

# +Saint Benedict, Abbot

Homily delivered by the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
July 11, 2021

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*At that time: Peter said to Jesus: Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee: what therefore shall we have?<sup>1</sup>*

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

It is all so simple. Our Lord promised and still promises the hundredfold of good things on this earth and everlasting life to those who renounce all earthly advantages to follow Him. Saint Benedict took Our Lord at His word and followed it. What did he get in return? According to a respected Catholic encyclopedia:

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the order [founded by Saint Benedict] is estimated to have comprised the enormous number of 37,000 monasteries. It had up to that time given to the Church no less than 24 popes, 200 cardinals, 7,000 archbishops, 15,000 bishops, and over 1,500 canonized saints. It had enrolled amongst its members 20 emperors, 10 empresses, 47 kings, and 50 queens. And many of these numbers continued to increase [for some time].<sup>2</sup>

If all of this seems too remote from us to be very relevant, we might note (while we are speaking of Benedictine notables) that the last Empress of the Austrian Empire, the Servant of God Zita of Habsburg, who died in 1989, was a fervent Oblate of the mother house of our Congregation, that of Solesmes, in France, as were many of her family members: three of her sisters and a cousin were Benedictine Nuns at the Abbey of Sainte Cecilia. Previously, the Titular Queen of Portugal Adelheid had retired to the same French abbey in 1896. Zita's brother, Prince Xavier, requested permission to enter as a monk at Solesmes abbey, but the abbot at that time thought his duty was to remain in the world. But he did become an Oblate.

In any case, the great extension of the Order and its high personalities all belong to the earthly scene: it is the blessed "hundredfold" mentioned by Our Lord, something to be superseded by a greater reward. The higher perspective of life everlasting eclipses our statistics however impressive. Saint Paul reminds us to be "zealous for the higher gifts."<sup>3</sup> We know this, but we forget. Perhaps, we need a new awareness.

So, where does this leave us, where do we stand? Well, speaking in terms of the Benedictine ideal, it leaves us with a road to follow and a task. The *road* is not difficult to locate. Christ is the Way, as He says Himself.<sup>4</sup> Saint Benedict with his Rule is a privileged part of that one true Christian road. There is no need to seek a newer or better path through life. There are variations and alternate routes to some extent, but this path is truly one: it is a rugged road, the way of the Beatitudes, but it is a very good one, and we can follow it in any walk of life, as priests, monks, or laity.

Now the *task* we have to accomplish in this life is varied, but we might summarize by saying that we have *to build walls*. While so many things around us are falling down before our eyes—whole institutions, entire blocks of our Western Civilization, including schools and many instances of government and courts of law—it is the lot of the sons and daughters of Saint Benedict to build up. These are not prison walls or walls to separate what should be joined. These are smaller, inchoate but precious, versions of the walls that the Evangelist Saint John contemplated in his vision of the Apocalypse:

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:27.

<sup>2</sup> George Cyprian Alston, "The Benedictine Order," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02443a.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 12:31.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John 14:6.

And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And it had a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and in the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

A true Catholic Christian family is a stone; a classical school is a stone; a job is a stone; good art is a stone—as is beautiful music. A parish is the truly foundational building block of the Church. We monks, as you know, are obstinate builders and are currently engaged in the process of raising a new physical building, Something Beautiful for God, as we hope. It was during the construction of a wall at Monte Cassino that one of Saint Benedict's greatest miracles was performed.

[A]s the monks were making a certain wall somewhat higher, relates his biographer, because that was requisite, the man of God in the meantime was in his cell at his prayers. To whom the old enemy appeared in an insulting manner, telling him, that he was now going to his monks, that were a-working: whereof the man of God, in all haste, gave them warning, wishing them to look unto themselves, because the devil was at that time coming amongst them. The message was scarce delivered, when as the wicked spirit overthrew the new wall which they were a building, and with the fall slew a little young child, a monk, who was the son of a certain courtier. At which pitiful chance all were passing sorry and exceedingly grieved, not so much for the loss of the wall, as for the death of their brother: and in all haste they sent this heavy news to the venerable man Benedict; who commanded them to bring unto him the young boy, mangled and maimed as he was, which they did, but yet they could not carry him any otherwise than in a sack: for the stones of the wall had not only broken his limbs, but also his very bones. Being in that manner brought unto the man of God, he bad them to lay him in his cell, and in that place upon which he used to pray; and then, putting them all forth, he shut the door, and fell more instantly to his prayers than he used at other times. And O strange miracle! for the very same hour he made him sound, and as lively as ever he was before; and sent him again to his former work, that he also might help the monks to make an end of that wall, of whose death the old serpent thought he should have insulted over Benedict, and greatly triumphed.<sup>6</sup>

Are we not a bit in the same situation as those monks working on a wall in their abbey, suffering from a true catastrophe provoked by the evil one, causing ruin and death? But for Saint Benedict, who had followed the path, Christ, so closely, and put his hand to the building of a Christian world, though tragic, the destruction of a wall and the death of a young monk was nevertheless unable to stop the grace that worked through him. Whatever the devil destroys, God builds it back up a hundred and a thousand-fold. May Our Blessed Father intercede for all of us, so that, each at his or her station along the construction site, we may ever build and rebuild the Civilization of love mentioned by all the recent popes, from Pope Saint Paul VI and Pope Saint John Paul II to Pope Francis. Bring your stone, and God will bring the mortar, the cement of His grace and Divine love. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>5</sup> Apocalypse 21:2, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book Two, Chapter 11.