

Man Of Peace - Saint Benedict

A.D. 480-1980

By Sister M. Xavier (Compton) S.G.S., Litt.B., M.A. Hons.
Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1730 (1984)

St. Benedict first gathered disciples around himself while he was living a life of solitude at Subiaco, a remote place in the hills not far from Rome. He later established the famous monastery at Monte Cassino which today is the Mother-house of the Benedictine Order.

This reflection on the life of St. Benedict captures something of the spirit of a remarkable Saint whose Monastic Rule is still followed by the Benedictines and Cistercians.

Now, fifteen hundred years after his birth, St. Benedict's spirituality offers much wisdom to the world. In 1965 Pope Paul VI named St. Benedict as the patron of Europe.

ST. BENEDICT

In the 6th century Pope Gregory I, who became known as St. Gregory the Great, wrote four books devoted to various Italian saints. One volume of these Dialogues (a name given to the books because they took the form of a conversation between a Deacon, Peter, and the Pope) was about St. Benedict. The fact that Gregory devoted to Benedict an entire volume shows in what veneration and respect the latter was held within a generation or two after his death, and how he was looked up to as a model. Gregory's account is perhaps over-fanciful for 20th century readers, with legendary touches meant to illustrate a point, to stress Christ-like virtues in Benedict, or to arouse admiration that would father the desire to imitate, with God's help, these virtues. St. Augustine had said some centuries earlier that Christian literature should delight, instruct, and motivate, and perhaps these were the aims of Gregory. Thus, the important thing is that we admire Benedict not so much for the sometimes extraordinary things attributed to him, as for his unassuming ways, his compassion, his devotion to duty, and his insistence on a similar sense of duty in his monks, and, above all, for his love of and veneration for God, which led him to such a profound consideration for other people.

But an even more valuable source when trying to discover what sort of person St. Benedict was, is his Rule for Monks, which he probably adapted from the writings of saintly spiritual leaders who preceded him. Scholars are now fairly sure that he made great use of the Rule of the Master, which had been written, it is now thought, when Benedict was a youth, by someone in Rome or southern Gaul. This rule in its turn owed much to such well-known spiritual leaders as Pachomius, Basil, Augustine, and Cassian, from the East. Benedict's Rule, however, was a truly personal thing, bearing the imprint of his personality, for the evidence suggests that he sometimes added to, sometimes subtracted from, the Master's Rule. One may reasonably consider that he weighed every word, every phrase, every sentence, and every section, so that the final draft that he presented to his monks, and that has been followed in a general way by Benedictines for over 1400 years shows clearly his temperament and character.

It is the aim of this simple work to discuss what sort of person Benedict was. He seems to have been of a practical turn of mind, very interested in people as individuals, so that he united the ideals from Basil and Augustine, for example, of fraternal relationships, with that of the 'Master', of the importance of a close master-disciple relationship. This could be expressed another way, as a linking of the tendency to paternalism with a more 'democratic' fraternalism, wherein one's peers must be treated with respect and forbearance. To put it concretely, there should, in Benedict's eyes, be a bond uniting all the members of the community to the Abbot and also to one another - Christ's way.

The boyhood of Benedict

About 1500 years ago, it is thought, Benedict was born, perhaps in 580 A.D., in Italy, at Nursia, in the Sabine district, about 70 kilometres to the north-east of Rome. About this time, the first 'barbarian' to rule the Roman Empire was on the throne, and the Empire appeared debased and dying. The PAX (PEACE) for which the Romans had been for so long famous was dying, too, and the future looked gloomy, with threats of misery and bloodshed. Rome had become, like many too-affluent cities, decadent from over-indulgence, and many of her citizens were soft and yielding, hardly caring that their city's very existence was threatened. Such was the state of the heart of the Roman Empire, when Benedict, as a young boy of about twelve, left his home to further his studies at Rome, as the custom was amongst youths of his class at that time. He left not only his beloved parents, but also, implies Gregory, his twin sister, Scholastica, who, we may surely judge, played a big part in Benedict's happy boyhood.

