

Thursday 11 July 2024

St Benedict of Nursia



Benedict was born in Nursia, central Italy, around the year 480 AD. As a young man, Benedict went to study in Rome, but was appalled by its corruption and vice, so withdrew to live as a hermit at Subiaco. He quickly attracted disciples and began to establish small monasteries in the neighbourhood. In about the year 525, a disaffected faction tried to poison him, so Benedict moved to Monte Cassino with a band of loyal monks.

Later in life Benedict wrote his 'Rule' for monks, based on his own experience of fallible people striving to live the gospel. He never intended to create an order, but his Rule was so good that it was shared widely. Today, Benedictine prayer is the model for almost all forms of western monasticism.

Benedict died at Monte Cassino in about the year 550.

Sermon and prayers of intercession © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN [Seek ye first the Kingdom of God](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

All **And also with you.**

The Preparation

All **Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, with all your mind,

and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All **Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for St Benedict

Eternal God,
who made Benedict a wise master
in the school of your service
and a guide to many called into community
to follow the rule of Christ:
grant that we may put your love before all else
and seek with joy the way of your commandments;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of Proverbs

My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures—then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. *Proverbs 2:1-6*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me [\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

A certain ruler asked Jesus, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother"' He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

Luke 18:18-22

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

St Benedict's long life was dominated by the idea of seeking God. As a young man, he took to himself Jesus' short parable about a **pearl in a field**. The idea is simple enough: a man bought a field because it contained a pearl of such value that he felt compelled to sell everything to buy the field and hence acquire the treasure. The parable implies that the pearl is hidden so the man spends the rest of his life looking for it. The pearl may be hidden but, because the man now owns the field, he knows he will find it eventually if he works hard enough.

In the parable, this ‘pearl’ equates with eternal life spent with God. Eternal life is costly like all genuinely precious things. And, like the pearl in the parable, true Godliness may lie hidden, but it will be found eventually even if it requires the search of a lifetime to find it.

St Benedict wanted eternal life so much that he fled the corruption and godlessness he saw in Rome to become a hermit in the Italian countryside. He settled in a place of beauty surrounded by fruitful silences. He soon attracted followers and tried to help them find the same inner peace that he evidently enjoyed himself. To that end he wrote a series of spiritual instructions that became the basis for the world’s first Christian monastic ‘rule’. Even today, the Benedictine Rule is the most widely followed monastic rule in all of Christendom.

St Benedict’s Rule is an example of a so-called ‘Rule of Life’—a detailed series of instructions designed to help us lead a life of godliness and peace. The best-known rule is the Ten Commandments but others underpin Christian discipleship, like the beatitudes. There are many others—most monastic movements have one: St Basil, St Francis, or think of the life expected of a Vicar as codified in an ordination service!

The parable of the pearl permeates the whole of Benedict’s rule. Benedict himself intended his followers to use the rule much like a fence that surrounds a large field. Benedict designed his rule to create a safe environment for Christian growth and help us avoid walking away from the treasure of Christ. He intended it to offer much liberty of movement and action but stops us from straying away from the field in which the treasure lies hidden. Like a fence, the rules set outer limits but do not restrict inner freedom: seekers only really notice the boundaries when they stray too far from the centre.

So far, so good. But humans love to create rules. Rules are good because they not only help us live safely but also make us *feel* safe., but we can cling to the rules themselves rather than live the life they intend to help us create. We can mistake the means for the end: walking along the perimeter of a fence means we’ll never wander away from the pearl hidden in the field but it also means we’ll never venture into the field itself to actually look for the pearl ... indeed, we’ll never find it if we never really look because we stay close to the fence. We have wasted our lives. In the same way we can become so caught up with the details in a rule of life that we forget to live that life. We could end up becoming legalistic or neurotic.

A good rule includes flexibility. All of us lead busy lives with unexpected events and illnesses. Slavishly following a rule of life during times of high stress can be counter-productive: for example, it can lead to ‘lip service’ such as praying by rote rather than meaning what we say; burn out; or maybe allowing everything to lapse. A rule is good but loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is better.

So a rule of life sometimes needs to change and adapt, usually when circumstances themselves change; sometimes we need to re-formulate from scratch. And sometimes our spiritual health benefits from the advice of a wiser, maturer (and often older) Christian with whom we can talk often and candidly. Such a 'soul friend' could usefully help in compiling or customising a suitable rule of life.

Any advance toward the holiness that God intends means that we turn from self and engage with Him as he speaks to us. That's why the first word of St Benedict's rule is 'Listen!' God's 'speaking' can take many forms, from the secret promptings of the Holy Spirit, to reading the Scriptures, hearing the liturgy in Church, advice from friends, ... , the list is surely endless. God wants us to share eternity with Him. So when God speaks He is telling us where to look for the pearl, to enhance our discipleship.

So today, as we remember St Benedict, we remind ourselves that God is inviting us to live by a series of simple rules—the Ten Commandments, the beatitudes, the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit, and so on. But those rules are a means to the end of growing into holiness of life. Those rules point beyond themselves to God. We therefore move from the mere observance of rules (do not lie, do not steal, come to Church, give in response to need in love, pray) in order to progress toward a more active discipleship. That way, we can find the pearl; we do find eternal life.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Almighty God, today we thank you for the witness of St Benedict whose quest for You led to countless lives dedicated to you and your Kingdom.

Lord in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Living God, pearl of great price, help us to seek You and, in finding You, share the infinity of the love You give to us to a needy and wounded world.

Lord in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

God of wonder, we pray for those whose lives lack discipline and order. Help them to find the structure and security that comes from knowing you.

Lord in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Father God, we raise before you our friends, families and neighbours. Inspire us through the loving ritual of prayer to support and treasure them.

Lord in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Loving God bring healing to all in need—in body, mind or spirit—that they may find wholeness and meaning in their lives ...

Lord in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

May the God of peace sanctify you: may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before him at the coming of our Lord Jesus with his saints.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Take time to be holy](#)

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who makes out saints of sinners,
who has transformed those we remember today,
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you now and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

HYMN 4 [The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases](#) [\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)
[The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases](#) [\(different version\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ.**

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

We, your holy Church, acclaim you.

In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.

Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:

Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Benedict and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Merciful God,
who gave such grace to your servant Benedict
that he served you with singleness of heart
and loved you above all things:
help us, whose communion with you
has been renewed in this sacrament,
to forsake all that holds us back from following Christ
and to grow into his likeness from glory to glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.