

BENEDICT OF NURSIA

THE LESSON: FULLY COMMITTED

*“The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backwards.”
(Isaiah 50:5)*

Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica were born around the year 480 in Nursia, Italy. Both siblings would grow up to establish influential monasteries, and remained close throughout their lives.

Benedict was educated in Rome and during that time was horrified by the vice he witnessed around him. He was still a teenager when he left the city to become a solitary monk in a remote part of Italy. During this time, Benedict struggled and overcame temptations of his own, and after a few years was asked to take on the leadership of a nearby monastery. Benedict was strict and the monks were rebellious. An attempt was made to poison him. Not surprisingly, he returned to his solitary life. But in the years that followed, many people came to him seeking to learn from him.

*“Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God,
walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments.”
(1 Kings 8:61)*

In due course Benedict, with some of his disciples, built a monastic community at a place called Monte Cassino, where he instituted – and importantly, *wrote down* – a “Rule” to govern every aspect of community life.

Benedict died at the age of 70. About four decades later his monastery was attacked, and the monks of Monte Cassino fled, taking Benedict’s “Rule” with them. It was this that went on to facilitate the spread of Benedict’s order for community life throughout the west.

*“For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you,
but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”
(Romans 16:19)*

Benedict’s experience had taught him that all members of a monastic community were human and had human failings. All people share the sinful inclination towards rebellion. And yet these people had come together with the common purpose of living lives obedient to God in every particular. So Benedict’s “Rule” was demanding, but realistic.

Those in charge were exhorted to act with humility and father-like compassion. Those under authority needed to be obedient, rather than rebellious. This sort of harmony and discipline was only possible, Benedict believed, when monks were committed to staying in one place under the authority of one abbot. For this reason, Benedict wrote against “vagabond” monks who wandered from place to place, and were therefore not held accountable by community and abbot for living in accordance with their vows.

The Benedictine monasteries were places of prayer and humble work, but they also became important places of teaching, health care, and hospitality within the broader communities where they were established. Benedict’s “Rule” is still read by many, and it has inspired numerous religious communities throughout the centuries, even to this day.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS”.)

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AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Benedict that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Benedict, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)