



THE CYBER TOOLBOX

A Monthly E-Newsletter of Benedictine Spirituality

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May, 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.

Once again, an apology to my readers for the lateness of this issue...I’m barely squeaking under the wire of May and missed April totally. The blessing is that my retreat and program schedule has been very busy which is a wonderful thing, but this has once again delayed The Cyber Toolbox.

“Self-Control”

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

Galatians 5:22-23

We have come to the final fruit in our journey through Paul’s fruit of the Spirit as revealed in The Rule of St. Benedict. That fruit is self-control. (“Best” for last??) Not that these fruit are listed by Paul in any hierarchical order, but it seems that self-control should be listed *first*. How can I show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness and/or gentleness if I am lacking in self-control? Seems like self-control is the fruit that makes all the rest visible and possible.

Whether it’s controlling our thoughts or actions, our tongue or our drive to in control others, self-control is just plain tough and goes against the grain. Most often our thoughts, actions and tongue just develop a momentum of their own that we feel powerless to stop or to change. I took a friend of mine to the airport early this morning. During the trip she

shared how a personal challenge frequently and persistently occupies her thoughts in a obsessive, negative way and sighed, “It’s so hard being human.” After a pause she added, “I’d like to be a robin.”

The more I read, the more it seems that monastic life and indeed the life of a Christian is all about learning self-control – how to curb those impulses and drives fueled by our ego that wall us off from God and from being the person that we would like to be – a person intent on following Jesus Christ and who actually does this! So what help can Benedict give us as we choose to follow Christ? Perhaps Benedict’s wisdom for a life of self-control can be found in the following directive from Chapter 4 – The Tools for Good Works:

Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. (4.21-22)

Benedict says that what comes first is Christ’s love. So rather than desperately asking ourselves, “How can I have more self-control??” we instead ask, “How can Christ’s love be first in what I do?” Rather than being pushed along by actions and words that we later regret, we instead recall the love Christ has for us and put that in the forefront of who we are. I quite agree with Esther de Waal who says the following about this powerful verse:

“If I were looking for one single, simple phrase to sum up Benedict’s whole way of life, I would find it in verse 21: ‘The love of Christ must come before all else...This Christ-love is the center of the whole Rule and the center of our lives. If there is any one thing that is characteristic of Benedict, it is that he makes the love of Christ the focal point to which everything must lead. One should really not talk

about a verse like this, but just stop and meditate on it.”¹

In order to follow what Benedict says, that is to put Christ’s love first, we turn back to the instructions given in verse 20 – to be different from what we see around us. In his commentary on the Rule, Terence Kardong OSB translates verse 20 as “You should become a stranger to the world’s ways.”² Citing Michael Casey O.C.S.O., Kardong explains that “we leave aside whatever prevents us from following Christ.”³

Chapter 4 – The Tools for Good Works gives use many ways that we can act differently from the world’s way and put the love of Christ first. Check it out in your copy of the Rule or click on this link to read on-line:

<http://christdesert.org/Detailed/71.html>.

Here’s a sampling from the chapter...

- ✓ Do not act from your anger. Let go of a resentment. (22,23)
- ✓ *Do not repay evil for evil.* (I Thess 5:15, I Pet 3:9 & vs 29)
- ✓ Do not grumble. (39)
- ✓ Place your hope only in God. (41)
- ✓ Guard your lips from harmful or deceptive speech (51)
- ✓ Prefer moderation in speech (52)
- ✓ Listen willingly to holy reading, and pray often (55,56)
- ✓ Do not love to quarrel. (68)
- ✓ Flee from haughtiness. (69)
- ✓ Pray for your enemies because you love Christ. (72)

Looking in your copy of the Rule or on-line or even at the “short-list” above, where might God be calling you to become a stranger to the world’s ways and put the love of Christ first? For me what pops out is “Do not grumble,” (I find myself in frequent dialogue with internal murmuring regarding a particular personal situation) and “Place your hope only in God,” (I tend to think it’s all up to me, realize my short-comings and forget to rely on the power of God. 2 Cor 1:9)

¹ Esther de Waal, *A Life-Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 39.

