

A Rule of Life

A Biblical Vision of The Christian Life

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

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A Biblical Vision of the Christian Life

An Introduction

This booklet presents the Prologue to the 1500 year old "**Rule of St. Benedict**" in ten short segments followed by reflections for discussion and meditation. The hope is that groups will find the vision St. Benedict provides as a kind of '**Rule of Life**' suited to the needs of lay people in the 21st Century. Although it is actually the introduction to St. Benedict's Rule, it is, in some respects, a summary of the essence of Christian spirituality, and as such, is a short literary work in its own right. It has enormous value for us in our times of major transition and sweeping changes.

This is intended for Traditional Catholics, by which we mean Catholics loyal to the Magisterium of the Church, in whichever of the ancient or modern liturgical traditions they worship. It is for Catholics who are grateful to be inheritors of the Catholic Faith, who treasure its commission from the Lord, and wish to see it flourish again in our society.

The Benedictine concept of a rule retains the original meaning of the term. The Latin term for a 'rule' (regula) indicates that this document was composed as a guide — something to help us move in a straight line to ensure we get where we want to go. In the original use of the term, it referred to a straight length or plank, as well as a ruler which children still use in school. In due course it came to mean a pattern, a model, and a rule. In our times, we tend to think of rules as a type of law, but that is only true when we view the Laws of God as His way of guiding us to our true home with Him. The Rule of St. Benedict is therefore a document which presents a Biblical pattern, a model for consecrated Christians to follow, and a guide to keep one moving along a line to reach one's desired end: union with God. In this respect it echoes, exceptionally clearly at times, the strong influence in the first few centuries of the Jewish-Christian love of the Word: the Word proclaimed, and the Word made flesh. In this Prologue there is strong evidence of that same tradition captured by St. Benedict (and the writers of the documents from whose works he quoted) as he presents Christ the Word in the age of fulfilment.

The Prologue to this great Rule, and its examination piece by piece, has been chosen to guide us in our unsettling times towards a Biblical vision of the ideal Christian life as it has been understood for two millennia. The hope is that the reader will find it a helpful guide to maintaining a sound Christian vision despite the disintegration, decay, confusion and despair which we meet so frequently in our contemporary society: a society not unlike that faced by St. Benedict and his supporters, with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th Century. They witnessed unprecedented and endless conflicts, raging violence, asset grabbing, inflation and confusion of values all of which, together, became unstoppable. We are entering a similar phase.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we can do for our society what St. Benedict did for his. We can support one another in our Christian life as well as in our outreach to our contemporaries. The unique nature and construction of the Rule of Sr. Benedict preclude a presentation of neat sets of discussion points in a standard format for each of the ten Sections. Instead we have ten Sections of very unequal volume with varying amounts of supplementary material, much of which is included to assist the general reader with essential background information. The booklet is therefore not intended to be read cover to cover; rather, to be discussed and meditated upon, portion by portion. It is left to the individual reader or group to choose how much or how little will be the focus on any occasion, depending on time availability and circumstances.

We wish the reader every good blessing in reflecting on St. Benedict's Rule, and close with his final admonition:

**"Are you hastening towards your heavenly home?
Then with Christ's help, keep this little rule that we
have written for beginners. After that, you can set out
for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we
mentioned above, and under God's protection you will
reach them. Amen."**

Adieu.

Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 1 Verses 1 and 2

Listen, my son, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart. Receive willingly and carry out effectively your loving Father's advice, that by the labour of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had departed by the sloth of disobedience.

Section 2 Verses 3 to 7

To you, therefore, my words are now addressed, whoever you may be, who are renouncing your own will to do battle under the Lord Christ, the true King, and are taking up the strong, bright weapons of obedience.

And first of all, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect it, that He who has now deigned to count us among His sons may not at any time be grieved by our evil deeds. For we must always so serve Him with the good things He has given us, that He will never as an angry Father disinherit His children, nor ever as a dread Lord, provoked by our evil actions, deliver us to everlasting punishment as wicked servants who would not follow Him to glory.

Section 3 Verses 8 to 13

Let us arise, then, at last, for the Scripture stirs us up, saying, "Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep, (Romans 13: 11).

Let us open our eyes to the deifying light, let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us, Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts," (Psalm 94 [95]: 8. And again, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches", (Apocalypse / Revelation 2: 7).

And what does He say? "Come, My children, listen to Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord, (Psalm 33 [34]: 12). Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you", (John 12: 35).

Section 4
Verses
14 to 18

And the Lord, seeking His labourer in the multitude to whom He thus cries out, says again, "Who is the one who will have life, and desires to see good days?" (Psalm 33 [34]: 12). And if hearing Him you answer, "I am he," God says to you, "If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it, (Psalm 33 [34]: 13 — 14). And when you have done these things, My eyes shall be upon you and My ears open to your prayers; and before you can call upon Me, I will say to you, 'Behold, here I am,' " (Isaiah 58: 9).

Section 5
Verses
19 to 21

What can be sweeter to us, dear brethren, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.

Having our loins girded (Eph. 6: 14 — 16), therefore with faith and the performance of good works, let us walk in His paths by the guidance of the Gospel, that we deserve to see Him who has called us to His kingdom, (1 Thessalonians 2: 12).

Section 6
Verses
22 to 28

For if we wish to dwell in the tent of that kingdom, we must run to it by good deeds or we shall never reach it.

But let us ask the Lord, with the Prophet, "Lord, who shall dwell in Your tent, or who shall rest upon Your holy mountain?" (Psalm 14 [15]: 1).

After this question, brethren, let us listen to the Lord as He answers and shows us the way to that tent, saying, "He who walks without stain and practises justice; he who speaks truth from his heart; he who has not used his tongue for deceit; he who has done no evil to his neighbour; he who has given no place to slander against his neighbour," (Psalm 14 [15]: 2 —3).

It is he, who, under any temptation from the malicious devil, has brought him to naught by casting him and his temptation from the sight of his heart; and who has laid hold of his thoughts while they were still young and dashed them against Christ.

Section 7
Verses
29 to 34

It is they who, fearing the Lord, do not pride themselves on their good observance: but, convinced that the good which is in them cannot come from themselves and must be from the Lord, glorify the Lord's work in them, using the words of the Prophet, "Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give the glory,"

(Psalm 114 [115]: 1).

Thus also the Apostle Paul attributed nothing of the success of his preaching to himself, but said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am," (1 Cor. 15: 10).

And again he says, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord," (2 Cor. 10: 17). Hence the Lord says in the Gospel, "Whoever listens to these words of Mine and acts upon them, I will liken him to a man who built his house upon rock. The floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not fall, because it was founded on rock," (Matt. 7: 24 and 25).

Section 8
Verses
35 to 44

Having given us these assurances, the Lord is waiting every day for us to respond by our deeds to His holy admonitions. And the days of this life are lengthened and a truce granted us for this very reason, that we may amend our evil ways. As the apostle says, "Do you not know that God's patience is inviting you to repent?" (Romans 2: 4.) For the merciful Lord tells us, "I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live." (Ezekiel 33: 11.)

So, brethren, we have asked the Lord who is to dwell in His tent, and we have heard His commands to anyone who would dwell there; it remains for us to fulfill these duties.

Therefore we must prepare our hearts and our bodies to do battle under the holy obedience of His commands; and let us ask God that He be pleased to give us the help of His grace for anything which our nature finds hardly possible. And if we want to escape the pains of hell and attain life everlasting, then, while there is still time, while we are still in the body and are able to fulfill all these things by the light of this life, we must hasten to do now what will profit us for eternity.

Section 9
Verses
45 to 48

And so we are going to establish a school for the service of the Lord. In founding it we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome. But if a certain strictness results from the dictates of equity for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity, do not be at once dismayed and fly from the way of salvation, whose entrance cannot but be narrow.

Section 10
Verses
49 and 50

For as we advance in *this way of life and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love. Thus never departing from His school, but persevering in *it*** according to His teaching until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom. Amen.**

* Phrase substituted from another authorised translation.

** St. Benedict's reference here to the monastery has been substituted by the pronoun "*it*" for our purpose. The meaning remains the same: that for the lay person, perseverance in "His school" for the duration of one's life will mean remaining an active member of one's parish, apostolate or, as discussed above a satellite "*schola*", by whatever name.

Reflections on the Prologue

A Rule of Life

This set of "Reflections" is offered to any person interested in having a short Rule of Life to help them in their spiritual life. The state of affairs internationally in our contemporary world is disquieting for many people. We think this short work may help individuals and small groups to persevere in the Faith and to keep their sights and hope on the glorious Return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A New Revision

The Reflections, as a document, is about to commence revision. Any opinions and ideas readers wish to share with us as part of this process will be appreciated.

Index of Ten Sections

**Ten short sections of the Prologue to St. Benedict's Rule
with notes for reflection and discussion together with
Key Principles derived from the text notes.**

Section		Verses	
	1		1 and 2
	2		3 to 7
	3		8 to 13
	4		14 to 18
	5		19 to 21
	6		22 to 28
	7		29 to 34
	8		35 to 44
	9		45 to 48
	10		49 and 50

Note: The [Prologue](#) is also available as a single item for easy reading.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 1 Verses 1 and 2

Listen, my son, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart. Receive willingly and carry out effectively your loving Father's advice, that by the labour of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had departed by the sloth of disobedience.

- *Listen, my son,.....*

- a. The first rule of the Christian life is **to listen!** The English word '**listen**' comes from the Latin 'obsculta' (or ausculta), which means: to make sure you **hear** what is said so you can carry it out. This requirement is addressed to each person individually.

St. Benedict thus links the essence of Christianity with the **Shema** proclamation and commandment given by God in Deuteronomy 6: 4 and 5 —

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!

Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

(New American Bible)

[Note: the Church traditionally respects Jewish Rabbinic teaching by refraining from printing or pronouncing the Most Holy Name of God, and instead substitutes it with LORD in block letters.]

Jesus, during His ministry, ratified this proclamation and commandment (Mark 12: 29 — 31) and added words from Leviticus 19: 18. Thus he made it clear He was endorsing the essence of the Torah (the Law or Teaching) for His followers.

Jesus said the first of all the commandments is:

" **'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!**

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

The second is this:

'You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself'.

There is no commandment greater than these'."

b. Note how St. Benedict means we should, in fact, **be listening, be hearing** so as to be able **to obey** and thus grow in understanding. The spiritual life of every Christian is based on this essential teaching.

All of this, as will be well known, is reiterating the central law of Judaism — the Shema of Deuteronomy 6: 4 and 5. Jews literally surround themselves with these words, on their doorposts, on their heads, on their arms thus symbolising their total union with the Word, the Teaching, the Law of God. Jesus called on His disciples to uphold this same level of devotion, commitment, and union. All that Jesus spoke and taught was ratified by the Father in the **only** commandment delivered personally by God in the New Testament.

"This is my beloved Son, LISTEN TO HIM!"

(St. Mark 9: 7.)

c. To **hear** and **obey** the commands of God form the very basis of the Judaeo-Christian understanding **of** religion. Only by **listening** to God's Word can we know God. Only when we know God can we **love** Him and only then have we the robustness of character to serve Him, obey His commandments, **and** love our neighbour as ourself..

d. This positive attitude of listening respectfully and seeking to hear and understand what you are required to do is at the heart of the Biblical Vision. There are certain obligations required of you and you are expected to carry them out with great care and attention to detail. Failure to do so is a very serious affair.

e. The Christian life is intensely demanding and many people today are choosing to abandon a way of life which requires such focus, serious intent, and attention to God's requirements before we give expression to our own desires.

f. The Christian disciple takes seriously the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament as exemplified for example in:

Proverbs 1: 7 — 9

"True wisdom is founded on the fear of the Lord; who but for a fool would despise such wisdom, and the lesson she teaches? Heed well, my son, thy father's warnings, nor make light of thy mother's teaching; no richer heirloom, crown or necklace, can be thine."

Proverbs 4: 1

"Sons of mine, take a lesson from your father; a lesson that will make discerning men of you, will you but heed it."

Proverbs 4: 10 — 12

"Listen then my son, and master the charge I give thee as thou wouldst have long life. Here lies the road to wisdom, here is the path that will bring thee straight to thy goal; here thou mayest walk unhampered, run without fear of stumbling."

Proverbs 4: 20 — 23

"Hear then and heed my son, these words of warning; never lose site of them, cherish them in thy inmost heart; let a man master them, they will bring life and healing to his whole being. Use all thy watchfulness to keep thy heart true; that is the fountain from whence life springs."

g. Notice how the Prologue to the Rule begins by addressing you as a family member. Everything which follows is aimed at strengthening your position in God's family household, the Church.

h. How to listen and hear with attention and precision, with sound knowledge and application is a very great skill and one each disciple of Jesus Christ must learn. As is so often said, it is simple but it is not easy. However we are not left to stumble along in the dark and to work out what we think Scripture means.

i. Traditional Christianity has always understood that the Church had been commissioned by her Founder, Jesus Christ, to pass on to his disciples **all** that He has taught. (Matt. 28: 20). We notice our Lord was very specific:

".....teaching them to **observe** all that I have **commanded** you."

Christianity is very much about **observing** and obeying the commandments of Jesus Christ.

j. The Church, then, is the normal "place" in which we learn how to listen to "do" the will of God as we read it in Holy Scripture, more especially those passages which are complex or obscure. Without this guidance of the Magisterium we are likely to follow only what appeals to us at the moment, and to pursue restlessly one new fancy after another.

- *.....to your master's precepts,.....*

k. The word "precepts" comes from the Latin word, "*praecipere*" which means: to give rules. In this context the word conveys the meaning that instructions, precepts or commandments are legitimately given by our Lord Jesus Christ or those who legitimately act in His place, to guide members of His Church towards the true fulfillment He desires for them.

l. If we choose to enter the service of Jesus Christ (and that's what it means to be a Christian) then we are obliged to listen with due attention to His instructions.

- *.....incline the ear of your heart.....*

m. Right at the beginning, St. Benedict spells out the secret of hearing Christ the Lord and how to grow in understanding. He talks of inner listening and inner hearing. The disciple of Christ is endowed at baptism with the talent to do this —

but the disciple must attend the school of Christ's teaching (the Church) to develop this on a spiritual level quite unlike anything else he or she will ever do. St. Benedict is highlighting the role of genuine Christian prayer and meditation in the spiritual life: listening with the ear of the heart. This, then, is a very special skill each Christian ought to develop.

