Making New Year’s Resolutions Last: Five Benedictine Lessons

By Benedictine Leadership Class of 2015

New Years resolutions sweep in the New Year. Nevertheless, many people do not keep their resolutions past the end of January. Gym memberships go unused, healthy foods remain uneaten, and daily planners have nothing written on them. However, members of one type of community, that we are proud to be a part of, are great at keeping resolutions everyday. This group is the Benedictines. Throughout the past 1500 years, they have worked towards their goals of devotion to God, each other, and the community. Here are some Benedictines traditions that could help others keep their resolutions:

1. Make it a Habit  
   The Benedictines keep relatively strict schedules. They wake up early in the morning and have set-aside times to pray throughout the day. These times repeat everyday until they become habitual. Making a habit is an important part of a New Year’s resolution if it is meant to last. A habit is a part of a lifestyle rather than just an added “thing to do” for the day. For example, if your resolution is to make it to work or school an hour earlier in the morning, be consistent. Don’t wake up an hour early one day, and sleep in the next day. Keep it the same, and your body will adjust.
2. Listen  
   One key phrase that the Benedictines use is “Listen with the ear of your heart.” This means to focus on what other people are saying and taking the time to empathize and learn from them. This listening ability is key to improving resolutions. The Benedictines listen to others so that they are better able to refine their own lives. For example, if your resolution is to swim a mile, go listen to your swim coach talk about breathing technique, stroke style, and building endurance, and make those practices part of your workout.
3. Begin Again  
   Another phrase we often hear as part of the Priory community is “Always we begin again.” This essentially means that though we make mistakes, we always have a chance to start over and make ourselves better people. In a resolution, many people reach points where they no longer wish to continue their resolutions despite their initial drive. Beginning again allows you to come back from failure stronger than you were before. For example, if your resolution is to eat healthier daily, but for lunch you eat a candy bar instead of a salad, beginning again will allow you to forgive yourself of your mistake, and continue to eat healthy in the future.
4. See Yourself as Part of Something Larger  
   The Benedictines acknowledge that they should not live their lives indulging in their own desires. Rather, they live to serve the community. Seeing a positive impact of your resolutions on other people will help you keep your resolution beyond the first month of the New Year. For example, if your resolution is to do more community service throughout the year, know that you are doing your part to make the world a better place. Knowing that what you are doing is beneficial to others gives you more of a reason to keep doing it.
5. Reflect  
   Reflection is a key part of the lives of the Benedictine monks. They spend many hours in prayer throughout the day and spend many other times in silence by themselves. Reflection is important to see where you are and determine the trajectory of a New Year’s resolution so you can amend it before it falters. For example, if your New Year’s resolution is to learn a new language, reflect on your progress daily in order to remind yourself of how much you have learned and how close to you are to reaching your goals. This will help you stay motivated to keep on learning regardless of being overwhelmed by the task at hand.

Hopefully these are some good tips to help you keep up with your New Year’s resolutions. Remember, Make it a Habit, Listen, Begin Again, See Yourself as Part of Something Larger, and Reflect, and have a Happy New Year!