² Terence G. Kardong, O.S.B., *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 80.

³ *IBID.*, 84-85.

It’s a big challenge before us, the fruit of the Spirit that is self-control. May we take heart in these words from Benedict:

And finally, never lose hope in God’s mercy.

(RB 4.74)

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The Tool of the Month

The Tools for Good Works: A Job Aid for Practicing Self-Control⁴

Purpose of the Tool: To give hands-on, intentional practice of actions that support can foster self-control.

Background on the Tool: We You and I know that it is only through the grace of God and God’s intervention that we grow to become more active followers of Jesus Christ. Yet we have a responsibility in this process to take actions befitting our calling.

The Tool: In Chapter 4 of the Rule, Benedict identifies the dimensions of Benedictine life that we can practice each day to get our feet, our hands, our mouths, our minds and our hearts moving in the right direction of Christ-focused living. Benedict lists seventy-three actions that he named as “The Tools of Good Works.” Each tool is an action that supports growth of Christ’s Spirit within us.

In your copy of The Rule or on-line using the link above, read through the list of Tools of Good Works. You will find that some apply more readily to your situation than others. In prayer, choose one or two tools to focus on and intentionally practice for the coming week to help you bear the fruit of the Spirit that is self-control. After that, choose others.

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⁴ Adapted from *St. Benedict’s Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living* by Jane Tomaine (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2005), 95-96.

Postscript to the Fruit of the Spirit

We have concluded our exploration of the connection between the fruit of the Spirit found in Paul's Letter to the Galatians and what The Rule of St. Benedict brings to the actualization of these fruits in our lives. I truly hope that you have found the journey "fruitful" and have been energized to embrace Benedict's wisdom and guidance in your Christian walk, or "run" as Benedict would have it (*Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you* (John 12:35 and Prologue 13). While we know that only the Holy Spirit working within us can truly bring these fruits alive in our hearts and lives, we can take steps to assist this life-long process. One of these steps is to follow the wisdom of St. Benedict in our daily lives. Peace and blessings to you in this journey!

New Look – New Name for *The Cyber Toolbox*

The Cyber Toolbox is moving to "constant contact.com!" I will not be writing a June issue of the newsletter and instead will be working on creating a new name and new format which will be released in July through the website www.constantcontact.com. The benefits will be many.

- ✓ Easy access to the newsletter – it will pop right up instead of having to be downloaded via pdf software
- ✓ A new inviting look
- ✓ Easy printing and forwarding to friends
- ✓ Pictures and graphics to make the newsletter more visual
- ✓ Links to other websites and information
- ✓ Ability for you to unsubscribe easily if you wish

Your name will automatically be added to the mailing list in "constant contact" if you receive the newsletter now.

It has been a challenge to write a monthly newsletter. Several times during this first year when my retreat schedule has gotten very hectic, I've had to go to a double-month offering. During

June, the month of redevelopment, I'll be assessing whether I can continue to offer the newsletter monthly or if I'll need to move to every other month (6 times a year). Once decided, I will commit to releasing the newsletter within a promised timeframe and *stick with it!*

Your help is requested! If you have any thoughts, comments or suggestions about the newsletter, please let me know via my email address jtomaine1685@verizon.net or through janetomaine@stbenedictstoolbox.org. I would like to have the newsletter be meaningful and helpful to you.

New Topic for Upcoming Newsletter Articles

In July I'll also be starting a new series of articles which I would like to have based around a theme or idea as I did with Paul's fruit of the Spirit. **Do you have any ideas for this umbrella theme??** The overarching theme could be drawn from the Rule or from aspects of life. Please let me know if you have any thoughts via my email address jtomaine1685@verizon.net or through janetomaine@stbenedictstoolbox.org.

Some Upcoming Programs

For a complete list of my programs for the Fall, visit my website www.stbenedictstoolbox.org/retreats-programs.html. Here's notice of a summer program on the east coast, about 40 minutes north of Boston:

Our Senses as Pathway to God

July 16 – 18, 2010 – Adelynrood Retreat and Conference Center in Byfield, MA. An exploration of the how 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.

Have a wonderful June!