- *Receive willingly and carry out effectively your loving Father's advice, that by the labour of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had departed by the sloth of disobedience.*

- n.** Whether we are considering the Commandments of God, the teaching of the Church, or the instructions of someone in authority in the Church or at home, our response needs to be the same — seeking to hear what God wants, and then doing our best to ensure it is put into practice.

Notice the clear emphasis on the need for an attitude of willing reception and perseverance until a task has been properly completed. There is no room for a half-hearted manner, or weak response.

- o.** Echoing St. Paul in Romans 5: 19 and Philippians 2: 8, St. Benedict reminds us that we have inherited a tendency to be enchanted by those who would mislead us, and have us follow our own desires. Thus we abandon the path which our Heavenly Father has laid before us and move further and further away from what He knows is best for our total welfare. Both St. Paul and St. Benedict have in mind how easily Adam and Eve were diverted from what God intended for them by the temptation to follow their own interpretation of events. This remains a major challenge for members of the Church at all times.

Key Principles

1. "Listen to Him" (St. Mark 9: 7) is the cornerstone of our Biblical vision of the Christian life and the spirituality it represents. Whilst the Bible is commonly referred to as the Word of God, God's command is that we **listen to Christ His Son** over and above all other sources. Thus it is **Christ the Word** to whom we always listen when reading and meditating on any Biblical passage.
2. We **listen** to Christ the Word in order to hear the Word of God (His holy will for us) and to do it, i.e. to carry out His designs. Obedience, action, and good works are essential components of the Christian Faith. The belief that salvation comes through faith alone is incomplete to traditional Christianity which sees this belief as inconsistent with Bible teaching.
3. An essential skill for **all** Christians is therefore to learn how to **listen** to Jesus Christ and put **into practice** all that He teaches. Discipleship requires formation based on the model Christ Himself demonstrated. The person following this Rule will therefore meditate on the Sacred Scriptures (Old and New Testament) in the tradition of Lectio Divina.
4. Traditional Christianity always upholds the Church alone as having the authority to declare the meaning of Sacred Scripture and therefore does not allow private interpretation to displace this authority. The Church encourages debate and expression of personal viewpoints but requires its members to defer to the teaching authority conferred on her by Christ Himself in the final instance.
5. The Church provides learning opportunities for her members to learn about the Faith and all are strongly encouraged to take up the opportunity as and when appropriate. Regular study of Scripture and Doctrine both private and communal will be immense help in the spiritual life of the disciple.

6. The world has never before witnessed the current massive expansion of newly formed groups claiming to be "Churches", or "special ministries or callings" constantly springing up all over the world. Often these arise from the "fit or split" attitude so strongly entrenched particularly in Western Society. The problem, in essence, is actually as old as our Faith. The modern phenomenon, however, parades as a new form of "popular" Christianity, bypassing the traditional Church which it constantly labels as remote, stuffy, conservative and failing to meet the needs of today's young people. Those who claim to be God's answer to such a situation frequently fall into the trap of tailoring their presentations to what they think people want (rather than need) and often seriously mislead them as to what true religion is about.

The principle we therefore wish to emphasise here is that true Church growth occurs when Christians live their Faith in full harmony with the teaching of our Lord as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures and guided by the teaching authority of the Church. The "fit or split" mentality and practice represents disintegration of Christianity; not as some believe it to be, the work of the Holy Spirit causing new growth to spring forth. Unity with the Church requires that we do not break away and "do our own thing" just because we "feel called" to exercise a chosen ministry based on what we want to do.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 2 Verses 3 to 7

To you, therefore, my words are now addressed, whoever you may be, who are renouncing your own will to do battle under the Lord Christ, the true King, and are taking up the strong, bright weapons of obedience.

And first of all, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect it, that He who has now deigned to count us among His sons may not at any time be grieved by our evil deeds. For we must always so serve Him with the good things He has given us, that He will never as an angry Father disinherit His children, nor ever as a dread Lord, provoked by our evil actions, deliver us to everlasting punishment as wicked servants who would not follow Him to glory.

● *To you, therefore, my words are now addressed, whoever you may be, who are renouncing your own will to do battle under the Lord Christ, the true King, and are taking up the strong, bright weapons of obedience.*

- a. The antidote to our tendency to follow our own desires rather than obey God is to fall in behind Christ the King, and live an uncompromising disciplined life in His service.

The New Testament provides us with a very clear model in strong military metaphors.

Ephesians 6: 10 — 17

1 Thessalonians 5: 8

1 Timothy 1: 18 and 6: 12

2 Timothy 2: 3 — 4

This might all sound a bit heavy, but that's how seriously the first Christians took being a disciple of Christ.

- b.** An increasing number of Christians are, for a number of reasons, pulling back from using such references as, "the Lord Christ" or "the true King".
- Critics will wax eloquent about why the concept or model of a "king" is not relevant to modern thinking.
 - To call Christ the "true King" is to ascribe to Him a class of ruler He seemed (on superficial evidence only) to strive openly to resist.
 - and further, to emphasise that He is the **true** King is to demean other religious leaders or at least to hint they may be false or inferior [as in the days of Herod etc.].
- c.** Traditional Catholics, and indeed traditional Protestants however continue to ascribe this honour and title to Jesus and to revere Him as the unique Son of God. He is Christ our King!
- d.** Spiritual Warfare is not for casual dabbling in or meddling with. It requires a strong leader — which we have in Christ our King — and strong bright weapons of obedience. We need to be clear about what these are.

- *And first of all, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect it, that He who has now deigned to count us among His sons may not at any time be grieved by our evil deeds. For we must always so serve Him with the good things He has given us, that He will never as an angry Father disinherit His children, nor ever as a dread Lord, provoked by our evil actions, deliver us to everlasting punishment as wicked servants who would not follow Him to glory.*

- e.** If Christ is our King, then **earnest prayer** is the first weapon of spiritual warfare. This is not anxious prayer, thumping the gates of Heaven with a long "shopping list" of requests — or even less, a wish list. Earnest prayer is the prayer of the earnest soldier who commends everything to God:
- first, that it be good, i.e. godly, i.e. in harmony with God's will, and
 - secondly, that, with God's blessing it will be "perfected", i.e. brought to proper completion and thus be pleasing to Him.
- f.** Our "good works" include among other things:—
- the Christian living of each day;
 - the performance of duties;
 - the rhythm of prayer throughout the day;
 - engagement in the humble routine tasks of the day.
- Thus prayer and work go hand in hand.
- g.** Inherent in the call to Christ's service is the undertaking on our part to keep focused, avoid distraction as best we can, and act the way sons and daughters of God should.
- h.** Our Lord did not pander to the crowd. He painted vivid pictures of the outcomes of our daily choices which showed God disinheriting those who were careless and weak in their commitment, or leading those who were earnest and loyal in following Christ to glory.

Key Principles

7. From the foundation of the Church, Christians have organised themselves into highly disciplined and focused **communities**. Church membership was not a casual or light-hearted flimsy association, but methodical, precise, defined, and closely regulated. Sound growth requires this to be the case today as well as in any previous era. The formation and nurturing of such communities (whatever their basis of organisation) will be beneficial, especially as pressure from atheistic and anti-theistic sources increases.
8. Traditional Christians hold Jesus Christ to be their King and act accordingly. Interestingly in the ancient tradition, Mary, the **mother of Jesus**, was given the title **Queen** by the early Christians, in view of the fact she was mother of the King. It was (and is) a way of reinforcing Christ's title. Special reverence to our Lord's Mother has been and always will be a feature of Christians following this Rule. It is also a distinctive feature of Hebrew Catholic spirituality.
9. If **prayer** is the first weapon of spiritual warfare, it also has first priority for members of Christ's Body, the Church. This priority will need to be reflected in the day-to-day living of each member. Most of us find this difficult and need assistance with both developing a realistic, sustainable rhythm as well as choosing appropriate prayers and devotions. The study and practice of prayer in all its aspects is therefore a major pursuit of our people.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 3 Verses 8 to 13

Let us arise, then, at last, for the Scripture stirs us up, saying, "Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep, (Romans 13: 11). Let us open our eyes to the deifying light, let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us, Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts," (Psalm 94 [95]: 8. And again, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches", (Apocalypse / Revelation 2: 7).

And what does He say? "Come, My children, listen to Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord, (Psalm 33 [34]: 12). Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you", (John 12: 35).

- *Let us arise, then, at last, for the Scripture stirs us up, saying, "Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep,"*

(Romans 13: 11)

- a. St. Paul is obviously not denying anyone legitimate rest. He is echoing our Lord's call to raise us from spiritual sloth — from a tendency to look at the tasks before our eyes and shrink back saying, "It's all too hard! How is my little effort going to make any practical difference!"
- b. The danger in this way of thinking is always very close at hand. It springs from a tendency to think success depends entirely upon our own efforts which (correctly) have very real limits. There is no place for spiritual sloth, which is in fact a slow, weak, uncommitted response to our Lord's expectations of us. Our Lord met this frame of mind frequently, and gave many a warning that his followers would have to be very vigilant about preventing it from gradually overtaking them, and those who came after them. Let us be warned! And let us also accept the fact that we can blame no one else if we become diverted from seeking first the Kingdom of God!

- *Let us open our eyes to the deifying light,.....*

c. It is often observed, there is no one so blind as one who just will not see! St. Benedict gathers up all the Biblical references about learning to see, with the light of Christ, the real nature of things, the real situation, the real needs of people, the real response required.

d. We need to remember that when we dare to see in this way, the Light of Christ will indeed, enlighten us. This inner seeing, or insight, is vital for disciples of the Lord. Remember in St. Mark 10: 46 — 52, which records the story of blind Bartimaeus. He was the only blind person in a locality which our Lord was approaching; yet he was the only person who could "see" that Jesus was the Messiah.

e. Spiritual blindness is always self-imposed. It results from poor choices made by us, and (to repeat) we have only ourselves to blame if we lose our way in the mad hurly-burly of our modern way of life.

f. St. Benedict "pulls no punches" when it comes to being realistic about our common difficulties with human nature. However he always raises our sights to the glorious heritage which is ours for the taking.

g. "Let us open our eyes, he says to the deifying light." Sometimes we need to pause and let some of these great truths "sink in". We are called to perceive divine realities! We are invited to participate in a highly privileged relationship which is a unique blessing: especially since this light comes from God. It is Sacred Scripture. It is Christ the Word.

- *".....let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us,"*

h. Again and again we will be cautioned about the need for listening with the ears of the heart because that inner hearing is the only way to learn and understand God's will for us: as individuals as well as for the whole Church, the Body of Christ. This divine voice we certainly will not hear unless we take time to be still and totally focused on trying to hear "with attentive ears".

i. From a negative viewpoint, the unenthusiastic soul might think — "does that mean I am always going to be constantly concerned with prayer and religious duties?" Actually the answer is, "Yes". St. Benedict captures the spirit of the first Christians who saw this calling to constant prayer and listening for God's voice as a duty — but much more besides: a great privilege and special honour. This is very, very important to grasp. In the passage above he draws on several beautiful Biblical quotations which reflect the immense dignity of our calling: our vocation as sons and daughters of the Most High.

- ***Additional Note: St. Benedict's Use of Scripture***

This Section (3) begins a very long list of Biblical quotations used by St. Benedict in outlining his Rule. There are several points we need to know about the traditional Christian understanding of "knowing" and using Scripture.

j. From earliest Christian times, our Lord's followers have learnt passages of Scripture by memory and repeated them and reflected on them regularly. This was, in fact, the oral tradition within the Church at a time when the ordinary individual did not have access to a copy of the Bible. Despite the lack of handwritten texts, the people knew Scripture amazingly well.

k. The regular repetition of Biblical passages allowed the person to develop a very profound grasp of the inner meaning of the texts, and to understand connections between passages. This was the Biblical understanding of what is meant **to know** Scripture, which never permitted the recitation of single verses, isolated from their context, to be taken as a definitive answer to a complex question or issue. To our Christian forbears, that was the abuse of Scripture! The early Christians (and we include St. Benedict in their tradition), always presumed that the quoting of a verse or two will call to mind in the hearer, the **whole** Scriptural context. This is extremely important if we wish to understand what a Biblical vision of the Christian life involves.

l. The early Church was conscious of its being grafted onto the well-cultivated 'Olive tree of Israel', inheriting therefore the whole of Scripture (which at that stage was what we call the Old Testament — **(Remember, what we called the New Testament was not defined and compiled till the 4th Century!)**). Its members believed passionately in the power of Scripture as the Word of God which possessed an inherent capacity to effect what it proclaimed. The account of Creation (in Genesis 1), demonstrates this power: God spoke and it was so!

m. The soul listening for the voice of God will hear it, and his or her positive response will manifest an empowerment by God in that person.

This could be a suitable place to divide Section 3 into Parts 1 and 2.

● *"Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts,"*

(Psalm 94 [95] : 8)

● *And again, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches".*

(Apoc. / Revelation 2: 7)

n. St. Benedict reflects the heightened awareness the early members of the Church had in terms of God constantly seeking us out. Thus he recalls Psalm 94 [95]: So God, daily, is calling to us. Are we going to respond or turn "a deaf ear" to Him? Our ancients responded to this beautiful call at two levels: by responding to God with prayer and adoration in their morning and evening prayers (reflecting our inherited Jewish model) as well informally by listening for Him in their daily lives. In both contexts God is seen as drawing us into a close and direct relationship with Him.

o. We could note here that many early Christians developed the custom of reciting Psalm 94 [95] every morning as their first prayer. That custom has continued in the Catholic Church to our own day. It is a good practice for Christians to recite this Psalm from time to time. We need to be reminded that when we hear His voice we must be on guard not to let the affairs and noise of the world drown out His voice and harden our hearts to His inspirations. Jesus went to great lengths, in the parable about the sowing of the seed, to highlight this ever-present danger.

