



THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

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February, 2010

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. In the article I am currently exploring the fruit of the Spirit as found in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians.

“Faithfulness”

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

Galatians 5:22-23

This month we consider the fruit of the Spirit that is faithfulness and its presence in the Rule of St. Benedict.

A number of years ago when I was working at AT&T my whole department in New Jersey was shipped off to a ranch near Santa Fe, New Mexico where for four days we climbed ropes, scaled seemingly glass smooth walls and generally eyed one another with nervous laughter as we did exercises designed to increase our levels of trust. In one such exercise the “victim” would stand on an old tree stump several feet high, cross arms over chest, take a breath (their last?) and fall backwards into the hopefully firmly-linked arms of their co-workers. I don’t know which role I liked the least—being the faller relying on others or the catcher assuring the safety of another human being. Gulp. It all was a real test of trust in others and in oneself.

To be faithful is to be steadfast; a person who stays the course, who can be counted on by others, who is guided by a commitment that shapes action. The importance of faithfulness in the Rule of St. Benedict is found in the vow of stability where we commit ourselves with a whole heart to stay the course in place, to community and relationship, to situations and work, to prayer and serving others

and to our relationship with God. The Rule gives us a model of what a life of faithfulness looks like in prayer, worship, relationships, work, hospitality and tasks.

In the Latin Vulgate Bible the word is *fides* for “faith” and “faithfulness.” Faith, for Benedict, is “the biblical trust in God alone” and not tenets or beliefs.¹ Benedict uses *fides* several times in the Rule including twice in the Prologue.

“Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him *who has called us to his kingdom.*” (1 Thess 2:12 and Prol 21)

“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.” (Prol 49)

Notice that each use of *faith* is coupled with *action*, either “the performance of good works” or to progress in “this way of life,” the latter referring to the Christian life inside or outside the cloister. In a sermon at our recent diocesan convention The Rt. Rev. George Councill, bishop of our neighboring diocese in New Jersey, gave us a wonderful image for faithfulness. Being faithful, he explained, is a matter of the heart because the heart is what pumps blood to the hands and feet. Faithfulness is not a “head-trip” but a life of action.

In Prologue Benedict gives us important ways to be faithful to God and to others...

¹ Terence G. Kardong, O.S.B., *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 24.

Pray before you begin a good work (4)
Open your eyes to the light that comes from God (9)
When you hear God, do not harden your heart (10)
Keep away from vicious talk and deceit (17)
Do good; let peace be your quest and aim (17 and last month's *Cyber Toolbox* focus)
Walk without blemish (25)
Dash your temptations against Christ, (28) and so forth.

Benedict then reminds us that “the Lord waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, his holy teachings.”(35) There are many days I know the Lord waits plenty long for me! How can we be more faithful and faith-filled people?? I believe that “all stability [e.g., faithfulness] is possible because God is faithful...We turn from God but God does not turn away from us. We run after other gods, yet God reaches out to us to draw us back again...Benedict says that we can be faithful because God is faithful.”²

In a recent book on prayer Joan Chittister, OSB describes prayer as “falling into God.”³ To me this describes what faithfulness is all about whether we are seeking at that moment to be faithful in a spiritual discipline, in service of others, in a relationship or in a tough situation. We can't be faithful alone without God's help just like I couldn't fall back off that tree stump safely without those trustworthy co-workers to catch me. Faithfulness isn't a signing up with a specific string of religious tenets or doctrines or something we conjure up in our heads. Faithfulness is falling back in trust into the power of God—just folding our arms over our chests, taking a breath and leaning ever so slightly, even a tiny bit, until the gravity of love lets us fall into the safety and power of God. We fall back into God knowing we will be caught, supported and will receive what we need to do those good works and to progress in the way of life that we desire most deeply. God's faithfulness will make our faithfulness

possible as the energy of the Spirit of God flows through our heart to hands and feet.

I'm grateful that Benedict joins faith, i.e., trust, with the process of growing into who I am to be as a Christian. To translate into action our Lord's instructions related just in the Prologue is a daunting task and will take a lifetime. Being a Christian inside or outside the cloister is living a process of conversion and transformation as we live into who we are to be in Christ. Referring to the Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum* Cyprian Smith, O.S.B. writes that “I shall never succeed in this unless the Spirit of God enters in, takes charge, and changes me into a new person and a new being.”⁴

When we fall back into God our inner attitude and our outward behavior will be different from the world's because God will be at the center of our life. With God at the center and faithfulness to the process of becoming as Christ, we will “progress in this way of life...we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”⁵

February 1, 2010

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The Tool of the Month

Falling Back Into God

Purpose of the Tool: To exercise and strengthen our faithfulness by a falling back into God.

