



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Homily for St. Benedict's Feast Day at the Benedictine Abbey
Monday, March 21, 2011
Subiaco, Arkansas

[This is not like a Monastic Scriptorium, but an iPad helps me, and perhaps is the current equivalent of the functions that the Scriptorium performed!!]

I wish to thank Abbot Jerome and the community welcoming me here today. Your welcome certainly has been an expression of what is found in the Rule of St. Benedict, to treat each guest as Christ Himself! I believe, in many ways, that even before I arrived, I have come to know you and your community, through the Faith and the families of the people in so many of the parishes of the Diocese of Fort Worth at St. Mary's Parish and Laneri High School, Rhineland, Windthorst, Muenster, Lindsay, and Gainesville. What your monks did, and the living of the rule of St. Benedict in North Texas continues to bear fruit to this day, even though the monks are no longer physically present, through the families, the faith, and the connections with the Academy and the Monastery, you are still a part of the life of the Diocese of the Church in Fort Worth, of the Faith in North Texas.

As our Liturgical Calendar brings us once more to this feast day of St. Benedict, let us reflect on the words of Pope Benedict at the Angelus on July 10, 2005. He spoke about how Benedict, amid the ashes of the decaying Roman Empire, planted the seeds of a new civilization. The principal aim, the Pope said, of St. Benedict was not to found a monastic institution to evangelize the barbarian peoples, but "he pointed out to his followers the search for God as the fundamental and indeed, one and only aim of life: 'Quaerere Deum' [to seek God].

To seek God, then finds it, seems to me, the fullest expression of the Rule in Chapter IV, No. 21, "To prefer nothing to the love of Christ."

That, I would say has been the guiding force and foundation to the Benedictine rule and way of life all through the centuries, and has been a light and path wherever the followers of St. Benedict were called and sent through the ages, in seeking God, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ." Everything else that they accomplished, that was built, came from that foundation.

The Scriptures for today certainly give us a clear road map of how to do that. Abbot Martin Marty, Father Isidor Hobi, and Father Wolfgang Schlumpf, among others in the pioneer days of this foundation certainly followed the words of the rule, as did those first monks who came to Texas in the 1880's to lead a monastic life on what was very much a frontier existence with all of the rigors of the day and time.

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To seek God, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ, is certainly something I have seen in my nearly six years in Fort Worth, in the parishes and foundations that you started. I can still see it to this day in many of the families of Muenster and Lindsay and elsewhere whom I have come to know and love. They, in turn, have showed me that as well. Your presence and spirit, and the rule of St. Benedict still are present in that way.

However, the challenge remains for us today, how do we seek God, how do we prefer nothing to the love of Christ. I believe, like St. Benedict, we live in a culture and society that seems to be in ashes, as well: a post Christian culture that has some of the same overtones of the pagan culture that resulted in the fall of Rome and resulted in the ashes of civilization. If that in fact, is the case, then the task of building again falls to us. Rather than to lament only as the Psalmist says, "Foundations once destroyed, what can the just do?," should we not, rather than trying to construct or invent some new program, seek God above all else, in preferring "nothing to the love of Christ," starting first with our own lives.

With that as the foundation for the rule of St. Benedict, a new civilization was built in his time. Let us, with confidence and hope, take up those words and that task in this age where the Lord has brought all of us together. Make this the calling for our own lives, and then for the lives of all whom God's Providence sends our way in monastic life, the apostolic work of this monastery, and in the lives of those who come in our in our daily lives and ministry. In the close of his rule, St. Benedict said *"Then with Christ's help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues mentioned above, and under God's protections you will reach them. Amen."*

+ Bishop Kevin Vann

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