



# THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

Volume 2. No. 1

January, 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.

May your New Year be filled with blessings and peace.

## “Peace”

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

Galatians 5:22-23

As I write this issue of *The Cyber Toolbox* falling snow blankets the dormant plants in my perennial garden and dons the tops of what remains of the black-eyed susan flowers like tiny hats. I know that this white blanket will regretfully soon be gone as snow changes to a rain that will wash away both blanket and hat. My garden is most always a source of peace and joy, yet she is a teacher too. The lesson is this – I will not have a perfect garden and I need to accept that. For two years now two coral bell plants have mysteriously died and last summer I lost all the Shasta daisies. The geranium plants spread with a mind of their own and weeds thrived in between the lovely perennials in spite of my dogged efforts to nip them out.

Finally setting aside panic and frustration that stole the peace, as a new gardener I have gradually discovered to approach my garden with light and gentle hand and heart. I am learning to accept her as she is. The garden, and the Rule of Benedict, teach me about peace-keeping, in my heart and in my life. Even though I try to arrange everything, even control everything, life has a mind of its own. I must learn to accept this or I will never be at peace.

Sr. Joan Chittister writes “The Rule is very clear about what it takes to live in peace. Peace comes from not needing to control everything and not needing to have everything and not needing to surpass everyone and not needing to know everything and not needing to have everyone else be like me. Peace comes from seeking God in the present and seeing the world as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Prologue to the Rule, Benedict zeroes in on the importance of peace, saying

*“Let peace be your quest and aim.”*

Ps 33[34]:15 and Prologue 17

There it is – the bottom line! I’ve read this verse many times of course, but looking at the Rule through the lens of peace I was struck even more by the pointedness of this directive that is rooted in love. Have I ever even thought about peace as both the quest and aim for my life? Or had peace been for me just an absence of stress or the joy of doing what I wanted??

According to the Rule peace is to be the overarching goal and the focus of our actions. Just trying to think peaceful thoughts or to feel that peace would be a good thing isn’t enough. We need to actually do something to make peace a reality. Terence Kardong writes “the pursuit of peace requires more than a mere burst of initial sentiment. What is needed is longterm, dogged effort to ‘make peace,’ that is, do those deeds that build a solid human foundation for true peace.”<sup>2</sup> The Rule is all about what will build this solid human foundation for true peace which will make any dogged effort worthwhile. Are we ready to take on that quest and aim?

<sup>1</sup> Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Terence G. Kardong, O.S.B., *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 13.

Peace begins in the heart. To me it comes from a centeredness in God and from trusting in God's providence and God's timing in our lives. Peace comes through acceptance of what life brings to us. If we do not have peace in our hearts every unplanned interruption, every time our plans are averted, every time someone does not "do" what we think best for them (i.e., for us), every time our own will is thwarted, we will shift into non-peace or even violence mode whether that be in mild or extreme form.

The Rule of Benedict teaches us how to make that peace of heart both quest and aim. Acceptance is a big part of this. In the chapter on humility Benedict says to accept what is before you even if doing so is under difficult, unfavorable or even unjust conditions (7.35). When do you and I fight circumstances that we may not be able to change? How does this impact a peaceful heart? Instead could we accept the challenges or annoyances of life and how we feel about them in trust that God is with us and will help us through it all?

In the Chapter on Distribution of Goods According to Need, Benedict says whoever needs less should "thank God and not be distressed" and whoever needs more should "feel humble because of his weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown him."(34.3-4) "In this way," Benedict concludes, "all the members will be at peace."(34.5) Again, the basis of these instructions is acceptance – that of our needs and those of other people. Benedictine peace involves justice for all people.

Detachment is also important to a peaceful heart. A gift received by a monastic may given to someone who needs that item more. Benedict says that "the brother for whom it was originally sent must not be distressed."(54.4)<sup>3</sup> Envy, jealousy and covetousness are not compatible in the quest for peace. In Chapter 64 – The Election of the Abbot, Benedict lists qualities that detract from peace or as he describes it, being "never at rest." The abbot is not to be "excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous or oversuspicious."(64.16) Let's read that list again. Any one of those have a familiar ring for you?

