

Benedict sees Lent (and the whole Christian Church sees it) as fully entering into the Paschal mystery. It is a dying to the false self, dying to all our sins. It is the dying to all the junk and nonsense that fill our lives and living to the reality of who we are as men who have been baptized into Christ. We are men called to share the fullness of the divine joy-the divine life. That is why God made us. Through baptism, God has brought us to that level of being able to share the fullness of divine life.



Benedict says at the beginning: "*The life of a monk ought to be a continuous Lent. Since few, however, have the strength for this, we urge the entire community during these days of Lent to keep its manner of life most pure*" [3]. And he comes up with the idea of doing some particular thing that is a hook on which everything hangs. Each day, do some little thing that says, This is a special time. It is a time that we are keeping before us to find out what we really want. Where this is going? What we are looking for? What is our deepest being crying out for? It is a time to cut through some of the stuff which we have been grabbing at to try to find some fulfillment, some happiness, some meaning. We realize that any and all has its meaning only to the extent that it is a means of coming to what we really want and what we are really made for.

Purity of heart. Lent is a time of coming to purity of heart. It is the pure of heart who see God. It is a challenge. But I think the community should support us in this by certain signs, symbols, and actions. The older monks may remember how dramatic Lent was. We put up this great Lenten curtain in the church. Each time you entered the church, you were confronted with this mass of purple that said, This is a special time. You are getting ready to penetrate through the veil and come to the fullness of the Paschal joy. You could not miss Lent. It just knocked you over. We had a lot of other things, too. We had much more fasting with days of bread of water. We had penitential processions through the cloister as we sang the penitential psalms. Then we would prostrate in church and chant the litany of saints. There were a lot of things that constantly reminded us of this special time of Lent. What can we do today? What do we want to do as a community to support each member of the community in entering more fully into the full meaning of this wonderful time?

Lectio during Lent. In chapter forty-eight, Benedict sets forth an observance which is still prevalent in our order. He is talking in that chapter of the daily manual labor but he goes on to say:

During the days of Lent, they should be free in the morning to read until the third hour, after which they will work at their assigned tasks until the end of the tenth hour. During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through. These books are to be distributed at the beginning of Lent. [4]

Benedict is speaking of *lectio* which consists of *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (reflection), *oratio* (response), and *contemplatio* (rest) [5]. The idea was that you began by letting the Lord have the first word. For monks back then, *lectio* did not always mean reading a book in the sense that today we can easily pick up a book. They did not have books and very few even knew how to read. In most monasteries, though, choir monks were taught to read. *Lectio* in Benedict's time was calling up to memory what was previously memorized.

Older monks will remember spending most of your postulancy memorizing psalms and prayers. We memorized the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. So we carried a lot of the scriptures in our head. In Benedict's time, even more memorization was being done. *Lectio* was a time when you sat down and let the Lord speak to you. You then responded to that and moved into contemplation.

During Lent, Benedict provided extra time for reading as well as a special book to be read. He said, "During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through." In a way, a special word from of the Lord was to be heard during Lent. When I was a young religious, you had no say about the book. You were just given a book. On the first Sunday of Lent you would be thinking, What am I going to have to read for the next forty days? For both my first and second year novitiate, I was presented with Saint Alphonsus Liguori's *The Glories of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. In recent times, for the monasteries who still have the distribution of books, each monk usually chooses the book himself or talks it over with his spiritual guide. It is spending significant time with that particular book and that particular author which helps in the entering into the Paschal mystery. Benedict goes on to say:

Above all, one or two seniors must surely be deputed to make the rounds of the monastery while the brothers are reading. Their duty is to see that no brother is so apathetic as to waste time or engage in idle talk to the neglect of his reading, and so not only harm himself but also distract others. If such a monk is found-God forbid-he should be reprov'd a first and a second time. If he does not amend, he must be subjected to the punishment of the rule as a warning to others. Further, brothers ought not to associate with one another at inappropriate times. [6] Benedict also speaks about Sunday as being a day for *lectio* [7].

Divine relationship. As we look at Lent as individuals and as community, it as a time for renewal in *lectio*. It is a time for opening ourselves in a renewed and special way to letting the Lord open up our lives in relationship with him through *lectio*. We allow his word be heard and resound, and then respond to it after giving it ample time.

