



THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

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March, 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.

An apology to my readers for the lateness of this issue...I’m barely squeaking under the wire of March if I will even make that! (It’s now 2:45 pm EDT and I have choir tonight!) My retreat and program schedule has been very busy which is a wonderful thing, but has delayed 1) The Cyber Toolbox, and 2) spring cleaning!

Have a joyous Easter and hope you find the article helpful. Please take a look at my new program offer on page 3.

Blessings and peace to you!

“Gentleness”

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

Galatians 5:22-23

I never really liked Rudy. He had some offensive personal habits that created suspicion, wariness and a marked lack of affection—he’d take a lightening-quick swipe at you or spit if you got too close. Oh...I didn’t mention this yet...Rudy’s a cat. In addition, Rudy was a vision of personal untidiness. A poor groomer, his fur was dull and lifeless, often adorned with unsightly hair mats.

One day I decided to try to tidy him up. Bravely securing the wire brush that the other cats love, I cautiously and soundlessly snuck up behind him as he was absorbed in eating. Knowing that

my hand might be the recipient of sharp claws, I *very gently* ran the brush down Rudy’s back. With his nose in the food dish Rudy paid little heed. I started to brush him at each meal and noticed that he would purr in contentment. Wow! Then, wonder of wonders, one day Rudy pulled his head out of the dish, turned around to face me and rubbed his head on my feet and ankles! The gentle brushing transformed our relationship and seemed to make Rudy a happy cat. His fur looks much better and smoother now though still not as nice as that of our other cats. My husband says the only thing that would make his fur shine would be to give him a bath. Pass the steel gloves, please!!

I would venture a guess that Benedict’s monastery had a cat or two to deal with errant mice. Benedict also had to deal with errant brothers who had habits not unlike Rudy’s—uncooperative and/or untidy in their obedience to the Rule. With these, Benedict advocated the healing balm of gentleness, the fruit of the Spirit that we are considering this month.

As I reflected on what part of the Rule to focus on in this article, the chapters on excommunication kept surfacing in my mind. (Eek!!) What strikes me about Benedict’s instructions for discipline is the underlying concern for the individual. Excommunication for stubbornness, disobedience, pride, grumbling and /or disobedience ranged from not sharing the common table or leadership in the Divine Office to exclusion from the Divine Office, corporeal punishment and expulsion from the monastery (RB 24, 25, 26, 28). While some of us might not mind eating alone once in a while or having some solitude or taking a break from prayers, for the monk of Benedict’s day exclusion must have been an isolating and bitter experience. Yet, the goals of discipline in the Rule are to restore the spiritual health of the individual and their place

in the community. Such goals foster a compassionate and gentle approach.

Specifically, Chapter 27 – “The Abbot’s Concern for the Excommunicated” can give us a picture of one way that Benedict advocated gentleness in the daily life of the monastery. At the beginning of the chapter Benedict explains that “the abbot must exercise the utmost care and concern for wayward brothers, because *it is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick*” (RB 27.1 and Matt. 9:12).¹ As Benedict would treat the physically ill with concern and care so would he treat the spiritually ill. In the exercise of discipline, Benedict is concerned about “the healing and salvation of the person...to change the thinking” and “to move the person to sorrow for the fault.”² In other words, discipline focused on the ultimate goal and good – the salvation of the person.

“One way of reading the Rule is to see Benedict’s whole purpose as remedial and the monk’s life-work as a healing process of the wounds of sin. The purpose [of the chapters on excommunication] is never with discipline per se, but with healing, with *metanoia*, with ongoing conversion and opening into freedom from all those forces that would threaten or destroy that.”³

Benedict likens the abbot to a wise physician who enlists others, “mature and wise brothers,” not to reprimand but “to support the wavering” and to urge them to be humble and to console them so that they are not “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Cor 2:7 and RB 27.3). The goal is not to punish but to restore. He reinforces the importance of both loving and praying for the person.

In addition to the image of physician, Benedict draws on a second image of Christ, that of the Good Shepherd (Luke 15). Understanding the weaknesses of the human condition, the abbot is to act with discretion and love, realizing that “he has undertaken care of the sick, not tyranny over the

healthy.” He is not to cast aside the weak but instead “to imitate the loving example of the Good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the mountains and went in search of the one sheep that had strayed.” (27.8) There is an urgency to act, to bring the person to repentance, to restore the individual to the community and to do all this with compassion for the weakness of the sheep.

What does all this say to us in the 21st century as members of families, churches, the workplace, other communities and circles of friendship? What does Chapter 27 bring to our desire to cultivate gentleness? As parents and/or partners, supervisors or managers, church or community leaders we will confront situations and individuals who do not behave (children), do not meet responsibilities (workers in a job or community) or who offend or distress us. While I might dearly love to have my husband prostrate himself before me when I feel that I have been wronged as Benedict recommends when serious mistakes are made in the oratory (RB 44.1-3), the Rule calls me to be guided by gentleness because of my concern for him and for our relationship. What does RB 27 say to our own practice of gentleness?

