

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese

Scripture: Philippians 2:4-11

Song: *Give me oil in my lamp*

Today and tomorrow, I will be looking with you at what we learn from St Benedict, one of the greatest figures of Christian monasticism. We celebrate his Feast Day tomorrow.

Benedict lived at the time when Europe had succumbed to Germanic invaders and was largely non-Christian. His parents were wealthy and influential. Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica grew up in the comfort of their home and under the loving care of their parents. He was born about the year 480 in Nursia, Italy. At the age of 14 Benedict was sent to Rome to complete his education. After two years young Benedict fled from the city, realizing that life in Rome then was a hotbed of vice and knowing that God was calling him to monastic life. After a brief stay with some holy men outside Rome, he set off again seeking **a life of intense prayer and solitude**. He received the monastic habit, a sheepskin, from St Romanus, a monk and settled in a cave at Subiaco. St Romanus arranged to provide him with food, to be let down in a basket by a rope. There for more than ten years, Benedict lived in solitude, silence, penance, and prayer.

When Benedict was there for three years, a priest was inspired by God to bring him food on Easter Sunday. Soon afterwards some shepherds climbing the mountains happened to meet Benedict in his cave. He gave them **spiritual help**, and his fame as a holy man spread. Benedict could not live in solitude anymore. Many earnest men desired to join him in the quest for holiness and to live near him. Therefore, he founded near Subiaco twelve monasteries of twelve monks each.

In 529, guided by God, Benedict left Subiaco after living there for 28 years, he went south to Monte Cassino where he had received land as a donation. Here he erected a monastery, which became a world-famous abbey. Benedict settled here for the rest of his life. It was here that he wrote his monastic rule which even today is the basic rule of very many religious. It is a remarkable document, strong, balanced, exquisitely charitable and fervent in faith. Benedict emphasised community life and divided the monk's day between prayer, study and manual work. He laid great stress on the virtues of obedience and humility. For him, the abbot, who is to rule with paternal love and compassion, is the personification of the paternal authority of God. In his rule Benedict states that to fulfil faithfully the service of God is to love humanity with sincere charity.

In his book of rules, Benedict writes, *"This is the kind of zeal then which monks should exercise with fervent love, that is: let them be eager to show honour to one another; let them bear patiently their infirmities whether of body or character; let them vie with one another in mutual obedience; let no one follow what he judges advantageous for himself but rather for another; let them love each other in all chastity; let them fear God in love; let them love their abbot with sincere and humble charity; let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may Christ lead us all alike to everlasting life."* These certainly are excellent guidelines for the life of a religious anywhere, any time.

This Rule, which is available in English translation, is eminently practical and though written for monks, can be profitably read by any who seek to live their life for God. It offers an ordered life of prayer, hard work and active charity, leaving little time for the normal ways of self-indulgence.

Let me draw some thoughts to ponder on from how far we are for today. Different thoughts or words may stand out for you, that you may want to take into your prayer time.

Some encouragement for our Covid-19 family and friends who are in self-isolation, is to use this time of solitude for intense prayer. The infirmity of Covid-19 bears no stigma. Please be patient with yourselves. The invitation to all of us is to divide our day to keep a balance between prayer, study and work, including manual work. How are those gardens growing? Even in cramped spaces we can have a pot of herbs,

flowers or vegetables growing. It is exciting to watch them break through the soil and grow. A priest was inspired to take food to Benedict. Who are you inspired to take food to? Are we actively seeking holiness and doing acts of charity?

In the Rule of St Benedict we are told to show honour to one another. The monks are to love their abbot with sincere and humble love. Our clergy are in a similar position to an abbot. They are helping us to live the best life possible during Covid-19. For some the use of technology is a strain but they are trying their best. We also are aware of how expensive data is, so have to use many methods to have a wider reach in our communities. Our clergy are only human and on the forefront of keeping their congregations together. We will not always get it right. It does not matter how many times we stumble and fall. It is more important that we get up and go again, God being our helper. Please keep in touch with your clergy to encourage them and assure them of your prayers. Churchwardens and Parish Councils, like the monks you offered your lives to God, you are the core group to help shoulder the weight of ministry during this Covid-19 pandemic. Please do this individually and collectively.

With God's help, I will continue the thread of this reflection tomorrow.

Please **reach out** to your Spiritual Director, your mentor, or anyone who you regard as your spiritual companion.

I pray a prayer received from Prof Nico : *Covid-19 speeds forward; a mother sleeps on the street with her baby; a youngster gave up on life; beloved are killed on farms and in the townships; violence against women and children thrive; nations threaten each other with war; beloved mourn their departed. Lord, your children need you. Your world needs you. Only you are Lord. Rescue us. Redeem us. Save us. Heal us. Give us victory. Give us Shalom. Please Lord. Amen*

I am, Because we Are, Because God Is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Jesus is Lord*