

+ Saint Benedict: Transitus

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
March 21, 2019

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My Very Dear Sons,

Today we celebrate the *transitus* of Our Blessed Father Saint Benedict, which is to say his passage from this earthly life to Heaven, his departure out of our mortal existence, in a word, his death. Although death is ever a sad event in a human life, the reminder of the sin of Adam and of its dark empire over the sons of Adam; nevertheless, in the case of the Saints, death appears more as a kind of triumph, something like what the ancients called the *apotheosis*, the culmination of a whole life. Such is eminently the case for the great Patriarch of the monks of the West we honor today.

Like Saint Francis, Saint Dominic and many other Saints, whose stories of the service of God span many centuries, Saint Benedict has been counted among the great founders of religious life for the Western regions of the world. He has thus played an important role in the epic of what was first only monastic life properly speaking, but later the story of religious life under other forms besides the monastic one. Saint Catherine of Siena, that seraphic virgin and Doctor of the Church, dictated to her confessor some luminous pages on the subject of religious life—or more exactly, during a prolonged ecstasy, she repeated the words given to her by God the Father, in the book we call *The Dialogue*. Here is a passage from the part of the book entitled, *Treatise of Obedience*. This part has to do with these great founders of religious Orders.

So, [the soul] wanders, seeking...in what place and in what way she can pay her debt [to God].... Enlightened in her search by faith, she finds the place—namely, holy religion [meaning here the religious life]—which has been founded by the Holy Spirit, appointed as a ship to receive souls who wish to hasten to perfection, and to bring them to the port of salvation. The Captain of the ship is the Holy Spirit, who never fails in Himself, despite the defects of some of His religious subjects who sometimes transgress the rule of the order. The ship itself cannot be damaged, but only the offender. ...The ship herself is so delightful that thy tongue could not narrate it. I say, then, that the soul, on fire with desire and a holy self-hatred, having found her place by the light of faith, enters there as one dead, if she is truly obedient; that is to say, if she perfectly observes...obedience. ... This ship is rich, so that there is no need for the subject to think about his necessities either temporal or spiritual, for, if he is truly obedient...he will be provided for by the Master, who is the Holy Spirit, as I told thee.... See the riches of these holy rules, so thoughtfully and luminously appointed by those who were temples of the Holy Spirit! See with what judgment Benedict ordered his ship.¹

In our day, it would be safe to say that the sea upon which our ship of monastic life sails is not without serious storms and perilous reefs. Many transformations are occurring around us, including a considerable change in the ethnic makeup of Europe and our United States of America (not necessarily a bad thing in itself) as well as a weakening of the faith in many places. Populations are on the move, and too many people seem afraid to bear children for fear of what the future may bring. On top of it all, numerous scandals threaten us from many sides, making for difficult sailing, indeed. However, like the Church herself, as Saint Catherine teaches us, the great religious orders, though they often know the difficulties of human sin and error, are

¹ Treatise 4, Chapter 5.

governed as a great ship by a perfect captain, the Holy Spirit. They will not perish, though this or that community may disappear. Let us humbly pray to Saint Benedict, on this day of his *transitus*, to grant us, if God so wills, the means of carrying on the mission of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek Abbey, which has now entered its twentieth year of existence. It has been said that everyone should a little bit monk, but that we monks should be this entirely. Keeping this in mind and striving generously to live our monastic life to the full, may we come some day to our own *transitus*, having like Saint Benedict the intimate sentiment of the impending joy of eternity, the bright fulfillment, beyond the storms of this world, of the whole program of our life of faith and monastic witness. Holy Father Saint Benedict, pray for us. Amen.