**Benedictine Vows Address Societal Pressures**

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Benedictine monks commit to a unique set of religious vows when entering their monastic community. These vows offer guidance both monks and lay people, religious and non-religious. In this day and age, when living in a world of “haste and frenzy”, societal pressure, harsh grudges, and communication breakdowns, we can call upon our Benedictine wisdom tradition. Below are three unique vows Benedictine monks take when joining a community, along with a short paragraph on how it may inform our lives.

**Conversatio: The Way of Formation and Transformation**

“Always we begin again”

Benedictines have not chosen an English term that directly translates from this Latin word. John McQuiston’s phrase “always we begin again” offers a helpful explanation. Saint Benedict emphasizes that monks are to better their relationship with God and others each day. In the morning, they wake with prayers about new life. In the evenings their prayers are about laying their burdens to rest, forgiving themselves and others. This daily cycle is just one representation of their vow to wake with opportunity to recommit to the monastic routine so that they can work toward an ultimate goal to serve God and others. As humans, we have our downfalls. Sometimes we are impatient or feel too busy for that which is truly import. Benedictines challenge us to recommit each morning to that which is most meaningful in our lives. We have an opportunity forgive ourselves and others for that we’ve done wrong or failed to do. The vow of conversatio invites the best versions of ourselves to show up each day. Always we begin again.

**Stability: Commitment to the Daily Life of this Place**

“For better or worse”

When Benedictines choose to join a community, they choose to stay with those people, in that place, for the rest of their lives. It is like marrying the community “for better or worse.” The vow of stability challenges monks to face difficult matters and to work with them. It asks them to engage in difficult conversations, when needed and to accept someone as they are. It asks monks to listen to the least among them, as if they were listening to Christ. Saint Benedict also emphasized the importance of deep sharing among community members (personal, intellectual, and spiritual). Monks guard their communal meal times as they do their prayer times. Sitting together in silence or in conversation helps hold them together as a community instead of simply becoming a group of people. There is also a part of the day carved out for dialogue and debate around academic reading or current events. In this age where time is limited due to technology and societal demands, Benedictines invite us to commit to family on a daily basis so that we can work together in good times and bad.

**Obedience: A Commitment to Listening and Consequent Action**

“Listen with the ear of the heart”

Benedictine monks today have a slightly different perspective on the vow of obedience than those of past generations. The Benedictines shift away from the word’s negative connotations and instead focus on the first part of the Rule’s prologue. Saint Benedict says, “Listen with the ear of the heart.”Monks are called to listen to each individual and their experience. They are called to open their minds, ears, eyes, and hearts to the experience, perspective of the other, and ways God may be present in that. After listening, they pray. They ruminate on the person, conversation, or situation and call the Divine into their experience. Only after listening and prayer are they then supposed to act.The vow of obedience is a commitment to God and others by listening, praying, *then* acting. The article “Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition” notes that Benedictine communities should be “different from haste and frenzy.” Our world demands efficiency and breads reaction. When we listen with the ear of the heart and ponder and pray before acting, we create a space “different from haste and frenzy.” Benedictines give perspective and ask us to prioritize. That which may seem urgent in the moment, may actually be begging for a listening heart and prayer before action.