● *And what does He say say? "Come, My children, listen to Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord, (Psalm 33 [34]: 12). Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you", (John 12: 35)*

p. In verse 12, St. Benedict quotes Psalm 33 [34]: 12 — "Come and listen to me sons", indicating that Christ is calling out and inviting any who would listen and respond. Thus He presupposes that the **Lord** of the Psalm is Christ. This indicates how the early Church saw Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and therefore already present throughout it. This observation is critical in our understanding of Christ the Word (St. John 1: 1 — 14) at work in Old Testament times. This helps us appreciate the importance of learning the unfolding themes and teaching contained in the Old Testament.

q. It matters not whether the translator says **run** or **walk**. The issue at stake in the Biblical vision is that we will act on the inspirations of the Holy Spirit **with alacrity**. St. Benedict echoes the Holy Scriptures in raising our sense of urgency as regards the mission our Lord presents to us. It is not to be one of many hobbies or interests, but the principal focus of our lives: one for which we must be prepared to sacrifice our lives at any moment.

We attach an appendix to this Section (following the Key Principles) which give us a Hebrew perspective in support of St. Benedict's teaching.

Key Principles

10. Our Lord reminded His disciples frequently that we need to be constantly alert to the danger of being distracted from our goal: to seek first the Kingdom of God. Soldiers of Christ will need a **military-like routine** to prevent unintended diversion from their goals. This cannot be emphasised enough in our busy but casual culture.

11. If we are not careful we can develop the attitude that we are doing God a favour when we turn to Him in prayer; and that when we do so, we obligate Him to respond in a way that fits our expectations! As a rule, it is when we read the Scriptures with the intention of listening to the Lord's intimations, that we hear what He wishes to share and impart; perhaps not immediately, but in due course. Part of our learning-curve is to be able to discern when the Holy Spirit is uncovering something for us to ponder and pray about. We need to devote some time, at least, each week to the practice of Lectio Divina.

12. Traditional Christians hold very dearly the understanding that they are grafted onto the olive tree: the Israel of the Sacred Scriptures in the age of the fulfillment. Their belief is founded in the mission and teaching of the Lord Jesus and the Church He established to continue His work for all humanity. What we call the Church is an authentic part of Biblical Israel in its continuation of God's caring for mankind. In the Church the Scriptural prophecies and Divine Will continue to be honoured and unfolded. We need to be committed to loyal, proud, yet grateful membership of the Church. This will entail an on-going study of the Church and an understanding of its true mission in the world. Traditional Christians look upon present day Jews as sincerely upholding what they have had entrusted to them by God, but without acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Messiah and fulfillment of the Old Testament.

We honour them for their sincerity and their zeal in remaining loyal and true to their traditions. There is no conflict between our belief that the Church is an authentic and organic extension of the Israel of the Old Testament and our respect for our Jewish sisters and brothers who cannot accept Jesus as Messiah. In God's good time we believe that everything will be revealed to His greater glory. We will, then, **all** find our attempts to live according to His Holy Law to be somewhat lacking and in need of His most gracious mercy.

Many Christians are frequently confused as to how to interpret the interactions of the modern State of Israel with other nations. Some traditional rabbis and Christians hold that the creation of the modern state known as Israel has no connection of any kind with God's Israel of the Old Testament. Likewise they do not acknowledge in the creation of that modern state, any fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy. Others see in the modern State of Israel the true and gracious fulfillment of God's promises. Our references to the subject acknowledge the **fact**, the **reality** of the nation rather than posit some theoretical adjudication favouring any particular corpus of opinion. This is indeed a ratification of the importance of respecting Jewish historical culture, and (even more importantly) the need to avoid any anti-Semitic position. We encourage our members to examine carefully all references to things Jewish and root out any language or expressions which could possibly be seen to demean Judaism. This position reflects the promulgations of the Holy See and it is our intention to implement these with the most sincere attention to detail.

13. One of the customs Christians have continued from the birth of the Church as members of God's household is the Jewish practice of punctuating the day with prayer and meditation. This custom, inherited directly from Judaism, highlights the importance of morning and evening prayer as two special times to honour God. Over the centuries additional calls to prayer have been added for those who are free to respond. Strangely, many of us have become accustomed to thinking that it is very difficult (if not impossible) in our busy modern life to maintain such a rhythm of prayer. In fact, the contrary is true — it has never been easier: in other words, if we make the decision that is what we want to do!

A daily rhythm of prayer and meditation, **no matter how brief or basic** is critical for living the Christian life. It must never be excessive, burdensome or impractical — but reasonable, sustainable and balanced, according to our circumstances.

"The Path of the Just"

by Moshe Chayim Luzzatto

(Published by Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem 5747 / 1987)

We offer a short excerpt from a great 18th Century Jewish spiritual writer. Our selection is to underpin the value of "**zeal**" and an accompanying sense of "**alacrity**" when we respond to a call from God to take action.

"The possession of Zeal constitutes an extremely high level of spiritual development, which a persons nature prevents him from attaining at once. He who strengthens himself, however, and acquires as much of Zeal as he is able to, will, in time to come, truly attain to it. The Creator, may His Name be blessed, will present it to him as a reward for having striven for it during the time of his service.

The concern of "Zeal after the beginning of the deed" is that a man, after taking hold of a mitzvah#, **make haste** to complete it; not for the sake of ease, as with one who wishes to relieve himself of a burden, but for fear that he might be not otherwise be able to complete it. Our Sages of blessed memory have voiced many exhortations concerning this: (*Bereshith Rabbah* 85:4), "One who begins a mitzvah and does not complete it buries his wife and sons;" and (*Ibid.*), "A mitzvah is attributed only to the one who completes it." And King Solomon, may Peace be upon him, said (Proverbs 22: 29), "Have you seen a man quick in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before low-life." Our Sages of blessed memory paid this tribute to Solomon himself (*Sanhedrin* 104b) for having made haste in the building of the Temple, and not having idled and delayed it. They commented in a similar manner upon Moses zeal in the work of the Tabernacle (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:2).

It is to be observed that all the deeds of the righteous are performed **with alacrity**. In relation to Abraham it is written (Genesis 18: 6), "And Abraham **hastened** to the tent, to Sarah, and he said, 'Hasten' and he gave it to the youth and **he hastened**." And in relation to Rivkah (*Ibid.* 24: 20), "And **she hastened** and emptied her pitcher....." And in the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbar* 10: 17). " 'And the woman **made haste**' (Judges 13: 10), — this teaches us that all the deeds of the righteous are **done quickly**," that they do not permit time to elapse before beginning them or in completing them.

The man whose soul burns in the service of his Creator will surely not idle in the performance of his mitzvoth, but his movements will be like the **quick movements** of a fire; he will not rest or be still until the deed has been completed. Furthermore, just as zeal can result from an inner burning so can it create one. That is, one who perceives a quickening of his movements in the performance of a mitzvah conditions himself to experience a flaming inner movement, through which longing and desire will continually grow. If, however, he is sluggish in the movement of his limbs, the movement of his spirit will die down and be extinguished.

It is known that what is most preferred in Divine service is desire of the heart and longing of the soul. And it is in relation to his goodly portion in this respect that David exulted (Psalms 42: 2), "As a hart yearns for the water-brooks, so does my soul yearn for You, O God....." "My soul thirsts for God....." "My soul longs and goes out for the courts of God (Psalms 84: 3); "My soul thirsts for You; my flesh pines for You" (Psalms 63: 2). The man in whom this longing does not burn as it should would do well to bestir himself by force of will so that, as a result, this longing will spring up in his nature; for outer movements awaken inner ones. Unquestionably a person has more control of his outer than his inner self, but if he makes use of what he can control, he will acquire, in consequence, even that which is not within the province of his control. For as a result of the willed quickening of his movements, there will arise in him an inner joy and a desire and a longing. As the Prophet says (Hosea 6: 3), "And let us know — **let us run to know God**;" and (Hosea 11: 10), "After God will they go, who will roar like a lion."

From Chapter 7, The Divisions of Zeal (Page 87/91)

Mitzvah — a commandment, or a good deed done in response to God's commandments.
A mitzvah is also a connection and in the religious sense means **being connected** or **attached** to God by means of performing mitzvot (plural form of mitzvah.).

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 4 Verses 14 to 18

And the Lord, seeking His labourer in the multitude to whom He thus cries out, says again, "Who is the one who will have life, and desires to see good days?" (Psalm 33 [34]: 12). And if hearing Him you answer, "I am he," God says to you, "If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it, (Psalm 33 [34]: 13 — 14). And when you have done these things, My eyes shall be upon you and My ears open to your prayers; and before you can call upon Me, I will say to you, 'Behold, here I am,' " (Isaiah 58: 9).

• *And the Lord, seeking His labourer in the multitude to whom He thus cries out, says again, "Who is the one who will have life, and desires to see good days?"*
(Psalm 33 [34]: 12).

- a. St. Benedict exemplifies the early Christian understanding that God is constantly seeking out individuals to invite them into His company. This is not how much of modern religion depicts God. What has happened to cause this change in emphasis — and does it really matter?
- b. God confronts each person with the very clear question: "Do you long for eternal life with all your heart, and mind and soul?" We are required to make a choice and reply: "I do," or "I don't." We need to look closely at the conditions God places for the gifting of true and eternal life with Him.

c. It is interesting to note that the deluge of New Age philosophy and quasi-religion which from the mid 20th century has been flooding into Western society is having an increasing effect in all sectors of Christianity. It is hard to find areas where it has not permeated into and modified popular understanding of some or other traditional Christian doctrine. Strangely, (and sadly) some Catholic and Protestant movements have become infected with this rebirth of paganism in our midst. Often it parades under the guise of "the work of the Holy Spirit" (a favourite), and few there are, who have not come across its promises to make us more spiritually mature, even more "like God" (the oldest trick in the book — Genesis 3: 5).

d. Traditional Christianity never peddled easy ways to heaven. There is no "play-way" in Christianity: it is the Cross — or else! New Age Christianity plays down the Cross, and presents us with an amazing choice of entertaining and attractive enticements to "be religious" or "spiritual". St. Benedict writes about practical, plain, Biblical religion. He highlights the Biblical principle which reveals **God seeking us**, rather than the New Age emphasis of "finding God in yourself" as well as other beguiling attractions. Any educated Christian has been taught about the presence of God within them. But in our day, the great truth about God constantly "Seeking His labourer" tends to have faded even in much supposedly Christian teaching. This in turn diminishes the spiritual perspective we develop, so that it becomes harder and harder to behold the magnanimity and graciousness of God who goes to unimaginable lengths to draw us to Him. This is a vital element of our Christian concept of reality. For the Christian, the Kingdom of God and everything that pertains to it, is real: super-real. Everything else is to be viewed from that perspective.

● *And if hearing Him you answer, "I am he," God says to you, "If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it". (Psalm 33 [34]: 13 — 14).*

e. It is easy to err here and think the first condition is stated only in the negative. Elsewhere Scripture provides the antidote for evil speech and thoughts: singing the high praises of God. It's good for us to take stock as to how often we do that.

f. The second requirement given here is that we "turn away from evil and do good". To be inheritors of the eternal life being offered, we are required to take positive action in the world and not just be "fence-sitters"! It is not enough just to condemn evil, or even just to "turn away from" it. We have to carry out good works in response to the commandments of God.

g. The third injunction is that we "seek after peace and pursue it". This can be a daunting prospect but there is no room for trying to avoid it. For the Christian, since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, peace can never exist naturally, nor even as a result of our efforts. Peace is **always** a special blessing from God. It is a restoration of the order and harmony established by our Creator.

h. How often we hear even religious people talk about peace as the mere absence of war. And these very same people will often overlook a number of issues just to prevent outbreaks of violence especially when the discord is a great inconvenience to the rest of the world. But there can be no peace without justice; until past wrongs are righted. If we are not prepared to face these and deal with them honestly we simply cannot "pursue peace". Any respite from violence will only be temporary, and sadly will serve ultimately to magnify the problem. There have never been any exceptions to this rule.

● *".....And when you have done these things, My eyes shall be upon you and My ears open to your prayers; and before you can call upon Me, I will say to you, 'Behold, here I am,' "* *(Isaiah 58: 9).*

i. Our modern English "you" (plural of the old "thou") conceals the fact that St. Benedict is echoing Isaiah's understanding that each individual is called to live a holy life in which God will respond to and bless each person. Our individual responses will then bind us together as the people of God who seek Him in all that we do.

j. God's response in Isaiah 58: 9 is both to us as individuals and as a people consecrated to His service. The words are overwhelming! They are words which reflect the closest possible sense of presence and togetherness.

k. The message is clear:

- Do not pander to Me in nice words and sweet thoughts.
- Do what I tell you to do!
- To seek Me can **only** mean to seek to **do** My will. So make this your target.
- When, and only when, you **have done** these things, before you can even call upon Me I will have already said to you: here I am in your midst.

Awesome thought!

Key Principles

14. Traditional Christians need to remain alerted to the constant tendency for new-age, popular religious beliefs to merge with traditional doctrines and distort them significantly. Those who resist this process are frequently maligned with labels such as, "locked in the past", "extremists", "arch-conservatives", or separatists". But resist them, we must, despite the demeaning labels we attract. The spiritual truth we want to present is that it is not enough to take God's presence in us for granted. Respect for our Creator and Redeemer calls for us to approach God humbly and consciously in prayer and worship, thus acknowledging His existence "out there", quite apart from His glorious in-dwelling within us. Much of the cold, meaningless, bizarre church architecture we see in our day may well reflect a certain absence of a strong, traditional Christian belief in the objective existence of God — or at least a much weakened belief in objective existence. Sadly, the same attitude has seen the decline of warm and attractive centres of devotion in Christian homes. We draw attention to this as we see the restoration of these to be important in our recovery of our own culture which is in rapid decline — but not beyond restoration. For most of us, training in identification of non-Christian influences will help us resist them.

15. One of the beautiful aspects of belonging to the family of God is that our response to His personal call to each individual is offered to Him both in our personal prayers and devotions as well as in those of the Church. There is always this twofold aspect of life as a Christian: the personal and the community, or as the New Testament records it — the "member" and the "whole Body". Individually, we cannot always be praying directly. However, as members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are (by the Power of the Holy Spirit) an organic part of the prayer of the whole Church constantly being offered through our Head, Christ the Lord, to the Father. Our understanding of this awesome truth will have a powerful effect in our day-to-day living.

