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## **St Benedict 2018**

(Letter n°56)

“Listen to me, you that seek the Lord.  
Look to the rock from which you were hewn.”  
(Is 51:1)

You were perhaps surprised not to receive our community letter at Easter and you are perhaps even more surprised to receive one now... We owe you a little explanation: for practical reasons, at the start of the year we decided to modify the arrangements for publishing our community letter. From now on you will receive it twice a year, around 11 July (St Benedict's Day) and around 25 December (Christmas).



The 6<sup>th</sup> of January, for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, Dom Diego M. Rosa, Abbot General of our particular Congregation within the Benedictine Order, officially promulgated a Decree which unites to our community at Rostrevor the two monks resident at the Monastery of Turvey (England), Bro John Mayhead and Bro Herbert Kaden, as well as Dom Benedict Heron who is being cared for in a Retirement Home in London. The Monastery of Christ our Saviour, Turvey, is now a Dependant House of the Monastery of the Holy Cross, Rostrevor.



We propose for your meditation an extract from the book of Dom Anselm Grün, a German Benedictine monk, about the character and spirituality of St Benedict.

The Benedictine ideal of the human being is not that of one who achieves and accomplishes things, not a person with an unusual religious gift, not a great ascetic, but the wise and mature person who knows how to bring people together, who creates around herself or himself an atmosphere of peace and mutual understanding. Behind this ideal image stands a high demand. No one can simply resolve to become a peacemaker. Only those who have created peace within themselves can make peace, only those who have become reconciled with themselves, their own weaknesses and faults, their needs and desires, their contradictory tendencies and ambitions. Making peace is not a program of action that one could write on one's banners; rather, it must arise from inner peace. And inner peace is achieved only through a hard and unremitting struggle for inner purity and through prayer, in which one seeks to accept everything God presents, whether one's own weaknesses or those of others.

In our time sociologists are documenting an increasing inability to achieve peace. The polarization of groups within society has increased. Parties have become accustomed to using a rougher tone in their dealings with each other. Groups have forgotten how to be objective toward others, to understand and take seriously the just desires of others. People very quickly set up a picture of the other as enemy and fight against it. Those who study the cause of peace are searching for ways in which we can live together in peace in this world

of increasing globalization. The future of our world depends on it. In this situation we can learn from Benedict how to practice the ability to be peaceful.

Benedict does not lay out a magnificent program for peace; what he does is to create peace around himself. That is what it is all about for us, too. Every “program” has something combative about it. Today, even in the name of what is good, in the name of positive ideals, programs are set up that are aimed first of all against something or someone. People fight for the Christian family, and in doing so they fight against everyone who has expressed an opinion contrary to their own ideal. There seems to be a need for an enormous expenditure on polemic in order to advocate for something positive. Benedict is a complete stranger to this kind of fight. He does not set himself up against something or someone, but for something—and yet not for abstract ideals or programs, but for concrete people, for his little community at Monte Cassino. In the midst of a world fallen into chaos he builds his community, attempting to make space for the peace of Christ within it. He makes no claim that he is modeling peace for the world. Without any claim to having been sent, he makes Christian life a reality around himself, working day after day to build up a Christian community of life. Walter Nigg calls Benedict “the building person,” who, undaunted and indefatigable, simply does the next thing, a person with a completely positive attitude to whom every negative tendency and every kind of polemic is foreign.

To become positive people who can build up without destroying others: this is one of the most important challenges Benedict sets before us today. We should not attempt to establish great programs, because programs can be used to avoid what is concrete and what is right in front of us. It is a matter, instead, of simply doing what we have recognized as good and worthwhile, without always having to aim our actions against someone. Especially in our de-Christianized world we effect very little if we are constantly complaining about de-Christianization. It is a question of living our Christianity without claiming to be the only good people in the world. With Benedict we never hear a word of complaint about the conditions in the church and in the world that seemed so hopeless in his time. Benedict does not sully his strength with accusations, but simply devotes himself to his work. In his little community of monks he tries to make peace a reality. That peace did not seize the entire West all at once. The community at Monte Cassino was much too insignificant for that. But in his attempt to make peace Benedict handed on experiences that had their effect over centuries and made an essential contribution to peace in the Western world of the Middle Ages.

For me, Benedict's message today is: “Quit complaining! The problems of the world are not there to be lamented, but to be solved. Do what you can. Build a community around you that will stand. It can be your family, your group of friends, your company, your parish. If you can create a Christian way of life where you live, it will be like leaven for this world.”

Benedict did not claim to be able to change the whole world. In the midst of the confusions of his own time he set out to shape a little community in such a way that it would be filled with the spirit of Jesus. His path led over many obstacles that people put in his way. But above all, Benedict experienced the resistance of his own brothers, it is not so easy to let oneself be shaped by the spirit of Jesus. Our old patterns of life are too entrenched. But it is worth it. When a little community reflects Jesus, it will become a leaven for this world. What Jesus said and did will become visible in the concrete life of the monastics together, in their way of working and praying and in the way they deal with the things of this world.

*(Benedict of Nursia, His Message for Today, Liturgical Press, 2006, p. 42, 46-48, 63)*



- ⌘ On 3 December, we opened the season of Advent in the Anglican parish of Rostrevor.
- ⌘ In the evening of 8 December, the community went to Belfast for a performance of Handel's *Messiah* by the Philharmonic Choir of Belfast and the Ulster Orchestra.
- ⌘ On 4 January, our bishop, Bishop John McAreavey, paid a visit to the community.

✠ From 4 to 6 January, we had the pleasure of welcoming Bishop Raymond Field, the Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin.

✠ From 9 to 10 January, in his role of Definitor, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in Paris for a meeting of the French-speaking Superiors of our Congregation with our Abbot General. Those present were: the Abbots of Abu Gosh (Israel), of Bec, and of Maylis, and the Prior of le Mesnil-St Loup.

✠ On 14 January, Fr Mark-Ephrem preached in the Anglican Cathedral of Armagh.

✠ On 18 January, to celebrate the Dedication of our monastic church, the preacher was Dom Brendan Coffey, Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Glenstal (Ireland).

✠ On 21 January, Sunday in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we invited Bishop Trevor Williams, former Anglican Bishop of Limerick (Ireland), to preach.

✠ From 21 to 27 January, Fr Mark-Ephrem was at the Abbey of Monte Oliveto (Italy) for a meeting of the Definitors with the Abbot General of our Congregation.

✠ From 26 to 28 January, the new Dean of the Anglican Cathedral of St Anne, Belfast, Rev Stephen Forde, came to spend a few days' retreat in the monastery before his installation which took place on 4 February. We were all in Belfast for the installation of the new Dean, who had asked us to participate in the liturgy by singing a Taizé chant to introduce and conclude the prayers of intercession.

✠ From mid-October 2017, our guest house was closed to permit the construction of a new meeting room and for restoration work to the bedrooms. On 2 February our guest house opened its doors once again.

✠ On 6 and 7 February, Fr Mark-Ephrem and Br Thierry were in Turvey to take part in a meeting of the editorial board of the review *One in Christ*, and to meet up with friends of the review. We were particularly honoured by the presence of Archbishop Bernard Longley, Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham and Bishop Jonathan Goodall, Anglican Bishop of Ebbsfleet, Provincial Episcopal Visitor for the Province of Canterbury.

Last year, after 10 years as editor of *One in Christ*, John Bolger had informed the editorial board that he wished to retire. Sr Emmanuelle Billoteau was chosen to succeed him. In the course of the Eucharist on 7 February, Bishop Peter Doyle, Bishop of Northampton (the diocese in which the monastery of Turvey is situated) presented the medal *Benemerenti* to John Bolger in recognition of his service to the Church as editor of the review.

✠ On 10 February, Moya Gahan from Belfast began her noviciate as a secular oblate.

✠ From 20 February to 12 March, Fr Mark-Ephrem was in the United States to continue his work on the process of closing our community at Holy Trinity Monastery.

✠ On 1 March, our Bishop, Bishop John McAreavey, announced his retirement as Bishop of Dromore. He had been Bishop since 1999. On 23 April, Bishop Philip Boyce, of the Discalced Carmelite Order, former Bishop of Raphoe (Ireland), was appointed apostolic administrator of our diocese.

