

Walking with Saint Benedict

A Pilgrimage in Ripon Cathedral

This is one of a number of guided quiet meditations for use in the Cathedral, each with a different theme.

Please feel free to take the leaflet with you when you leave.

About the Cathedral

The Cathedral website can be found at www.riponcathedral.org.uk.

Cathedral Office Telephone No: 01765 603462.

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We begin at the Crossing

The Crossing

Walking with St Benedict

Beneath our feet lies a crypt built by St Wilfrid in the 670s. Stephen of Ripon, Wilfrid's biographer, writing shortly after Wilfrid's death in 710, tell us that it was here, in Wilfrid's monastic community in Ripon, that the Benedictine Rule was first used in England.

In this ancient church, the worship of God has continued unbroken for fourteen hundred years.

Today we celebrate that wonderful Benedictine link, and come together to explore its relevance for us.

Benedict was born into a world of turbulence and violence. The fall of Rome in 410 AD, seventy years before his birth, had shocked the civilized world. The onslaught of 'barbarian' tribes brought about the end of the Western empire in 476 AD and Italy was ravaged by war. The sixth century was an age characterized by danger, mass injustice, dislocation of population, and the apparent collapse of almost all high culture. Not even the Church was spared disruption as theological controversies raged. It was into this chaos that Benedict brought the promise of an ordered, Christ-centred life.

Almighty God,
by whose grace alone we are accepted
and called to your service:
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit
and make us worthy of our calling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Now move to the Quire

The Quire

A Vision of Community

Here, in the Quire, the community of the Cathedral offers daily worship to God. Here we can share that community by offering our own prayers, and by reflecting on the importance of community in our lives.

Benedict, born into a wealthy family in Italy, abandoned his studies and his wealth and for a time lived a solitary life in a cave near Subiaco. His spirituality attracted others to join him, and in due course he moved to Monte Cassino, south of Rome, where he established a community of monks under the guidance of a Rule of Life that he wrote for them. This, the Rule of St Benedict, shaped the development of the monastic life throughout Western Christendom. His vision was of a community of love and of balance, 'Preferring nothing to the love of Christ'.

The first priority of a Benedictine community was to express the love of God in worship, meeting in the church to sing the Daily Hours which regularly punctuated the day and the night. It was Wilfrid who invited Eddius Stephanus from Kent to teach his new community in Ripon how to sing these services to the glory of God. As the Benedictine Rule makes clear, between the services there was time for manual labour, study, private prayer, simple meals eaten in community and regular rest. In all of this, each individual was serving God, wherever they were and whatever they were doing.

You may want to spend some time thinking about how you balance your own life, given the many pressures that face us all.

Gracious and holy Father,
please give me: intellect to understand you; reason to discern
you; diligence to seek you;
wisdom to find you; a spirit to know you;
a heart to meditate upon you;
ears to hear you; eyes to see you;
a tongue to proclaim you; a way of life pleasing to you;
patience to wait for you;
and perseverance to look for you.
Grant me: a perfect end; your holy presence;
A blessed resurrection;
and life everlasting. Amen

Next move to the Chapel of St Peter, which is to the left of the High Altar.

St Peter's Chapel

Obedience

In this place we remember the obedience of St Peter and all the disciples in answering the call from Jesus to 'follow me!' We remember too that when Wilfrid established his church here, he dedicated it to St Peter, reflecting his own obedience to God's call, and his recollection of Christ's words to Peter,

You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16: 18

The First Vow of the Benedictine order is of Obedience and the first word of the Rule of St Benedict is 'Listen'.

Listening is the root of obedience – to listen and to act, making a living and loving response. We too are called to be observant and obedient to God's Word, to each other and to ourselves.

When we hear and obey, we enter into relationship, an encounter. When we listen to each other, there is accountability and a transparency as we attend to each other's needs.

God be in my head,
and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes,
and in my looking;
God be in my mouth,
and in my speaking;
God be in my heart,
and in my thinking;
God be at mine end,
and at my departing. Amen

Move back to the Crossing.

The Crossing

Stability

In the Benedictine Rule, Stability is the Second Vow. It is both an outward and inner condition, calling for rootedness and faithfulness to a place and to a community.