First, *each of us can be “a wise physician” and offer healing* with the benefit of the person in mind and enlisting the help of others where needed (spouse, partner, clergy person, counselor, etc.) Every effort should be made to stay in conversation with the person and to encourage the person toward responsible actions, whatever that is in the given environment or situation. As a parent, we can support and love the child while we urge him or her to recognize that their actions are not the best for themselves or for others.

Secondly, *we can imitate Christ the Good Shepherd* who brought back a sheep who had strayed. Ignoring a problem will not make it go away or be resolved. There are people who are lost, who are acting out their pain or who have run away that need to be brought back to God’s love. *Urgency* is needed! As Benedict explained, “It is the abbot’s responsibility to have great concern and to act with all speed, discernment and diligence in order not to lose any of the sheep entrusted to him.” (27.5) We do not wish to lose the precious relationships that have been entrusted to us nor to see a loved one or friend traveling down a road to destruction.

¹ 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).

² Terence G. Kardong, O.S.B., *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 253.

³ Esther de Waal, *A Life-Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 11-112.

Third, *our actions can spring from a place of compassion*. Like the abbot, we can “hate faults but love the brothers [siblings, children, spouse, partner, co-worker, etc]” (RB 64.11). As Benedict says of the approach to the wayward and disobedient, “*Let love for [them] be affirmed* (RB 4a and 2 Cor 2:7). Not an easy task but so important. Love is Jesus’ message to us. Love, therefore, is Benedict’s as well.

Rudy continues to purr at meals when I brush him. I’ve even managed his beauty treatment at other times too, which if you know anything about cats, is a big deal! The balm of gentleness has, I think, brought some healing of a hurt within him. Might we do the same for some one who’s been hissing at us??

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“Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”

Phil 4:5a

The Tool of the Month

Being a Wise Physician and a Good Shepherd

Purpose of the Tool: To bring the healing balm of gentleness to an individual, a situation or relationship.

Background on the Tool: We can take a blaming view or a compassionate view of a negative situation, a conflict with another person, a misbehaving child, or a negligent employee or co-worker. We can stand on the outside and criticize or we can enter with gentleness and be a healer.

The Tool: Identify a person with whom you are in conflict or who is creating an unhealthy disruption or who is drifting away or any other situation like this. Then, consider bringing to life the three steps mentioned in the article above.

1. What actions could you take to be a wise physician? Do you need others to help you?
2. Like Jesus our Good Shepherd, envision yourself as the “good shepherd” in this situation or relationship and embrace a heart of compassion and a spirit of resolve to be an agent of healing.
3. Form a plan to act with speed. If it could help, set an “act-by” date. (I’ve done this – it does help, but don’t be distressed if you postpone the plan. Ask God for help.)

When you have taken some action think about how gentleness changed the situation.

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A New Program Format Offered!

Benedictine Spirituality Alive: Phone Chats with St. Benedict

Would you like to learn more about Benedictine Spirituality?

Are you interesting in meeting with a group of like-minded followers of St. Benedict to discuss the Rule?

Is it hard for you to find the time to attend a long program?

Jane is offering a creative program on Benedictine Spirituality of *four call-in telephone sessions*.

Using conference call technology, a group of twelve people will discuss the Rule on four successive Thursday evenings May 20 and 27 and June 3 and 10, 2010.

As a group member you will explore Benedictine Spirituality using *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English* and Brian Taylor’s book *Spirituality for Everyday Living* as resources and share your experiences of bringing Benedictine practice to daily life. Topics include the monastic vows of

stability, obedience and conversion of life as well as prayer, study, work, relationships and solitude. Whether you are experienced with the Rule, an oblate or a person new to St. Benedict, the monastic vow of conversion of life calls us to continual growth. This program is an opportunity for that growth!

Dates: Four Thursday evenings – May 20, 27 and June 3, 10.

While unforeseen conflicts can arise, Jane requests that when you enroll you commit to attend all four weeks so that the phone community can be formed and maintained.

Time: 7:30 pm Eastern Daylight Time

Cost: \$40

Materials: Participants will purchase the following books *on their own*:

Spirituality for Everyday Living by Brian Taylor (\$7.95) and

RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English (\$2.95).

(Prices quoted are through www.amazon.com.)

To sign up or for more information, please email Jane at jtomaine1685@verizon.net.

Please note that you won't be able to click on this email address. Please reply via the email that delivered the Toolbox or at a later time.

Some Upcoming Programs

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

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.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.

Our Senses as Pathway to God

July 16 – 18, 2010 – Adelynrood Retreat and Conference Center in Byfield, MA. An exploration of the gifts of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell connect us with the holy.

For more information contact Adelynrood at 978-462-6721 or www.adelynrood.org.

Look for details on Jane's Fall Retreat Schedule in the April issue of *The Cyber Toolbox* or shortly on the website www.stbenedictstoolbox.org.

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.