16. St. Benedict, rightly, draws our attention to the need to **do** what the Lord God commands. People often exclaim, "Why does God seem to take no action concerning the assaults against Christianity — and why does He allow the Church to disintegrate before our eyes"? The message arising, "loud and clear" from every page of Sacred Scripture is to listen to what He commands and carry out His holy will. That is the test for us: the real challenge. For the Church in our day, it is becoming clearer and clearer we would benefit from increased respect for the Torah, (together with the other Old Testament books) and the principles and practices of Jewish observance. By "Jewish observance" we mean the duty, indeed privilege of **listening** daily to the Divine Word and setting our hearts on **obeying** His **teaching**. This includes the methodical study of Sacred Scripture Texts in private as well as in the gathered community. We have become detached from the early foundations of our Faith, and we are in danger of falling over at the rising onslaught of those who are out to destroy both Judaism and Christianity.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 5 Verses 19 to 21

What can be sweeter to us, dear brethren, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.

Having our loins girded (Eph. 6: 14 — 16), therefore with faith and the performance of good works, let us walk in His paths by the guidance of the Gospel, that we deserve to see Him who has called us to His kingdom, (1 Thessalonians 2: 12).

● *What can be sweeter to us, dear brethren, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.*

- a. Here St. Benedict pauses and reiterates what has already been said. It is a little pep talk, before we continue with the second half of his Prologue. And most of us need it.
- b. It is probably no exaggeration to say that there is nothing in St. Benedict's Prologue which we don't already know. As is often very rightly said of the Bible, we read it, not because **we don't** know what is written there — but because we **do!** We read it to refresh our jaded vision, our wilting hope. In like manner, St. Benedict directs us back to Scripture to unfold new levels of understanding and to recover our sense of belonging, identity and purpose. He therefore assumes his reader is familiar with the material he presents. He demonstrates therefore that his Rule, as with the Bible itself, is not so much to **inform** but to **form us**.
- c. In the tradition of St. Benedict (and the early Church), when he writes, "..... by the guidance of the Gospel..... " he assumes this will be interpreted in the Biblical tradition — i.e, with the understanding and backing of the Old Testament.

- *Having our loins girded (Eph. 6: 14 — 16), therefore with faith and the performance of good works, let us walk in His paths by the guidance of the Gospel, that we deserve to see Him who has called us to His kingdom. (1 Thessalonians 2: 12).*

d. The early Christians had no problem embracing the complementary roles of faith and good works, the latter being commanded, not just recommended. Sadly, some religious leaders later rejected that position and in so doing departed from the Scripture they so assertively claimed as their only guide and authority.

e. St. Benedict reflects the custom of the early Church in highlighting the four accounts of the Gospel (St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John) as the chief element of Scripture bequeathed by the Lord to His Church to guide them "safely home". As we shall see later, how we look upon Scripture and use it will influence significantly our progress in His service.

f. It would be helpful to note here that St. Benedict is talking about the Lord Jesus and us, as his disciples, down through the ages. It is therefore entirely proper for us to embark on this great journey of faith at the end of which we shall surely "see Him". Many a Christian has wondered just how to interpret our Lord's injunction: "Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God", (Matthew 5: 8). St. Benedict is helping us prepare ourselves for this great privilege, and, to grow in our understanding of what Jesus meant and what St. Paul was referring to in 1 Thessalonians 2: 12.

Key Principle

17. The Gospel accounts recorded by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John are carefully designed and crafted documents which reflect the fulfillment of God's revelation in the Old Testament in the light of Christ. In that Light only, with the guidance of the Teaching Magisterium of the Church, can we correctly understand the teaching of the rest of Sacred Scripture — both Old and New Testaments. Strangely, in our time, even a casual conversation with many Christians soon discloses how little is understood about these wonderful Scriptures. The good news is that it need not be that way: quality resources are available to help us develop a reasonable understanding of all the Gospels. Meditation on the Sunday Gospel readings, or on each Gospel taken systematically will soon begin to shape the thinking of the person who makes the effort. A simple approach followed regularly within a family will also produce valuable results.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 6 Verses 22 to 28

For if we wish to dwell in the tent of that kingdom, we must run to it by good deeds or we shall never reach it.

But let us ask the Lord, with the Prophet, "Lord, who shall dwell in Your tent, or who shall rest upon Your holy mountain?" (Psalm 14 [15]: 1).

After this question, brethren, let us listen to the Lord as He answers and shows us the way to that tent, saying, "He who walks without stain and practises justice; he who speaks truth from his heart; he who has not used his tongue for deceit; he who has done no evil to his neighbour; he who has given no place to slander against his neighbour," (Psalm 14 [15]: 2 —3).

It is he, who, under any temptation from the malicious devil, has brought him to naught by casting him and his temptation from the sight of his heart; and who has laid hold of his thoughts while they were still young and dashed them against Christ.

● ***For if we wish to dwell in the tent of that kingdom, we must run to it by good deeds or we shall never reach it.***

a. As mentioned earlier, we are often going to hear St. Benedict, (as well as other great teachers of the spiritual life) urging us to **run** towards our goal — our true home. This echoes a strong Biblical tradition which the Church has developed, based on both the Old and New Testaments. The Christian religion is, simply put, far too demanding for dawdlers and indecisive individuals who want to reserve time and energy for other favourite pursuits on the way. Pretty tough talking! But Biblical Christianity constantly warns us not to get distracted by the enticements of the atheistic culture around us.

b. Notice that while St. Benedict urges us frequently to **run** towards our goal, the whole tone is based on his emphasising that the Christian vocation is an invitation. Do you want to have life? Do you long to dwell in the Lord's tent? Do you hear the Lord calling you today? He assumes, therefore, that if we have made a choice to follow His calling, then we should focus all our efforts into making a strong and total commitment.

c. In this context his use of the term "good deeds" does not just mean "doing good" to others. It means actions commanded by God. These actions our Hebrew brothers call "mitzvot", the plural of mitzvah — commandments, laws, good deeds. It includes any loving response to God's promptings or inspirations as demonstrated in such actions as:

- expressing gratitude to God;
- giving time to morning and evening worship;
- prayerfully affirming our belief in God during the hurly-burly of everyday life and work;
- as well as all the other good choices and actions of our day-to-day life, e.g. consciously choosing to obey God's commandments.

d. But having said that, St. Benedict also draws our attention to the fact that doing "good deeds" to one another should be a normal feature of healthy relationships we have with one another. In fact he reminds us that all these things are necessary if we would hope to dwell "in the tent of that kingdom" referred to by St. Paul in 1st Thess. 2: 12 (See previous Section 5: verse 21.). Obviously we need to examine carefully this crucial idea of the "tent of that kingdom".

**● *But let us ask the Lord, with the Prophet,
"Lord, who shall dwell in Your tent, or who shall rest
upon Your holy mountain?" (Psalm 14 [15]: 1).***

e. A reader could well be puzzled by St. Benedict's link between the Kingdom of God referred to by St. Paul (1 Thess. 2: 12) and God's "tent" or "His holy mountain". But he is taking us to the very core of Biblical understanding of what it means to live in God's presence — in all its dimensions. St. Benedict recalls for us how each one of us is part of the People of God whom He graciously leads attentively and assiduously (which means "sitting close by") into His presence. The reference to "tent" (or "tabernacle") is a strong Biblical symbol of God's real presence among us. It depicts God establishing His dwelling among us as His people as well as drawing us into His presence. During Israel's years of camping in the wilderness the Tabernacle of God's Presence was **always** in the centre of the orderly rows of dwellings placed around His. He was at the centre of their day to day living: mutual presence, ordered relationship and frequent interaction were critically important for the Israelites of that period. These features of mutual presence, relationship and interaction were governed by formal protocols, procedures and ceremonies. They were **NEVER** casual.

f. All of this is vital for us to understand. Traditional Christianity as practised in the Catholic Faith has continued to reflect the physical and spiritual reality of the tent of God's presence in its buildings for worship as well as the ceremonies performed within them. The same goes for the traditions and ceremonies carried out in Christian homes. They form an extension of worship performed in the local Church and help heighten our consciousness of Christ's presence in us through the Holy Spirit, and our presence in Him and His Body, the Church. A very beautiful custom in traditional Catholicism is to visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in our churches. For a variety of reasons, some associated with vandalism and security, our churches these days are often locked. But if we are able, it is of enormous benefit to us, as well as a mark of respect to God's Presence, to make visits whenever we are able. If this is impracticable, we can make "spiritual visits" using any appropriate prayers or meditations and present these to our Lord as a spiritual communion with Him. Many saints made such spiritual visits and communion with our Lord several times a day.

g. We may consider it appropriate to review the trends of some contemporary teaching and practices, and the powerful influence they exert in moving us away from a strong Biblical model towards assimilating modern "pop" culture and its atheistic influences in our society. Much of modern Christianity is failing to pass on our Christian culture to the youth of today despite all efforts to make it "relevant" to them. This has become strongly reflected in the way people behave in Church as well as at home.

• *After this question, brethren, let us listen to the Lord as He answers and shows us the way to that tent, saying, "He who walks without stain and practises justice; he who speaks truth from his heart; he who has not used his tongue for deceit; he who has done no evil to his neighbour; he who has given no place to slander against his neighbour," (Psalm 14 [15]: 2 —3).*

h. Having boldly confronted us with the opening question of Psalm 14 [15], St. Benedict just as forthrightly proclaims the answer provided by the Psalmist! Reciting those first three verses of this powerful Psalm may help us through many a difficult moment. Readers may be used to different translations of these wonderful words of advice, and the impact may be therefore diluted a little. So let's process the material a little more.

i. To walk "**without stain**" may seem at first more than a little unrealistic. The Psalmist does not just mean "marks"; he means permanent marks: stains! And the Christian has no excuse for bearing residual stains! There is a way provided by the Lord for them to be dealt with, and it **must** be used by His followers if they are to dwell in God's Presence or rest upon His Holy Mountain. Our failings must be confessed and absolved according to the dictates of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church which He commissioned to continue His work.

j. To "practise justice" can mean different things to different people. In the Biblical context, however, it is very meaningful and necessary to understand. The Latin "*iustitia*", (from which our word "justice" comes) and the Hebrew word "*sedek*" (which "*iustitia*" translates) incorporate a wide range of meanings such as:

- Justice (in the modern sense); but also
- Observance of God's Holy Word / Law, (or in Hebrew) Torah, especially, in due course, obeying the Torah i.e. the Word made flesh, (John 1: 14);
- Holiness;
- God's just ways or decrees.

In particular the word "justice" here means giving priority to God's Torah, i.e. His Law, His Word, or His Presence. Sometimes the word "righteousness" is used similarly and this is always connected in some way with **Torah** dwelling in or among us (like the tent of God's Presence pitched in our midst), and us dwelling in Torah: God's Holy Word / Law.

k. **Righteousness** is all about mutual indwelling; not about being moralistic. St. Benedict reflects the traditional Christian view that true righteousness requires that we put our own house in order first before criticising the actions of others! St. Jerome had already spelt this out in one of his sermons. Talking about the self-righteous, St. Jerome applies the term 'hypocrite' to those who make it their business to focus on the faults of others as a devious way of parading their own virtue. He points out that such people are just as much "off the track" as those they criticise.

It seems to me that the term applies also to the one who says to his brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye." For he appears to be doing this for the sake of publicity, to have the look of virtue. Hence our Lord says to him, "Hypocrite, first cast the beam out of your own eye." It is not the manifestation of virtue, then, but its motivation that God rewards. And if you wander off the track a bit, it makes no difference whether you veer to the right or to the left: the important thing is that you are not on the right road. St. Jerome AD 347 — 426.

l. The Rule we are studying was drawn up to help keep us "on track" for our true home. So St. Benedict is reminding us emphatically that our way of life, our words and deeds must reflect flawlessly the real, mutual, indwelling of God in us and we in God. Our words must echo this state of affairs if God is to be "believable" at home as well as in our society around us. Our actions must also reflect the goodness, loving kindness and mercy of God if He is to be manifested as one who seeks to share His living Presence with us.

m. For traditional Christians this concept is loaded with imagery.

- Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God who came to dwell (pitch His tent of Presence) among us.
- Towards the end of His life He talked about His dwelling in us and we in Him.
- This reflects, He said, the way He dwells in the Father, and the Father in Him. (See John 14: 11 and 23; John 15: 4 and John 17: 23 among other passages.)

● *It is he, who, under any temptation from the malicious devil, has brought him to naught by casting him and his temptation from the sight of his heart; and who has laid hold of his thoughts while they were still young and dashed them against Christ.*

n. In the first part of this section (6) St. Benedict challenges us to ask with the Prophet (meaning King David): Who is worthy to be in your presence? The Psalmist goes on to provide the answer. The reader is challenged to live up to standards which seem impossible. And so they are, if we rely on ourselves at a natural level.

o. St. Benedict gives the advice of the ancient Fathers of the Church. He is emphatic in declaring that no one has to listen to all the voices we hear within us giving conflicting advice and urging us to act contrary to how we know we ought. We are free he says, to take any temptation whatsoever, while it is in its infancy — before it takes hold **within us** — and dash it to pieces on a hard, sharp rock. He calls that rock Christ. This imagery comes from the early Christian way of interpreting Psalm 136 [137]: 9. Some moderns complain that this is mere spiritualising a horrible passage in the Psalm which originally called for Babylonian babies to be dashed on the rocks and destroyed. The trend today is to either omit the offensive passage from the Psalm, or translate the problem away. After all, claim these moderns, such thoughts are too inappropriate and obnoxious for Christian use. Quite apart from the fact that modern man can hardly claim to be more virtuous when it comes to dealing with anyone deemed to be an enemy, we can learn much from our Christian forbears who want us to penetrate the heart of Scripture and learn its real lessons. If we were to do this, there wouldn't be the widespread maltreatment of the weak and defenceless, which is becoming rampant in our society.

p. The essence of St. Benedict's writing on this point is: you can choose a course to follow, and don't have to be dictated to by weird or evil alternatives which surface in your mind. Let Christ deal with everything which you judge to be wrong. But do it quickly. Involve Him at the earliest opportunity — especially at the moment you detect any doubt in your mind about resisting temptation. Don't dally, nor allow yourself to be indecisive: **See — judge — and act!**

Key Principles

18. At first reading we could easily surmise that St. Benedict is giving activity and good works precedence over prayer and worship. Not so! Our actions (including our good works) and our obedience spring from a belief in and a commitment to the loving God who is constantly calling us to Him. They are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in us. They are the measure of our faith in Him and His presence within us. Prayer, adoration, worship and love of God must be firmly entrenched in our ordinary, daily life before we will have the stamina necessary for us to "run by good deeds" as St. Benedict prescribes.
19. If we consider ourselves to be Christian, we need to remember that this means being an active disciple of the Lord. Disciples are, among other aspects of membership, attentive worshippers and students of His teaching.
20. Christian homes should, to a degree, reflect in some visible, material way, the spiritual tone, appearance, and activity of the local Church. In this regard we encourage Christians to set aside some chosen space where the household can gather for worship in the home. We highly recommend families to make provision for this and offer some guidance on the matter in "[An Oratory at Home](#)".
21. The Biblical concept of "justice" and putting it into practice demand first that those who require it, model it in their own behaviour. This applies to whole communities as well as individuals. If society doesn't like what it sees developing among its youth, it needs to look at itself in a mirror to see what is wrong. The Gospels are Christ's mirror for us to see where we are going wrong. In particular, His parables are intended (a) to help us identify our failings as well as (b) to provide a perfect model for putting them right.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 7 Verses 29 to 34

It is they who, fearing the Lord, do not pride themselves on their good observance: but, convinced that the good which is in them cannot come from themselves and must be from the Lord, glorify the Lord's work in them, using the words of the Prophet, "Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give the glory," (Psalm 114 [115]: 1).

