




SAINT LOUIS
PRIORY SCHOOL

12

HALLMARKS
OF A
BENEDICTINE
SCHOOL



Abbot Gregory Mohrman, O.S.B. leads Saint Louis Abbey and is an alumnus and former Headmaster of Saint Louis Priory School. After much reflection and study, Abbot Gregory identified 12 hallmarks of a Benedictine school.

1. Love of God and Neighbor
2. Prayer and Worship
3. Listening
4. Discipline
5. Moral and Spiritual Development
6. Community and Stability
7. Hospitality
8. Stewardship
9. Humility
10. Obedience
11. Work
12. Conversion

We invite you to reflect on these important elements of a Benedictine education.

1 LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

The love of God and neighbor is at the heart of the Gospel and at the heart of Saint Benedict's Rule. Every aspect of Saint Benedict's teaching, whether spiritual or practical, stems from it and aims towards it. Accordingly, every aspect of life in a Benedictine school should stem from and aim towards the love of God and neighbor. It should animate the entire program of the school and direct every encounter between students and faculty, among all the various constituencies of the school community and in all the ways in which the school relates to the wider community.



PRAYER AND WORSHIP

2

Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God.
(RB 43:3)

Prayer is the fundamental human response to the Creator. In prayer we lift up our minds and hearts to God in attitudes of praise, thanksgiving, contrition and petition. Prayer is, at its most basic level, a conversation with God in which we both speak and listen. Saint Benedict realized that prayer and worship are the most important practices in fostering the love of God and neighbor. Prayer should be a regular feature of the school's life. We tell ourselves and the world most explicitly who we are as children of God in the Eucharist and other forms of liturgical prayer. A particularly important vehicle to foster this awareness of the presence of God is *lectio divina*, where (either individually or in groups) the Word of God is listened to attentively and taken into the heart so as to transform the inner life of the person. This is increasingly important in our day, where so many external forces are constantly clamoring for our attention. In Benedictine schools, prayer should be

present in a powerful way. A Benedictine school should provide regular opportunities for individuals to pray, both privately and communally. The Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, should be celebrated regularly, and the Liturgy of the Hours should feature prominently in the common life of the school. As a Benedictine school, the monastic tradition of *lectio divina* should be fostered. All students and faculty should have the opportunity to learn various forms of *lectio*. As a Benedictine school, we need to teach the value of silence and reflection as integral components of the whole person.



LISTENING 3

Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart. (RB Prologue 1)

Saint Benedict begins his Rule with the word "listen"; and, in doing so, he consciously locates his work within the wider context of wisdom literature, both scriptural and patristic. The teaching of the Rule is meant to be a guide for those seeking to acquire virtue and attain wisdom. In another place, Benedict writes: Speaking and teaching are the master's task; it befits the disciple to be silent and listen. (RB 6, 6) The master to whom Benedict refers is first and foremost the abbot, whose teaching is meant to hand on the wisdom of lived experience in the monastic life. Still, it must be noted that the master is also ultimately God who chose to reveal himself through the Word, both in the person of his Son, Jesus, and in the Sacred Scripture. Particularly in *lectio divina* we can hear God speaking to us. Listening, then, is the primary task of all those who truly seek God.

In a Benedictine school, listening "with the ear of the heart" is to be practiced by everyone. We listen first and foremost to the Word of God and to the Rule as part of our daily experience, both in public and in private. We listen to each other in the classroom as part of the learning act, but also in all our interactions. Students listen to teachers and coaches not only to gain knowledge or skill, but also to gain wisdom from the lived experiences of their elders. Teachers and coaches listen attentively to their students to hear the questions, cares and concerns of the young. In all circumstances we listen with respect to the voice of the other.



4 DISCIPLINE

"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life." (Matthew 7:14)

Saint Benedict makes it clear in his Rule the way to holiness and union with God requires a person to undertake a way of life which is characterized by a great deal of discipline. The daily perseverance in a way of life lived in charity and in the pursuit of virtue forms the individual and eventually prepares the path for one to move into an ever deeper relationship with God.

Self-discipline is a virtue whose merits are clear in any educational context. In a Benedictine school, however, the values of delaying gratification, putting the needs of others first, and choosing to deny oneself are particularly important, because they unite the individual in a strong way to the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. All members of the school community need to cultivate these habits of discipline, in order to foster the common good. Self-discipline is also essential for the cultivation of "excellence," whether academic, athletic, artistic, moral or spiritual.



MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft. When we have used them without ceasing day and night and have returned them on judgment day, our wages will be what the Lord has promised: "What eye has not seen nor ear heard, God has prepared for those who love him." (I Corinthians 2:9)

Saint Benedict makes clear in the chapter on the Tools for Good Works that a monastery is a place where virtue is practiced; all the members of the monastery should strive for virtue and for that love that casts out fear. In Benedictine schools, the fostering of the moral and spiritual life should go hand-in-hand with the academic program as an essential part of the school's mission. Indeed, the curricular and co-curricular life of the students and faculty form the context in which all members of the school can learn to live a more vibrant moral and spiritual life. The school's discipline system is designed to challenge all to grow in a deeper awareness of the demands of a truly moral life.



COMMUNITY AND STABILITY

First, there are the cenobites, that is to say, those who belong to a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot. (RB 1:2)

Saint Benedict defined his monks as those who live in community (as opposed to anchorites or hermits who lived alone) vowing to stay in that same community until death. For Saint Benedict, community is the place where the practice of charity is lived out on a daily basis, where God is encountered in the other, and where we find the way to salvation and eternal life. Benedictine schools should likewise be characterized by stability and community. In a school setting, the sense of community should be so real as to be almost palpable. This experience of community is expressed most powerfully in worship – especially at the Eucharist. This sense of community should also permeate the whole culture of the school, and lend a particular sense to all those elements of school life which we call “school spirit.” Stability in Benedictine schools would be characterized by that

sense each individual has of “having one’s place” – of being accepted and valued for who one is in the community, and of being a vital part of it as long as one is in the community, and that “Here we belong.” This sense of stability and community transcends the finite time that one spends at the school to include all the members of the community past and present. This is particularly true of the school’s alumni, who, though they rightly and necessarily “move on” from their place as students, will never lose their place in the community.



HOSPITALITY

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). ... Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received. (RB 53:15)

Hospitality is one of the most important values to Saint Benedict, as he sees it as one of the most concrete ways that his monks can encounter Christ. He also values the reception of guests as one special way by which a monastery can serve the poor. In Benedictine schools, the practice of hospitality should reflect this key concept of encountering Christ in the stranger and the guest, in the poor and those who are "pilgrims." All visitors to our schools – whether they be prospective students, visiting teams in competitions, guest speakers or workers – should experience the attention and concern, the warmth of welcome and sensitivity to any need that we would want shown to ourselves. Hospitality, however, is not just directed to the "outsider."

To the degree that every member of the community is a "pilgrim" and a "stranger" on this earth, we should also strive to see Christ in everyone and treat each person accordingly. Our community service projects are themselves an expression of St. Benedict's injunction to "receive the poor," even if it does not happen at the school.



8 STEWARDSHIP

The Cellarer will regard all the utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected.
(RB 31:10-11)

In the Book of Genesis, God, the Creator, entrusts his creation to man to “till and to keep it” (Gen 2:15). Christians understand that we have a moral duty to care for God’s creation and to use wisely the resources of this creation for the good of all human beings. Saint Benedict valued both frugality and the good stewardship of the monastery’s resources. He wanted things to be so arranged that everyone’s needs were provided for (yet without any sense of undue luxury), while, at the same time, making wise use of the material possessions of the monastery. These practices preserved over centuries have imbued Benedictine monasteries with a sense of good order and respect for both human and natural resources.

As an institution, a Benedictine school will aim to both shepherd all its resources with the

same attitude of good stewardship and impart to all its members a sense of obligation to good stewardship, at school and in their personal lives. In particular, the program of a Benedictine school should be committed to forming its students in good stewardship and the responsible use of natural resources. Combined with stability, stewardship should foster the desire in the community to hand on to the next generation a school in good order. A Benedictine school should strive to meet the highest standards of sustainability in its daily operations.



HUMILITY

"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light."
(Matthew 11:25-30)

Saint Benedict's teaching on humility is perhaps the most important for his understanding of monastic life. It also can be the hardest for us to understand, for it runs counter to many of our contemporary cultural norms. Saint Benedict wants us to be able to say with the psalmist: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory."

More than anything else, humility is about the acceptance of the truth about myself: I am not God; I am not the center of the universe; I am weak and sinful, and often find myself acting or thinking in ways that are counter to what I know to be the will of God for me. In this realization, I must be willing to face this truth in the light of God's love for me, in order to experience the healing that is the grace of reconciliation.

In a Benedictine school, God must be at the center of all we do. The virtue of humility should be cultivated by fostering in all members of the community the life-long habit of self-reflection. The climate of the school should be one that encourages everyone to "own up" to their mistakes. Adults in the community must model this behavior for the young. Teachers, coaches and administrators should cultivate in themselves a genuinely humble spirit, where they are not reluctant to admit when they have made a mistake, and apologize for their fault. Students should strive to be honest with themselves when facing their shortcomings and failure to live up to the standards of the school.

10 O B E D I E N C E

Obedience is a blessing to be shown by all, not only to the abbot but also to one another as brothers, since we know that it is by this way of obedience that we go to God.

(RB 71:1-2)

Obedience is a central value in Saint Benedict's Rule, not only because it forms the basis on which any community functions, but, more importantly, because it links the life of a monk to the salvific experience of Jesus' own obedience to the Father's will. For Benedictines, obedience is ultimately the conforming of one's own will to that of God's through the help of others – the superior, one's fellow monks, a guest. Obedience is a powerful weapon in the battle against the assertions of self-will that lie at the heart of the rebellion of Adam and Eve. This entrusting of oneself to others entails both the opening of one's life to the discernment and teaching of a spiritual elder, and the attentive listening to the voice of God speaking from the depths of our being. At the heart of obedience lies the conviction

that God's will for us is made known through the words and actions of others. Benedict's chapter on the Assignment of Impossible Tasks is particularly instructive in this light, for he tells the monk that, in the end, "he must in love obey" (RB 68:5). But this obedience is rooted in a conviction that assures the monk that the superior's discernment comes from "a father who loves" him (RB Prologue 1). Thus, at the heart of Benedictine obedience is a Christ-like relationship of love and trust.

In a Benedictine school, this kind of obedience should always be present. All members of the school community need to be open and responsive to the will of God being made manifest through the words and actions of others. This is particularly important in our relationships with those with authority over us. We must trust that when decisions are made, they come after sincere reflection and are intended for our good. Thus, the obedience that is required for the good order of the school should never be solely an imposition of power, but rather should gladly be given in an expression of trust and fraternal charity. Everyone in a Benedictine school should experience the great gift of being listened to attentively and treated with the utmost respect. While the adults in the community have been entrusted with the task of guiding



the young, they should learn never to impose their will on others arbitrarily, but rather to see their role as an opportunity to serve in love. Students, for their part, should accept the direction of their elders, trusting that they have the student's best interest at heart.

11

WORK

We gave you a rule when we were with you: not to let anyone have any food if he refused to do any work. Now we hear that there are some of you who are living in idleness, doing no work themselves but interfering with everyone else's. In the Lord Jesus, we order and call on people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food they eat.
(2 Thessalonians 3:10-13)

The motto of Benedictines is “*Ora et Labora*” – “Prayer and Work.” Saint Benedict had much to say about manual labor. It was intended to sustain the monastery’s livelihood, to provide appropriate occupation for the monks when they were not at prayer or *lectio*, and to protect them from the pitfalls of idleness. Work in the monastery also included artisans and craftsmen, where human creativity found expression, producing goods that were both beautiful and useful.

Work is central to the mission of a Benedictine school, for its whole purpose is devoted to the “work” of education and the formation of

young people in the faith. Thus, the work of administrators, teachers, coaches and members of staff is to ensure that the activities proper to the mission are carried out. The “work” of the students is to participate in the academic, athletic, community service and co-curricular programs of the school so as to achieve their purpose of growing in mind, body and spirit. It is especially important in our contemporary fast-paced culture, which puts such an emphasis on competition, to take to heart Benedict’s admonition to the abbot to “so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from” (RB 64:19). Such a balanced approach to the demands of “excellence” will require a particular attentiveness to each student, each teacher and member of staff, so that “no one may be disquieted or distressed in the house of God.” (RB 31:19)

12

CONVERSION

But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.

(RB Prologue 49)

The notion of conversion is central to the whole monastic project, yet in many ways it is the hardest to grasp. For Benedict, it simply meant the whole complex network of values and practices that made up living the monastic life in a particular monastery. Thus, it is a kind of overarching concept encompassing all monastic values. In essence, it is the way a monk lives.

For Benedictine schools, conversion sums up in one word the whole set of values and practices that establish the school's culture as "Benedictine." It comprises all those things which make us who we are. Saying "yes" to Priory means embracing this place, our beliefs, our values, our very way of being. It is conversion which links us to other Benedictine schools around the country

and throughout the world. It is that subtle "culture" which one can immediately sense whenever one visits another Benedictine school. Conversion is the name we might give to the enduring set of values which our graduates take with them when they leave, and which mark their identity long after graduation.



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