True friendship only grows when friends give each other time. The Lord wants us to be his friends in a most deep and intimate and total way. We enter into the divine relationship with the realization that this divine relationship occurs in our lives in human ways. One of them is spending time with a friend. *Lectio* is precisely that. We sit down, and we know the Lord is present in his Word. We sit down and let him speak to us, and we speak to him. We spend that time with him which opens out into real contemplation. The Holy Spirit brings us into deep communion with God with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

I invite everybody to spend time on reflecting on these chapters in the Rule. As we meet in our different groups during the next two weeks, we will try to look at it and say, What do we as a community want to do to support each member of the community in living the Lenten mystery in fullness? Let us come together to one of the greatest Easters of our lives. May each of us fully experience, and we as a community experience, the fact that we have been baptized into Christ and have risen with Christ. We are even now called to live the risen life.

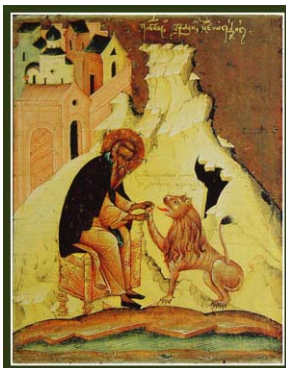
And may the Divine Assistance remain with us always.
Amen.

NOTES

1. RB 15:1-4. 2. RB 49:1-10. 3. RB 49:1-2. 4. RB 48:14-16.
5. See M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).
6. RB 48:17-21. 7. RB 48:22-23.

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Desert Wisdom



The holy fathers used to say of John, the disciple of Abba Paul, that he possessed the virtues of great humility and obedience to such extent that he would make no objection whatsoever no matter how difficult the tasks the abba set him, nor did he ever grumble.

When a certain tool was needed for the monastery workshop the abbot told him to go to the nearest village to buy it and bring it back as quickly as possible. Now although there was

a fierce lioness in that place, the disciple John got up to go immediately as the abba asked. As he went out he said to the abba, "Father, I have heard that many people say there is a fierce lioness in that place." The abbot half jokingly said to him, "Well if it comes upon you catch it, tie it up, and bring it back here!"

When he got to the place that evening the lioness rushed out at him and he tried to catch it, but the lioness slipped out of his grasp and ran off. John ran after her, crying, "But my abba commanded me to tie you up and bring you back with me." The animal immediately stood still, and he secured it and led it back in the direction of the monastery.

By this time it was getting late and the abba was getting worried about him, when suddenly John appeared leading the lioness after him. Seeing this the abba was astonished and gave thanks to our Lord and Savior. "See, father," John said, "I have brought back the lioness as you said." The abba decided to teach him humility lest John should think he had done something marvelous and said, "Since you are so stupid, go and take this stupid beast back. Let it go, say goodbye to it, and let it go to its own place."

The Ordo

Listed are the Feast days and Memorials that are observed at the Monastery and follows the Ordo of the American Cassinese Congregation. You can also see the observed feast days by going to <http://oblates.gastonhobbit.org/ordo>

MARCH

- 15 Third Sunday of Lent. (Week III)
- 19 Joseph Husband of the Virgin Mary. Solemnity.
- 21 Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict. Solemnity.
- 22 Fourth Sunday of Lent (Week IV)
- 25 Annunciation of the Lord. Solemnity
- 28 Anniversary of Dedication of Belmont Abbey. Solemnity
- 29 Fifth Sunday of Lent. (Week I)

APRIL

- 5 **Passion Sunday**
- 9 **Thursday of Holy Week.** Vespers is said only by those who did not participate in the Evening Mass.
- 10 **Good Friday.** Vespers is said only by those who did not participate in the Afternoon Liturgy. The third degree of humility (Rule of Benedict, Ch 7) is read today and tomorrow.
- 11 **Holy Saturday.** Vespers at usual hour; Compline is said only by those who do not participate in the Easter Vigil.
- 12 **Easter Sunday.** Solemnity "Regina Caeli" is sung after Compline throughout the Easter Season.
- 19 **Second Sunday of Easter.** Mercy Sunday.
- 20 **Week II begins today**

April Meeting

Our next meeting will be April 19, 2009.