



ENEDICT, THE FOUNDING Father of Western monasticism, was born in *Nursia*, in what is now known as *Italy*, in c. 480 and died at

Monte Cassino in 542. The only authentic account of his life that has come down to us was written by St. Gregory the Great about fifty years after Benedict's death. After spending time living as a hermit, followed by a rather disastrous period as Abbot of an existing community, Benedict eventually founded his monastic community for men at *Monte Cassino* and there he wrote his, famous, *Rule of St. Benedict*. (Tradition has it, that Benedict's twin sister, Scholastica, also founded a monastic community for women around the same time, and that it was Benedict's Rule that provided the nuns with the model for their own community Rule of Life). It is Benedict's Rule that has become the foundational document for Western monastic life and spirituality down through the centuries.

The bedrock of Benedictine spirituality and prayer is the daily round of liturgical gatherings, the Divine Office or Daily Offices, referred to by Benedict as the '*work of God*' or '*Opus Dei*'. For Benedict prayer was the fundamental spiritual practice that cultivated



For further reading:

INNOCENZO GARGANO OSB

Holy Reading: An introduction to Lectio Divina



CHRISTOPHER JAMISON OSB

Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life



BASIL PENNINGTON OCSO

A Place Apart: Monastic Prayer and Practice for Everyone



COLUMBA STEWART OSB

Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition



JANE TOMAINE

St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living



THE BENEDICTINE HANDBOOK

(includes a copy of St. Benedict's Rule)



Praying with...

St. Benedict



St Benedict of Nursia

mindfulness of the Divine presence. “*We believe that the Divine presence is everywhere... We should believe this all the more, without any doubt whatsoever, when we attend to the divine work*” (Rule of Benedict, chapter 19).

For Benedict, the common prayer of the liturgy of the Opus Dei was nurtured and deepened by private prayer, while private prayer energised the experience of corporate prayer. Personal private prayer and common prayer formed different movements in the great experience of communion with God.

It is this ebb and flow of private and corporate prayer that nourishes the Benedictine way of prayer and spirituality.

The Daily Office

ANGLICAN SPIRITUALITY HAS BEEN formed and nurtured through the experience of praying with the *Book of Common Prayer* and its modern development, Common Worship. And it was to the Rule of St. Benedict that Church of England looked to for the model and pattern of its regular daily round of Morning and Evening prayer, and latterly, the short additional servic-

es of Prayer during the day and Compline (Common Daily Prayer). The pace of life today is such that for many people the practice of praying these offices in church is not something that they can readily fit into the busy day. Nevertheless, the practice of setting aside regular daily time for praying one or more of the Daily Offices of the Church is a valuable way of nourishing one’s spiritual life and deepening one’s relationship with God.

Lectio Divina

BENEDICT EXPECTED HIS MONKS to spend up to three hours a day in *lectio*; however, he left very few directives as to what exactly he meant by the practice of this prayerful, spiritual reading. He directs that the monks should leave themselves free for, or give themselves to, this spiritual practice. It is a spiritual exercise that is hard to describe as much depends on the personality and temperament of the reader, but at its heart it is the prayerful immersion in Scripture or other spiritual texts in order to develop and deepen one’s awareness of God’s presence.

Most people today would find Benedict’s instruction to spend three hours a day in *Lectio Divina* very hard to manage; however, it is a spiritual discipline

that benefits from regularity and focus. Benedict gave the best hours of the day to *lectio*, and most people find beneficial to devote a regular set time over to it, when nothing else intrudes. Experience suggests that for most people this works best at the beginning or end of the day so that it does not have to compete with the practical and emotional demands of the rest of daily life. Fidelity to *lectio divina* is a reminder that we cannot bypass the Word of Life.

Silence

THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE of Benedict’s community was silence. For those early Benedictine monks there was little private space, even when sleeping or eating, and so creating times of silence was not only a spiritual, but also a psychological necessity. Nevertheless, in a world saturated with noise and information overload, silence remains a spiritual and psychological necessity.

Building periods of silence into the day creates time and space creates “*quality time for God*” and allows us to hear “*the still small voice.*”