THE HEART OF SAINT BENEDICT’S TEACHING

by

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1 Based on ‘Medulla Doctrinae S. Benedicti’ in Abbot Cuthbert Butler’s edition of the Rule (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1912, pp.149-169). It was originally prepared for the novices of Downside Abbey in England. Translated and edited by Dom Ambrose Flavell, OSB. © Kristo Buase Monastery, 2006.
PART 1: THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF MONKS

What should be the intention of a Benedictine monk?
To live the monastic life, according to the Rule of our Holy Father Benedict:
This Rule is to be read to [the novice] right through, and he is to be told: ‘Here is the law under which you wish to take service: if you are able to keep it, come in’ [RB 58].

The following words, which conclude the Prologue, seem to sum up well the Rule and the goal of Benedictine monastic life:
But as we progress in our monastic life and our faith, the heart expands and we run along the ways of God’s commandments with a delight of love that cannot be described; so that, never leaving his masterly guidance but persevering in his teaching until death in the monastery, we play our part by patience in the passion of Christ and so win our right to share in his kingdom. [RB Prologue].

What is required of us if we want to be Benedictine monks?
To you then my words are now addressed, who are renouncing your own desires … [and] are taking up the strong and glorious arms of obedience. [RB Prologue].

[The Novice Master] must try his best to see if the novice is really seeking God, if he is eager for the Work of God [i.e. the Divine Office], for obedience, for humiliations. [RB 58].

What is a Benedictine Monastery?
A school of the Lord’s service. [RB Prologue]

What are the main lessons in this school?
PRAYER: MANUAL WORK: SPIRITUAL TRAINING

PRAYER

What is the first duty of a Benedictine monk?
To celebrate the Work of God (the Liturgy), since our Holy Father says: Nothing is to be put before the Work of God. (RB 43).

How should this duty be discharged?
[Let us] so stand to sing the psalms that our mind may be in harmony with our voice. (RB 19).

B. Private Prayer and Private Devotions [RB 49]

What method of prayer does St Benedict teach?
If anyone wants to pray privately by himself, let him just go in simply [to the oratory] and pray. (RB 52)
How should we pray?
Not with many words,
but in purity of our heart
and with the smarting tears of compunction. (RB 20)

Not with loud cries,
but with tears
and earnestness of heart. (RB 52)

Prayer ought to be short and pure,
unless perhaps it be prolonged under the influence of divine grace. (RB 20)

What is ‘Pure Prayer’?
The expression is taken from John Cassian, Conferences 9 and 10. It is a kind of prayer which is truly mystical and contemplative.

In St Benedict’s own monastery, was there prayer in common besides that of the Divine Office?
Yes, as can be seen from the following passage of the Dialogues:
In one of those monasteries which he had built all round the place, there was a monk who could not remain at prayer. As soon as the brothers would give themselves to prayer he would go outside … at the usual hour, after the psalmody was completed, the brothers gave themselves to prayer. The next day, when prayer was over, the man of God left the oratory and found the monk standing outside. Benedict struck him with a rod because of the blindness of his heart. From that day he … remained steadfast in his efforts at prayer. (Dialogues, Book 2, 4).

St Benedict warns:
In community, however, prayer should be kept quite short, (RB 20),

but amongst the Tools of Good Works he asks us:
To apply ourselves often to prayer (RB 4).

He also advises:
Now first of all, whenever you begin to undertake any good work, beg him with most earnest prayer to bring it to completion (RB Prologue).

WORK
(Chapter 48 of the Rule embraces both MANUAL WORK & LECTIO DIVINA)

What did St Benedict teach concerning work and the daily occupations of his monks?
Idleness is the enemy of the soul.
Therefore the brethren ought to be occupied at definite times in the work of the hands,
at other set times in holy reading. (RB 48).
They are truly monks if they live by the labour of their hands, as did our fathers and the apostles. (RB 48).
Should anyone be so slack or lazy that he will not or cannot study or read,
some work must be given him to do that he may not be idle. (RB 48).

What was St Benedict’s opinion on Scripture?
For what page, what saying of the divinely inspired Old and New Testaments is not a perfectly straight rule for the life of man? (RB 73).