Wilfrid's seventh century crypt is beneath our feet and above us soars part of the Cathedral that was built in the twelfth century. Both speak to us across the centuries of the continuity and stability of Christian worship and Christian community in this place.

Our stability in faith is a response to that promise.

God of faithfulness,
teach us that we have a home
and that is Christ.
Enable us to be rooted in him,
the source of our staying power,
To stay put
and remain connected,
standing in the reality
of the present moment
and seeking to do
whatever You set before us,
In your Grace. Amen

Now walk towards the main entrance of the Cathedral and move to the Chapel of Justice and Peace, which is on your right, at the end of the side aisle.

The Chapel of Justice and Peace

Reconciliation

The Benedictine Rule points towards communities of peace and justice and reconciliation at work in the larger world.

The community is the first place
where you will make God's kingdom incarnate.
It is one of the countless points
where God's new people assemble in peace,
in reconciliation, justice and joy,
in praise of God and service to the world.

*From 'Rule for a New Brother'
by H van der Looy (1997)*

Father in heaven,
form in us the likeness of your Son
and deepen his life within us.
Send us as witnesses of Gospel joy
into a world of fragile peace and broken promises.
Transform all hearts with your love
so we may, in turn, love each other.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Next move towards the main entrance

The West Doors

Hospitality

The glass doors at the west end were given to the Cathedral in 2012. The top panels show scenes from Wilfrid's life. In the centre, he is seen as Bishop, with angels on either side. To the left he is seen on one of his missionary journeys, teaching the people of Sussex to fish in a time of famine; to the right he is returning to Ripon from one of his three journeys to Rome. The clear glass of the Narthex emphasises the seamless link between church and world.

Doorways are thresholds. By using a doorway, we are entering a new space, a new world, full of meaning and possibility.

There is a beautiful story told of St Cuthbert, when he was guest-master at the Celtic monastery founded at Ripon in the 650s, before it was committed to the Benedictine tradition by St Wilfrid.

A stranger arrived at the monastery in the dead of winter, and was received warmly by Cuthbert, who cared for his needs, washed his feet, and asked him to stay for breakfast. He left the young man to go and fetch some warm bread, but when he returned the visitor had gone, leaving no footprints in fresh snow. Instead, Cuthbert found three fresh loaves.

This story shows how, in the words of Benedict we should ‘Welcome everyone as if they were Christ’.

O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship,
and narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride and strife.
Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling-block to children,
nor to straying feet, but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter’s power.
God – make the door of this house the gateway to your eternal kingdom. Amen

Finally we move to the Font

The Font

Conversion of Life

Benedict says, ‘Always we begin again’.

In Baptism, we are called to ‘turn away from evil, and turn to Christ’. Here we consider the Third of the Benedictine Vows: Conversion of Life. This is a process of constantly changing direction whilst keeping our eyes focused on Jesus.

In Baptism, God reaches out with his love and gives us a place among his people. God promises to be with us in joy and in sorrow, to be our guide in life, and to bring us safely to heaven. In Baptism God invites us on a life-long journey.

Heavenly Father,
by the power of your Holy Spirit
you give to your faithful people new life in the water of
baptism.
Guide and strengthen us by the same Spirit,
that we who are born again may serve you in faith and love,
and grow into the full stature of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit
now and for ever. Amen.

Conclusion

St Benedict in his Rule emphasised the importance of achieving a balance in life between work, prayer and study with all of them being performed to the glory of God.

As we leave the Cathedral let us take inspiration and strength from the example of St Benedict and his Rule of Life, first used in England here in Ripon, which after almost fifteen hundred years offers insights and lessons for all of us today.

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
And may God bless and keep us always. Amen

Further Reading

St Benedict, *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed Carolinne White (2008) Penguin

Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St Benedict* (1999) Canterbury Press Norwich

The quotation from H Van Der Looy is taken from *Rule for a New Brother* (1997) Templegate Publishing



The Ripon Jewel

The Rule of St Benedict encouraged the practice of crafts and fine arts. Found in the general area of the Anglo-Saxon monastery in 1976, and datable, by its style, to the late seventh or eighth century, the Ripon Jewel is a fine example of contemporary application of Benedictine principles.

The Jewel is on display in the Cathedral Library.