Disillusionment

In Rome Benedict studied Roman and other Latin Classics, especially, one may conjecture, the works of such noble writers as Virgil. This education was to influence Benedict in several ways. One of these influences was his later concern for literacy and culture: and it seems to be a truism that the Benedictine monasteries in what we call the dark ages to follow kept alive this tradition, saving for the Western world, by copying the ancient classics, a heritage that otherwise would have been lost in the onslaught and destruction of the barbarian invasions. But of course Benedict would have had no inkling of this future gift to mankind! He would have been concerned mainly with literacy as an aid to prayer, both liturgical and personal, or public and private, for he made much of the Scriptures and patristic writings in this regard. But that was later on. At this time in his life, however, public and private morals had reached a low ebb, and Gregory tells us that Benedict, dismayed by the moral laxity, even depravity, of his fellow students, decided to leave Rome, for crime and violence were becoming almost a way of life there. Therefore, Gregory wrote, Benedict seemed to hear an interior voice prompting: 'Fly, Benedict, into the desert; there you will taste how sweet is the Lord to those who love Him.'

Enfide

So off went Benedict towards the east, in the direction of the Anio River in the Sabine Mountains; and Gregory adds that he settled in a rather wild, isolated spot, a village called Enfide. Here, however, Gregory tells us, the villagers made too much of Benedict's gifts for his humble peace of mind and the people began to consider him as a wonder-worker, a tendency in those unscientific days. Benedict's regret at being made so much of was all the stronger in that all he wanted to do was to carry out God's will, and to lead a quiet, holy life, and a hidden one. It seemed clear to him that he would have to become a hermit!

The hermit

So Benedict got away in secret, one fresh, fine spring day, heading further east to a wilder, more mountainous spot, Subiaco, we are told by his biographer. Here for three years he lived a rugged life, to quote an old author:

...alone with his Creator; the roaring of the torrent, the whistling of the wind, the rolling of thunder, the song of birds were his only companions, and they served to lift up his heart on high. In silence he meditated on the great mysteries of faith, and realized more and more his nearness to God...

This writer knew, however, that it could not have been all poetry, and he commented also on the days when Benedict would have loved to give up such a demanding life:

In spite of the consolations and fervour which Benedict often felt, he must necessarily have had times of sadness and suffering, of dryness and temptation...

As he was still in his early twenties, at an age when most people still desire the company of their peers, the loneliness must have been at times almost unbearable. Perhaps it made him appreciate the need for 'the help of many brethren' that became a characteristic of his monastic rule later on. In the meantime, the humble people around, shepherds and peasants and such simple folk, came to know that Benedict was a man of God, and they began to visit him, to ask about God and prayer. Benedict gladly helped them, for he was beginning to realize more clearly that God wants us to share His good things with others. Later on, when he was in charge of monasteries, he was to develop still further, according to Gregory, what God was now teaching him by circumstances, 'a ready sympathy' for the people outside the monastery. We read that Abbot Benedict 'was ready to go himself or send his monks outside the monastery on works of mercy or pastoral care.' We know, too, from his Rule, that Benedict surpassed the 'Master' in his delicate treatment of pilgrims and other guests, whether rich or poor, insisting: 'Let all guests be received like Christ.' He received them all with humility, a virtue dear to him, but his best-loved guests were the poor and lowly ones, he stressed:

...In the reception of the poor and of pilgrims the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because it is specially in them that Christ is received...

Benedict seems to have shown more kindness and forbearance than the 'Master'.

Subiaco

Very soon Benedict realized that he was being called to lead men as monks, and so he began to share with an ever-increasing number the fruits of his own prayerful reading of the Scriptures and of the writings of such wise men as have been mentioned earlier, all guides in the spiritual life. Probably between the years 510 and 519, twelve small monasteries sprang up around Subiaco, under the general guidance of Benedict. A recent writer refers to some of the miraculous events related by Gregory - events that are probably legendary, but which are told by Gregory to point a moral in some form or other. This writer puts it neatly:

...St. Gregory has charming tales of early days at Subiaco: how water was produced at a mountain-top; how a lost iron tool floated up from a bed of the lake; what happened to the monk who found it difficult to pray; how Maurus walked on the water when young Placid got a dangerous ducking...