✠ On 13 March, we learned of the death of our oblate and friend of long standing, Norah McGrath. On 14 March, the community sang the Office of Compline to welcome her remains into the Church of the Good Shepherd in Belfast. On the following day, Fr Mark-Ephrem presided and preached at the funeral liturgy and Br Éric concelebrated.

✠ On 19 March, we hosted a dozen of our oblates for a day at the monastery. In the morning, Claire Dowds, of Belfast, made her secular oblation; in the afternoon, our oblate Gerry O'Gorman gave an account of his participation in the Fourth International Congress of Benedictine Oblates in Italy which took place in November 2017.

✠ On 29 March, Fr Mark-Ephrem concelebrated at the Chrism Mass of our diocese in Newry Cathedral.

✠ On 4 April, Rev Suzanne Cousins, a Church of Ireland priest in Donegal, made her oblation as a secular oblate.

✠ On 9 and 10 April, Fr Mark-Ephrem and Br Éric were in Penistone (England) for Joan Broadhead's funeral.

✠ 125 years ago, in April 1893, work began on the building of St Anselm's Basilica in Rome, and in July of the same year Pope Leo XIII created the Benedictine Confederation. In order to celebrate this anniversary, the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order invited the Abbots and Conventual Priors to a meeting in Rome. On 18 April, Fr Mark-Ephrem was present at a meeting with Pope Francis; on 19 and

21 April, he took part in a meeting with the Abbot General of our Congregation and other members of the Definitory.

✠ From 22 April to 24 May, we were delighted to welcome Sr Pierrette, former Prioress of the community of Grandchamp (Switzerland).

✠ On Thursday 10 May, feast of the Ascension in the calendar of the Church of Ireland (the feast is transferred to the following Sunday in the Catholic Church), Fr Mark-Ephrem occupied his stall in the Anglican Cathedral of Armagh for the liturgy of the opening of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and was asked to lead the prayers of intercession for the Synod.

✠ On 13 May, to commemorate the anniversary of the death (on 12 May 2017) of our oblate Marie McStay, the Celtic Lyre group of which she was a member came to give a concert in our church. The money collected at the end of the concert was given to an association engaged in cancer research.

✠ On 19 May, during our Eucharist, Br Éric had a heart attack and was taken immediately to Newry hospital. On Sunday, he was transferred to the Royal Hospital in Belfast where he underwent an operation. All went well, he returned to the monastery where he began a period of convalescence and rest.

✠ On 31 May, for the feast of Our Lady of the Visitation, we welcomed Bishop Philip Boyce, the apostolic administrator of our diocese. He presided over our Eucharist and spent a while with the community.

✠ From 3 to 12 June, Br Thierry was in France for a period of rest with his family. From 12 to 14 June, he went to the Abbey of Monte Oliveto (Italy). Next year, this Abbey, mother of our Benedictine Congregation, will celebrate the 7th centenary of its foundation in 1319 by St Bernard Tolomei. Br Thierry is a member of the commission charged with preparing the events which will mark this important anniversary for the community of Monte Oliveto and for the whole of our monastic family.

✠ From 13 to 20 June, Bishop Anselm Umoren, a Missionary of St Paul and Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja (Nigeria), was on retreat with us on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his ordination to priesthood.

✠ From 18 June to 10 July, Br Joshua was on a visit to his family in Mexico.

✠ From 19 to 21 June, Fr Mark-Ephrem accompanied Dom Diego M. Rosa, our Abbot General, and Dom Andrea Santus, the bursar of our Congregation, on a visit to the Abbey of Bec (France).

✠ On 25 June, we learned of the unexpected death of Fr Kevin Scallon CM, in the United States of America. An Irish Vincentian and friend of our community, he came nearly every year to spend Holy Week with us at the Monastery. He was engaged in an International Ministry to Priests for over 4 decades.

✠ From 1st to 6 July, Fr Mark-Ephrem was at the Abbey of Monte Oliveto (Italy) for a meeting of the members of the Definitory.



Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details.

The little detail that wine was running out at a party.

The little detail that one sheep was missing.

The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins.

The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay.

The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had.

The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.

A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord's love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God.

Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus' prayer "that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 17:21).

(Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 144-146)