Benedict gives instructions to prevent people from becoming distressed or disturbed. People are to treat one another in ways that show peace to be

the aim. Last month I wrote about the cellarer who was to "offer a kind word in reply" when he or she did have not what someone wanted and who was to be humble and reasonable in denying an improper request. (31.14, 7) By opting against either rejecting a person with disdain or retorting with an angry reply, the cellarer aims for peace-making. Goods must be given out at regular times so that "no one may be disquieted or distressed in the house of God (31.19), reading which was often done aloud should be done "without disturbing others" (48.5), the monastery should have a separate kitchen for guests (53.16), rank is to be determined by date of entry into the monastery, the virtue of their lives and the decision of the abbot (63.1-2) – each of these things were to be done so as not to cause distress or disturbance in the house of God. Benedict reminds us that we can aim for peace in our own lives by using kind words, meeting our commitments, acting with consideration for others and not demanding special privilege for ourselves. "Pray for your enemies out of love for Christ," Benedict says. "If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down."(4.72-73) Do not let the sun set on your anger. The Evil One will only stir it up at night so that it's fresh and ready in the morning!

Having peace as quest and aim means that we try to minimize the distress of others. Workers are to be given help so that they remain calm and peaceful in performing their duties. Turning again to the cellarer we read that the cellarer is to be given help when needed so that "he may calmly perform he duties of his office." 31.17) I like these directives - I need help! The question is, will I ask for it?

Perhaps the foundation of this goal of peace can be found in Benedict's instruction that the Lord's Prayer be recited at the end of Vigils and Lauds "because thorns of contention are likely to spring up" (13.12). One of the most powerful tools of peace – that of forgiveness – cements the relationship between peace and love.

This quest and aim for peace is a tall order. Take heart in these words of Joan Chittister, O.S.B.

"Benedictine peace is not something that is ever achieved. It is something sincerely and consistently sought. It comes, in fact, from the seeking, not from the getting. It comes from the inside, not the outside. It comes from right-heartedness, not from self-centeredness...it

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from the Rule are from *RB1980 – The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minnesota; The Liturgical Press, 1982).

comes from the attitudes we bring to things, not from the power we bring to them.”<sup>4</sup>

Peace comes from keeping our eyes on Christ; in Benedict’s words, preferring nothing whatever to Christ (72.11). It is through Christ that we can find the wisdom and strength to let peace become our true quest and aim. So let us begin and let our garden of peace flourish.

January 1, 2010  
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## **The Tool of the Month**

### **Practice Gentleness**

**Purpose of the Tool:** The New Year is a good time to seriously take on this goal to “let peace be your quest and aim.” This tool offers a way to notice when we slip (or dive) from a peaceful heart so that we can make a course correction back to peace.

**Background on the Tool:** Joan Chittister writes that the Rule of Benedict “offers a model of peace that depends on being gentle with ourselves, gentle with the other, and gentle with the earth. It is a vision of nonviolence that Benedictine spirituality gives a word for which violence is the air it breathes, the song it sings, the heroes it worships, the business it does.”<sup>5</sup>

#### **The Tool:**

Practice gentleness as a daily spiritual discipline and a daily gift to yourself and others.

Then, notice when you move into violence-mode.

I’m not talking necessarily about coming to blows with someone else, having a huge argument or kicking the cat, although these could happen.

I’m asking us to develop a heightened sensitivity for when we move into even the slightest level of violence, for example, when we feel frustration coming on, when someone isn’t doing what we would like them to do and

we want to leap at them, when we want to slam a door, or when a “no-peace” thought springs into our mind.

When you see even the smallest act of violence of word or deed – Name it.

Repeat – “Let peace be my quest and aim.”

Replace violence with a gentle action for peace-making.

Later, in a quiet moment explore how the movement to violence connects to “self”. How might you do differently next time?

NOTE: If you are interested in information about non-violence, contact The Center for Nonviolent Communication at [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org). CNVC is a [global network](#) of people and communities committed to living and teaching NVC to resolve conflict and meet the needs of all people.

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## **Scripture for Peace of Heart**

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And *the peace of God*, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,184.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 188.

excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and *the God of peace will be with you.*"

Philippians 4:4-9

### **Some Upcoming Programs**

For a complete list of my programs visit my website [www.stbenedicttoolbox.org/retreats-programs.html](http://www.stbenedicttoolbox.org/retreats-programs.html).

#### **Evening Benedictine Way Spirituality Group – Preferring Nothing Whatever to Christ**

This evening group will meet once a month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](http://www.interweave.org).

#### **Spirituality for Everyday Living – A Journey with St. Benedict**

A year-long program on the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto: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](http://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.

#### **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: [guesthouse@hcmnet.org](mailto:guesthouse@hcmnet.org)

[www.holycrossmonastery.org](http://www.holycrossmonastery.org)

#### **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](mailto:penny213@verizon.net).

### **A Website Update**

[www.stbenedicttoolbox.org](http://www.stbenedicttoolbox.org)

My program list has been updated on the website. Other changes are planned...the wheels of progress (me) move sssslloooooowwwwwlllllyyyyyy.....

### **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](mailto:jtomaine1685@verizon.net).

***"Let peace be your quest and aim."***

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