

SOLEMNITY OF ST BENEDICT 2024

What was it that energised Benedict so much that when he looked upon the surrounding culture, he considered it was decadent and far from the Gospel? What gave him the impetus and inspiration to abandon his studies and eventually seek a radical lifestyle of solitude? Clearly it was not a powerful and motivational speaker or preacher who had influenced him, nor a work of literature that had opened his mind to new ideas. What had gained entry to the very core of his being was the Gospel, the personal encounter with Jesus, who is the gospel made flesh.

Listen again to today's first reading:

*³...if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
⁴if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
⁵then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding...*

The meeting with Jesus cleansed the lens of his mind and heart and he could see in a way that was not clear before. His faith gave him sight and he could see that all was not as God intended and so he acted. He wanted to live a way of life that would enable him to experience the gift that God had already given and to reach the destination that God had already prepared. His choice was a simple choice, to be true to the promise he had heard in the teaching of Jesus. A radical alternative. A way of life that activated the kingdom in the here and now. He took to heart the words of Paul in today's second reading:

'...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body...¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

Benedict therefore invites all his sons and daughters, those in monastic vows and those who are partners as Oblates and Associates to see clearly and to build our lives firmly on Christ who is our rock. He invites us to see the world, our personal world, and the world around us through eyes of Jesus. I think of those inspiring words in *Lumen Fidei* n21:

'Christians can see the world with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision.'

Those who believe see, those who have encountered Jesus, see. They see with a radical light that illuminates their whole journey and once you have seen, you cannot with integrity deny what you have seen.

The world that surrounds us is no less dysfunctional than the world that surrounded Benedict. It is a world where materialism is idolised, and truth is minimised. A world where education is secularised and everything is commercialised. The Church is satirised, and God marginalised. Our faith too suffers because it is compartmentalised, and our witness compromised. In this context we need a radical alternative. Our communities need to be reenergised, the lost and abandoned evangelised and our faith and worship revitalised.

This is why on Tuesday of this week when I welcomed the Cardinal to bless Alban Roe, I asked that that blessing be extended to us and our monastic family so that we could be renewed in our sense of mission. Committed to be at the service of the Church in England and Wales as a genuine cenacle of formation in faith. To do that we ourselves must be deeply immersed in the mystery we announce to others.

We exist to be a witness to the primacy of God. To empower others to come to a full awareness and enthusiasm for the beauty of our humanity, people who are, because of who God is and because of the plan and promise inscribed in us. We are a vocal voice that denies the plastic anthropology of our age that says human beings have no nature or essence, a transhumanism that wants to reassemble human beings to have abilities beyond what is normal. Or an ideology that simply sees human beings as commodities. But we are witnesses to God's 'Divine Project' if we remember each day why we are monks and why we felt a vocation to live according to the Rule of St Benedict. We need each day to go to the roots of our vocation as disciples of Jesus, otherwise we will forget who is working in us and who we seek to serve.

Sr Martha Driscoll OCSO, at present living at Tra Fontane, wrote:

"As Church we have the mission of transmitting our filial life in the Spirit to others, to the next generation. It is in transmitting it that we live the fullness of that filial life of Jesus who gave himself for the life of others. Spiritual maternity is at the heart of our vocation. Our divine filiation in Christ is not something abstract, not just a theory. It is given to us through human relationships in the community. This is only possible if our hearts and affections are deeply involved and centred in Christ."

On this Solemnity of St Benedict, he invites us to be a radical alternative so that we can become transparent with Christ himself. Then we will fulfil our vocation. Then we will have a reason to exist.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

Conventual Mass, Ampleforth Abbey

21 March 2024