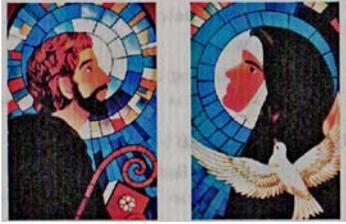


SSCS EVENTS 2011 june - August 2011



Once a year the Benedictine Institute for Spiritual and Liturgical Formation offers a “major” major study on the Rule of St. Benedict to the Benedictine and Cistercian communities in the Philippines. Also invited are interested Benedictine members from overseas. This year we again had the singular privilege of having Sr. Agquinata Boeckmann, OSB, from the

Generalate of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Rome give us a 4-week Intensive RB Study from July 18-August 18, 2011. Forty participants took up the challenge of exploring the texts of the Holy Rule under her tutelage. They spent the mornings with an exegesis of the RB chapters using the semantic approach which Sister developed through 30 years of research. The afternoons were devoted to personal reflection / group work.



HOW CAN A DOCUMENT OF THE 6TH CENTURY PRESUME TO SAY SOMETHING TO US OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

Sr. Aquinata tackled this question with regard to the 6TH century Rule written by the monk Benedict in Monte Cassino towards the end of his life. That was around the year 547 AD. Since then until now, this little book of the Holy Rule has exerted a drawing power beyond human calculation. Sr. Aquinata and her students pored over its chapters to understand the Rule and its life-giving dynamism for all ages – including our age.

At face value the Rule is easy enough to understand. What is difficult is its categorical imperative that it be lived. In the exegesis of the Rule Sr. Aquinata drove home the point that Benedict used strong verbs, intense expressions, and absolute statements to say that it is a win all or lose all. Yet, the Rule escapes the harshness of power through the love that shines within: “Thou shalt not break the bruised reed” (RB 64.) The seminar participants gladly took the challenge of exploring the difficult chapters on obedience, silence and humility which create the backbone of the Rule. They are doubly difficult because they are injunctions which are far removed from the life style of our modern and post modern people.

Obedience, silence and humility! What do they really mean and what have they to tell us today?

A mixed group

A BNEK group

A Tutzing group



From the “Brief Notes” of Sr. Esperanza we have a precious resume of the lectures on these three rather “difficult” teachings of St. Benedict.

Obedience

The most distinguished character of obedience is immediacy. In fact, it is the first degree of humility (Obedience without delay) as mentioned in the RB. When we follow the voice of the ones who call us to a higher service or any service, we put down our own concerns and interests, allow ourselves to be led by the insight of another with a relaxed grasp. We empty ourselves out so that we can realize the presence of God, the divinely human. Human self will is our greatest enemy; obedience is a help for us in letting God prevail.

The Abbot is to be obeyed by the monk and yet Benedict is open to dialogue wherein the monk is heard. The monk sees Christ whom he loves as the One giving the task in the person of the Abbot. Hence, the monk obeys out of love for God Who loves him first. In other words, out of reverence to the Superior (Abbot), the monk obeys. If the order/command is impossible, the monk may ask for a dialogue with the superior, but at the end, he should heed the superior. Obey the human superior for love of God. We have to have the love of God; otherwise, this is not possible. Render obedience in humility.

Silence / Taciturnity

This is the cornerstone of Monastic / Benedictine life. Monastic silence which is our goal, is respect for others – a sense of place and spirit of peace. It helps us to listen always to the voice of God, to listen to another, to sit silently in the presence of God and to ponder. A monk refrains from speech for the love of silence. He is admonished to refrain from speaking even good words, but much more, from bad words. In chapter 72, it is implied in “*what he judges better for someone else*” that if the word is good for the others to hear, let him speak. If silence is good for the others, then silence is observed. We use our tongue to praise the Lord and not to speak or talk bad things. Refrain from speech for the edification of others. Silence would help persons live in unity and enable

them to see the needs of others in the community and of all peoples.

Silence is pure prayer. Authentic silence is the inner peace. It is a means to love, to be open to God and neighbor. It is an attitude to be attentive, to conquer sin, to conquer the negative.

Humility

This is one of the foundations of monastic life. True humility is simply a measure of the self that is accepted without exaggerated approval or exaggerated guilt. It is the ability to know ourselves as God knows us and to know that it is the little we are that is precisely our claim on God. It is the foundation of our relationship with God, our connectedness with others, our acceptance of ourselves, our way of using the goods of the earth and even our way of walking through the world without arrogance, domination, scorn, put-downs, disdain and self-centeredness.

In this chapter, St. Benedict teaches us a total human approach to God. If we reach out and meet God where He is, if we accept God’s will in our life, where our will does not prevail, if we are willing to learn from others, if we can see ourselves and accept ourselves for what we are and grow from that, if we can live simply, if we can respect others and reverence them, if we can be a good steward, then we will have achieved perfect love for God in Christ who casts out fear.

