

+ TRANSITUS OF SAINT BENEDICT

March 21, 2023

Homily pronounced by the Rt. Rev. Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

Today's solemnity recalls the *transitus*, the "passing" as it were, the death, of Our Blessed Father Saint Benedict. It falls rather appropriately in the season of Lent, during which we turn the eyes of our soul toward the more austere aspects of life in the Church and in the lives of all of us. The death of Our Lord is a lesson in the ultimate meaning of things, and the death of His Saints is like a miniature version of the unique passage toward His Father of the Word Incarnate.

The mood of the Church these past decades has been about a certain reform (a constant need that always returns) and about the re-evangelization or New Evangelization of so many places, where the Faith has turned cold and tepid, especially in Western Europe and in much of the United States of America. This has been one of the preoccupations, not only of Pope Francis, but also of his predecessors, beginning with Pope Saint Paul VI, and continuing with Pope Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI. What are we monks supposed to do to help the Church in this effort to renew the face of the earth?

In a conference given to Benedictine abbots, a Benedictine theologian once made the following observation. A monk has only to "look up" so to speak from the page of his liturgical book or his *lectio divina*, in order to do his share and bring about the desired transformation. But this will take a bit of explanation.

The allusion is to the story, recounted by Pope Saint Gregory the Great in his *Book of Dialogues* (chapter 31). He tells us that one day an Arian Goth named Zalla, who was savage and cruel in his persecution of devout Catholics, came up to Saint Benedict's monastery, leading a poor peasant by a rope. The Goth was hoping that he could force the man of God to give money for the ransom of this innocent farmer. St. Benedict, in the meanwhile, was quietly engaged in reading in front of the monastery, not being much worried about the approach of this ruthless murderer. When the fierce Zalla yelled out threats to the Saint, the latter merely looked up from his book, and, as his eyes fell upon the knots that bound the hands of the peasant, the rope fell off in a miraculous manner. Seeing this, Zalla fell trembling to his knees and was reprimanded by Benedict. Never was a "social issue" (as we might say in our day) resolved so quickly.

The point is that the Church's preaching, catechizing, social action, and other active works all derive their original strength from God's grace, working through the well-springs of contemplative prayer. Thus, there is no need for monks to leave their essential work that upholds

the apostles of the active life by the power of prayer, in order to go about the highways and byways of the world. There have been some glorious exceptions to the rule, but in general the monk is intent upon God alone, only “looking up” as it were from time to time from his reading in order to resolve more practical problems. Whereas Saint Dominic walked along all the roads of Southern France, stopping to preach the Word of God in every place, St. Benedict and his sons mostly founded monasteries and stayed in them, contemplating there the eternal years of God’s love.

If there is a time and place for every purpose under Heaven, then surely no one person or institution has to accomplish all the tasks that fall upon the Church. There is Mary and then there is Martha, but, in the words of Our Lord Himself, “Mary hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Lk. 10:42). Amen.