

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The wisdom of St. Benedict is an important inspiration for our parish life together. Over the last several weeks I wrote a series of Pastor's Letters about the three Benedictine vows of Obedience, Stability and Conversion of Life. The way these three vows are lived out is important because without a practical plan the vows remain just a good idea or a positive intention.

When one reads St. Benedict's Rule it does not come across as a masterpiece of Western spirituality. Instead, it reads as what it is: a practical rule for the monastic life in sixth century Italy. However, locked within those pages are some more general principles for a healthy spiritual life. These principles spring from Benedict's simple understanding of human psychology and relationships. He knows what is needed for a happy and healthy spiritual life, and if our spiritual lives are in tune, then the rest of our lives will fall into place. Remember the Bible verse, "Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will be added to you."

St. Benedict taught that the monastery was "a school for the Lord's service" In other words, it was a training academy for saints, and what Benedict said of the monastery can also be said of our school, our parish and our homes. They are the boot camp for saints.

The three Benedictine vows are put into action in the monastery with what I call the three "tools". The three vows are Obedience, Stability and Conversion of Life. The three tools are Prayer, Work and Study. Notice how the three vows apply to the three aspects of our being: Obedience - the Body. Stability - the Mind. Conversion of Life - the Spirit. Likewise, the three tools connect with the three parts of our being: Prayer - Spirit. Study - Mind. Work - Body.

The three vows and the three tools interface with one another like three strands in a rope are intertwined. Obedience leads to Stability which leads to Conversion of Life. Prayer and Study nurture the mind and heart, and they inspire and motivate our work, and all six working together lead us to an integrated, balanced and healthy life.

It is important for our own well being and the health of our parish, families and school that we learn these six principles and actively put them into practice. The implications of this are enormous: Here's why:

St. Benedict established about twelve small monasteries in his lifetime—simple communities of men living, praying and working together, but his wisdom became the foundation for the great monastic movement that produced the greatest civilization the world has seen: Christendom. European civilization—and by extension the Americas—has been the most advanced and humane accomplishment of mankind. St. Benedict is rightly named the Patron of Europe.

For the renewal of our church and world we need to pay attention to his way and his wisdom.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker