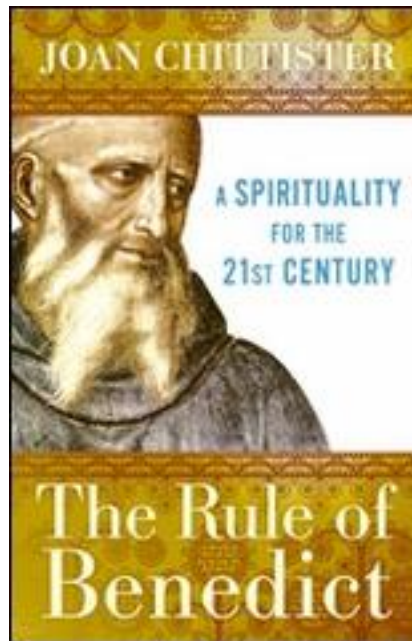


Discussion Questions

The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century



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An Invitation + Introduction

QUESTIONS:

1. The Rule of Benedict is called, by Benedict himself, a “little Rule for beginners.” As you open this book, what is the journey you are beginning? What is the invitation you are responding to?
2. Sister Joan gives a brief overview of the over 1,500 years of history of the Rule of Benedict. As she says, this spiritual guide “has weathered every period of Western history since the fall of the Roman Empire and been a dynamic source of light and energy to each.” In our own time, what is it that draws you to read the Rule? What are you looking for in this wisdom literature??

Prologue

QUESTIONS:

1. The Rule begins with a very important word: “Listen.” The spiritual life requires we listen “with the ear of our hearts,” and pay attention to what we hear. In a world full of noise and distractions, we could spend a lifetime with this practice of listening. How do you create silence or inner solitude in order to listen with the ear of your heart? When you actually slow down and listen, what do you hear?
2. Toward the end of the prologue, Benedict writes that “If we wish to dwell in God’s tent, we will never arrive unless we run there by doing good deeds.” He also writes, “God waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, these holy teachings.” The spiritual life, according to Benedict, is a life of action; it is meant to prepare our hearts and bodies for God’s service. As you conclude this Prologue, what actions are you called to?

Chapter 1: The Kinds of Monastics

QUESTIONS:

1. In Chapter 1, Benedict outlines the four kinds of monastics: cenobites, anchorites or hermits, sarabaites, and gyrovagues. The Rule of Benedict is written for cenobites, monks who live in community within a monastery. As you explore the monastic tradition, which type of monk do you think you are? Are you called to be in community or in solitude, in one place or traveling on the road?

Chapter 2: Qualities of the Abbot or Prioress

QUESTIONS:

1. Leadership in a monastery is a great honor and responsibility. As Sister Joan writes, “those who hold authority in a community are not to be above the group, they are to be the centers of it, the norm of it, the movers of it. They themselves are to mirror its values... Their job is to live out the ideals.” Have you seen leadership modeled this way in your life? How would our communities, companies, or countries transform if leadership was understood this way?

Chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

QUESTIONS:

1. In Chapter 4, Benedict lays out “Tools for Good Works,” and Sister Joan writes in her commentary: “The call to contemplation here is the call not simply to see Christ in the other but to treat the other as Christ. Benedict calls us first to justice: love God, love the other, do no harm to anyone.” There is a list of what this means, citing the Gospel: “clothe the naked, visit the sick’ (Matt. 25:36) ... ‘love your enemies’

(Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27) ... ‘Endure persecution for the sake of justice’ (Matt 5:10),” and more. What good works do you engage in? Is there a particular gospel verse you carry with you throughout your day?

2. One of the most powerful and challenging sentences in the Rule is: “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way.” What values or practices does the world stand for that you want to challenge? What sacred alternative do you live into? Write a list of those worldly ways you refuse, and the more spiritual path you embrace.

Chapter 5: Obedience

QUESTIONS:

1. Benedict writes, “The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.” Sister Joan defines obedience in her commentary, calling it “the ability to hear the voice of God in one another,” and responding to those voices which call us to higher service. In your daily life, where do you encounter the voice of God? Do you heed their requests and demands? How might you listen and respond more fully tomorrow?

Chapter 7: Humility

QUESTIONS:

1. The longest chapter in the Rule of Benedict is on the 12 steps of humility. The call to humility is always a radical call; it was in the 6th century, and it is today. Sister Joan says humility “is the basis for right relationships in life.” Which part of this chapter stands out to you as most challenging? What about most life-giving? Is there one sentence you can take with you as you practice humility in your daily life?

Chapters 8-20

QUESTIONS:

1. There are several chapters about the rhythms and schedules of prayer schedule each day and throughout the year. Do you follow a consistent prayer schedule, like monastics? If so, how has it slowly impacted you over time? If not, try committing to a daily schedule for prayer for one week and see how it feels.

Chapter 14: The Celebration of Vigils on the Anniversaries of the Saints

QUESTIONS:

1. Benedict lays out a practical description of how to pray on Feast Days, and Sister Joan's commentary brings the practice to its spiritual depths. She writes, "We all need someone in our lives who brings courage. We all need to get to know how the Christian life looks at its best, at its most difficult, at its most joyous." What saint are you drawn to? How do you mark their feast days each year?

Chapters 32-34

QUESTIONS:

1. There are three chapters about the goods of the monastery, common ownership, and the distribution according to need. In Benedict's monastery, all goods are held in common and shared. This core value and way of life through simplicity not only ensures personal freedom, but is the basis of human community, according to Sister Joan. She writes, "We rely on one another. Community life is based on mutual giving." Do you practice shared ownership or redistribution of

resources? If so, what has it taught you? If not, what is holding you back? What might happen if you do give up private ownership or personal wealth?

Chapters 35-38

QUESTIONS:

1. In the Rule, there are specific chapters about various roles and responsibilities in the monastery, from those who work in the kitchen, to the sick, to the elderly and the young, to the readers for prayer. Where would you feel called to serve in the monastery? What role might you play for the larger whole?

Chapter 43: Silence After Compline

QUESTIONS:

1. Benedict writes in chapter 42, “Monastics should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night.” Sister Joan writes in her commentary: “until we are able to have at least a little silence every day, both outside and in, both inside and out, we have no hope of coming to know either God or ourselves very well.” Do you spend time in silence every day? What if you started and ended your day in intentional silence? Try it for a week and see what happens.

Chapter 42: The Daily Manual Labor

QUESTIONS:

1. *Ora et labora*, prayer and work, is one of the most foundational principles of Benedictine tradition. As Benedict writes in chapter 48, “Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the community members

should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading.” Do you spend time each day in both prayer and work? What is the rhythm or balance between the practices of your heart and work of your hands?

Chapter 53: The Reception of Guests

QUESTIONS:

1. Throughout history, monasteries have always offered hospitality and welcomed guests. In Chapter 53, Benedict states that “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ.” Have you experienced this monastic hospitality? What did it feel like?

Chapter 57: The Artisans of the Monastery

QUESTIONS:

1. In Chapter 57, Benedict writes that the artists of the monastery should “practice their craft with all humility.” Sister Joan adds: “The function of the artist in the monastery—and in the life of us all—is to make the transcendent visible; to touch the soul in ways that match the soul; to enshrine beauty so that we may learn to see it; and to make where we live places of wonder.” How does art play a role in your spiritual life?

Chapter 72: The Good Zeal of Monastics

QUESTIONS:

1. In the penultimate chapter, Benedict describes good zeal this way: “[Monastics] ‘should each try to be the first to show respect to the other’ (Rom. 12:10).” Good zeal, showing love to all, is the crux of the

Rule, Sister Joan writes: “Good zeal, monastic zeal, commits us to the happiness of human community and immerses us in Christ and surrenders us to God. ... it provides the foundation for the spirituality of the long haul.” Where, or from whom, did you learn good zeal? What does good zeal look like in your life?

Chapter 73: This Rule Only a Beginning of Perfection

QUESTIONS:

1. Finally, at the end of the Rule we arrive again at a new beginning. Benedict writes that these chapters lay out the beginning of the monastic life, a pathway that will lead us to a whole and holy life. Is there a new beginning you find yourself at as you conclude this book? What are your next steps as you continue following this “life-altering way”?

Reflecting back on The Rule in its entirety

QUESTIONS:

1. Which chapter in this book most appealed to you at this time in your journey? Which chapter challenged you the most?

2. Is there a specific word, sentence, or practice you will carry forward with you as you deepen in the Benedictine path as a way of life?