

Socrates said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” In his Prologue to his Rule, Benedict says “attend to the important things in life.” Both of these edicts are directing us to pay attention, choose wisely and live life consciously. All of us in this room tonight are trying to do just that. ... because we’re here. Because we’ve chosen to join a group trying to live our lives in a certain manner. This group will soon be celebrating the one-year anniversary of our founding. And because of that, I would like us to look again and repeat some vows we took when we entered community.

Hand out

Some of us in this room may have repeated these vows last Sunday, when we welcomed Annemie Nanette Sharp as she received the Sacrament of Baptism. We joined with Annemie in committing ourselves to Christ. In effect, we said, “this is how I choose to live my life.”

In his chapters on The Self & Others and The Self & Things, Benedict summarizes how a Christian is to live. Benedict is asking us to look at how we relate to ourself, to others, and to things. And he says that if we can reach a BALANCE in those relationships, then we are well on the way to becoming a follower of Christ, one who lives as Christ lived and is a reflection of the ideals Christ modeled.

How we relate to others and to “things” shows the world our true selves. We may speak of good things but if we don’t DO them ... who are we?

It’s sometimes hard to interpret Benedict’s language from 1500 years ago, but when Benedict says in Chapter 31 that the cellarer should be a person who is wise, mature in conduct, temperate, and not wasteful it’s not a far stretch for me to look at my credit card balance. Have I been so unwise and intemperate in chasing after “things” that I have sacrificed my ability to tithe – or to support a food pantry or other outreach program? Benedict admonishes that when we can’t control ourselves, we hurt others.

I loved Joan Chittester’s commentary on this section. She says that once a rabbi received a visitor into his home and the visitor was astonished by how little furniture the rabbi owned. He asked the rabbi, “Why don’t you have any furniture?” The rabbi replied, “Why don’t you?” The visitor said “Well, I’m only passing through.” And the Rabbi answered, “As am I.”

Her point is the same as Benedict’s. On the journey to heaven, “things” can tie us to earth.

The point of Benedictine life is to live simply, joyfully and fully.

We live simple because simplicity is the best way to live. It frees us to help others and to live in community with others. The Shaker's also knew this and expressed it in music: "T'is a Gift to be Simple."

If living simply is the best way to live, living joyfully can be amazingly difficult at times. Benedict says "don't grumble." We would say "don't complain – or PLEASE, stop whining!" We all know what it's like to be around someone who never stops finding the dark center of the cloud. I say "What a beautiful oak tree", and she says "It's planted too close to the house – if it falls it will kill someone." We're at work, and someone says "Let's all meet in half an hour and work through this", and he says "It will never happen."

Living With, Working with, Being in Community with someone who frequently complains can destroy our souls. It can suck the life out of a new enterprise, a resolution we make, even just an attempt to enjoy a beautiful day. We recognize these people, but do we recognize it in ourselves? Do I watch how I speak? We can't go around being Polly Anna all the time, but we can try to get out of the sheer habit of complaining. Living joyfully is a serious component of Benedict's rule because the weight of our negativity can bring down everyone around us.

And lastly – we are told to live life fully? How can we do that? It means dependence on God. It means handing God our life – every day – every morning. If, when we arise we say, "I offer you all my prayers, works, and sacrifices of this day" – and mean it – our lives will be full. Our lives will have enough "things" in them that they will be full.

To be able to live life simply, joyfully and fully is a stretch. A big stretch. We're not going to do it overnight and we're going to need help. We can't give our lives and ourselves fully to God without involving God in the process.

Benedict asks, "Are you hastening toward your heavenly home? Then with Christ's help, keep this little rule." It is through deliberately establishing and keeping a "rule", a "method" of living a deliberate Christian life that we can hear and answer God's call "Follow me".