

Homily for the  
Solemnity of St. Benedict  
Preached by Fr. Brendan Freeman  
(July 11, 2006)

[Scripture Readings: Prov 2:1-9; Eph 4:1-6; Lk 22:14-20,24-30]

St. Benedict's Rule for Monks is called a Classic of Western Spirituality. A classic is a work of art, a literature that speaks to every age. Its wealth is never exhausted.

If you look at our Cistercian Fathers, they produced something new based on the Rule of St. Benedict even though the Rule had been in existence for over 600 years by their time. What was new and yet hidden, you might say, in the rule was their teaching on friendship. Nowhere in the Rule will you read that the monks should be friends with each other.

The seed is there and it waited for the Cistercian renewal to bring it to flower. What is the seed? It is highlighted in today's liturgy in both the Scripture readings and prayers as well as in the Office. One of the great themes running through the liturgy today is unity.

The little passage we heard from Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a wonderful summary of this theme from the Rule: "Bear with one another through love, strive to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:2).

There are many places in the Rule where this teaching is emphasized. It is the undercurrent flowing through the whole Rule of life. As such it is the current flowing through our whole monastic day. A monastic day is only different from any other day in that we try to live out the principles of the Rule: bearing each other in love.

When you get a group of people living together with a shared vision of life in the normal course of time they become friends. This was known in Benedict's day but it was not emphasized. It was more or less a by-product of monasticism.

In the Middle Ages the reality of friendship took center stage. We are the inheritors of grace. It is a big part of our charism. Our Fathers gave a new definition to the monastery. They called it "a school of love". This is a classic, it will never be exhausted. Love and friendship is the air we breathe.

Perhaps this is a gift monasticism can offer our modern world: an ordered friendship, an ordered love. This friendship is not based on physical attraction or material goods. It is based on a shared vision of what life is all about. It is based on working together to build up the body of Christ through virtuous living and prayer. It is based on giving up your own will for the sake of

the common good. There is thought of personal return but it is not the primary good that is sought.

St. Benedict did not create monastic life. His generous gift to the Church was to make it accessible to the ordinary Christians. His work is like a vine with many clusters of grapes. All kinds of people, monastic and non-monastic can enjoy his wine. When people live his rule honestly and thoughtfully they become friends. They don't set out to become friends. That is not the purpose of the Rule. However, in the process of living the Gospel, people become friends.

This is a great gift St. Benedict gives us.