**Benedictine Perspective in These Times**

Recent events in our country and world call us to a moment of pause. In the midst of disturbing rhetoric, fear, anger, and hate there are also moments of compassion, love, and stillness. The old Tale of Two Wolves says that each of us has two wolves residing in ourselves. One embodies a compassionate, open, empathetic side and the other, a fearful, angry, self-centered side. When there is conflict, one must win. The winning wolf is the one we feed.

The news normally covers bad wolves and overlooks good wolves. Today, we are challenged to feed the good wolves in ourselves and ask those wolves to see good wolves in others. We must ban together as a compassionate, open, empathetic pack.

The main goals of Benedictine life are to serve God and others. Benedictine monks join communities to surround themselves with support and inspiration. Monks faithfully feed their good wolves and hold each other to that. The Rule of Saint Benedict gives suggestions on how to develop such habits. They include many elements that are easily accessible to people outside monastery walls. Today, I choose to offer only a few.

1. **Routine Prayer and Pause (Communal and Individual)–** Monks stop and pray together five to seven times a day. The prayers are usually just 10 - 15 minutes long but offer a moment of pause, peace, silence, gratitude, and perspective in the midst of sometimes chaotic, emotional, and task-driven days. Prayer times are guarded. The monks drop everything to meet. They commit themselves to honoring the peace within them and their connection to God and others. **Is there a way for you to plan moments of individual or communal pause in your day?** Is there a loved-one with whom you’d like to share these moments? Could you list “graces and gratitude’s?” Could you set a standing appointment with yourself to step outside and admire nature’s beauty or read a page of spiritual reading?
2. **Deep Listening –** St. Benedict begins his Rule with “Listen…with the ear of the heart.” This is no easy task for any human. Monks are burdened with long “to do” lists like us all. They also live in community with individuals who have quirks and tendencies that may be frustrating, like siblings and spouses. Monks are tasked with listening to the deepest yearnings, pains, and graces of their community members. They try to drop all personal bias and thoughts to listen to the other. Sometimes listening requires more than hearing words, but also reading body language. Sometimes listening to the unsaid words is more important than the verbalized. When listening deeply, we are more prepared to serve. **How can you strive to listen deeply?** Is there someone with whom you struggle to connect? Could you drop preconceived notions when listening to them? Could there be something deeper? Could moments of pregnant pause and silence be moments of grace?
3. **Time Allotment -** Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister asks us to spend time on things that are “of eternity.” Monastics have many stressors. Priory monks help run the school, others work with inner-city communities, others run hospitals, and others businesses. Their work is to serve the local community while earning enough money to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. They spend time attending to others. There is plenty of worry in monastic life but the moments of pause and prayer remind them that their time is to be spent on faith, hope, and love. They have mandated periods of “recreation.” Even if work isn’t all done, they must stop to give the body, mind, and spirit a rest, so that they are healthy and more prepared to serve. “Recreation” looks different for each monk. Br. Edward used to walk to the gym and field after school to watch athletics. Fr. Martin works in the woodshop or takes walks. These are moments of recreation AND grace. They are relaxing but still connecting with God and others. **How do you spend your time and energy?** How do you transform worry to hope? Do you guard your “recreation time?” How do you spend your “recreation time?”

Benedictines have been around for over 1500 years. There is a sense of peace, justice, and stability in this tradition. Monasteries offer wise perspectives on individual and communal life. They also honor God’s presence in the past, present, and future. They have seen the rise and fall of many turbulent times. They serve as sanctuaries of peace and justice while serving God and others.I pray that we learn from our Benedictine tradition, accepting the challenge to feed our compassionate, open, empathetic wolves in this time of transition.