



## SAINT BENEDICT OF NURSIA The Father of Western Monasticism

Attractive ex petra Subiaci Relic from the Subiaco Cave, the first place of his monastic life, with Authentics signed by the Capuchin Postulator General



**A**ttractive ex petra Subiaci relic of Saint Benedict of Nursia, the Father of Western Monasticism, housed in a floral embellished theca and accompanied by properly sealed and matching authentics issued and signed by Fr. Bernardinus a Senis, Capuchin Postulator General. 20<sup>th</sup> century, housed in an attractive monstrance reliquary. AH 1107-006cc

**S**aint Benedict of Nursia (Italian: San Benedetto da Norcia) (480–547 AD) is a Christian saint, honored by the Roman Catholic Church as the patron saint of Europe and students, and by the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Church as the Father of Western Monasticism.

Benedict founded twelve communities for monks at Subiaco, about 64 kilometers to the



east of Rome, before moving to Monte Cassino in the mountains of southern Italy. There is no evidence that he intended to found a religious order. The Order of Saint Benedict is of later origin and, moreover, not an "order" as commonly understood but merely a confederation of autonomous congregations.



Benedict's main achievement is his "Rule", containing precepts for his monks. It is heavily influenced by the writings of John Cassian, and shows strong affinity with the Rule of the Master. But it also has a unique spirit of balance, moderation and reasonableness (*epieikeia*), and this persuaded most religious communities founded throughout the Middle Ages to adopt it. As a result, the Rule of Benedict became one of the most influential religious rules in Western Christendom. For this reason, Benedict is often called the founder of western Christian monasticism.

Apart from a short poem, attributed to Mark of Monte Cassino, the only ancient account of Benedict is found in the second volume of Pope Gregory I's four-book *Dialogues*, thought to have been written in 593. The authenticity of this work has been hotly disputed, especially by Dr Francis Clarke in his two volume work "The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues". Book Two consists of a prologue and thirty-eight succinct chapters.

Gregory's account of this saint's life is not, however, a biography in the modern sense of the word. It provides instead a spiritual portrait of the gentle, disciplined abbot. In a letter to Bishop Maximilian of Syracuse, Gregory states his intention for his *Dialogues*, saying they are a kind of *floretum* (an anthology, literally, 'flowers') of the most striking miracles of Italian holy men.

Gregory did not set out to write a chronological, historically anchored story of Saint Benedict, but he did base his anecdotes on direct testimony. To establish his authority, Gregory explains that his information came from what he considered the best sources: a handful of Benedict's disciples who lived with the saint and witnessed his various miracles. These followers, he says, are Constantinus, who succeeded Benedict as Abbot of Monte Cassino; Valentinianus; Simplicius; and Honoratus, who was abbot of Subiaco when Saint Gregory wrote his *Dialogues*.

In Gregory's day, history was not recognized as an independent field of study; it was a branch of grammar or rhetoric, and *historia* (defined as 'story') summed up the approach



of the learned when they wrote what was, at that time, considered 'history.' Gregory's Dialogues Book Two, then, an authentic medieval hagiography cast as a conversation between the Pope and his deacon Peter, is designed to teach spiritual lessons.

Benedict was the son of a Roman noble of Nursia, the modern Norcia, in Umbria. A tradition which Bede accepts makes him a twin with his sister Scholastica. Saint Gregory's narrative makes it impossible to suppose him younger than 19 or 20. He was old enough to be in the midst of his literary studies, to understand the real meaning and worth of the dissolute and licentious lives of his companions, and to have been deeply affected himself by the love of a woman (ibid. II, 2). He was capable of weighing all these things in comparison with the life taught in the Gospels, and chose the latter. He was at the beginning of life, and he had at his disposal the means to a career as a Roman noble; clearly he was not a child. If we accept the date 480 for his birth, we may fix the date of his abandonment of his studies and leaving home at about 500.

Benedict does not seem to have left Rome for the purpose of becoming a hermit, but only to find some place away from the life of the great city. He took his old nurse with him as a servant and they settled down to live in Enfide, near a church to Saint Peter, in some kind of association with "a company of virtuous men" who were in sympathy with his feelings and his views of life. Enfide, which the tradition of Subiaco identifies with the modern Affile, is in the Simbruini Mountains, about 65 kilometers from Rome and three kilometers from Subiaco.

A short distance from Enfide is the entrance to a narrow, gloomy valley, penetrating the mountains and leading directly to Subiaco. Crossing the Aniene and turning to the right, the path rises along the left face off the ravine and soon reaches the site of Nero's villa and of the huge mole which formed the lower end of the middle lake; across the valley were ruins of the Roman baths, of which a few great arches and detached masses of wall still stand. Rising from the mole upon 25 low arches, the foundations of which can even yet be traced, was the bridge from the villa to the baths, under which the waters of the middle lake poured in a wide fall into the lake below. The ruins of these vast buildings and the wide sheet of falling water closed up the entrance of the valley to Saint Benedict as he came from Enfide; today the narrow valley lies open before us, closed only by the far-off mountains. The path continues to ascend, and the side of the ravine, on which it runs, becomes steeper, until we reach a cave above which the mountain now rises almost perpendicularly; while on the right, it strikes in a rapid descent down to where, in Saint Benedict's day, 150 meters below, lay the blue waters of the lake. The cave has a large triangular-shaped opening and is about three meters deep.

On his way from Enfide, Benedict met a monk, Romanus of Subiaco, whose monastery



was on the mountain above the cliff overhanging the cave. Romanus had discussed with Benedict the purpose which had brought him to Subiaco, and had given him the monk's habit. By his advice Benedict became a hermit and for three years, unknown to men, lived in this cave above the lake.

Saint Gregory tells us little of these years. He now speaks of Benedict no longer as a youth (*puer*), but as a man (*vir*) of God. Romanus, he twice tells us, served the saint in every way he could. The monk apparently visited him frequently, and on fixed days brought him food.



Saint Benedict rebukes Totila, King of the Ostrogoths, and tells him to mend his evil ways.

During these three years of solitude, broken only by occasional communications with the outer world and by the visits of Romanus, Benedict matured both in mind and character, in knowledge of himself and of his fellow-man, and at the same time he became not merely known to, but secured the respect of, those about him; so much so that on the death of the abbot of a monastery in the neighborhood (identified by some with Vicovaro), the community came to him and begged him to become its abbot. Benedict was acquainted



with the life and discipline of the monastery, and knew that “their manners were diverse from his and therefore that they would never agree together: yet, at length, overcome with their entreaty, he gave his consent” (ibid., 3). The experiment failed; the monks tried to poison him, and he returned to his cave. The legend goes that they first tried to poison his drink. He prayed a blessing over the cup and the cup shattered. Then they tried to poison him with poisoned bread. When he prayed a blessing over the bread, a raven swept in and took the loaf away. From this time his miracles seem to have become frequent, and many people, attracted by his sanctity and character, came to Subiaco to be under his guidance. For them he built in the valley twelve monasteries, in each of which he placed a superior with twelve monks. In a thirteenth he lived with a few, such as he thought would more profit and be better instructed by his own presence (ibid., 3). He remained, however, the father, or abbot, of all. With the establishment of these monasteries began the schools for children; and among the first to be brought were Saint Maurus and Saint Placidus.

Saint Benedict spent the rest of his life realizing the ideal of monasticism which he had drawn out in his rule. He died at Monte Cassino, Italy, while standing in prayer to God. According to tradition, this occurred on March 21, 547. He was named patron protector of Europe by Pope Paul VI in 1964. In 1980, Pope John Paul II declared him co-patron of Europe, together with Saints Cyril and Methodius.

In the pre-1970 Roman Calendar, his feast is kept on the day of his death, 21 March. Because on that date his liturgical memorial would always be impeded by the observance of Lent, the reform of the General Roman Calendar set an obligatory memorial for him on 11 July, the date on which some monasteries commemorated the translation of his relics to the monastery of St. Benoit-sur-Loire in Northern France. His memorial on 21 March was removed from the General Roman Calendar but is retained in the Roman Martyrology.

The Orthodox Church commemorates Saint Benedict on March 14.

The Anglican Communion has no single universal calendar, but a provincial calendar of saints is published in each Province. In almost all of these, Saint Benedict is commemorated on 11 July.

### The Rule of Saint Benedict

Seventy-three short chapters comprise the Rule. Its wisdom is of two kinds: spiritual (how to live a Christocentric life on earth) and administrative (how to run a monastery efficiently). More than half the chapters describe how to be obedient and humble, and what to do when a member of the community is not. About one-fourth regulate the work



of God (the *Opus Dei*). One-tenth outline how, and by whom, the monastery should be managed. And two chapters specifically describe the abbot's pastoral duties.

Before studying the Rule of Saint Benedict it is necessary to point out that it is written for laymen, not for clerics. The saint's purpose was not to institute an order of clerics with clerical duties and offices, but an organization and a set of rules for the domestic life of such laymen as wished to live as fully as possible the type of life presented in the Gospel. "My words", he says, "are addressed to thee, whoever thou art, that, renouncing thine own will, dost put on the strong and bright armor of obedience in order to fight for the Lord Christ, our true King." (Prol. to Rule.) Later, the Church imposed the clerical state upon Benedictines, and with the state came a preponderance of clerical and sacerdotal duties, but the impress of the lay origin of the Benedictines has remained, and is perhaps the source of some of the characteristics which mark them off from later orders.

Another characteristic feature of the saint's Rule is its view of work. His so-called order was not established to carry on any particular work or to meet any special crisis in the Church, as has been the case with other orders. With Benedict the work of his monks was only a means to goodness of life. The great disciplinary force for human nature is work; idleness is its ruin. The purpose of his Rule was to bring men "back to God by the labor of obedience, from whom they had departed by the idleness of disobedience". Work was the first condition of all growth in goodness. It was in order that his own life might be "wearied with labors for God's sake" that Saint Benedict left Enfide for the cave at Subiaco. It is necessary, comments Saint Gregory, that God's elect should at the beginning, when life and temptations are strong are strong in them, "be wearied with labor and pains". In the regeneration of human nature in the order of discipline, even prayer comes after work, for grace meets with no co-operation in the soul and heart of an idler. When the Goth "gave over the world" and went to Subiaco, Saint Benedict gave him a bill-hook and set him to clear away briars for the making of a garden. "Ecce! Labora!" go and work. Work is not, as the civilization of the time taught, the condition peculiar to slaves; it is the universal lot of man, necessary for his well-being as a man, and essential for him as a Christian.

The religious life, as conceived by Saint Benedict is essentially social. Life apart from one's fellows, the life of a hermit, if it is to be wholesome and sane, is possible only for a few, and these few must have reached an advanced stage of self-discipline while living with others (Rule, 1). The Rule, therefore, is entirely occupied with regulating the life of a community of men who live and work and pray and eat together, and this is not merely for a course of training, but as a permanent element of life at its best. The Rule conceives the superiors as always present and in constant touch with every member of the government, which is best described as patriarchal, or paternal (ibid., 2, 3, 64). The



superior is the head of a family; all are the permanent members of a household. Hence, too, much of the spiritual teaching of the Rule is concealed under legislation which seems purely social and domestic organization (ibid. 22-23, 35-41). So intimately connected with domestic life is the whole framework and teaching of the Rule that a Benedictine may be more truly said to enter or join a particular household than to join an order. The social character of Benedictine life has found expression in a fixed type for monasteries and in the kind of works which Benedictines undertake, and it is secured by an absolute communism in possessions (ibid. 33, 34, 54, 55), by the rigorous suppression of all differences of worldly rank - "no one of noble birth may [for that reason] be put before him that was formerly a slave" (ibid. 2). and by the enforced presence of everyone at the routine duties of the household.

Although private ownership is most strictly forbidden by the Rule, it was no part of Saint Benedict's conception of monastic life that his monks, as a body, should strip themselves of all wealth and live upon the alms of the charitable; rather his purpose was to restrict the requirements of the individual to what was necessary and simple, and to secure that the use and administration of the corporate possessions should be in strict accord with the teaching of the Gospel. The Benedictine ideal of poverty is quite different from the Franciscan. The Benedictine takes no explicit vow of poverty; he only vows obedience according to the Rule. The rule allows all that is necessary to each individual, together with sufficient and varied clothing, abundant food (excluding only the flesh of quadrupeds), wine and ample sleep (ibid., 39, 40, 41, 55). Possessions could be held in common, they might be large, but they were to be administered for the furtherance of the work of the community and for the benefit of others. While the individual monk was poor, the monastery was to be in a position to give alms, not to be compelled to seek them. It was to relieve the poor, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to bury the dead, to help the afflicted (ibid., 4), to entertain all strangers (ibid., 3). The poor came to Benedict to get help to pay their debts (Dial. St. Greg., 27); they came for food (ibid., 21, 28).

Saint Benedict originated a form of government which is deserving of study. It is contained in chapters 2, 3, 31, 64, 65 of the Rule and in certain pregnant phrases scattered through other chapters. As with the Rule itself, so also his scheme of government is intended not for an order but for a single community. He presupposes that the community have bound themselves, by their promise of stability, to spend their lives together under the Rule. The superior is then elected by a free and universal suffrage. The government may be described as a monarchy, with the Rule as its constitution. Within the four corners of the Rule everything is left to the discretion of the abbot, the abuse of whose authority is checked by religion (Rule, 2), by open debate with the community on all important matters, and with its representative elders in smaller concerns (ibid., 3). The reality of these checks upon the wilfulness of the ruler can be appreciated only when it is



remembered that ruler and community were bound together for life, that all were inspired by the single purpose of carrying out the conception of life taught in the Gospel, and that the relation of the members of the community to one another and to the abbot, and of the abbot to them, were elevated and spiritualized by a mysticism which set before itself the acceptance of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount as real and work-a-day truths.

When a Christian household, a community, has been organized by the willing acceptance of its social duties and responsibilities, by obedience to an authority, and, further, is under the continuous discipline of work and self-denial, the next step in the regeneration of its members in their return to God is prayer. The Rule deals directly and explicitly only with public prayer. For this Benedict assigns the Psalms and Canticles, with readings from the Scriptures and Fathers. He devotes eleven chapters out of the seventy-three of his Rule to regulating this public prayer, and it is characteristic of the freedom of his Rule and of the "moderation" of the saint, that he concludes his very careful directions by saying that if any superior does not like his arrangement he is free to make another; this only he says he will insist on, that the whole Psalter will be said in the course of a week. The practice of the holy Fathers, he adds, was resolutely "to say in a single day what I pray we tepid monks may get through in a whole week" (ibid., 18). On the other hand, he checks indiscreet zeal by laying down the general rule "that prayer made in common must always be short" (ibid., 20). It is very difficult to reduce Saint Benedict's teaching on prayer to a system, for this reason, that in his conception of the Christian character, prayer is coexistent with the whole life, and life is not complete at any point unless penetrated by prayer.

The form of prayer which thus covers the whole of our waking hours, Saint Benedict calls the first degree of humility. It consists in realizing the presence of God (ibid., 7). The first step begins when the spiritual is joined to the merely human, or, as the saint expresses it, it is the first step in a ladder, the rungs of which rest at one end in the body and at the other in the soul. The ability to exercise this form of prayer is fostered by that care of the "heart" on which the saint so often insists; and the heart is saved from the dissipation that would result from social intercourse by the habit of mind which sees in everyone Christ Himself. "Let the sick be served in very deed as Christ Himself" (ibid., 36). "Let all guests that come be received as Christ" (ibid., 53). "Whether we be slaves or freemen, we are all one in Christ and bear an equal rank in the service of Our Lord" (ibid., 2).

Secondly, there is public prayer. This is short and is to be said at intervals, at night and at seven distinct hours during the day, so that, when possible, there shall be no great interval without a call to formal, vocal, prayer (ibid., 16). The position which Saint Benedict gave to public, common prayer can best be described by saying that he established it as the center of the common life to which he bound his monks. It was the



consecration, not only of the individual, but of the whole community to God by the oft-repeated daily public acts of faith. and of praise and adoration of the Creator; and this public worship of God, the *opus Dei*, was to form the chief work of his monks, and to be the source from which all other works took their inspiration, their direction, and their strength.

Lastly, there is private prayer, for which the saint does not legislate. It follows individual gifts - "If anyone wishes to pray in private, let him go quietly into the oratory and pray, not with a loud voice, but with tears and fervor of heart" (ibid., 52). "Our prayer ought to be short and with purity of heart, except it be perchance prolonged by the inspiration of divine grace" (ibid., 20). But if Saint Benedict gives no further directions on private prayer, it is because the whole condition and mode of life secured by the Rule, and the character formed by its observance, lead naturally to the higher states of prayer. As the Saint writes: "Whoever, therefore, thou art that hastenest to thy heavenly country, fulfil by the help of Christ this little Rule which we have written for beginners; and then at length thou shalt arrive, under God's protection, at the lofty summits of doctrine and virtue of which we have spoken above" (ibid., 73). for guidance in these higher states the Saint refers to the Fathers, Basil and Cassian.

From this short examination of the Rule and its system of prayer, it will be obvious that to describe the Benedictine as a contemplative order is misleading, if the word is used in its modern technical sense as excluding active work; the "contemplative" is a form of life framed for different circumstances and with a different object from Saint Benedict's. The Rule, including its system of prayer and public psalmody, is meant for every class of mind and every degree of learning. It is framed not only for the educated and for souls advanced in perfection, but it organizes and directs a complete life which is adapted for simple folk and for sinners, for the observance of the Commandments and for the beginnings of goodness. "We have written this Rule", writes Saint Benedict, "that by observing it in monasteries, we may show ourselves to have some degree of goodness in life and a beginning of holiness. But for him who would hasten to the perfection of religion, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers, the following whereof bringeth a man to the height of perfection" (ibid., 73). Before leaving the subject of prayer it will be well to point out again that by ordering the public recitation and singing of the Psalter, Saint Benedict was not putting upon his monks a distinctly clerical obligation. The Psalter was the common form of prayer of all Christians; we must not read into his Rule characteristics which a later age and discipline have made inseparable from the public recitation of the Divine Office. We can now take up again the story of Benedict's life. How long he remained at Subiaco we do not know. Abbot Tosti conjectures it was until the year 529. Of these years Saint Gregory is content to tell no more than a few stories descriptive of the life of the monks, and of the character and government of Saint Benedict. The latter was making his first



attempt to realize in these twelve monasteries his conception of the monastic life. We can fill in many of the details from the Rule. By his own experiment and his knowledge of the history of monasticism the saint had learnt that the regeneration of the individual, except in abnormal cases, is not reached by the path of solitude, nor by that of austerity, but by the beaten path of man's social instinct, with its necessary conditions of obedience and work; and that neither the body nor the mind can be safely overstrained in the effort to avoid evil (*ibid.*, 64). Thus, at Subiaco we find no solitaries, no conventual hermits, no great austerities, but men living together in organized communities for the purpose of leading good lives, doing such work as came to their hand - carrying water up the steep mountain-side, doing the other household work, raising the twelve cloisters, clearing the ground, making gardens, teaching children, preaching to the country people, reading and studying at least four hours a day, receiving strangers, accepting and training new-comers, attending the regular hours of prayer, reciting and chanting the Psalter. The life at Subiaco and the character of Saint Benedict attracted many to the new monasteries, and their increasing numbers and growing influence came the inevitable jealousy and persecution, which culminated with a vile attempt of a neighboring priest to scandalize the monks by an exhibition of naked women, dancing in the courtyard of the saint's monastery (*Dial. St. Greg.*, 8). To save his followers from further persecution Benedict left Subiaco and went to Monte Cassino.

Upon the crest of Monte Cassino "there was an ancient chapel in which the foolish and simple country people, according to the custom of the old Gentiles, worshiped the god Apollo. Round about it likewise upon all sides there were woods for the service of devils, in which, even to that very time, the mad multitude of infidels did offer most wicked sacrifice. The man of God, coming hither, feat in pieces the idol, overthrew the altar, set fire on the woods and in the temple of Apollo built the oratory of Saint Martin: and where the altar of the same Apollo was, he made an oratory of Saint John: and by his continual preaching he brought the people dwelling in those parts to embrace the faith of Christ" (*ibid.*, 8). On this spot the saint built his monastery. His experience at Subiaco had led him to alter his plans, and now, instead of building several houses with a small community in each, he kept all his monks in one monastery and provided for its government by appointing a prior and deans (*Rule*, 65, 21). We find no trace in his Rule, which was most probably written at Monte Cassino, of the view which guided him when he built the twelve small monasteries at Subiaco. The life which we have witnessed at Subiaco was renewed at Subiaco was renewed at Monte Cassino, but the change in the situation and local conditions brought a corresponding modification in the work undertaken by the monks. Subiaco was a retired valley away in the mountains and difficult of access; Cassino was on one of the great highways to the south of Italy, and at no great distance from Capua. This brought the monastery into more frequent communication with the outside world. It soon became a center of influence in a district



in which there was a large population, with several dioceses and other monasteries. Abbots came to see and advise with Benedict. Men of all classes were frequent visitors, and he numbered nobles and bishops among his intimate friends. There were nuns in the neighborhood whom the monks went to preach to and to teach. There was a village nearby in which Saint Benedict preached and made many converts (Dial. St. Greg., 19). The monastery became the protector of the poor, their trustee (*ibid.*, 31), their refuge in sickness, in trial, in accidents, in want.

Thus during the life of the saint we find what has ever since remained a characteristic feature of Benedictine houses, i.e. the members take up any work which is adapted to their peculiar circumstances, any work which may be dictated by their necessities. Thus we find the Benedictines teaching in poor schools and in the universities, practicing the arts and following agriculture, undertaking the care of souls, or devoting themselves wholly to study. No work is foreign to the Benedictine, provided only it is compatible with living in community and with the performance of the Divine Office. This freedom in the choice of work was necessary in a Rule which was to be suited to all times and places, but it was primarily the natural result of the which Saint Benedict had in view, and which he differs from the founders of later orders. These later had in view some special work to which they wished their disciples to devote themselves; Saint Benedict's purpose was only to provide a Rule by which anyone might follow the Gospel counsels, and live, and work and pray, and save his soul. Saint Gregory's narrative of the establishment of Monte Cassino does little more for us than to supply disconnected incidents which illustrate the daily life of the monastery. We gain only a few biographical facts. From Monte Cassino Saint Benedict founded another monastery near Terracina, on the coast, about 65 kilometers distant (*ibid.*, 22). To the wisdom of long experience and to the mature virtues of the saint, was now added the gift of prophecy, of which Saint Gregory gives many examples. Celebrated among these is the story of the visit of Totila, King of the Goths, in the year 543, when the saint "rebuked him for his wicked deeds, and in a few words told him all that should befall him, saying 'Much wickedness do you daily commit, and many sins have you done: now at length give over your sinful life. Into the city of Rome shall you enter, and over the sea shall you pass: nine years shall you reign, and in the tenth shall you leave this mortal life.' The king, hearing these things, was wonderfully afraid, and desiring the holy man to commend him to God in his prayers he departed: and from that time forward he was nothing so cruel as before he had been. Not long after he went to Rome, sailed over into Sicily, and in the tenth year of his reign he lost his kingdom together with his life." (*ibid.*, 15).

Totila's visit to Monte Cassino in 543 is the only certain date we have in the saint's life. It must have occurred when Benedict was advanced in age. Abbot Tosti, following others, puts the saint's death in the same year. Just before his death we hear for the first time of



his sister Scholastica. "She had been dedicated from her infancy to Our Lord, and used to come once a year to visit her brother. To whom the man of God went not far from the gate to a place that did belong to the abbey, there to give her entertainment" (ibid., 33). They met for the last time three days before Scholastica's death, on a day "when the sky was so clear that no cloud was to be seen". The sister begged her brother to stay the night, "but by no persuasion would he agree unto that, saying that he might not by any means tarry all night out of his abbey... The nun receiving this denial of her brother, joining her hands together, laid them on the table; and so bowing her head upon them, she made her prayers to Almighty God, and lifting her head from the table, there fell suddenly such a tempest of lightening and thundering, and such abundance of rain, that neither venerable Benedict, nor the monks that were with him, could put their head out of door" (ibid., 33). Three days later, "Benedict beheld the soul of his sister, which was departed from her body, in the likeness of a dove, to ascend into heaven: who rejoicing much to see her great glory, with hymns and lauds gave thanks to Almighty God, and did impart news of this her death to his monks whom also he sent presently to bring her corpse to his abbey, to have it buried in that grave which he had provided for himself" (ibid., 34).

It would seem to have been about this time that Saint Benedict had that wonderful vision in which he came as near to seeing God as is possible for man in this life. Saint Gregory and Saint Bonaventure say that Benedict saw God and in that vision of God saw the whole world. Saint Thomas will not allow that this could have been. Urban VIII, however, does not hesitate to say that "the saint merited while still in this mortal life, to see God Himself and in God all that is below him". If he did not see the Creator, he saw the light which is in the Creator, and in that light, as Saint Gregory says, "saw the whole world gathered together as it were under on beam of the sun. At the same time he saw the soul of Germanus, Bishop of Capua, in a fiery globe carried up by the angels to Heaven" (ibid., 35). Once more the hidden things of God were shown to him, and he warned his brethren, both "those that lived daily with him and those that dwelt far off" of his approaching death. "Six days before he left this world he gave orders to have his sepulcher opened, and forthwith falling into an ague, he began with burning heat to wax faint; and when as the sickness daily increased, upon the sixth day he commanded his monks to carry him into the oratory, where he did arm himself receiving the Body and Blood of our Savior Christ; and having his weak body holden up betwixt the hands of his disciples, he stood with his own hands lifted up to heaven; and as he was in that manner praying, he gave up the ghost" (ibid., 37). He was buried in the same grave with his sister "in the oratory of Saint John the Baptist, which [he] himself had built when he overthrew the altar of Apollo" (ibid.). There is some doubt whether the relics of the saint are still at Monte Cassino, or whether they were moved in the seventh century to Fleury. Abbot Tosti in his life of Saint Benedict, discusses the question at length (chap. xi) and decides the controversy in favor of Monte Cassino.



Perhaps the most striking characteristics in Saint Benedict are his deep and wide human feeling and his moderation. The former reveals itself in the many anecdotes recorded by Saint Gregory. We see it in his sympathy and care for the simplest of his monks; his hastening to the help of the poor Goth who had lost his bill-hook; spending the hours of the night in prayer on the mountain to save his monks the labor of carrying water, and to remove from their lives a "just cause of grumbling"; staying three days in a monastery to help to induce one of the monks to "remain quietly at his prayers as the other monks did", instead of going forth from the chapel and wandering about "busying himself worldly and transitory things". He lets the crow from the neighboring woods come daily when all are at dinner to be fed by himself. His mind is always with those who are absent; sitting in his cell he knows that Placid is fallen into the lake; he foresees the accident to the builders and sends a warning to them; in spirit and some kind of real presence he is with the monks "eating and refreshing themselves" on their journey, with his friend Valentinian on his way to the monastery, with the monk taking a present from the nuns, with the new community in Terracina. Throughout Saint Gregory's narrative he is always the same quiet, gentle, dignified, strong, peace-loving man who by the subtle power of sympathy becomes the center of the lives and interests of all about him. We see him with his monks in the church, at their reading, sometimes in the fields, but more commonly in his cell, where frequent messengers find him "weeping silently in his prayers", and in the night hours standing at "the window of his cell in the tower, offering up his prayers to God"; and often, as Totila found him, sitting outside the door of his cell, or "before the gate of the monastery reading a book". He has given his own portrait in his ideal picture of an abbot (Rule, 64):

It beseemeth the abbot to be ever doing some good for his brethren rather than to be presiding over them. He must, therefore, be learned in the law of God, that he may know whence to bring forth things new and old; he must be chaste, sober, and merciful, ever preferring mercy to justice, that he himself may obtain mercy. Let him hate sin and love the brethren. And even in his corrections, let him act with prudence, and not go too far, lest while he seeketh too eagerly to scrape off the rust, the vessel be broken. Let him keep his own frailty ever before his eyes, and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken. And by this we do not mean that he should suffer vices to grow up; but that prudently and with charity he should cut them off, in the way he shall see best for each, as we have already said; and let him study rather to be loved than feared. Let him not be violent nor over anxious, not exacting nor obstinate, not jealous nor prone to suspicion, or else he will never be at rest. In all his commands, whether spiritual or temporal, let him be prudent and considerate. In the works which he imposeth let him be discreet and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, when



he said: 'If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all perish in one day'. Taking, then, such testimonies as are borne by these and the like words to discretion, the mother of virtues, let him so temper all things, that the strong may have something to strive after, and the weak nothing at which to take alarm.



### The Saint Benedict Medal

This medal originally came from a cross in honor of Saint Benedict. On one side, the medal has an image of Saint Benedict, holding the Holy Rule in his left hand and a cross in his right. There is a raven on one side of him, with a cup on the other side of him. Around the medal's outer margin are the words "Eius in obitu nostro praesentia muniamur" ("May we, at our death, be fortified by His presence"). The other side of the medal has a cross with the initials CSSML on the vertical bar which signify "Crux Sacra Sit Mihi Lux" ("May the Holy Cross be my light") and on the horizontal bar are the initials NDSMD which stand for "Non Draco Sit Mihi Dux" ("Let not the dragon be my overlord"). The initials CSPB stand for "Crux Sancti Patris Benedicti" ("The Cross of the Holy Father Benedict") and are located on the interior angles

of the cross. Either the inscription "PAX" (Peace) or the Christogram "IHS" may be found at the top of the cross in most cases. Around the medal's margin on this side are the Vade Retro Satana initials VRSNSMV which stand for "Vade Retro Satana, Nonquam Suade Mihi Vana" ("Get thee behind me Satan, do not suggest to me thy vanities") then a space followed by the initials SMQLIVB which signify "Sunt Mala Quae Libas, Ipse Venena Bibas" ("Evil are the things thou profferest, drink thou thy own poison").

This medal was first struck in 1880 to commemorate the fourteenth centenary of Saint Benedict's birth and is also called the Jubilee Medal; its exact origin, however, is unknown. In 1647, during a witchcraft trial at Natternberg near Metten Abbey in Bavaria, the accused women testified they had no power over Metten, which was under the protection of the cross. An investigation found a number of painted crosses on the walls of the abbey with the letters now found on St Benedict medals, but their meaning had been forgotten. A manuscript written in 1415 was eventually found that had a picture of Saint Benedict holding a scroll in one hand and a staff which ended in a cross in the



other. On the scroll and staff were written the full words of the initials contained on the crosses. Medals then began to be struck in Germany, which then spread throughout Europe. This medal was first approved by Pope Benedict XIV in his briefs of December 23, 1741, and March 12, 1742.

The early Middle Ages have been called “the Benedictine centuries.” In April 2008, Pope Benedict XVI discussed the influence Saint Benedict had on Western Europe. The pope said that “with his life and work Saint Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture” and helped Europe to emerge from the “dark night of history” that followed the fall of the Roman empire.

To this day, The Rule of Saint Benedict is the most common and influential Rule used by monasteries and monks, more than 1,400 years after its writing.

The leaders of the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, when choosing a single figure from each century of Christian history, chose Benedict of Nursia as the most important figure of the 6th Century.

The influence of Saint Benedict produced “a true spiritual ferment” in Europe, and over the coming decades his followers spread across the continent to establish a new cultural unity based on Christian faith.

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- “The Life of Saint Benedict,” by Saint Gregory the Great, Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, ISBN 0-89555-512-3



... u Denis  
Causarum Sacerdotum Dei Ord. Fr. Min. S. Franc. Cap.  
Postulator Generalis

... has Litteras inspecturis fidem facimus ac testamur, Nos ex authenticis  
... novisse particulam *ex petra sublacii S. Benedicti Albstadi*  
... reverenter collocasse in theca *formae rostratae*, et  
... a, et sigillo Nostro parvo *hispanica* signata: quam don  
... elinendi, vel aliis donandi, ad *melium* venerationi exponendi,  
... fat. - Monemus autem fideles, *quorum* manus hae sacrae reliqu  
... lo modo licere eas vendere, nec cum ullis rebus quae mercimonii  
... uorum fidem has Litteras, manu Nostra subscriptas, sigilloque  
... heca fideliter servandas, remisimus.

... um Romae, ex Curia Generali,



... sunt, nullo modo licere ea  
... In quorum fidem ha  
... theca fideliter s  
... Datum Romae,  
... Die *5*  
... ubique.

GENERALIS ORD. MIN. CAPUCINORUM  
POSTULATOR