It may be worthwhile to consider some of these tales, to see how each illustrates not so much the extraordinary in Benedict's life, as his loveable character.

Thus, Benedict, says Gregory, consoled with 'sweet words' some monks who were weary of laboriously carting water bucket by bucket, step by step, up the steep and dangerous slope to their monastery on top of the hill. But everyone knows that nothing is emptier than mere words, no matter how sweet! Benedict, practical as well as eloquent, that night took a young monk, Placid, up the mountain to pray while the work-weary monks slept. He told Placid to mark the spot with three rocks. And what then? Next morning, the spot was a spring which soon developed into a fast-flowing brook, abundant and cool. Thus, in this event, we should accent Benedict's concern for others.

Another of Gregory's tales tells of how Maurus, another young monk, saved Placid from a watery grave at the bidding of Benedict. This time, Gregory is perhaps extolling the Benedictine virtue of obedience, which imitates, as far as humans can, the loving and sacrificial obedience of Christ.

Yet a third of Gregory's stories about Benedict is also concerned with water, and is meant to illustrate the saint's kindness once more. Italy at that time was being overrun by Goths, many of whom were unlettered barbarians. Some, impressed by the lives of Benedict and his monks, were converted, and entered the monastery. According to Gregory, one such man was given the job of clearing some land overlooking the lake. Big strong man that he was, hitherto more used to hacking down men on the battlefield than thickets on a cliff, he wielded the hatchet given by Benedict with more vigour than judgement. Suddenly its head parted company with the handle, and, swooping over and then into the lake, sank from view. All the Goth could see were telltale ripples spreading in larger and larger circles. The poor man, used to stern and immediate punishment as a soldier, rushed off to confess his fault to the prior, Maurus, expecting, no doubt, to suffer some deprivation or other. Instead, Maurus told Benedict, who came calmly back to the spot with the Goth, and, gently taking the handle of the hatchet from the astonished monk, threw it, too, into the water. But it did not sink. Instead, says Gregory, the iron head rose up as if the handle were a magnet, and joined itself to its mate! Benedict then gave back the restored tool to the monk, saying gently, 'Continue your work and grieve no more.' Again, one is shown the forbearance of the saint by means of a tale.

It is interesting to note that many of the early monks in Benedictine monasteries at this time of social upheaval were rude peasants, not at all the cultivated intellectuals of earlier days in other parts where the Church had held sway. This explains why at times Benedict in his Rule had to express himself sternly, telling his men, for example, that they were not to strike one another! He even incorporated the Ten Commandments into it, whereas today one would assume that monks would know that killing and drunkenness, to mention just two wrongs, are most unmonklike behaviour!

A digression concerning St. Scholastica, Benedict's twin sister

It would be pointless to give here all the little tales that Gregory tells to 'edify' us in the good and noble sense of that word. But one cannot agree to skip over another incident in Benedict's life, as related for us by Gregory, that occurred not long before he and his saintly sister died. It may be merely a legend, but its poetic truth is too appealing to omit the story. It is interesting, too, because it, also, deals with water, this time in the form of torrents of rain and a woman's weapon, tears. Scholastica had become a nun, we are told, and followed her brother's Rule, which, though allowing monks to do pastoral work outside the monastery, prefers them to return to it at night when possible. Once a year, Benedict and his monks used to go out to meet Scholastica and some of her nuns, enjoying friendly talk and praying together as they considered the delights of heaven. On the last

occasion this happened, Scholastica begged her brother, as dusk fell, to stay the night, so that they might 'talk until the morning of the joys of the heavenly life', as Gregory puts it. Rather sternly, true to his Roman sense of duty, Benedict refused. So his sister prayed, and at the same time 'poured forth a flood of tears upon the table, by which she changed the fair weather into foul and rainy', to quote Gregory. Still Benedict was stern, even sad as he began to realize that with thunder and dangerous lightning and torrential showers, he and his monks would have to disregard the Rule on this one point. With rare severity, he said, 'God Almighty forgive you, sister, what have you done?' Scholastica, who loved Benedict dearly, could not resist a teasing answer: 'I prayed you to stay, and you would not hear me; I prayed to Almighty God and He heard me. Now, therefore, if you can, go forth to the Monastery and leave me.'