And on the Fathers?
Or what book of the holy Catholic Fathers does not loudly proclaim how we may come by a straight course to our Creator? (RB 73)
(we know from the sources of the Rule that St Benedict must have been familiar with the writings of Augustine, Jerome, Leo and other writings of the Fathers).

Which authors, writing on the monastic life, did St Benedict particularly recommend to his monks?
The works of John Cassian, the Lives of the Fathers and the Rules of St Basil:
Then too the Conferences of the Fathers and their Institutes and Lives, and the Rule of our Holy Father Basil, what are these if not the tools for achieving the virtues for good living and obedient monks? (RB 73, cf. RB 42).

SPIRITUAL TRAINING (ASCESIS)
The Practice of the Virtues

Which are the most important chapters for discovering the nature of Benedictine asceticism?
Chapter 7, on the Steps of Humility, and Chapter 4, on the Tools of Good Works.
At the end of Chapter 7 he says:
Then when all these steps of humility have been mounted, the monk will soon arrive at that love of God which casts out fear when it is perfect. Through this love, all that he used to observe with some degree of fear he will now keep without any effort, as if it were a habit of nature; no longer from fear of hell, but for love of Christ, as the result of good habits and the delight that virtues bring. (RB 7).

At the beginning of the same chapter 7, St Benedict implies that he expects all his monks to want to reach ‘the peak at the summit of humility’, i.e. by climbing each and every rung of the ladder of humility.

Teaching on Benedictine asceticism is also to be found in the practice of the tools of good works, of which our Holy Father says: Here, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft.
When they have been used by us steadily day and night, and have been handed in on the day of judgment, then the reward will be paid over to us by the Lord, which he himself has promised: ‘No eye has seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him.’ (RB 4).

Mortification

With what is mortification chiefly concerned, in the opinion of St Benedict?
With renunciation of self-will and with obedience.

What does he say about the renunciation of self-will?
A monk is one who renounces his own desires. (RB Prologue).
We are taught not to do our own will (RB 7, First Step of Humility); to abandon our own will (RB 5); and to hate it (RB 4).
We are indeed forbidden to do our own will,
when Scripture tells us, ‘Turn away from your own will’ (RB 7).
The humble monk, not loving his own will, takes no pleasure in gratifying his own desires (RB 7, Second Step of Humility).
In the monastery no one should follow the will of his own heart (RB 3).
Not living at their own choice or obeying their own desires and attractions, but walk by the judgment and command of another (RB 5).
For monks are not allowed to have even their own bodies or their own wills at their own disposal (RB 33).

Obedience

What is St Benedict’s teaching on obedience?

In theory: As if it was a direct command from God (RB 5).
The obedience that is given to superiors is shown to God (RB 5).
For the love of God he subjects himself in all obedience to a superior (RB 7, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Step of Humility).

In action: Without delay (RB 5).
They may not tolerate any delay in carrying it out (RB 5).
At once laying aside their own interests (RB 5).
At once they drop their work,
and leave what they were doing unfinished (RB 5).
In barely in one moment of time the uttering of the master’s order
and the completion of it by the disciple
are both rapidly accomplished as a single act,
in the swiftness of the fear of God (RB 5).

How will this obedience be “acceptable to God and pleasing to men”?
Only if orders are carried out neither timidly, nor tardily, nor tepidly,
nor yet with grumbling or the raising of objections (RB 5).

In what should Benedictine monks compete with one another?
Let them vie with one another in showing mutual obedience (RB 72).

Whom should the Abbot love more than the others?
The one whom he has found better in good works or obedience (RB 2).

Austerity of Life

What was St Benedict’s understanding of monastic austerity of life?
We can discover his opinion from the following extracts from the Rule.
Our task then is to establish a school of the Lord’s service.
In establishing this we hope that we shall not make rules that are harsh or burdensome (RB Prologue).

Although the life of a monk ought always to maintain a Lenten observance, yet as few are strong enough to manage this, we recommend all during these days of Lent to keep their life perfectly pure and to wash away the negligences of other times during these holy days (RB 49).

We do indeed read that wine is not the drink for monks, but as monks nowadays cannot be brought to see this, let us agree at any rate on this: that we do not drink to the full, but sparingly (RB 40).

