

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Benedictine “tools” are the practical methods to live out the Benedictine vows of Obedience, Stability and Conversion of Life. The first of the tools is Work.

From the beginning, God ordained that man should live by the work of his hands. In St. Benedict’s day in sixth century Italy, this meant farm work. Everyone lived at a subsistence level—eating and drinking what they could grow on their land. This meant early rising, living in the natural rhythms of the day and the seasons and being integrated with the life of nature through hard physical labor.

How different our lives are fifteen centuries later! We are separated from the land. Our food comes to us on a truck to a refrigerated supermarket. For many of us “work” means sitting at a computer all day long. It is up to us, however, to see our work—whether it is hard manual labor or dull modern work—as a redemptive and meaningful occupation.

Through work our bodies are engaged in the process of “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) Through work the physical aspect is not forgotten in the spiritual quest.

Benedict teaches that work is one of the tools of the spiritual life because, by its nature, work humbles us. No matter how sophisticated our lives are, we have to work to put bread on the table, and this opportunity teaches us that we are not independent beings. We are contingent. We rely on others and on variables beyond our control, and this means we must learn a kind of implicit obedience. We obey our boss. We obey the tax man. We obey the market forces. We obey our work colleagues.

If through work we realize our dependence on others and on circumstances, we also learn our dependence on God. We can do nothing without his Grace. Ask for a moment what you have that has not been given to you. You might reply, “But I worked hard for all the things I have!” Great, but from whom did you receive the life, the intelligence and the energy to work as you’ve done?

Work dignifies our lives—even when the work is hard, sweaty and back breaking. In fact, the harder the physical labor the more edifying it can be if our attitude towards our work is integrated with the other tools and vows of the Benedictine vision. Remember, the third vow is “Conversion of Life” and with the holistic vision of Benedict the drudgery of our workaday world becomes one of the tools God uses for our conversion.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker

PS: Remember the two books I have written on the Benedictine Rule: *Listen My Son St. Benedict for Fathers* and *St. Benedict and St. Therese* are available from the parish office.

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