Thus also the Apostle Paul attributed nothing of the success of his preaching to himself, but said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am," (1 Cor. 15: 10).

And again he says, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord," (2 Cor. 10: 17). Hence the Lord says in the Gospel, "Whoever listens to these words of Mine and acts upon them, I will liken him to a man who built his house upon rock. The floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not fall, because it was founded on rock," (Matt. 7: 24 and 25).

● *It is they who, fearing the Lord, do not pride themselves on their good observance: but, convinced that the good which is in them cannot come from themselves and must be from the Lord, glorify the Lord's work in them, using the words of the Prophet, "Not to us O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give the glory," (Psalm 114 [115]: 1).*

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And again he says, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord," (2 Cor. 10: 17).

a. Most readers will be aware that in the English language, the word "fear" has long had two distinct meanings:

- apprehension of danger or pain;
- deep reverence or piety towards God.

St. Benedict, of course, is using the second definition here.

b. He has already drawn our attention to a major theme in Scripture: living lives which reflect the dignity and privilege of our being the people of God. Now he ensures we don't get carried away with our own success. Do good works, he says, but always acknowledge that any good in us or in our works comes from God. That actually sounds easier than it really is. So St. Benedict, always aware of human nature, makes quite an issue of our need to "glorify" the Lord's work in them. The members of some traditional communities for which St. Benedict composed this Rule recite the whole of the Psalter (150 Psalms) each week. A recurring theme throughout the Book of Psalms is the frequent promise of God's faithful people to proclaim His wonderful deeds.

Psalm 9: 1 I will give thanks to You O Lord, with all my heart;
I will declare all your wondrous deeds.

Psalm 21 [22]: 23 I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.

Psalm 25 [26]: 6 and 7 I wash my hands in innocence, and I go around
your altar, O Lord, giving voice to my thanks and
recounting all your wondrous deeds.

Psalm 44 [45]: 18 I will make your name memorable through all
generations; therefore shall nations praise you
forever and ever.

Psalm 77 [78]: 1 — 5 Hearken my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter mysteries from of old.
What we have heard and know,
and what our fathers have declared to us,
We will not hide from their sons,
we will declare to the generations to come.
The glorious deeds of the Lord and his
strength and the wonders that he wrought.

Canticle of Moses

Deuteronomy 32: 1 — 3 Give ear, O heavens, while I speak;
let the earth hearken to the words of my mouth!
May my instruction soak in like the rain,
and my discourse permeate like the dew.
Like a downpour upon the grass, like a shower
upon the crops.
For I will sing the Lord's renown.
Oh, proclaim the greatness of our God!

c. St. Benedict's emphasis on the need to deflect all honour for our good works to God begs the question: What is he underscoring here? For the early Christian, the great truth underlying the Scripture quotations in St. Benedict's text at the beginning of Section 7, as well as those above from the Psalms, is the vibrant awareness they had of being an instrument and co-worker of the Holy Spirit. This was a dignity they found profoundly humbling — And rightly so. It is the dignity of being a member of Christ's Body, His Church — and thus an instrument of the Holy Spirit which is of prior importance. The content of our actions is secondary in human thinking: some will do great things; some very humble things. What matters is that all give God the credit for any good whatsoever they have achieved.

- *Hence the Lord says in the Gospel, "Whoever listens to these words of Mine and acts upon them, I will liken him to a man who built his house upon rock. The floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not fall, because it was founded on rock,"* (Matt. 7: 24 and 25)

d. This part of Section 7 provides us with an excellent example of the correct way for Christians to learn from Sacred Scripture. Short crisp quotations have their place, but the Christian life requires an in-depth familiarity with the Bible. Note, we are not saying we must be academics or highly qualified theologians. But we are called to be students of the Bible together with the approved commentaries and scholarship of the Church, according to our ability and circumstances. We will take a look at St. Matthew's Gospel 7: 13 — 29 and examine how St. Benedict links to our Lord's teaching.

e. The use by St. Benedict of St. Matthew 7: 24 and 25 demonstrates how he is not just giving a short quotation from the New Testament, but bedding it into a large and highly significant passage: the well-known Sermon on the Mount. Typical of St. Benedict, (and other early Christian writers, especially in a succinct work such as the Rule we are studying), he gives only a short quotation. This, in fact, sums up a longer passage which we are expected to **know** and to **apply to the whole** of what he is explaining.

f. This section of the Prologue ends with a single sentence, verses 24 and 25 of St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 7. This, in fact is meant to recall and bring to our attention **the whole** of the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 to 7 of St. Matthew's Gospel. So we need to be generally familiar with that. More specifically, St. Benedict expects us to take into account verses 13 to 29 of St. Matthew 7, which form the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. As a demonstration of this approach to using Sacred Scripture, we attach an Appendix to this section. It is a valuable insight into a passage which forms part of the core teaching contained in St. Benedict's Prologue. Our acceptance of it is assumed.

g. Final Summary

In summing up the importance of St. Benedict's use of St. Matthew 7: 24 and 25 and the whole passage of verses 13 to 29.

- Our acceptance of Jesus' teaching on his constitution for the Kingdom of God given in the Sermon on the Mount is assumed.
- We must be vigilant about the dangers **always** lurking nearby within and beyond the Church.
- Our Lord will not tolerate the empty preaching of those who claim authority but do not teach **all** that he proclaimed and commanded with his power and his passion.
- Jesus requires his teaching to be carefully and consistently put into practice. He demands his followers constantly **listen** to his word and **obediently** carry it out.
- Devout obedience will stand the followers of Christ in good stead. However, it will not cocoon them to such an extent that they will not experience hardship and other difficulties. After all, the floods will still come. And the winds will still blow. The promise of our Lord is that those who **listen** to Him and **act** on His instruction will be empowered to weather the storm. His constant message for us is to be vigilant and prepared!

Key Principles

22. Many aspects of life in our contemporary society have been the target of shrewd opportunists who have poured huge resources into developing many kinds of package deals, whether it be:

- weddings
- housing
- holidays
- charity, and so on.

Over the past 50 years, traditional Christians have observed the corporatisation of religion: specifically Christianity.

We have seen the emergence of mega-churches, media evangelists, new "prophets for our times" and a whole line of promoters with their slick messages. These messages are often one-liners with little depth but carefully tuned emotional appeal, offering instant, direct, even overwhelming attraction. The abuse of the name and role of the Holy Spirit has been the major focus of this kind of hijacking. Organisations specialising in a whole culture of "dispensing" the Holy Spirit, aggressively lay claim to a special preserve or status, and openly talk of the traditional Church as "not having the Spirit". Traditional Christians need to be very clear about this "take-over bid" and stand very firmly in their Faith and its day-to-day practice. This may sometimes entail humbly, yet boldly declaring these latter day religious entrepreneurs to be misleading sincere people away from the central focus on Jesus Christ and His teaching.

23. We wish to affirm strongly the need for us to retain the traditional role of Sacred Scripture in the Church and not allow it to be used to support every misguided theory that surfaces in our time. Traditional Christianity has consistently taught that Sacred Scripture together with the teaching authority bestowed on the Church by her Founder guide the teaching of the Church in terms of what Scripture contains and how it should be used.

24. The Church is called to remain on the alert at all times for attacks from misguided persons — whether genuine and sincere, or motivated by personal advantage. Our Lord's teaching illustrates how false guides launch their attacks both from within and outside the Church. There has never been an era when the Church has not had to be dealing with 'cranks' and their distortions of the Faith. In our own time we are under very real attack from outside the Church — but also from within. We wish to affirm the principle that growth and change, while a genuine part of the Church's existence in the world with all its problems, should always manifest organic development from what has come before. The True Faith is that which has been handed down before in an unbroken stream from the founding of the Church at Pentecost. Our only truly reliable safeguard in terms of the Faith is that which is approved by the Sacred Magisterium of the Church. We therefore need to keep ourselves well-informed about the Church, as well as about what is going on around us to ensure we are not hoodwinked by the latest fads and trends in the world.

25. The repetitions that keep occurring in our sequence of "Key Principles" reflect the repeated warnings of our Saviour to impress upon us the need to look carefully at our performance (as individuals as well as in the Body of the Church) and identify where we have gone astray. Many organisations claim Gospel teaching as their standard — even calling themselves "Full Gospel" this, or that. The critical standard by which we will all be judged is whether we believe and teach **all** that our Lord taught and commanded (St. Matt. 28: 20). Embodied in this mandate of the Lord is therefore the requirement to be constantly listening to the Divine Word interiorly, and hearing what He requires as well as attempting whole-heartedly to carry it out. The interpretation of this tiny word **all** is what finally will sift those who are genuinely seeking to follow Christ from those who insist on deciding for themselves what they wish to believe and do.

Appendix: Essential Understanding of St. Matthew 7: 13 — 23

The concluding part of Christ's famous Sermon on the Mount contains three sub-sections:

- Verses 13 to 23 warnings against dangers;
- Verses 24 to 27 exhortation to apply our Lord's teaching;
- Verses 28 and 29 an observation of St. Matthew.

Let us consider each of these briefly as background to St. Benedict's reference to St. Matthew's Gospel.

Warning against dangers: St. Matthew 7: 13 to 23

Virtually every Christian remembers stories about **entering by the narrow gate**. The theme however, was often not developed and many are unsure of the meaning. We print a brief summary of the teaching of Jesus in these verses from the Knox-Cox Gospel Story, (CYM Publications 1957).

Entry into the kingdom requires effort; it is a hard, painstaking search for a small, hidden gate into a city. There, a narrow, winding street begins; courage and perseverance are needed to follow this street. It is a way of virtue that leads to life. Only those who accept the standards of the eight beatitudes need apply. Jesus would lead nobody after him by false promises of an easy, pleasant life.....

He warns his audience against one of the main obstacles in their way, false guides. They are the Pharisees, that body of official religious teachers bent on his destruction. He calls them 'false prophets,' i.e. men wrongly claiming to speak for and safeguard the interests of God. They are hypocrites: an outward show of sanctity, but evil ruling in their hearts. To no other class of men is our Lord so hard and unrelenting; 'wolves, serpents, whitened sepulchres,' is a terrible judgment from his lips.....

He who is Truth as well as Love can make no compromise with either error or evil. It is because they have wrong ideas on the nature of the kingdom, that their guidance is false and dangerous; it cannot be otherwise, no more than a farmer can get good fruit from a withered tree, or 'figs from thistles'. Our Lord finally warns the Pharisees of their responsibility as teachers: their words will be matter for judgment as well as their deeds: the purpose of words is to teach truth, not falsehood.

In this regard very little has changed. The Church also has its false guides and lobby groups who correspond with their ancient counterparts. They do not sincerely support the Magisterium and quietly work towards their own deviant plans.

Exhortation to apply our Lord's teaching:

St. Matthew 7: 24 to 27

(Also from the Knox-Cox Gospel Story, CYM Publications 1957.)

*Our Lord does not want his hearers just to stand and admire the beauty of his thoughts; he wants them to follow him, and live his life. They must not only know the will of God, they must do it. It is a call to action. They have to continue on, observing the commandments of the law, and following their customary religious duties; he has perfected them, not abolished them. His new spirit of personal sanctity does not dispense them from doing what they have been bound to do before; **it gives grace and power to do it.** Only habits of life, acquired by daily practice, can give that solidarity and strength to stand up against the trials and persecutions in store for him, and his followers. Total adherence to his principles alone can weather the approaching storm.....*

Again, through the ages, little has changed. The Church, as with the People Israel, must be constantly on guard against the temptation to use spiritual knowledge and gifts to obtain temporal power and advantage. The Pharisees in the above reading quoted, were not, by any means representative of all Israel. Our Lord is referring to a relatively small but powerful band who had hijacked authority in Jerusalem. His warning is that, without great care, the Church could find itself in a similar position. Repeatedly He warns the greatest danger to the Church would come from within rather than from beyond. Our Lord's emphasis on good, practical application of his teaching, and generosity in good deeds is both a prompting and a warning,

(See St. Matt. 25: 31 — 46).

Observation of St. Matthew 7: 28 and 29

The Gospel writer records a brief but powerful comment reflecting what he had witnessed:

- The common people were stunned by the quality and content of his message.
- Jesus taught as one having power and authority.

This was the response of ordinary, uneducated yet intelligent and devout people.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 8 Verses 35 to 44

Having given us these assurances, the Lord is waiting every day for us to respond by our deeds to His holy admonitions. And the days of this life are lengthened and a truce granted us for this very reason, that we may amend our evil ways. As the apostle says, "Do you not know that God's patience is inviting you to repent?"
(Romans 2: 4.)

For the merciful Lord tells us, "I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live."
(Ezekiel 33: 11.)

So, brethren, we have asked the Lord who is to dwell in His tent, and we have heard His commands to anyone who would dwell there; it remains for us to fulfill these duties.

Therefore we must prepare our hearts and our bodies to do battle under the holy obedience of His commands; and let us ask God that He be pleased to give us the help of His grace for anything which our nature finds hardly possible. And if we want to escape the pains of hell and attain life everlasting, then, while there is still time, while we are still in the body and are able to fulfill all these things by the light of this life, we must hasten to do now what will profit us for eternity.

- *Having given us these assurances, the Lord is waiting every day for us to respond by our deeds to His holy admonitions. And the days of this life are lengthened and a truce granted us for this very reason, that we may amend our evil ways. As the apostle says, "Do you not know that God's patience is inviting you to repent?"*
(Romans 2: 4.)

For the merciful Lord tells us, "I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live."

(Ezekiel 33: 11.)

So, brethren, we have asked the Lord who is to dwell in His tent, and we have heard His commands to anyone who would dwell there; it remains for us to fulfill these duties.

- a.** St. Benedict has, to this point, highlighted the constant call throughout Scripture — reaching its strongest pitch in the words of our Lord — the invitation (indeed **plea**) for us to seek the fullness of life which only God can give. Again he reminds us, "....the Lord is waiting every day for us to respond by our deeds....."
- b.** St. Benedict shows God as a loving (almost indulgent) Father, desperately longing for his separated children to return to Him. Later in his Rule, St. Benedict reminds us of the loving father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son who daily watches for the return of one who foolishly left his father's household and runs to him to embrace him when he is not much more than a speck on the horizon.
- c.** How vital it is we take St. Paul seriously when he warns us that God's apparent lack of action regarding our on-going offending is to allow time and experience to bring us to our senses and turn our lives around. For God does all in His power to bring us back — bar over-riding the free will He gave us — so that we can inherit the fullness of life for which He designed us.
- d.** However, the deal does require us "to fulfill our duties". Christianity is **NOT** a religion of just pure contemplation or perfect faith. It is the perfect and harmonious inter-relationship of faith and good deeds in those who belong to God — of being and doing as sons and daughters of the Most High.

● *Therefore we must prepare our hearts and our bodies to do battle under the holy obedience of His commands; and let us ask God that He be pleased to give us the help of His grace for anything which our nature finds hardly possible.*

e. The key ideas in this small passage could well sound a little strange to some modern readers: that we must:

- prepare our hearts and bodies
- for battle
- under holy obedience to His commands.

"Preparation" requires planning and sustained attention to striving to achieve the required standards.

"Hearts and bodies" makes it very plain that the Christian life is not merely a pursuit of lofty spiritual values but of obeying God with all our heart and mind and body and soul. It is a holistic blend of all aspects making up the human person and bringing them into line for God's purposes.

"Battle" is no fun! It is a matter of life and death whether we reach our Heavenly Home. St. Benedict is repeating for his reader, the need to take up spiritual weapons.

"Holy obedience to His commands" requires that we know what these commands are and that we form a mind-set of living lives which reflect an honest attempt to obey them. St. Benedict does not make reference here to what happens when we fail. That is covered in the Scriptures and we should know how to handle this in our lives. Rather, St. Benedict emphasises in the next few words how to avoid failure, (see below).

f. It is not enough to just "hope for the best". We have an obligation to ask God to help us cope with things which seem virtually impossible or at least unreasonable to us. St. Benedict rightly offers this advice since the Gospels frequently illustrate how far we may think such and such is utterly beyond us; yet when we approach it prayerfully, somehow the obstacles fall to the side and permit us to pass through. The lives and experience of the saints of the Church demonstrate this very dramatically. We are encouraged to read them frequently as an important part of our spiritual life for this very reason.

- *And if we want to escape the pains of hell and attain life everlasting, then, while there is still time, while we are still in the body and are able to fulfill all these things by the light of this life, we must hasten to do now what will profit us for eternity.*

g. It is not a sin to be human. It is indeed "lawful" to "want to escape the pains of hell and attain life everlasting". Most of us don't talk about (let alone think about), the pains of hell. To do so tends to earn the label of "backward", "simple" or "frightfully unsophisticated". We are very conscious of what our non-Christian (or even sophisticated Christian) friends think of us. Hell and sin are seen by many as outdated expressions which have been displaced by concepts more acceptable to "enlightened" modern people. What so many of our contemporaries do not realise is that non-Christian protagonists have always, (for 2000 years), looked on us as pitiful, weak, and intellectually dull for believing the warnings from Jesus about sin, death and hell. Actually, they pity us even more for believing in Heaven and eternal life.

h. We should be wary of some contemporary writers who insist the Gospels do not contain the words actually spoken by our Lord, but rather mere representations in language of the period which we can now put aside and interpret according to more acceptable terms. This argument is shallow but very useful to permit all kinds of distortions to traditional Christian teaching.

i. St Benedict focuses us on our true goal: attaining life everlasting. He is a thorough pragmatist. If you are still alive, he says, it is not too late to review your progress and attend to any discrepancies.

j. He closes the instructional part of his Prologue with a final reminder that we must "hasten" (he means **RUN**) to perform **NOW** what will be to our advantage for all eternity!

Key Principles

26. One of the most beautiful understandings in traditional Christianity, is the positive value of "doing one's duty". Most of us have grown up having to listen to certain groups of Christians taunting us with accusations of attending worship "because you have to", or doing this or that, "out of fear". Interestingly these voices are heard less now because their particular organisations are in rapid decline. Many have all but disappeared. Nevertheless we consider it worth highlighting that there is such a thing as religious (in our case, Christian) duty. This concept springs from our Jewish heritage and we should have no hesitation accepting that to be an active Christian will require our obedience to God's Law and the teaching of His Church. Our Lord emphasised this constantly. We draw attention to our Jewish heritage, as many will have grown up accustomed to the constant, frequent reference to "Jewish legalism" : an obsession with compliance to God's commandments in the Torah (613 of them). Added to this demeaning and degrading language, we have so often been led to believe that Jews are fanatical about the literal compliance so they can take pride in achieving everything commanded — yet do not really carry out those duties with an inner conviction, in love and devotion to God. We would be guilty of the gravest hypocrisy if we were to perpetuate such mistruths. In our Lord's time, He accused small bands of hypocrites for that type of performance. However he **never** generalised the application to include the ordinary devout Jew, and nor should we.

27. The Church rightly draws our attention to the examples of many fine men, women and young people in the 2000 year history of the Church who have persevered in the Faith despite the most horrific odds. Some were called to die for their Faith in Christ. Others were called to live for Him and manifest in their lives the virtues the Holy Spirit nurtured in them. We too are called to know, love and serve God and to aspire genuinely to holiness and perfection in Christ.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 9 Verses 45 to 48

And so we are going to establish a school for the service of the Lord. In founding it we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome. But if a certain strictness results from the dictates of equity for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity, do not be at once dismayed and fly from the way of salvation, whose entrance cannot but be narrow.

- *And so we are going to establish a school for the service of the Lord.*

a. Up to this point St. Benedict has been expounding a Biblical vision of the Christian life. In almost extreme brevity, he has summarised the key Biblical themes and understandings we need to be familiar with if we are to get the balance right. In this section we take a brief look at the state of the Church in the world and humbly offer a few thoughts on how to continue living the Christian life in our society.

b. Though we hope much of our commentary on St. Benedict's Prologue can be usefully read by any Christian reader it is essentially for people in two sets of circumstances.

First: For those who are unable to attend the church of their choice for regular Sunday worship. As this has become increasingly impractical for many, some assistance is needed to help them practise their Faith in their own localities.

Secondly, it is offered for those who have chosen a particular form of apostolate, who find it beneficial to adopt some model of religious rule to strengthen the membership in their common pursuit. Hebrew Catholics will find St. Benedict's approach very consistent and compatible with Jewish cultural tradition.

In both these cases, St. Benedict's Prologue can be supplemented by other additional guidelines put in place by the group.

c. This booklet does not tackle all the issues which are a real problem for Christians in our contemporary society. That is done elsewhere by competent writers whose works can be trusted and respected. Our purpose, here, is to offer a traditional Christian model which may help Catholics in some situations to maintain their Catholic culture, or pass it on to their young. We hope these pages will also be of assistance to our non-Catholic friends.

d. In verse 45 of his Prologue, St. Benedict talks of establishing "**a school for the service of the Lord**". His phrase in Latin is, "*dominici schola servitti*". The highly esteemed commentary of the Rule of St. Benedict (Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1980), makes this comment, applying "*schola*" (school) to the monastery:

In this noble and often quoted phrase, a school "for" rather than "of" seems best to catch the idea that the monastery is a place where the monks both learn how to serve the Lord and actually do so. In the Latin of this period, "schola" could mean not only a place where instruction was received but the group receiving instruction as well as, more generally, a vocational corporation (such as a guild) of people devoted to a common craft or service. A similar usage can be seen in the English "school of painters" or "school of porpoises".

The "school for the Lord's service" may certainly be regarded as the central idea of the Prologue. It implies that the monastery (the school) is the place where Christ continues to teach his disciples the baptismal renunciation of sin and the ways that lead to the repose of eternal life. It implies that the life in the monastery is a service of Christ, the Lord. It implies, finally, that service calls for strenuous obedience and suffering with Christ but that such service leads even now to a joyful and loving observance of the commandments of God.

e. We believe this concept of the *schola* can be applied to our contemporary context as lay people to great advantage. The word *schola* today is sometimes used as a term for a group of singers or cantors who specialise in chanting or singing particular parts of liturgical worship. We are retaining St. Benedict's traditional use of the Latin term as embodied in verse 45 above, which means **a school for the Lord's service**. It is our belief (from experience as well as from a theoretical position) that any number of interested persons can form a type of *schola* and can establish themselves as a "school for the service of the Lord".

The *schola* could consist of one or more families or individuals who would see themselves as constituting a small unit for the purpose of living and practising their Faith according to traditional Catholic culture. Insofar as this is appropriate or desirable, we would see them being established and operating under the auspices of a parish priest or other appointed cleric who would maintain whatever level of interaction is possible or appropriate.

f. A *schola* would not exist for its own sake, but to help provide an organic link between a parish church, fellowship, or religious community somewhere and help facilitate visits by members of the *schola* to that Church or community if and when practicable, as well as provide an organised setting for a priest to visit it when this can be arranged.

g. A *schola* could therefore, as stated, consist of a family or a group of families together with other individuals. Those familiar with religious community methods of organisation may be familiar with the traditional "*laura*" model. This was a community of dispersed individuals who came together according to an agreed rhythm, for prayer, study and worship. The *schola* could, in fact, be a *Christian lay laura* and operate as a unit attached to a parish, some form of organised fellowship, or religious community despite distance or other difficulties or considerations.

h. We see the *schola* potentially as a cluster of satellite individuals and families who would:

- develop a rhythm of coming together for a time and then dispersing;
- establish a defined range of activities (including prayer and worship, study and reflection, social and charitable);
- maintain communication with their chosen centre or fellowship as practicable;
- foster links with the diocese in which the *schola* is situated, as well as with its various parishes.

Hopefully, a priest travelling on an extended circuit may be able to celebrate Mass, administer the Sacraments from time to time, and meet with leaders to encourage them and ensure the educational direction of the *schola* is in harmony with that of its parish centre, organised fellowship or associated religious community.

i. In elaborating a little on how we see the *schola* groups developing, we do not necessarily see them as modern "base" or "ecclesial" communities. They could well form a network of concerned lay people who wish to recover and build a stronger, more visible model of unity within the Church.

j. A *schola*, as we have described, could facilitate traditional Catholic culture in its smallest unit (of the family) as well as in the connected group of units. With this understanding the *schola* would be a localised Catholic group and its associates coming together for:

- religious education;
- devotions;
- corporal and spiritual works of mercy;
- social activities.

k. St. Benedict, in his Prologue, gives considerable emphasis to the concept of the *schola* being a place of on-going learning. This is an **essential feature** of these centres. Together with the other activities listed above, it would ensure traditional Catholic culture is fostered for the benefit of the members as well as the wider community.

l. A *schola* is likely to gather in the home of one of its members, and this is an excellent practice. However, the *schola* may, due to its particular circumstances, maintain some other meeting place for its members to gather for worship or education or social events or perhaps for all of these. There is no reason why the *schola* should not, under appropriate guidance, set up an oratory or chapel in a spare basement, garage or unused hall, or even an unused Church. The setting aside of a place specifically for worship would be a great help. Otherwise, the devotional centre in a private home is another option, never to be under-valued. We offer to readers a supplement to this commentary which provides ideas to guide the establishment of a "[An Oratory At Home](#)".

m. We ask you to read again the quoted commentary above on verse 45 of the Prologue and to visualise the *schola* not as a monastery envisaged by St. Benedict, but as a *lay laura* — a dispersed community which functions as a satellite fellowship attached in some appropriate way to a diocese. There is enormous potential for such groups to preserve, foster and pass on the richness of our wonderful Catholic culture even in an age such as ours.

- *In founding it we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome.*

n. The Rule of St. Benedict is known for its balance and utter reasonableness. St. Benedict avoided cluttering up his Rule when things could be presented simply without over-complicating any aspect. He was totally down-to-earth and disliked excessive sophistication. Thus, in the spirit of this Rule the regulations put in place to guide members of a *schola* should be the minimum needed for good governance. Having said this, it would be entirely in the spirit of the Rule to have some form of leadership structure in place, with the allocation of duties to different members. A *schola* is not a casual affair, but an organised and well-run form of a community.

o. St. Benedict goes to great lengths in his Rule to outline how those appointed or elected to be in charge must see themselves as servants of the community and never lord it over the other members.

● *But if a certain strictness results from the dictates of equity for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity, do not be at once dismayed and fly from the way of salvation, whose entrance cannot but be narrow.*

p. St. Benedict is realistic. There are going to be leaders, agreed practices and regulations. These are necessary for good order and ensuring the *schola* serves the spiritual needs of its members. He paves the way for leaders to seek support for new or revised rules. He also sounds a warning to would-be members, that when they choose to enter the *schola*, the way at first may seem narrow and a little bit disconcerting, for whatever reason. "Persevere", he says, "Give yourself a chance".

q. A *schola*, then should not hesitate to set clear guidelines for itself, as well as parameters and restrictions. These can be very simply presented and should always be seen as protecting the *schola* as well as the very reason people wish to belong to it: their sanctification as active members of Christ's Body, the Church.

r. For this reason, a *schola* should always comprise of enthusiastic members who take their Faith seriously and apply themselves in a systematic and organised way to reflect Christ to the wider community. A *schola* should not be inward-looking but see itself as an organic part of its local setting and take care to engage warmly with other people and community initiatives. Non-Catholic visitors should be made welcome and given sufficient explanation to help them participate as may be appropriate, without any pressure or obligation.

Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Section 10 Verses 49 and 50

For as we advance in *this way of life* and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love. Thus never departing from His school, but persevering in *it* according to His teaching until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom. Amen.

- *For as we advance in this way of life and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love.*

a. The only two changes we made to our chosen text occur in the above final section of the Prologue. The first, "*this way of life*", we took from another authorised translation. We take the point St. Benedict is reiterating in his final paragraph — the Christian calling is a serious matter and requires serious planning and discipline to ensure we arrive at our goal — our Heavenly home. Mounting pressures and forces beyond our personal control are making it increasingly more difficult for us to retain anything of our precious traditional heritage. Our hope is to return to the true Gospel teaching of Christ our King and the earnest application of that message as embodied in the teaching of the early Fathers and Sacred Magisterium of the Church.

b. St. Benedict has presented in the Prologue to his Rule, a beautiful Biblical vision of the Christian vocation. In his Rule, he goes on to give further guidelines on how members of his "school for the service of the Lord" should organise themselves in close-knit consecrated religious communities. The Rule of St. Benedict is a wonderful document, and many lay people read it for their edification. However we will leave off here, thankful that we can share the benefits of his teaching contained in the Prologue and apply it with equal zeal in our own dispersed *schola* (**school**) communities.

- *Thus never departing from His school, but persevering in it according to His teaching until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom."*

c. The only other change we make to St. Benedict's text is to substitute the words, "*the monastery*" with "*it*" which still refers to the "school" and makes it applicable to our context. Actually there are today "schools" as described above which call themselves "monasteries" — meaning communities or urban monasteries — i.e. communities of dispersed members who come together according to an agreed schedule for the activities we have suggested above. However we prefer to leave the term "**monastery**" for application in the traditional meaning of the term.

d. Our use of St. Benedict's term "*schola*" is entirely appropriate, and incorporates the understanding that it is in fact, an organic part of the Church in that locality. To participate in a *schola* is to take one's Church membership seriously and apply oneself to living the Christian life as best as practicable given either: one's distance from the normal centre of Catholic culture: i.e. the parish church / religious community, or one's chosen religious apostolate. This actually, is completely consistent with St. Benedict's concept of the monastery — applied one and a half millennia later in different circumstances.

e. St. Benedict's final sentence above, could be more literally translated as, "**Never swerving from his instructions, but faithfully observing his teaching.....**". This is an unmistakable allusion to St. Luke:

"They devoted themselves to the Apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

(Acts 2: 42)

This is a miniature cameo of the Jerusalem Community recorded by St. Luke, which became the prototype of Christian religious communities. Note the specific references:—

- The Apostle's instructions;
- communal life;
- breaking of bread;
- the prayers

We will focus on each of these briefly, as they support so very strongly St. Benedict's admonitions.

f. First, the indirect but clearly discerned reference St. Benedict makes to studying the "**Apostle's instruction**", the teaching passed to them by our Lord and their passing it on to us. This **always** included the embodiment of the whole of Sacred Scripture as alluded to in the very first sentence of the Prologue. This is the tradition of studying God's Will — His Torah, His Teaching, and learning how to put it into practice. Jesus — Christ the Word — is our Torah. St. Paul taught us to "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ". We therefore are in step with our Jewish brothers who, according to their custom, literally, "put on" the Word and wear it faithfully. This is a very beautiful way of being in union with God — by literally "putting on" the Word of God. It is achieved by strapping on the head, and one arm the **tefellin** which are miniature scrolls of Sacred Scripture highlighting thereby the awesome duty and privilege of remaining bound to Him — of living in the presence of the Divine Word.

Our Lord, an orthodox Jewish rabbi, wore these on His arm and head in obedience to God's commands in the Torah:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!

Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.

**Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.
Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and
abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.**

Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be a pendant on your forehead.

Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

(Deuteronomy 6: 4 — 9)

There are many ways we as Christians can reflect, in our following of Christ the Lord, a desire to remain united to God. We can, of course, do this in the way Jesus did. Another custom which corresponds, in a way, with this practice, is the placing of Holy Water fonts at the entrances to our home, and to major rooms in the house. This is strongly recommended to strengthen the consciousness of our choosing to make our house a Christian home where God dwells with us. The frequent use of Holy Water is a powerful aid in remembering the Biblical use of water in Salvation history, and of dispelling from our midst the constant pressure from our atheistic society to conform to its values.

g. Secondly, **the communal life**. The Prologue of St. Benedict, our "Rule of Life" intentionally seeks to engender the same zeal, commitment and spiritual energy of the very first Christian community.

h. Thirdly, **the breaking of bread**. It is assumed, in this Rule of Life, that our members will take their privileged place in the carrying out of this command of our Lord.

i. Fourthly, **the prayers**. In the context, this is a simple and direct reference to the prescribed prayers of the Synagogue which formed the staple, "spiritual diet" of the Jews and first Christians. Even with the later massive expansion of the Church among the Gentiles, largely the work of St. Paul, the general format of the cycle of Christian prayer has retained the shape of its Jewish origins.

j. We have thus taken guidance from St. Benedict as to how we can maintain the beautiful heritage of our Catholic culture in a world which is growing daily more hostile to our values, traditions and religious practice.

k. We are counselled to remain loyal to our *schola*, to continue to be guided by "His teaching," and to persevering in it for the rest of our lives. St. Benedict rounds off with a perfect finale:

*We may by patience share in the sufferings of
Christ and deserve to have a share also in
His Kingdom. Amen.*

l. St. Benedict, as we see, concluded his Prologue with the "Amen". His vision is no less than what God led him to see and write down. It is thus a prayer in which we can all share and help one another to bring to completion. It is a prayer reflecting the love of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for us. St. Benedict calls on us to respond with generosity of heart, mind, body and soul in our prayer and in our work — to the greater glory of God.

Key Principles

28. The "way of life" St. Benedict so skillfully presents in his Prologue (and subsequent chapters) is a brilliant summary of the ideal (yet very achievable) Christian model of living, according to God's Law, Teaching, Torah. It takes effort to organise and sustain, and cannot be left to chance or casual attitudes. With sincere and serious attempts to give our Faith this priority in our lives, there is every hope that we will live the way our Lord taught, and we will pass it on to the younger generation. One of the constant attacks against "tradition" is that it is too overladen with ritual, formal prayers, customs and practices. Anyone with any common sense is aware that prayers and traditional practices can be recited or carried out coldly, and without due reverence. It needs to be said that informal (extemporary) prayer can be just as "deadly", irrelevant and uninspiring. Obviously the leading of prayer and worship, whether in public or in the home, calls for the proper formation of those who lead together with a respect for the religious function being undertaken. The principle we therefore wish to highlight is that traditional Christians need not be afraid of giving form (if not formality) and good order their proper place in religious performance. Let them not pander to emotionalism and tailoring the Faith according to popular but ever-changing appeal of the day.

29. St. Benedict firmly bases his concept of Christian communities on St. Luke's summary in Acts 2: 42. We note the specific reference to three vital elements:

- a) the **instruction** given by the Apostles;
- b) the **communal life**; and
- c) the **breaking of bread** and the prayers. This reference includes:
 - the **Eucharist**
 - the **daily prayer routine** of the faithful which was in place even before Pentecost.

Traditional Christianity has upheld and consistently promoted each of these aspects of the Christian life since the very beginning of our Faith. Those who have chosen a particular apostolate in the Church, or find themselves isolated from a closer network they would like to be part of, can, with planning and guidance from appropriate pastors, maintain a rich and vibrant religious life in a *schola*, (a form of community) as described in these pages.

Geographical or social isolation need not present an impossible barrier.

30. St. Benedict's closing words sum up beautifully the purpose of the Christian religious life: that we willingly participate in the Lord's own Passion and Death that we might also rise with Him and have fullness of Life in His Kingdom.

Our modest and little *schola / schools / communities* are therefore to be, in so far as human frailty permits, extensions of Christ's Kingdom on earth. Let them boldly manifest with confidence and certitude: **Jesus Christ Reigns!**

Rule of Life

A Biblical Vision of The Christian Life

Some Key Principles contained in the Prologue To the Rule of St. Benedict

Introduction

In our companion notes to the Prologue of St. Benedict's Rule, we highlighted several places which, in some way, echoed or reflected basic traditional Christian principles. In the main these were taken as understood by the reader. In our times however, with such serious rupture occurring throughout the Christian world, we can no longer assume their acceptance. Such is the decline in the teaching of Christian doctrine. We have therefore added very brief notes on just thirty of the many excellent points enshrined by this great abbot in his guide to living the Christian life in a troubled world.

These thirty explanations are, in a way, assumed by St. Benedict to be part of the belief of each reader. Some of them will not be in harmony with the beliefs of non-Christian or non-Catholic readers but it must be remembered these notes are intended to help isolated Catholics maintain organic links with the traditional Catholic Faith. The temptation to form break-away movements is just as ever-present among modern-day Catholics as it is among other sections of our society. It is our belief this must be resisted — and how better than to encourage and assist members to strengthen their ties to the Church through the daily living of the traditional Faith.

At the end of each of the ten Sections we explain the Key Principles arising from our reflection on that Section. They may not necessarily provide a summary of the content of the Section but will usually highlight significant elements which need to be understood.

2. "Listen to Him" (St. Mark 9: 7) is the cornerstone of our Biblical vision of the Christian life and the spirituality it represents. Whilst the Bible is commonly referred to as the Word of God, God's command is that we **listen to Christ His Son** over and above all other sources. Thus it is **Christ the Word** to whom we always listen when reading and meditating on any Biblical passage.

2. We **listen** to Christ the Word in order to hear the Word of God (His holy will for us) and to do it, i.e. to carry out His designs. Obedience, action, and good works are essential components of the Christian Faith. The belief that salvation comes through faith alone is incomplete to traditional Christianity which sees this belief as inconsistent with Bible teaching.

3. An essential skill for **all** Christians is therefore to learn how to **listen** to Jesus Christ and put **into practice** all that He teaches. Discipleship requires formation based on the model Christ Himself demonstrated. The person following this Rule will therefore meditate on the Sacred Scriptures (Old and New Testament) in the tradition of Lectio Divina.

4. Traditional Christianity always upholds the Church alone as having the authority to declare the meaning of Sacred Scripture and therefore does not allow private interpretation to displace this authority. The Church encourages debate and expression of personal viewpoints but requires its members to defer to the teaching authority conferred on her by Christ Himself in the final instance.

5. The Church provides learning opportunities for her members to learn about the Faith and all are strongly encouraged to take up the opportunity as and when appropriate. Regular study of Scripture and Doctrine both private and communal will be immense help in the spiritual life of the disciple.

6. The world has never before witnessed the current massive expansion of newly formed groups claiming to be "Churches", or "special ministries or callings" constantly springing up all over the world. Often these arise from the "fit or split" attitude so strongly entrenched particularly in Western Society. The problem, in essence, is actually as old as our Faith. The modern phenomenon, however, parades as a new form of "popular" Christianity, bypassing the traditional Church which it constantly labels as remote, stuffy, conservative and failing to meet the needs of today's young people. Those who claim to be God's answer to such a situation frequently fall into the trap of tailoring their presentations to what they think people want (rather than need) and often seriously mislead them as to what true religion is about.

The principle we therefore wish to emphasise here is that true Church growth occurs when Christians live their Faith in full harmony with the teaching of our Lord as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures and guided by the teaching authority of the Church. The "fit or split" mentality and practice represents disintegration of Christianity; not as some believe it to be, the work of the Holy Spirit causing new growth to spring forth. Unity with the Church requires that we do not break away and "do our own thing" just because we "feel called" to exercise a chosen ministry based on what we want to do.

7. From the foundation of the Church, Christians have organised themselves into highly disciplined and focused **communities**. Church membership was not a casual or light-hearted flimsy association, but methodical, precise, defined, and closely regulated. Sound growth requires this to be the case today as well as in any previous era. The formation and nurturing of such communities (whatever their basis of organisation) will be beneficial, especially as pressure from atheistic and anti-theistic sources increases.

8. Traditional Christians hold Jesus Christ to be their King and act accordingly. Interestingly in the ancient tradition, Mary, the **mother of Jesus**, was given the title **Queen** by the early Christians, in view of the fact she was mother of the King. It was (and is) a way of reinforcing Christ's title. Special reverence to our Lord's Mother has been and always will be a feature of Christians following this Rule. It is also a distinctive feature of Hebrew Catholic spirituality.

9. If **prayer** is the first weapon of spiritual warfare, it also has first priority for members of Christ's Body, the Church. This priority will need to be reflected in the day-to-day living of each member. Most of us find this difficult and need assistance with both developing a realistic, sustainable rhythm as well as choosing appropriate prayers and devotions.

10. Our Lord reminded His disciples frequently that we need to be constantly alert to the danger of being distracted from our goal: to seek first the Kingdom of God. Soldiers of Christ will need a **military-like routine** to prevent unintended diversion from their goals. This cannot be emphasised enough in our busy but casual culture.

11. If we are not careful we can develop the attitude that we are doing God a favour when we turn to Him in prayer; and that when we do so, we obligate Him to respond in a way that fits our expectations! As a rule, it is when we read the Scriptures with the intention of listening to the Lord's intimations, that we hear what He wishes to share and impart; perhaps not immediately, but in due course. Part of our learning-curve is to be able to discern when the Holy Spirit is uncovering something for us to ponder and pray about. We need to devote some time, at least, each week to the practice of Lectio Divina.

12. Traditional Christians hold very dearly the understanding that they are grafted onto the olive tree: the Israel of the Sacred Scriptures in the age of the fulfillment. Their belief is founded in the mission and teaching of the Lord Jesus and the Church He established to continue His work for all humanity. What we call the Church is an authentic part of Biblical Israel in its continuation of God's caring for mankind. In the Church the Scriptural prophecies and Divine Will continue to be honoured and unfolded. We need to be committed to loyal, proud, yet grateful membership of the Church. This will entail an on-going study of the Church and an understanding of its true mission in the world.