For monks give a very feeble proof of their devotedness in this service of God, if they chant less than the Psalter [i.e. 150 Psalms] with its customary Canticles in the course of a week, when we read how our holy Fathers strenuously accomplished in one day what I hope we lukewarm monks may manage to achieve in a whole week (RB 18).

If local conditions or poverty requires them to get in the crops themselves, let them not be distressed, for then they are truly monks if they live by the labour of their hands, as did our fathers and the apostles.
Yet let all be done with due moderation for the sake of the fainthearted (RB 48).

The delicate should have assistance provided for them, so that they may do their duty cheerfully, and indeed all should have help (RB 35).

In all the offices of the monastery, let this consideration be shown, that whenever there is need of help it is provided (RB 53).

One hour before the time for a meal the weekly servers may each take some wine and bread over and above the regular allowance, so that when the meal time comes they may serve their brethren without grumbling or hardship (RB 35).

Everything necessary should be provided by the Abbot so that all excuse of need may be removed (RB 55).

Sick or delicate brothers should be set to some craft or task such that they will not be idle, nor yet be overwhelmed by the heaviness of the work and so frightened off.
The Abbot must take their weakness into consideration (RB 48).

St Benedict brings his Rule to a close with these words: We have written this Rule, so that by observing it in monasteries
we may give proof that we have at least some goodness of life or the beginning of monastic observance. But for one who would hasten to the perfection of the monastic life, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers, the observance of which would bring a man to the lofty summit of perfection (RB 73).

Therefore whoever you are who are hastening soon to reach the heavenly fatherland, first with the help of Christ carry out fully this very small Rule for beginners, which we have written; and then one day under God’s protection you will arrive at those loftier heights of learning and virtue of which we have spoken (RB 73).

That these words come not from a false modesty but from a sincere acknowledgment of the truth may be seen by comparing the Benedictine Rule with other rules of the same period, and also by reference to what Cassian, Palladius and others tell us of the monks of Egypt.

What did St Gregory say of the distinctive character of the Rule? St Benedict ‘wrote a rule for monks, remarkable for its discretion’ (Dialogues, Book 2, 36). This discretion can be well illustrated by the following excerpts:

Acting therefore on these and other examples of discretion, the mother of virtues, let him so temper all things that the strong may have something to strive for and the weak nothing to dismay them (RB 64).

The Abbot should so adjust and arrange everything that souls may be saved and what the brethren do they may do without just complaint (RB 41).

PART 2: COMMON LIFE AND THE GOVERNING OF THE MONASTERY

CENOBITIC LIFE

For which kind of monks is St Benedict writing his Rule? For Cenobites; since he says: So passing [the other kinds of monks] over, let us start with the Lord’s help to legislate for the Cenobites, the strongest kind of all (RB 1).

What are Cenobites? The first kind of monks are the Cenobites, who live in monasteries, serving under a rule and an Abbot (RB 1).

What does St Benedict mean by this word ‘monasteries’? His meaning can be gathered from the following:

Living in monasteries (RB 5). Persevering until death in the monastery (RB Prologue).

[The newly professed] may be received into the community,
fully realizing as fixed by the law of the Rule
that from that day forward it will not be lawful for him to leave the monastery (RB 58).

The workshop, where we are to work diligently at all these tasks,
is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community (RB 4).

So far as is possible, the monastery ought to be so planned
that all requirements, such as water, mill, garden and the various crafts,
are all available inside the enclosure,
so that there may be no need for the monks to go out abroad,
for this is not at all good for their souls (RB 66).

What does St Benedict say of the life of Cenobites?
Not living at their own choice
or obeying their own desires and attractions,
but walking by the judgment and command of another,
living in monasteries of the common life,
they really want to have an Abbot over them (RB5).

Poverty

What does St Benedict say about the personal poverty of his monks?

[At profession] if the brother has any property,
he must either give it away beforehand to the poor,
or else draw up a formal deed of gift in favour of the monastery,
reserving nothing at all for himself (RB 58).

As regards their property,
[the parents of a child offered to the monastery] shall promise under oath
in the same document
that never personally, never through anyone else on their behalf,
nor in any way whatsoever, will they at any time give him anything
or provide the means of his possessing anything.
… In this way every loophole must be stopped up,
whereby any expectation might be left for the boy
that might ensnare and ruin him (RB 59).

Let no one presume to give or receive anything without the Abbot’s leave,
or to hold anything as his own – nothing whatsoever… just nothing at all (RB 33).

They are not allowed to have anything
which the Abbot has not given or permitted (RB 33).

Should anything be found which a brother has not received from the Abbot,
he must be subjected to the severest discipline (RB 35).

How should both the monks and the Abbot act in this matter?
For all that is needful monks should look to the father of the monastery [i.e the Abbot] (RB 33): Everything necessary should be provided to the monks by the Abbot so that all excuse of need may be removed (RB 55).

What about unnecessary things? Anything more than this is superfluous and ought to be cut off (RB 55).

Who owns the things that the Abbot either gives or allows a brother to keep? All things are common to all (RB 33).

How is poverty practised in daily life? In showing great care for all the goods of the monastery: All the monastery utensils and all its belongings are to be regarded as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar (RB 31).

Let the Abbot appoint brethren on whose life and character he can rely, and let him entreat the various articles to their care as he judges convenient, to be looked after and recovered. He should keep a list of these for himself, so that when the officials succeed one another in their duties he may know what he gives out and what he receives back (RB 32).

The server who is coming off duty at the end of the week must clean up on Saturday. He must hand back the vessels of his office to the cellarer clean and whole, and the cellarer is to hand them over to the new server, and so he will know what he gives out and what he receives back (RB 35).

Anybody who treats the monastery property in a slovenly or careless way is to be rebuked (RB 32).

THE VICES WHICH MOST GRAVELY HARM COMMON LIFE

Which are the two vices against Common Life which St Benedict speaks most strongly against? Private ownership and grumbling. Private ownership is called a ‘thoroughly bad vice’ (RB 33). And he orders: It is of primary importance that this vice should be utterly rooted out of the monastery (RB 33). This vice of private ownership must be cut out at the very root (RB 33).

Against Grumbling he warns: Above all so not let the pest of grumbling show its head for any reason whatsoever in any word or indication (RB 34).

Above all we urge that they keep free from complaints (RB 40).

What does he say about merely inner grumbling?
If a disciple obeys with a bad grace, and murmurs not only with his lips but also in his heart, then even if he fulfils the order, God who looks at the heart that is murmuring will not find it acceptable, and so he gains no grace for such an act; on the contrary, he has incurred the punishment due to murmurers, if he does not put it right by fitting atonement (RB 5).

THE GOVERNING OF THE MONASTERY
THE ABBOT

What does St Benedict say of the office of the Abbot?

1. The Abbot is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery (RB 2, 63).
2. The Abbot is the Father of the Monastery - For all that is needful monks should look to the father of the monastery (RB 33).
   He is also the Spiritual Father of his monks (RB 49)
‘Father of the Monastery’ is the term used by St Gregory in Book Two of the Dialogues (Chapters 3, 4, 7 etc.), one of the oldest and purest sources of the Benedictine tradition.

What other images does St Benedict use of the Abbot?

3. He is the Master (RB 3), whose task it is to teach the disciples (RB 6); and who should be learned in the divine law (RB 64).
4. He is the Shepherd of the flock (RB 2), who should take the utmost care and use all the skill he has and make every effort not to lose any of the sheep entrusted to him … and let him imitate the example of the Good Shepherd (RB 27).
5. He is a skilful Doctor who should treat offending brethren by applying fomentations and dressings through his exhortations, and by using the remedies of the Holy Scriptures (RB 28, 27).
6. He is the Steward of the house of God (RB 64), who should arrange everything with foresight and fairness (RB 3).

THE AUTHORITY OF THE ABBOT

What authority is given to the Abbot in ruling the monastery?
He is given the full authority of a patriarch: We have come to see that it is best for the preservation of peace and charity that the management of his own monastery should be under the control of the Abbot (RB 65).

Listening to the advice of the brethren, let [the Abbot] think it well over and then do what he judges more expedient (RB 3).

Let it be left to the judgment of the Abbot, so that all may unite in obeying what he decides to be most beneficial (RB 3).

Everything ought to be done with the approval of the Abbot (RB 49).

Anybody who has presumed to leave the monastery enclosure
or go somewhere else or do anything, however trifling, without the Abbot’s permission, must undergo the discipline of the Rule (RB 67).

Let no one presume to give or receive anything without the Abbot’s leave (RB 33).

Similarly, the Abbot can use his full discretion in matters of food, etc.: If the work happens to have been rather heavy, then it shall be in the Abbot’s discretionary power to provide something extra [i.e. more food] as need requires (RB 39).

If the local conditions or the work or the summer heat demand more [than the usual measure of wine], it can be left to the judgment of the Superior (RB 40).

[The quality and quantity of clothing] is a matter for the consideration of the Abbot (RB 55).

For bedding they are to have what is suitable for monks, as the Abbot shall arrange (RB 22).

[The measure of faults and punishments] is a matter for the judgment of the Abbot (RB 24, cf.44).

THE ABBOT SHALL HAVE TO RENDER AN ACCOUNT TO GOD

What limit does St Benedict place on the power of the Abbot?
Only Conscientiousness, and the fact that he will have to render an account to God for all his actions.
Let [the Abbot] reflect that it is souls he has undertaken to rule, and for these he will have to render an account (RB 2).

Let him know that one who undertakes the ruling of souls must prepare himself for giving an account: whatever is the number of the brethren he knows are under his care, let him take it as certain that for every single one of these souls he will have to render an account to the Lord on the day of judgment, and without any doubt for his own soul as well (RB 2).

He himself is always conscious that there will be an examination at the dread judgment of God into his own teaching and the obedience of his disciples, both these things. The Abbot must realise that whatever lack of profit the head of the household has been able to find in the sheep will be laid to the charge of the shepherd (RB 2).

[The Abbot] must always bear in mind that he is going to render an account to God for all his judgments and doings (RB 63, cf. 3, 65).

DELEGATED AUTHORITY: OFFICIALS
Who are the main Officials named in the Rule?
The Prior (RB 65), the Cellarer (RB 31), and the Deans (RB 21).

THE APPOINTMENT OF OFFICIALS
How should these Officials be appointed?
As St Benedict lays down in the Rule concerning the Prior:
Let the Abbot himself appoint his own Prior,
choosing anyone he wishes after asking the advice of God-fearing brethren (RB 65).

Similarly, the Cellarer, Deans and others are chosen by the Abbot himself, and he has the power to remove them from office (RB 21, 65).

RELATION TO THE ABBOT
What is the relation between the Officials and the Abbot?
By no means should they judge that they are exempted from the authority of their Abbot (RB 65).
The Prior must carry out respectfully the instructions given him by the Abbot, doing nothing contrary to the will or direction of the Abbot (RB 65).
The Cellarer must do nothing without the Abbot’s approval, but carry out his orders carefully (RB 31).
He must do everything according to the instructions of the Abbot (RB 31).
Everything that the Abbot has assigned to him
he is to have under his care,
but he must not take upon himself to deal with anything which the Abbot has told him to leave alone (RB 31).
If possible, the whole conduct of the affairs of the monastery should be entrusted to Deans, in accordance with the directions of the Abbot (RB 65).

RELATION TO MONKS
What is the authority of the Officials?
Authority is delegated from the Abbot to the Officials:
The Prior can give commands: Apart therefore from the commands of the Abbot or of the superiors appointed by him, to which we do not allow private commands to be preferred, in everything else let the juniors obey their seniors with all charity and zeal (RB 71).

In the same way the Cellarer can exercise his discretion:
Suppose a brother asks for something unreasonably; he must not treat him rudely and upset him, but in a reasonable and humble way say no to the one who asks amiss (RB 31: from which it can be seen that the Cellarer has the power to give or deny in everyday matters, without constant recourse to the Abbot).

The Deans are to devote themselves to the complete charge of their deaneries, according to the commandments of God and the instructions of their Abbot (RB 21).

RELATIONS TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY
What does St Benedict warn about business conducted with those outside the monastery?
If any of the work of the craftsmen is to be sold, let those who have to deal with the matter see to it that they do not venture to act dishonestly.
Let them ever remember Ananias and Sapphira, lest they and all who commit fraud in the affairs of the monastery suffer in their soul that death which befell those two in the body. In fixing the price the vice of avarice must not show its head, but the goods are to be offered a little cheaper than can be done by people of world, so that in all things God may be glorified (RB 57).

This means that a religious purpose should be apparent in all things. The Cellarer, and others involved in business matters, should remember that St Benedict calls the monastery the ‘House of God’ (RB 31, 53, 64): therefore let them take care that they don’t deserve to hear those words of the Lord: ‘You shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade’ (Jn 2:16).

**ADVICE TO THE CELLARER** (Extracted from RB 31).

He must not upset the brethren. Let him look to his own soul. Let him not think that anything may be disregarded. but observe a well balanced moderation in everything he does. Above all else he should have humility; and when he has nothing he can give let him offer a kindly word in answer. Let him fulfil the office committed to him with peace of mind.

**ADVICE TO THE ABBOT**

The newly appointed Abbot must be ever thinking what a burden he has undertaken, and to whom he will have to render an account of his stewardship (RB 64). Let him realise too how difficult and arduous a task he has undertaken, to rule souls and suit himself to many different characters (RB 2). According to the disposition and understanding of each, he must so adapt himself and fit himself to all (RB 2). He must realise that he has undertaken the care of souls that are sickly, not a tyranny over the sound and well (RB 27). The Abbot for his part must always act with the fear of God and in conformity with the Rule (RB 3). The Abbot must not disturb the flock committed to him, nor make any unfair arrangement as though he was perfectly free to do as he liked (RB 63). He should arrange everything with foresight and fairness (RB 3; cf. RB 2 ‘right in justice). Let him do everything with deliberation, and when he has acted he will not regret it (RB 2). Let him show them all that is good and holy by deeds rather than by words (RB 2). No distinction of persons should be made by him in the monastery. He is not to love one more than another, unless it be for one whom he has found better in good works or obedience ...
Therefore let the Abbot have an equal love for all,
and let discipline be impartial for all according to their deserts (RB 2).
With all solicitude should the Abbot have care for offending brothers …
Indeed the Abbot should take the utmost care and use all the skill he has
and make every effort [like the Good Shepherd] not to lose any of the sheep
entrusted to him (RB 27).
The Abbot therefore must take great care that the sick suffer no neglect (RB 36).
Sick or delicate brothers should be set to some craft or task
such that they will not be idle,
nor yet be overwhelmed by the heaviness of the work and so frightened off.
The Abbot must take their weakness into consideration (RB 48).
Indeed he should so adjust and arrange everything that souls may be saved
and what the brethren do they may do without just complaint (RB 41).
Above all he must not shirk or undervalue
the salvation of the souls put under his care,
and take more trouble over things that are passing, earthly and perishable (RB 2).
Any neglect on the part of his disciples is his responsibility (RB 36).
In all his judgments let him think of the retribution of God (RB 47).

THE ABBOT’S WAY OF ACTING (Extracted from RB 64)
Let him realise that it is his duty to profit his brethren
rather than to preside over them.
Let him hate the vices, but love the brethren.
In correcting let him act with prudence and avoid excess,
for fear that, while he is trying over-eagerly to scour off the rust,
the vessel itself may be broken.
Let him always mistrust his own frailty.
He must eliminate vices prudently and with charity,
in the way he sees best for each soul,
He should make it his aim to be loved rather than to be feared.
He must not be bustling and over-anxious.
Not excessive and obstinate.
Not jealous and too suspicious,
for then he is never at rest.
In his commands he should be foreseeing and considerate.
Let him so temper all things
that the strong may have something to strive for
and the weak nothing to dismay them.

