

Benedict of Nursia 11 July
Abbot, c. 547 — Memorial

Today we honour Benedict, an abbot in sixth-century Italy and the author of an influential Rule for communities of monks and nuns.

In his youth Benedict abandoned society and for many years dwelt all alone in a cave in order to learn complete obedience to the will of Christ. Word of his holy life spread throughout Italy, and soon he was surrounded by several thousand disciples, whom he formed into a single community. He eventually moved to Monte Cassino, where he gathered a second community of monks. There he died around the year 547. Shortly before his death Benedict drew up a Rule for the continuing nurture of his community. This Rule teaches monks two chief duties — obedience to their abbot and the work of prayer. Obedience is not meant to be an end in itself; it is supposed to foster stability in spiritual growth, so that each monk might look beyond his own needs and support his brothers in attaining the common goal of perfect conformity to Christ. This communal discipline finds its chief expression through the daily offices, which Benedict called "the work of God." Seven times a day the whole community gathers to pray the Psalms, hear Scripture, and offer intercession for the needs of the Church and the world. As with the precept of obedience, "the work of God" is meant to be a work of love in Jesus Christ.

Several centuries after Benedict's death, his Rule was adopted by other monastic communities throughout Europe and became the foundation for the Order of St. Benedict, which flourishes in the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions to this day.

See Readings, page 602.

Sentence

Pray at all times in the Spirit in every prayer and supplication
Ephesians 6. 18

Collect

Eternal God,
you endowed your holy servant Benedict
with gifts of discernment and power
to be a true and faithful guide
in the way of Christian perfection.
Instill in our hearts the virtues of stability and concord,
that our prayers may be fixed on you
and our judgements may be formed
according to your great commandment of love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Acts 2.42-47a Psalm 34.1-8

Refrain Look on the Lord and be radiant.
John 15.12-17

Prayer over the Gifts

Gracious Lord,
by the Rule of your blessed servant Benedict
you have taught numberless Christians
to rejoice in the holy work of prayer.
Let our devotion be joined with these gifts
that we may exalt your Name together
and taste the abundance of your goodness.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface of a Saint

Prayer after Communion

Grant us, O Lord our God,
after the example of your holy servant Benedict,
to practise with joy the labour of obedience,
that we may never cease from the work of prayer
nor ever relent in our service to one another.
We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.