

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Benedictine monks take three vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life, but these vows are lived out with what I call "the three tools". These tools are the practical ways obedience, stability and conversion of life can be accomplished.

Just as the three vows are intertwined, so the three tools are intertwined with each other and with the three vows. These three tools make up the three aspects of everyday Benedictine life. While we are not all called to be monks and nuns, the three tools can inform our own lives seeking to follow Christ in the secular world.

The three tools are prayer, work and reading or study. The first of the three tools is prayer. St Benedict builds the life of prayer around the divine office. Up to seven times a day the monks drop everything and head off to the chapel for prayer. The prayer services consist of singing the psalms, a hymn a Bible reading and prayers. Each "office" lasts about fifteen or twenty minutes.

Building a prayer life around the divine office is something we all can do. We may not be able to go into a church or chapel seven times a day, but we can punctuate our daily lives with a small formal prayer. Maybe we use the Magnificat publication to say morning and evening prayer. Perhaps we just begin the day with a Morning Offering and end the day with an examination of conscience, an act of contrition and the Lord's Prayer. Formal prayers give our prayer life structure and a framework.

Benedict also encourages informal, private prayer. He says the chapel should always be open so a monk can always go in and pray spontaneously and be close to the Lord. These two aspects of formal and informal prayer provide a framework while also making room for informal prayer and worship.

The three tools, like the three vows minister to the wholeness of our being. We are little holy trinities--body, mind and spirit. Prayer ministers to the spirit while reading ministers to the mind and work ministers to the body.

If we are aware of these three tools in our own lives, they will help us achieve balance and grow spiritually. Very often prayer, work and study get out of balance, but when the three are working together harmoniously we thrive spiritually, mentally and physically.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker