God when we are facing difficult challenges and frustrating circumstances which we long to be different. Benedictine joy comes when we treat people with respect and flexibility, doing what we can to build a community of God's house wherever we are. Everything we do is to come from love and for the purpose of furthering the kingdom of God for ourselves and others. Life in the house of God, life within our own houses of family, church, community, work and friendships are to be places where the "grief/distressing" barometer is low and

the support for joy is high. You and I can do our part to create an open and loving environment by who we are and what we do. Following the Benedictine way of joy we can nurture the path to joy as we live close to God, offering all we do in trust and confidence that God will take our offering and use it for the furthering of the kingdom and for our own fruit of the Spirit that is joy.

P.S. Check out those stars!!

September 1, 2009
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The Tool of the Month

Opening to Joy

Purpose of the Tool: To provide a reflection on what saps our joy in God and in life.

Background on the Tool: As Esther de Waal wrote in "Creation," in *The Oblate Life*, Benedict's concern is always to form "the disposition of the heart, which determines the way we see and handle our lives."² With this thought in mind I offer this tool for reflection and action.

The Tool:

Here are the steps:

- What is it that most saps your ability to be joyful? Be specific. Write it down.
This could also be a prime obstacle in your relationship to God and to the flow of the Spirit of Love in your life.
- Now, think of a very joyful experience you have had.
It could be like my star gazing or something totally different. Picture it. Relive your feelings if you can.
- Next, ask yourself this: Is it worth my missing experiences like this because of [*whatever you named that most saps your energy*]? Is experiencing what most saps

¹ Terence G. Kardong O.S.B., *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 405-406.

² Esther de Waal, "Creation." *The Oblate Life* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2008), 205.

my energy worth missing out on a greater sense of God's presence in my life?

If the answer is, "No!" (and I hope it is!) read on.

When you feel yourself getting caught up in that joy-sapping feeling, take a deep breath, hold it for a moment and exhale slowly. Then, turn your heart to Christ in whatever way works for you. Recite a meaningful verse from scripture or something like, "My joy is in you," or visualize yourself with him.

Be intentional. Live close to God and the fruit of joy will bubble up from within you. God bless.

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A Note on the Tools

Perhaps some would like to share how it is going to use these tools. I will explore with my techno guru as to what I could set up to make this possible. Stay tuned...

A Website Update

My webmaster has been at work putting in some updates and new features to my website. I am hoping that these will be ready very soon. To be added are these features:

Copies of *The Cyber Toolbox* and a link to request to be added to the list.

An updated list of the programs that I have scheduled.

A new section called "Toolbox News."

In the meantime, please check out my website at

www.stbenedictstoolbox.org

Upcoming Programs

Jane will be leading two Benedictine Experiences this fall in addition to other programs requested by churches and spirituality centers. Benedictine Experiences are retreats modeled after the way of

life set out by St. Benedict in his Rule, giving balanced attention to body, mind and spirit. **All are welcome!**

❖ ***Living with Christ at the Center – The Benedictine Way of Hope***

Oct 19-23, 2009 Monday eve – Friday morning,

St. Mary's Convent in Greenwich, New York

Sponsored by *The Friends of St. Benedict*

Phone: 202-363-8061

Email: saintbenedict@verizon.net
www.benedictfriend.org

❖ ***The Benedictine Path to Living Simply: Living with Peace in Your Heart***

Nov 12 – 15, 2009 Thursday eve – Sunday morning

Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, NY

Phone: 845-384-6660

Email: questhouse@hcmnet.org
www.holycrossmonastery.org

Jane will be leading a day retreat on Benedictine hope at the **Convent of St. John Baptist in Mendham, NJ** on Saturday, November 7 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Please see the Convent website for further information:
www.csjb.org.

Plan a Retreat or Program

Jane is available to do retreats and programs in the Benedictine Tradition. Content is personalized to maximize the relevance and benefit to attendees. Programs will bring the ideas to life in a practical and down-to-earth way. Retreats are modeled by Benedictine balance—time alone and time together, and time for rest, study and prayer.

To schedule a retreat or seminar or if you have questions about a program, contact Jane at 908-233-0134, cell-908-463-3252 or send an email to Jane at jtomaine1685@verizon.net.

*But as we progress in this way of life and in faith,
we shall run on the path of God's
commandments,
our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible
delight of love.*

Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict 49