



THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

Volume 1. No. 4

October, 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.

Help Requested in *The Cyber Toolbox* Delivery

Yeeek!!! When I decided to do an on-line newsletter I had no idea of the administrative glitches that could happen. Right now I have 41 unopened emails to attend to for delayed and undeliverable emails of *The Cyber Toolbox* from last month! I would like everyone who wishes this newsletter to receive it, so...

- ✓ If you change your email address, please let me know.
- ✓ If you come upon someone who requested *The Cyber Toolbox* and is not receiving it, have them contact me at jtomaine1685@verizon.net.

Thanks for the help!

"Kindness"

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

Galatians 5:22-23

The sign for *kindness* in *American Sign Language* for the hearing-impaired is a great illustration for this fruit of the Spirit. The palm of the open right hand faces the heart and is then moved in a circle, up-out-in-up-out, around the left open hand which faces the body. You can see *kindness* word signed at this web address:

<http://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/KINDNESS/1642/1>

The origin of this sign is a movement as if winding a bandage around the hand and arm. As we do acts of kindness we bandage one another.

The wound may be small and contained or large and frightening.

When Jesus described the nature of his yoke in Matt 11:30, our translations read, "my yoke is easy" but the word is literally "kind" in the sense of "comfortable" or "fitting for the work to be done." Kindness is an act that is "tailor made" to the situation or person. This bandage of kindness "fits perfectly."

Benedict offers us many ways to practice perfectly-fitting kindness. In fact, the Rule could be said to be a manual for the practice of kindness revealed through Jesus in the Gospels. As Jesus so often ministered to one individual at a time, tailoring his responses and actions to that person, kindness in the Rule is tailor-made to fit each person perfectly. Awareness of individual differences guides the practice of kindness for different people and in different situations. Let's take a look at a few examples.

Chapter 4 – *The Tools for Good Works* gives us many ways to practice kindness such as honoring everyone (4.8) and not doing to someone what we would not want done to ourselves (4.9). Benedictine kindness asks us to relieve the lot of the poor (4.14), visit the sick, help the troubled, and console the sorrowing (4.16-18). We are to turn to someone who needs our love (4.25), bless instead of curse (4.32) and love our enemies (4.31).

Special kindness and care are to be given to the sick, the elderly and children. Benedict was well aware of the differences in strength and capabilities among community members. The lack of strength in the elderly and children must be considered and the Rule relaxed for them with regard to food - they "should be treated with kindly consideration and allowed to eat before the regular hours" (RB 37).

The sick "must rank above and before all else" because in them Christ is served (RB 36.1-2). They are to have a separate room for their convalescence and are to be served by an

attendant who is “God-fearing, attentive and concerned” (36.7). The sick are given leave to eat meat in order that their strength be regained (36.9). The abbot is to “take the greatest care” that the sick are not neglected (36.10).

Benedict’s practice of kindness permeates his description of the role and qualities of the abbot/abbess. In one of my own favorite quotes about lived-out kindness Benedict says,

“they must show forethought and consideration in their orders, and whether the task they assign concerns God or the world, they should be discerning and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, who said: *If I drive my flocks too hard, they will all die in a single day* (Gen 33:13). Therefore, drawing on this and other examples of discretion, the mother of virtues, they must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from” (64.17-19).

I also like the way Benedict instructs that Psalm 94[95] in the service of Vigils “is to be said quite deliberately and slowly” (43.4) to allow time for the monastics to reach their places and not to be tardy for the Work of God. Not only is this a wonderful example of kindness shown toward our very human foibles, it is also a beautiful illustration of arranging things to enable success rather than failure and to build up, as Paul says (1 Thess 5:11), rather than to tear down. What could be kinder than this?

