



God's Delightful Voice: A Benedictine Spirituality On-line Retreat

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- Monasticism: An Ancient Way For Modern Times***

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PART ONE: Monasticism: It's Not Just For Monks Any More

“Therefore we intend to establish a school for God’s service. In drawing up its regulations we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love.” Prol.45-47

“...God waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, these holy teachings. Prol.35



We live in a time when people seem to be “discovering” spirituality. In an increasingly busy, shallow and materialist society many of us are recognizing our need for God and our desire to grow in holiness. Books, courses and web sites abound and assure us that we can fill our deep, often inarticulate desire for something more, something beyond ourselves. This plethora of resources gives us innumerable answers for how to fill the God- shaped hole in our lives.

However, much of the well-intentioned spirituality produced today has little depth or staying power. The answers are often simplistic and the promises shallow. We continue to buy the books or go to the websites because most of us prefer easy, quick answers to difficult, life-long questions. But ultimately the easy, quick ways and answers will not satisfy or endure. The spiritual journey, our journey to God, is the journey of a lifetime. We will not be transformed overnight, once and for all, by simply reading one more book, making one more resolution to change or listening to one more expert.

In this age of quick fixes and easy solutions many people are rediscovering an ancient and tested path of spiritual wisdom. For over fifteen hundred years men and women, monastics and lay people alike have listened to and followed the wisdom of the monastic way. This way has endured throughout the centuries because it is a simple, practical way for ordinary people who want to deepen their relationship with God.

The monastic way is a spiritual path that honors and responds to the call of God each of us hears in our life. Monasticism acknowledges that God’s call to a deeper relationship of love is real and that the journey to respond to God’s call is not always easy or short. It is a path that emphasizes commitment to the long haul, to our need for God and our need for others to help us along the way.

Exercise – Getting Started:



- Spend some time reflecting on what you hope to get out of this retreat, be as specific and honest as possible and write your expectations in a retreat journal.

- Write down a plan for how you will make the time for reflection each day.

- When and how often will you schedule your reading and reflection times during this retreat?

- How will you prevent interruptions and distractions?

- Decide on a specific place that will be your "retreat spot" during this time.



Monasticism: An Ancient Way For Modern Times

Monasticism is not something that died out after the Middle Ages. For many people the term “monk” or “monastery” conjures up an image of medieval, black robed and hooded men in a monastery far from civilization. The reality is that the

monastic way is followed and practiced by many modern men and women in a wide variety of ways of life. Many are Religious (Sisters, Brothers and Priests) who are engaged in active ministry throughout the world. Others are Nuns, Brothers and Priests who continue a traditional lifestyle that emphasizes the enclosed, contemplative aspect of monastic life. More and more people who live according to monastic values are married, have families or are single with no desire to enter religious life but see monastic spirituality as a way to deepen their relationship with God.

There are a variety of monastic traditions in the Christian Church and in other world religions but they all have certain elements in common. Monasticism emphasizes the deep, archetypal desire to seek God as the primary activity of our lives and recognizes the need for structure and community to do so.

In the Western Church the predominant monastic tradition is that founded by Saint Benedict of Nursia in the 6th century. The modern followers of Benedict, Benedictines, continue to use the guidebook or monastic “Rule” that he wrote as a guide to their way of life. Benedict’s Rule is a book of deep wisdom, grounded in Scripture and common sense. It has been a spiritual guide for countless men and women across the centuries and continues to be so today.

Many of the terms Benedict used in his Rule are still used today and will recur throughout this retreat. The spiritual leader of a group of Benedictines is called an abbot or prior in men’s communities and an abbess or prioress in women’s communities. Benedictine women today are reclaiming the monastic vocabulary that is part of their heritage and call their communities “monasteries” rather than convents. A monastery is simply a place where people follow the monastic way,

whether men or women. Throughout this retreat the term “monastic” will be used both as an adjective as well as a noun to describe men or women who follow this way of life.

The Benedictine, monastic way is not for people who want instant spirituality for an age that demands everything instantly. Benedictine spirituality is for the long-haul. It offers a way of life, practices and structures, not simple answers. But for people who know that simple answers ultimately fail to satisfy and have realized that conversion is a life-long process, the monastic way can be a satisfying spiritual path.

May this retreat be for you the beginning of a journey of deep listening to the “delightful voice of God” who calls each of us to a deeper relationship. As you learn about the Benedictine way you will be surrounded and accompanied by the witness of innumerable men and women who have been brought to holiness and a closer relationship with God in following this way of life.



Questions for Reflection:

- What is your current spirituality and practice?
- What kind of answers are you looking for?
- What appeals to you about the Benedictine, monastic approach to spirituality?