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Rule of St Benedict: Prescriptions for a Monastic Life

Benedict of Nursia was born around 480 to a Roman nobleman. As a young student, he did not agree with the decadence of Roman society and withdrew from it, instead joining a group of men away from the city. He discovered a cave and lived in it for three years in solitude, his only contact being with the person who came to bring him food once a week. People in the vicinity started to notice him as a spiritual man and made him Abbot of a local monastery when one was needed. However, the monks did not like the strict rules he imposed and tried to poison him. Such was the strength of his faith that he averted death by a miracle.

In 529, he moved to Monte Cassino, a rugged hill near Rome, where he founded a monastery. As the Abbot of the monastery, he devised the Rule of St. Benedict. In 73 chapters, the Rule determines in every detail how monks should live and eat and dress, how God should be revered, how a monastery should be organised, and how monasteries relate to the outside world. This Rule has been the basis for all monastic life, for men and women, and for Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran clergy alike. It is from these Rules that the saying 'ora et labora' stems from: 'Pray and work'.

The guiding thread throughout all the rules is humility. In a posture of humility Benedict is depicted: Head bowed, hands folded in prayer. Benedict died of a high fever in 543. He was declared a saint in 1220 by Pope Honorius III and Pope Paul VI declared him the patron saint of Europe in 1964. The medal of St Benedict, also named the "devil-chasing medal", contains the image of St. Benedict on one side and a series of symbolic abbreviations on and around a cross on the other side. It is used in rosaries or individually to ward off spiritual and physical dangers in the face of evil, poison and temptation.

Many monasteries around Switzerland are based on the Benedictine Rule, and some of them nowadays are open to non-clergy people wanting to stay and enjoy the peace and simplicity of the monasteries and their surroundings.

By Trudi Fill-Weidmann



Saint Benedict of Nursia, detail from a fresco by Fra Angelico, San Marco, Florence (c. 1400–1455)
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fra_Angelico_031.jpg

Consigli della Nonna

1. If you are holding a garden party, keep insects at bay and away from your guests by placing a bowl filled with apple cider vinegar outside.
2. If you find your compost bins are attracting rats and mice, make sure you aren't including any meat or uncooked food and spray the bottom edge with undiluted vinegar as a further precaution.
3. Water butts are invaluable in the garden, but can attract mosquitos. Spray the lid and top with undiluted vinegar to reduce their numbers.

By Ursula Nixon



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