Probably what is most unusual here is that Benedict is shown as having a miracle done that he did not want! Gregory is, of course, showing Benedict's 'humanness', amongst other things. He gave in with a good grace, and perhaps with a chagrined smile when he realized that Scholastica had won that round in the spiritual competition. As it turned out, the two had a happy long talk for the last time on earth. Scholastica died a few days later, and Benedict joined her in the tomb (for he had her buried in the monastery cemetery) in less than two months, in 547 A.D., according to the calculation of some historians. Again, we are meant to look further than the literal story - to the underlying lesson. Do you agree that Gregory wanted to show that Benedict could be too stern at times, but had the grace to mend his ways? Or is it the story of Martha and Mary in other words? Strangely, many people like Benedict all the more on seeing him in this story as a good loser. Somehow, we all favour the under-dog!

Back to Subiaco

Scholastica's story has taken us too far ahead in Benedict's life-story as told by Gregory. Another tale shows that his life was not all a bed of roses at Subiaco. About 529 A.D. there lived near the main monastery an envious, unhappy, unvirtuous priest, who felt Benedict's life was a reproach to him. This priest made things so unpleasant for everyone at the monastery, not only for Benedict, that the latter decided to go elsewhere, to form a new monastery, in the hope that his miserable enemy would then leave the other monks alone. So, arranging for the care of the Subiaco groups, Benedict headed south for a mountainous place between Rome and Naples, Monte Cassino. He had not long set out, before he was pursued by Maurus and some other monks, who begged him to return, bringing what they considered was very good news: the persecuting priest was dead! But Benedict went on his way, not without severely reprimanding Maurus for his lack of charity in gloating over the ignominious end of the enemy, and grieving over his sad end. One is reminded of Our Lord grieving over Jerusalem. Gregory's aim here seems to be to make us appreciate the need for the forbearance that runs like a rare and precious thread through the Rule.

Monte Cassino

At Monte Cassino, instead of a group of perhaps twelve small monasteries, Benedict, we are told, set up one large one, over which he, now a mature man of 50, with plenty of practical experience, was to be sole director as Abbot. A 19th century author writes that Monte Cassino rose 'abruptly to a height of 3,000 feet,' and that in Benedict's time there were still 'tokens of idolatry and superstition' in the ruins of old pagan temples here and there among the groves. But Benedict, he goes on, resolved:

...to erect a fortress of peace into which he would gather together a silent generation of pray-ers and singers who would draw down by their labours and penance, their tears and good works, the grace of God, not only upon Monte Cassino, but upon the whole world...

One of Gregory's little tales tells of a hermit whom Benedict found there, and who became a follower of the saint, though still living, as the Rule permits in rare cases, as a hermit. One day, in an excess of penance, this hermit chained himself to a rock, and Benedict sent him a typical wise and gentle reproof:

If you are God's servant, let the chain of Christ and not a chain of iron hold you!

At Monte Cassino a large and solidly built monastery developed, according to Benedict's ideals expressed in the Rule, for he wanted it to be self-contained, a necessity in those days when the surrounding districts were often still wild. He respected manual labour, the monks earning their keep by crafts, farming, and so on; but there was plenty of time allowed for study, especially of the Scriptures, for the monks needed to be able to read, as has been explained earlier.

Perhaps even as early as this they copied old manuscripts, as they certainly did later on. Gregory gives more stories of Benedict, but all are told, in general, as a recent writer says:

...to convey a true picture of the man who wrote the Rule. They illustrate what the Rule suggests; the strong, warm love of God which was the basis of his whole inner life, the spirit of quiet recollectedness and unshakeable trust, the Roman gravitas together with the un-Roman gentleness; his fellow feeling for men, and especially for his own monks. and the respect he shows for them: they are treated as grown men, open indeed to guidance and correction, but also trusted with responsible tasks and expected to face difficulties and shoulder heavy crosses.

Benedict consoled his monks for their hard work and self-denial with the promise that they would ...receive from the Lord in return that reward which he himself has promised: Eye has not seen nor ear heard, what God has prepared for those that love him.

The 'Father'

Benedict was still full of solicitude for the people outside the monastery, too. Often, in those years of war, pillage and plunder, refugees from barbarian invaders poured into the monastery compound, and he cared not only for the spiritual needs of these poor ones, but also for the physical. This was especially so in the dreadful famine of Italy in 538 A.D., when even the monks found themselves hungry. It is well known that in England in later years the poor of the parish knew where to go for help, before the monasteries and convents were taken over by the friends of Henry and Elizabeth!

The Physician

Benedict's compassion for the sick leads one to consider that he was a student at some time or other of medicine, for in one of the chapters of his Rule and elsewhere he makes use of accurate medical terminology; and it is a truism that his followers in later ages were practical dispensers and nurses. As well, he expressed in the Rule unusual care for the sick; and when referring to 'remedies' for the spiritual ills that attack monks from time to time, he accurately used varied medical terms in a metaphorical sense.

And the Psychologist

Some of Gregory's tales show that Benedict had a good understanding of the quirks of human beings. An amusing one is the story of a young monk, who Gregory claims was still alive when he wrote the tale.

He had the delightful name 'Exhilaratus', and one day had been out on business for Benedict. Someone had given him two flagons of wine to carry to the Abbot, but Exhilaratus decided to keep one for himself to enjoy in secret. Benedict accepted the one flagon; then, surely with a twinkle in his eye, he added, "Take good care, my son, how you drink out of that flagon which you have hidden; pour out what is in it very gently, and you will see what it contains." One can imagine the young monk's embarrassment and shame as he left the room. He obeyed Benedict, however, and carefully poured out the contents of the other flagon - not wine, but a horrible snake. This snake story is probably only a snake story, but it shows Benedict in his understanding of the less perfect and even of delinquents. After all, the monk was next-door to a thief! It shows, too, how Benedict could put into practice his own advice to the Abbot, to adapt himself to many dispositions. One he must humour, another rebuke, another persuade, according to each one's disposition and understanding. Benedict insisted, too, that the Abbot should govern by love rather than by fear, just as he wanted his monks to rise from the fear of God to loving Him, writing:

...But, as we progress in our monastic life and in faith, our hearts shall be enlarged, and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness of love in the way of God's commandments...

In this respect, he is said to have been much more tender than the 'Master', who was inclined to stress difficulties, and not to be so optimistic in his expectations concerning his monks.

Still, Benedict could be stern when necessary, as in the case of the monk who considered menial tasks beneath him, instead of considering, like Benedict, that there should be no vanity and distinctions about one's parentage in the monastery, and that all should take their turn doing work. Such a concept makes an appeal in today's world, but was fairly revolutionary in Benedict's day, despite the teaching of St. Paul on this.

The Good Shepherd

It is clear from the Rule that Benedict loved Our Lord's teaching on the Good Shepherd, for he modelled the Abbott (and himself) on this concept. Like Jesus, the Good Shepherd par excellence, Benedict was full of compassion for the stray monastic 'sheep', and made provision for wise and gentle monks, to as it were, secretly console the wavering brother and induce him to make humble satisfaction on the occasions when the Abbot had had to treat severely a monk who had broken the Rule in a serious way, and who refused to make satisfaction out of pride and stubbornness. Here again Benedict showed what a natural psychologist he was, for most people have had some experience of acting in this way, being foolishly obstinate out of silly pride yet wanting to apologize, but not knowing just how to go about doing so. A wise friend is an asset in such a case, so Benedict understandingly made provision for this need. Actually, he was thus putting into practice what we call 'formation' tactics today. This mildness and gentleness of Benedict makes him an appealing man.

Benedict's humility

Mildness and gentleness require humility, and so the 'Master's' emphasis on this attitude of mind, whereby one never forgets that all one has and all one is depend on God's continual love and care, made a great impression on Benedict. So he used this part of the 'Master's' rule almost verbatim.

Humility leads the Benedictines, and of course, all thoughtful people, 'to seek God', and further, to co-operate with Him (to use our faltering human words) so that they can eventually become 'other Christs'. In this seeking, Benedict continued the tradition of praying and reciting in common, and meditating on, the psalms, on other parts of the scriptures, and on spiritual writings. So important did he consider this communal celebration and petition, that he insisted that nothing should replace them. He improved upon the 'Master's' arrangements, but humbly left it to the Abbot in each monastery to make what alterations he thought fit. One notes that Benedict was not niggardly. He gave people credit for honesty and good faith, and was not of a suspicious turn of mind, expecting the worst. Still, his arrangement of the 'Office' or 'opus Dei' as this important prayer was called, became the standard in the Western church for centuries.

A clear mind.

Like the Romans of his class, Benedict had a clear, logical mind, and this may be why most people who have looked into the matter find that he was much surer in his understanding of the aim of the monastic life than was the 'Master'! Thus, he made his Rule more concise than the latter's, and generally clearer, for he omitted irrelevant detail. In a way, his work sometimes seems harder and sterner than the 'Master's', but careful study shows that, on the whole, Benedict's shows greater concern for people, and less for detail and rules for rules' sake. Benedict comes out as a saintly, reasonable man, interested in education, culture, and in his monks, whom he wants to act as reasonable and friendly human beings, as well as men of God.

The Abbot

The end of his chapter on the Abbot brings out this:

...Let them practise fraternal charity with a pure love. Let them fear God. Let them love their Abbot with a sincere and humble affection. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And may he bring us all alike to life everlasting...

And though Benedict was far less flowery in expression than the 'Master', at times he reached mystical heights. The ending of his chapter on Humility is a little gem:

...the monk will presently come to that perfect love of God which casts out all fear; whereby he will begin to observe without labour, as though naturally and by habit, all those precepts which formerly he did not observe without fear: no longer for fear of hell, but for love of Christ and through good habit and delight in virtue. And this will the Lord deign to show forth by the power of His Spirit in his workman now cleansed from vice and from sin.

Such a man Benedict himself became, one may be sure. Gregory put it this way:

...And if anyone wishes to know Benedict's character and life more precisely, he may find it in the ordinances of his Rule, for the holy man cannot have taught otherwise than as he lived.

The influence of Virgil and of other classical authors on Benedict.

It has already been noted that while Benedict was in Rome, he studied classical writers, such as Virgil. This writer, together with another famous Roman writer, Cicero, had respected the Sabine people (Benedict's forebears) for their integrity and lack of affectation. Later these sturdy folk had been converted to Christianity by St. Felician, so that by the time Benedict was born, their innate rather stern and independent outlook had been softened by Christian gentleness. Benedict, it is fairly certain, would have been attracted to Virgil's character as revealed in his writings, for Benedict, as

described by Gregory, and as suggested in his own famous Rule, shared many of the qualities of Virgil. They were alike, too, in the appreciation of nature, especially in quiet, secluded places. Virgil loved and taught the noble Greek idea of moderation, and it is noteworthy that Benedict, in adapting the Rule of the Master, exhibited this characteristic, as his use of words like 'reasonableness', 'measure', 'proportion' makes clear. Thus Benedict shared Virgil's dislike of excess and extremes, which so easily degenerate into fanaticism. But Virgil esteemed, too, the Roman ideal of integrity and steadfastness, and another most noble ideal, Pietas, an awareness of one's many and varied duties.

Integrity and steadfastness are depicted by Virgil in his famous epic, the Aeneid, in which the hero, Aeneas, after seven years of wandering from his defeated city of Troy, and of suffering and battling, begins in a small way to build up what becomes the Roman Empire. In so doing, Aeneas, according to Virgil, who, though not a Christian, was a religious-minded man, was going against his own inclinations and desires a good deal of the time, to follow the Will of Providence in thus founding a new city. As Virgil recounts the legend, Rome was destined to bring civilized peace and harmony to the world. Indeed, Pope Leo the Great, who lived not long before Benedict, agreed in a sense, with this opinion, writing:

To the end that the fruit of God's unspeakable grace might be diffused throughout the world, the Divine Providence created beforehand the dominion of Rome.

There is a parallel between Aeneas and Benedict in so far as Benedict, like Aeneas, was called against his own will to do God's, and he had 'to do battle'. Benedict, however, battled 'under the Lord Christ ...taking the strong, bright weapons of obedience', to quote his own Rule. In it, too, he called on the men who eventually gathered to live under him as their Abbot, to journey, or to return to God by obedience, from Whom they had 'departed by the sloth of disobedience', that is, by sin. This is, indeed, a spiritual battle, in which the enemy is one's own self-centredness. And with regard to Pietas, the Roman of noble character knew that he had responsibilities to his country, to his family (parents and children), to his fellows, and to himself; and such a person subordinated his own desires and pleasures to the commands of Providence. From this virtue grew up in Rome's best days a life of helpful law and order, of stability. This Roman virtue comes to the fore in Benedict's Rule, but it is raised to a higher plane, as it were, for it is oriented less to an earthly situation than to mankind's final destination. Benedict beautifully expresses it, writing that his followers should:

...vie in paying obedience to one another - no one following what he considers useful for himself, but rather what benefits another -; tender the charity of brotherhood chastely, fear God in love...

There was another Latin writer with whose writings Benedict would have been familiar, namely Cicero. He too had the idea of life as a journey, leading often through sorrow and trouble to final happiness. He wrote that we were not created for an unreasoning whim, but to reach the haven of death, whence we arrive at our heavenly home. Benedict in his Rule echoed, of course, the words and teaching of Christ and of His Apostles, but he was also echoing of course, in a more spiritual sense, the ideas of Cicero and of Horace, Virgil's poet friend, when he wrote in his Rule that if his monks persevered in following Christ, they would 'deserve to share in His Kingdom.' Horace told his fellow-citizens that because they were servants of the gods (that is, they had obeyed the dictates of Providence) they had become the 'rulers' of the Western world as then known.

Now, as in these authors, so too in Benedict, this Roman Pietas was balanced by the virtue already referred to, that of an appreciation of a classical Greek characteristic, the love of moderation. This

Greek ideal is wedded to a sense of harmony - beauty in the classical sense. Not surprisingly, therefore, as has already been noted, this concept runs through Benedict's Rule, expressed in such phrases as 'let the house of God (the monastery), be managed wisely by the wise.' This beautiful moderation of Benedict develops into a deep consideration for the needy, the sick, the very young, the aged. It is seen in Benedict's compassionate thoughtfulness:

In his commands let the Abbot be prudent and considerate; and whether the work which he enjoins concerns God or the world, let him be discreet and considerate ...Taking then ...discretion, the mother of virtues, let him so temper all things that the strong may have something to strive after, and the weak may not fall back in dismay.

But Benedict did not see himself merely as one in command, just as Aeneas, Virgil's hero, 'enters Italy not as an invader, but as a friend; no freebooter, but a pilgrim, seeking only to execute divine commands.' This again links up with Benedict, who began monasticism in Western Europe, as a guide, it is true, but much more truly as a pilgrim himself, seeking 'to run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love', to use his own words. Perhaps it is in this humble guise of a 'spiritual pilgrim' that Benedict is best understood today.