Traditional Christians look upon present day Jews as sincerely upholding what they have had entrusted to them by God, but without acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Messiah and fulfillment of the Old Testament. We honour them for their sincerity and their zeal in remaining loyal and true to their traditions.

There is no conflict between our belief that the Church is an authentic and organic extension of the Israel of the Old Testament and our respect for our Jewish sisters and brothers who cannot accept Jesus as Messiah. In God's good time we believe that everything will be revealed to His greater glory. We will, then, **all** find our attempts to live according to His Holy Law to be somewhat lacking and in need of His most gracious mercy.

Many Christians are frequently confused as to how to interpret the interactions of the modern State of Israel with other nations. There are traditional rabbis and Christians who hold that the creation of the modern state known as Israel has no connection of any kind with God's Israel of the Old Testament. They also do not acknowledge in the creation of that modern state, any fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy. Others see in the modern State of Israel the true and gracious fulfillment of God's promises. Our references to the subject acknowledge the **fact**, the **reality** of the nation rather than posit some theoretical adjudication favouring any particular corpus of opinion. This is indeed a ratification of the importance of respecting Jewish historical culture, and (even more importantly) the need to avoid any anti-Semitic position. We encourage our members to examine carefully all references to things Jewish and root out any language or expressions which could possibly be seen to demean Judaism. This position reflects the promulgations of the Holy See and it is our intention to implement these with the most sincere attention to detail.

13. One of the customs Christians have continued from the birth of the Church as members of God's household is the Jewish practice of punctuating the day with prayer and meditation. This custom, inherited directly from Judaism, highlights the importance of morning and evening prayer as two special times to honour God. Over the centuries additional calls to prayer have been added for those who are free to respond. Strangely, many of us have become accustomed to thinking that it is very difficult (if not impossible) in our busy modern life to maintain such a rhythm of prayer. In fact, the contrary is true — it has never been easier: in other words, if we make the decision that is what we want to do!

A daily rhythm of prayer and meditation, **no matter how brief or basic** is critical for living the Christian life. It must never be excessive, burdensome or impractical — but reasonable, sustainable and balanced, according to our circumstances.

14. Traditional Christians need to remain alerted to the constant tendency for new-age, popular religious beliefs to merge with traditional doctrines and distort them significantly. Those who resist this process are frequently maligned with labels such as, "locked in the past", "extremists", "arch-conservatives", or separatists". But resist them, we must, despite the demeaning labels we attract. The spiritual truth we want to present is that it is not enough to take God's presence in us for granted. Respect for our Creator and Redeemer calls for us to approach God humbly and consciously in prayer and worship, thus acknowledging His existence "out there", quite apart from His glorious in-dwelling within us. Much of the cold, meaningless, bizarre church architecture we see in our day may well reflect a certain absence of a strong, traditional Christian belief in the objective existence of God — or at least a much weakened belief in objective existence. Sadly, the same attitude has seen the decline of warm and attractive centres of devotion in Christian homes. We draw attention to this as we see the restoration of these to be important in our recovery of our own culture which is in rapid decline — but not beyond restoration. For most of us, training in identification of non-Christian influences will help us resist them.

15. One of the beautiful aspects of belonging to the family of God is that our response to His personal call to each individual is offered to Him both in our personal prayers and devotions as well as in those of the Church. There is always this twofold aspect of life as a Christian: the personal and the community, or as the New Testament records it — the "member" and the "whole Body". Individually, we cannot always be praying directly. However, as members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are (by the Power of the Holy Spirit) an organic part of the prayer of the whole Church constantly being offered through our Head, Christ the Lord, to the Father. Our understanding of this awesome truth will have a powerful effect in our day-to-day living.

16. St. Benedict, rightly, draws our attention to the need to **do** what the Lord God commands. People often exclaim, "Why does God seem to take no action concerning the assaults against Christianity — and why does He allow the Church to disintegrate before our eyes"? The message arising, "loud and clear" from every page of Sacred Scripture is to listen to what He commands and carry out His holy will. That is the test for us: the real challenge. For the Church in our day, it is becoming clearer and clearer we would benefit from increased respect for the Torah, (together with the other Old Testament books) and the principles and practices of Jewish observance. By "Jewish observance" we mean the duty, indeed privilege of **listening** daily to the Divine Word and setting our hearts on **obeying His teaching**. This includes the methodical study of Sacred Scripture Texts in private as well as in the gathered community. We have become detached from the early foundations of our Faith, and we are in danger of falling over at the rising onslaught of those who are out to destroy both Judaism and Christianity.

17. The Gospel accounts recorded by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John are carefully designed and crafted documents which reflect the fulfillment of God's revelation in the Old Testament in the light of Christ. In that Light only, with the guidance of the Teaching Magisterium of the Church, can we correctly understand the teaching of the rest of Sacred Scripture — both Old and New Testaments. Strangely, in our time, even a casual conversation with many Christians soon discloses how little is understood about these wonderful Scriptures. The good news is that it need not be that way: quality resources are available to help us develop a reasonable understanding of all the Gospels. Meditation on the Sunday Gospel readings, or on each Gospel taken systematically will soon begin to shape the thinking of the person who makes the effort. A simple approach followed regularly within a family will also produce valuable results.

18. At first reading we could easily surmise that St. Benedict is giving activity and good works precedence over prayer and worship. Not so! Our actions (including our good works) and our obedience spring from a belief in and a commitment to the loving God who is constantly calling us to Him. They are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in us. They are the measure of our faith in Him and His presence within us. Prayer, adoration, worship and love of God must be firmly entrenched in our ordinary, daily life before we will have the stamina necessary for us to "run by good deeds" as St. Benedict prescribes.

19. If we consider ourselves to be Christian, we need to remember that this means being an active disciple of the Lord. Disciples are, among other aspects of membership, attentive worshippers and students of His teaching.

20. Christian homes should, to a degree, reflect in some visible, material way, the spiritual tone, appearance, and activity of the local Church. In this regard we encourage Christians to set aside some chosen space where the household can gather for worship in the home. We highly recommend families to make provision for this and offer some guidance on the matter in "[An Oratory At Home](#)".

21. The Biblical concept of "justice" and putting it into practice demand first that those who require it, model it in their own behaviour. This applies to whole communities as well as individuals. If society doesn't like what it sees developing among its youth, it needs to look at itself in a mirror to see what is wrong. The Gospels are Christ's mirror for us to see where we are going wrong. In particular, His parables are intended (a) to help us identify our failings as well as (b) to provide a perfect model for putting them right.

22. Many aspects of life in our contemporary society have been the target of shrewd opportunists who have poured huge resources into developing many kinds of package deals, whether it be:

- weddings
- housing
- holidays
- charity, and so on.

Over the past 50 years, traditional Christians have observed the corporatisation of religion: specifically Christianity.

We have seen the emergence of mega-churches, media evangelists, new "prophets for our times" and a whole line of promoters with their slick messages. These messages are often one-liners with little depth but carefully tuned emotional appeal, offering instant, direct, even overwhelming attraction. The abuse of the name and role of the Holy Spirit has been the major focus of this kind of hijacking. Organisations specialising in a whole culture of "dispensing" the Holy Spirit, aggressively lay claim to a special preserve or status, and openly talk of the traditional Church as "not having the Spirit". Traditional Christians need to be very clear about this "take-over bid" and stand very firmly in their Faith and its day-to-day practice. This may sometimes entail humbly, yet boldly declaring these latter day religious entrepreneurs to be misleading sincere people away from the central focus on Jesus Christ and His teaching.

23. We wish to affirm strongly the need for us to retain the traditional role of Sacred Scripture in the Church and not allow it to be used to support every misguided theory that surfaces in our time. Traditional Christianity has consistently taught that Sacred Scripture together with the teaching authority bestowed on the Church by her Founder guide the teaching of the Church in terms of what Scripture contains and how it should be used.

24. The Church is called to remain on the alert at all times for attacks from misguided persons — whether genuine and sincere, or motivated by personal advantage. Our Lord's teaching illustrates how false guides launch their attacks both from within and outside the Church. There has never been an era when the Church has not had to be dealing with 'cranks' and their distortions of the Faith. In our own time we are under very real attack from outside the Church — but also from within. We wish to affirm the principle that growth and change, while a genuine part of the Church's existence in the world with all its problems, should always manifest organic development from what has come before. The True Faith is that which has been handed down before in an unbroken stream from the founding of the Church at Pentecost. Our only truly reliable safeguard in terms of the Faith is that which is approved by the Sacred Magisterium of the Church. We therefore need to keep ourselves well-informed about the Church, as well as about what is going on around us to ensure we are not hoodwinked by the latest fads and trends in the world.

25. The repetitions that keep occurring in our sequence of "Key Principles" reflect the repeated warnings of our Saviour to impress upon us the need to look carefully at our performance (as individuals as well as in the Body of the Church) and identify where we have gone astray. Many organisations claim Gospel teaching as their standard — even calling themselves "Full Gospel" this, or that. The critical standard by which we will all be judged is whether we believe and teach **all** that our Lord taught and commanded (St. Matt. 28: 20). Embodied in this mandate of the Lord is therefore the requirement to be constantly listening to the Divine Word interiorly, and hearing what He requires as well as attempting whole-heartedly to carry it out. The interpretation of this tiny word **all** is what finally will sift those who are genuinely seeking to follow Christ from those who insist on deciding for themselves what they wish to believe and do.

26. One of the most beautiful understandings in traditional Christianity, is the positive value of "doing one's duty". Most of us have grown up having to listen to certain groups of Christians taunting us with accusations of attending worship "because you have to", or doing this or that, "out of fear". Interestingly these voices are heard less now because their particular organisations are in rapid decline. Many have all but disappeared. Nevertheless we consider it worth highlighting that there is such a thing as religious (in our case, Christian) duty. This concept springs from our Jewish heritage and we should have no hesitation accepting that to be an active Christian will require our obedience to God's Law and the teaching of His Church. Our Lord emphasised this constantly. We draw attention to our Jewish heritage, as many will have grown up accustomed to the constant, frequent reference to "Jewish legalism": an obsession with compliance to God's commandments in the Torah (613 of them). Added to this demeaning and degrading language, we have so often been led to believe that Jews are fanatical about the literal compliance so they can take pride in achieving everything commanded — yet do not really carry out those duties with an inner conviction, in love and devotion to God. We would be guilty of the gravest hypocrisy if we were to perpetuate such mistruths. In our Lord's time, He accused small bands of hypocrites for that type of performance. However he **never** generalised the application to include the ordinary devout Jew, and nor should we.

27. The Church rightly draws our attention to the examples of many fine men, women and young people in the 2000 year history of the Church who have persevered in the Faith despite the most horrific odds. Some were called to die for their Faith in Christ. Others were called to live for Him and manifest in their lives the virtues the Holy Spirit nurtured in them. We too are called to know, love and serve God and to aspire genuinely to holiness and perfection in Christ.

28. The "way of life" St. Benedict so skillfully presents in his Prologue (and subsequent chapters) is a brilliant summary of the ideal (yet very achievable) Christian model of living, according to God's Law, Teaching, Torah. It takes effort to organise and sustain, and cannot be left to chance or casual attitudes. With sincere and serious attempts to give our Faith this priority in our lives, there is every hope that we will live the way our Lord taught, and we will pass it on to the younger generation. One of the constant attacks against "tradition" is that it is too overladen with ritual, formal prayers, customs and practices. Anyone with any common sense is aware that prayers and traditional practices can be recited or carried out coldly, and without due reverence. It needs to be said that informal (extemporary) prayer can be just as "deadly", irrelevant and uninspiring. Obviously the leading of prayer and worship, whether in public or in the home, calls for the proper formation of those who lead together with a respect for the religious function being undertaken. The principle we therefore wish to highlight is that traditional Christians need not be afraid of giving form (if not formality) and good order their proper place in religious performance. Let them not pander to emotionalism and tailoring the Faith according to popular but ever-changing appeal of the day.

29. St. Benedict firmly bases his concept of Christian communities on St. Luke's summary in Acts 2: 42. We note the specific reference to three vital elements:

- d) the **instruction** given by the Apostles;
- e) the **communal life**; and
- f) the **breaking of bread** and the prayers. This reference includes:
 - the **Eucharist**
 - the **daily prayer routine** of the faithful which was in place even before Pentecost.

Traditional Christianity has upheld and consistently promoted each of these aspects of the Christian life since the very beginning of our Faith. Those who have chosen a particular apostolate in the Church, or find themselves isolated from a closer network they would like to be part of, can with planning and guidance from appropriate pastors, maintain a rich and vibrant religious life in a *schola*, (a form of community) as described in these pages. Geographical or social isolation need not present an impossible barrier.

30. St. Benedict's closing words sum up beautifully the purpose of the Christian religious life: that we willingly participate in the Lord's own Passion and Death that we might also rise with Him and have fullness of Life in His Kingdom.

Our modest and little *schola / schools / communities* are therefore to be, in so far as human frailty permits, extensions of Christ's Kingdom on earth. Let them boldly manifest with confidence and certitude: **Jesus Christ Reigns!**

Appendix: The Numbering of the Psalms

St. Benedict, in his Rule, makes copious references to Scripture — especially the Psalms. In referring to the Psalms we have placed the Greek and Latin number first and the Hebrew number in square brackets [].

Many modern translations in English divide Psalm 9 into two Psalms (which the Greek and Latin do not).

- Psalm 9: verses 1 — 21
- Psalm 10 verses 22 — 39

Thus from Psalm 10 to Psalm 146 inclusive, the modern English translations are one number higher than those translations from the Greek Septuagint or Latin Vulgate (and Douai Rheims or Knox English).

This numbering continues to Psalm 146 (in the Greek / Latin / Douai / Knox) and stops at verse 11. The remaining verses 12 — 20 are then called Psalm 147 in the Greek / Latin / Douai / Knox.

The remaining Psalms (148 — 150) are numbered the same in all editions. This custom merely reflects the editorial policy of the learned translators. No doctrinal bias is intended by any such policy pursued.

Christians of all denominations should respect the different customs followed in the arrangement of the Psalter, and should be familiar with the above historic practice.