DAILY LIFE
ADVICE TO THE MONKS

Do not do to another what you would not like done to yourself (RB 4, 61,70)
In everything let all follow the Rule as their master,
and let no one rashly depart from it (RB 3).
In the monastery no one should follow the will of his own heart (RB 3),
A monk should make himself a stranger to the doings of the world (RB 4).
Let a monk not do anything but what the common rule of the monastery
or the example of his seniors encourages him to do (RB 7).
No one should be troubled or distressed in the house of God (RB 31).
Above all do not let the pest of grumbling show its head for any reason whatsoever
in any word or indication (RB 34).
Nothing is to be put before the Work of God (RB 43).
Idleness is the enemy of the soul.
Therefore the brethren ought to be occupied at definite times
in the work of the hands, and at other set times in holy reading (RB 48).
All visitors who call – and the monastery is never without them - are to be welcomed
as if they were Christ (RB 53).
Fitting courtesy should be paid to all guests - let them be met with all the attention
charity inspires - let utter humbleness be shown to all - let every kindness be shown
them (RB 53).
Priests should realize that they are now all the more bound
to submit to the regular discipline.
And let them not by reason of their priesthood
forget the obedience and discipline of the Rule (RB 62).
Let the younger brethren honour their seniors,
and the seniors love their juniors (RB 63).
Whenever brethren meet one another,
a junior will ask a senior’s blessing.
When one of higher rank comes along,
an inferior will rise and offer him a seat (RB 53).
Not only to the Abbot should the blessing of obedience be shown by all,
but the brethren should also be obedient to each other,
realising that by this road of obedience they will journey to God.
Therefore ... let the juniors obey their seniors with all charity and zeal (RB 71).
So that in all things God may be glorified (RB 57).

“GOOD ZEAL” (Extracted from RB 72)
Let them bear with weaknesses,
whether of body or of character,
with the most tolerant patience.
Let them vie with one another in showing mutual obedience.
Let no one follow what he thinks is useful to himself,
but what is of use to another.
Let them cherish mutual love chastely as brothers.
Let them fear God lovingly.
Let them love their Abbot with sincere and humble charity.
Let them put absolutely nothing before Christ (RB 72).

PART 3: THE SUM OF ST BENEDICT’S TEACHING ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOR EVER (Heb 13:8).
The spirit of our Holy Father Benedict can be seen in these words: his Rule begins
with Christ, and ends with Him. Christ’s Life and Love are the whole purpose of a
monk.
1. At the beginning of the Rule the goal of monastic life is defined as serving as
a soldier of Christ:
To you then my words are now addressed, who are renouncing your own desires and, on entering the service of Christ the Lord our true King, are taking up the strong and glorious arms of obedience (RB Prologue).

2. The monks should see Christ in everyone, namely:

**In the Abbot:** For he is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery (RB 2).

The Abbot is called by a title of Christ’s, as the Apostle says: ‘You have received the spirit of sonship, when we cry Abba, Father’ (RB 2).

The Abbot, because he is believed to hold the place of Christ, is to be called ‘Lord’ and ‘Abbot’, not through any pretension on his part, but for the honour and love of Christ, and he must take this to heart and behave in a way deserving of such an honour (RB 63).

**In Guests:** All visitors who call are to be welcomed as if they were Christ, for he will one day say: ‘I was a stranger and you took me in’ (RB 53).

Let Christ be worshipped in visitors, who is indeed received in their person (RB 53).

**In the Poor:** It is in the welcome given to the poor and the strangers that special attention should be paid, because in them Christ is more truly received (RB 53).

**In the Sick:** Before all and above all else, care must be taken of the sick, so that they may be served as Christ himself in very deed, for he said: ‘I was sick and you visited me’ (RB 36).

Here we may recall the saying which is very much to the mind of St Benedict: ‘Have you seen a brother? you have seen your Lord’ (Tertullian, On Prayer, 26).

3. Similarly, in all the actions of daily life a monk ought to look to Christ: by refusing to gratify ourselves that we may follow Christ (RB 4); by obedience, through imitation of Him (RB 5, 7); in temptation, by dashing evil thoughts on Christ (RB Prologue, 4); by patience, persevering in the monastery until death, sharing in his passion of Christ (RB Prologue).

For love of Christ, arriving at that perfect love which casts out fear (RB 7).

4. St Benedict said to the Hermit who had bound himself to a cave by an iron chain: ‘If you are a servant of Christ, let no chain of iron hold you, but the chain of Christ’ (St Gregory the Great, Dialogues 3, 16).

5. The kind and measure of love which the monk should bear towards Christ is described by St Benedict in the following maxims:

To put nothing before the love of Christ (RB 4).

Reckon nothing dearer to oneself than Christ (RB 5).

Put absolutely nothing before Christ, and may he bring us all together to life eternal! (RB 72).

And with these words, since Chapter 73 is really an appendix, the Rule closes.