**Benedictine Schools Week**

By Molly Buccola

“They are completely like us, yet not at all!” exclaimed a Priory student at the International Benedictine Youth Congress in Australia. When our six representatives gathered with three hundred Benedictine school students from throughout the world they realized that, like siblings, the schools shared a foundation of strong values and tradition yet each school was vastly different due to their unique context and culture. Like long lost siblings, students laughed at the similarities in school structure and tradition and delightfully shared how their paths had split, forming unique schools. In the evenings they explored the area together, sat in awe under the stars, and even created space for their own dance parties.

We celebrate St. Benedict’s Feast Day today, March 21st. Our patron saint is known as the “Father of Western Monasticism” and for “creating schools in the Lord’s service.” Benedictine communities throughout the world have committed to a structured life that aims to help individuals live up to their potential as blessed beings while understanding that each is broken and carries their own weakness. St. Benedict found that living in community with specific shared values and daily routines was a way to deeply immerse the self in this complicated world, not escape it. Sister Joan Chittister says, “St. Benedict asks us to live ordinary life extraordinarily well.”

In monasteries, individuals must practice acceptance, empathy, generosity, forgiveness, introspection, and renewal. In silence and prayer, St. Benedict challenges us to face ourselves. In community, St. Benedict requires us to give of ourselves for the sake of the community. St. Benedict was a psychologist and sociologist before the development of those fields. He studied the way humans tick, in our greatness and our downfalls. He was interested in each individual as well as the way in which individuals work together.

This week we celebrate Benedictine communities throughout the world that “are completely like us, yet not all.” We share the same house “rules” for reaching our full potential as spiritual and communal beings. We are known and loved. We are challenged to be our best selves. As a “school in the Lord’s service” we practice acceptance, empathy, generosity, forgiveness, introspection, and renewal.

Yet we are a very unique community celebrating this tradition in the midst of fast-paced Silicon Valley. I’m thankful that St. Benedict encourages us to explore this high-tech capitol together, remembering that our purpose is to grow closer to God and each other. May we take time to sit in awe of ways God breathes through our days.