No account of kindness in the Rule would be complete without some mention of Benedict’s instructions for hospitality in Chapter 53. Guests are to be received promptly by a porter who is always on call and ready to greet (66.1-3). Guests are to be welcomed as Christ and met “with all the courtesy of love.” They are to dine at the abbot’s table and to be served by an attentive brother or sister “whose soul is filled with the fear [awe] of God,” the first step of humility in Benedict’s ladder of humility (RB 7). A *sufficient* number of beds are to be ready (53.22). Commenting on this verse Aquinata Bockmann O.S.B. writes that one of Benedict’s resources for his own Rule - *The Rule of the Master* - “only said that beds had to be ready...Benedict is concerned even with the small, practical details. Here especially his human kindness (*humanitas*) is clearly visible. Everyone who has some experience knows that offering hospitality not only means providing strangers with necessities, but that it is equally important to

anticipate needs and to make thoughtful preparations as a concrete sign of love.”¹

Kindness is *action*; an action that fits the situation and that bandages another’s wounds. Just like any other fruit of the Spirit, genuine acts of kindness generally cannot be willed. Only when God lives deeply in our hearts can we continually enact kindness. Yet we can still take some steps to move our bodies and minds until our heart is in full alignment with the Spirit and this fruit of kindness flows out from us. Think about the situations and people in your life. What is an act of kindness that is “tailor-made” for that person or situation? What kind action will bandage a small wound or a grievous one?

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The Tool of the Month

Cutting One Another Some Slack

Purpose of the Tool: To provide a contemporary suggestion to help us follow the path of kindness as found in so many places of the Rule of St. Benedict.

Background on the Tool: In Chapter 72 – The Good Zeal of Monks, Benedict gives us the bottom line for kindness.

“*They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other* (Rom 12:10), bearing with the greatest patience one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another.”

RB 72.4-6

How can we really live kindness when our expectations of or impatience with others leads us to be unkind? The Rt. Rev. Paul Marshall, Bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem offers us a ministry that fits well into the practice of kindness – the *Ministry of Cutting Each Other Some Slack*. Instead of expecting everyone to measure up to our standards we can take the path of kindness and relax our expectations of one another.

¹ Aquinata Bockmann, O.S.B., *Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 199-200.

The Tool:

Embrace the *Ministry of Cutting Each Other Some Slack*. Watch throughout the day for times and places for opportunities where might you cut someone some slack and patiently bear that person's weaknesses of body or behavior. Look for opportunities when might you cut *yourself* some slack. It's the *kind* thing to do!

October 1, 2009

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A Response to the Reflection in the September *Cyber Toolbox*

Last month I began my article by reflecting on my first experience seeing the Milky Way and countless stars while on vacation in New Hampshire. I received an email from Sharon Massey and, with her permission, I reprint her insightful reflection.

"Your stargazing experience was especially meaningful to me. My husband and I take our vacation each year in August and schedule it around the peak of the Perseid meteor showers. As we get older, it is harder and harder to be outside after midnight. Many times over the years, weather has obstructed our viewing. Sometimes the peak comes just at the full of the moon, so viewing isn't much. Sometimes we spend hours when the conditions are perfect and see only a couple shooting stars. This year, however, there was a good show between 11:30pm and 1:30am before the moon rose, and we saw dozens. Sitting in the silence with my dear husband, staring up at God's wonderful heavens, I was reminded that even when my view is blocked, it is always there, just as God is always with me even when I'm not looking. I am grateful to relive this year's experience with you."

Thank you, Sharon!

If others would like to share their thoughts, please contact me via email.

A Website Update

Thanks to Russ Worthington, *St. Benedict's Toolbox* website is now up-to-date. The update

included 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 and a new section called "Toolbox News." Please check out my website at

www.stbenedictstoolbox.org

Upcoming Programs

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.

From Thursday evening November 12 to Sunday noon November 15 Jane will lead an experience of Benedictine living at **Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, NY**. The retreat entitled "*The Benedictine Path to Living Simply: Living with Peace in Your Heart*" will provide a Benedictine balance of study, worship with the brothers, prayer, rest, silence and (light) work.

Phone: 845-384-6660

Email: guesthouse@hcmnet.org

www.holycrossmonastery.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