Australia and St. Benedict

Most people in Australia have heard of Dr. Ullathorne and of Archbishop Polding, both Benedictines here in the last century (the 19th). But even before their arrival, Dr. Slater, a Benedictine from England, had been asked from Rome to guard the interests of the Church in 'New Holland' from his bishopric in Mauritius, which, however, was too far away for him to do anything personally. Still, he got the help of two Irish priests, the volunteers Frs. Conolly and Therry, the latter taking the chief responsibility until the arrival of Ullathorne in 1833. In 1835 Polding arrived as first bishop, and he worked in Australian spiritual pastures until his death four decades later. He began a Benedictine monastery in Sydney, so that for many years followers of St. Benedict worked as priest-monks among the people of Sydney and of places farther afield. The early monks, notably Polding, did great things in helping the convicts; and Ullathorne is credited with helping on the cessation of the transportation of convicts to our country. Polding, helped by Ullathorne, got the Irish Sisters of Charity to come here, their first 'active' apostolate being amongst the poor women convicts, who, Polding considered, were being treated worse than slaves, such a contrast to the Benedictine ethos, which sees all human beings as 'all one in Christ.'

Polding was also responsible for the setting up in Australia of the Benedictine Nuns, who in 1847 left England with him after one of his journeys home in search of personnel. They had a monastery at 'Subiaco', near Parramatta, on the river. For a long time the nuns had a small school for girls, but about 50 years ago in 1930 they relinquished this apostolate, preferring to devote their time to one more directly 'spiritual', in the sense of providing opportunities for those desiring to come to a quiet, secluded spot for prayer and advice, apart, of course, from the long hours of prayer and other practices of the Benedictine enclosed life. A daughter branch of this group was recently formed in Queensland, and the present address of the original foundation was at Pennant Hills, Sydney and is now at Jamberoo since 1988. The influence for good of these Benedictine Nuns should not be discounted, just as we cannot justly overlook the good done by early women like Scholastica.

Yet another Benedictine group who came to Australia with the encouragement of Polding were the Spanish, who settled eventually under Abbot Salvado in Western Australia, at 'New Norcia', about the middle of the last (the 19th) century. Their apostolate among the Aborigines is well known. We

need another St. Gregory to do this interesting group justice, so unusual are some of the incidents in their history! Their work has extended to other parts of the state besides New Norcia. For some time, a convent of Spanish Benedictines worked with the monks for the Aborigines, but recently this missionary female group returned to their home-base. To the list of women followers of St. Benedict in Australia should be added the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Montmartre, at Manly and at Riverstone, Tyburn Priory, and an indigenous congregation, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, founded in Sydney by Archbishop Polding in 1857. True to the missionary charism of their Founder, they have spread to Japan, where they now have three houses. In that country there are many other disciples of Benedict from America, Germany, France and Belgium; and Japanese have entered these convents and monasteries.

Besides these English and Spanish foundations in Australia, there are now here foundations with Italian and Irish antecedents. The former have their headquarters at Arcadia, near Sydney, the latter, Cistercians, are at Tarrawarra, near Melbourne.

So it can be seen that, as St. Benedict would put it: IN OMNIBUS GLORIFICETUR DEUS!

That is, in all things - and places and people and events - may God be glorified!

Central Addresses of the Benedictine-inspired Groups in Australia and New Zealand.

MEN

(O.S.B.) Benedictine Abbey, New Norcia, Western Australia, 6509.

(O.S.B. 'Sylvestrines') St. Benedict's Monastery, Arcadia, New South Wales, 2159.

(O.C.S.O. Cistercians) Tarrawarra Abbey, Yarra Glen, Victoria, 3775.

(O.C.S.O. Cistercians) Southern Star Abbey, Kopua, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand.

WOMEN

(O.S.B. Benedictine Nuns) Benedictine Monastery, 695 Jamberoo Mountain Rd, Jamberoo, New South Wales, 2533.

(S.G.S. Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict) Convent of the Good Samaritan, St. Scholastica's, Arcadia Road, Glebe Point. New South Wales, 2037.

(O.S.B. Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre) Tyburn Priory, 325 Garfield Rd, Riverstone, New South Wales, 2765.