Background on the Tool: In the above article I described a trust-building exercise where a person would fall backwards into the linked arms of co-workers. We can appropriate this same exercise as we follow that process of conversion that is the Christian life—we can cross our arms, take a breath and fall back into God who is ready and waiting to catch us and empower us to good works (Prol 21) and to progress in the Christian way of life (Prol 49).

² Jane Tomaine, *St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publications, 2005), 26.

³ Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *The breath of the soul: Reflections on Prayer* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009), 119.

⁴ Cyprian Smith, O.S.B., *The Path of Life* (Leominster, England: Ampleforth Abbey Press, 1995), 31.

⁵ This quote and all quotes from the Rule come from *RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981). Here we cite Prologue 49.

The Tool: This tool of falling back into God has endless opportunities. Here are a few.

In the morning after you rise from bed, cross your arms over your chest, take a breath and fall back into God in trust of God's guidance and help for that day.

Find yourself in the buff, having taken off all the clothes of good works? Cross your arms over your chest, take a breath and fall back into God who will gladly re-clothe you and have you begin again.

Facing a difficult situation, conversation or decision, or in the thick of one and aren't sure how to go on? Cross your arms over your chest, take a breath and fall back into God.

Catch yourself grumbling (a Benedictine no-no)? Cross your arms over your chest, take a breath and fall back into God who will help you gain a different perspective on the person or the situation.

Fearful? Cross your arms over your chest, take a breath and fall back into God who will give your courage.

And so on...

Although using our imaginations is fine, bringing our bodies into this tool can help even more. I tried crossing my arms and falling back onto the bed. Not a good idea – tough on the neck. Better to sit in a comfortable chair with a high back, cross your arms with your hands by the shoulders the way you would if you wanted to receive a blessing (which you will!), take a breath and let your head fall back into the chair. If you're at work and not in a comfy chair, just press your back into the chair a bit.

However you do this tool, as you use it fall back into trust. God will catch you, I promise!

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Some Upcoming Programs

For a complete list of my programs visit my website www.stbenedictstoolbox.org/retreats-programs.html.

Evening Benedictine Way Spirituality Group – Preferring Nothing Whatever to Christ

This evening group will meet once a month on the 3rd Thursday evening of each month January – May, beginning January 21, 2010, from 6:30pm – 8:45 pm with an optional light supper. Sponsored by the New Jersey based Interweave Center, the group will meet at Calvary Episcopal Church, 31 Woodland Avenue in Summit NJ. For information contact www.interweave.org.

Spirituality for Everyday Living – A Journey with St. Benedict

A year-long program on the 2nd Sunday of each month January – May and September – December from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at St. John's Episcopal Church in Bala Cynwyd, PA (a suburb of Philadelphia).

Share a simple meal, prayer and explore the richness of Benedictine Spirituality as a framework for the Christian life.

For more information contact the church office at 610-664-4517 or email office@stjohnlm.org.

Finding a Place to Rest – Looking for Sabbath Time on the Lenten Road

February 19-20 at Church of the Advent in Cape May, NJ. We will look at why Sabbath time is important. We will explore both traditional and novel ways to keep Sabbath. For information contact the church office at 609-884-3065 or visit the church's website at www.capemayadvent.org.

Seeking Our Roots in a Fragmented World

February 26-27 – St. Nicholas' Episcopal Church in Midland, Texas. Contact the church office at 432-694-8856.

**Finding Grace Right Where You Are:
A Lenten retreat on Living in the Present
Moment**

March 5 & 6. Sponsored by the Episcopal churches of Grace, Nutley and St.James' Upper Montclair, NJ to be held at the Convent of St. John Baptist in Mendham, NJ. Contact the St. James Office for information, 973-744-0270.

**Benedictine Spirituality for the Frazzled –
Part 2: Finding Holiness in Our Work**

April 15, 2010 – Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, New York

For more information contact Holy Cross:

Phone: 845-384-6660

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

Embracing Prayer in Your Daily Life

May 1, 2010 – Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery in Phoenix, Arizona – Sponsored by the Benedictine Cell Group of Victorville California.

For more information contact Barbara Croshier at penny213@verizon.net.

Plan a Retreat or Program

Jane is available to do retreats and programs in the Benedictine Tradition. Content is personalized. 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.

Contact Jane at 908-233-0134, cell-908-463-3252 or via email at jtomaine1685@verizon.net.