

Excerpts from *The Rule of Benedict*

This document has been put together by R.A. Baker, Ph.D.
for classroom use only. Baker's notes are in this arial font.
The text is downloaded from (A Pax Book, preface by W.K. Lowther Clarke,
Translated into English. London: S.P.C.K., 1931)

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The Prologue:

Listen continually with your heart,
O son, giving an attentive ear to the direction of thy master
[the Abbot]...
that thou may return, by your obedience, to Him from Whom, by
the idleness of disobedience, you have moved away...
...renounce your own will...and enter the service of your true
king, Christ the Lord.
And with our eyes open to the divine light, let us with astonished
ears listen to the admonition of God's voice...
"He who has the hearing ear,
let him hear what the Spirit says...
And what does the Spirit say?
"Come, children, listen to me: I will teach you the fear of the
Lord."

Commentary:

[Listen is used four times in the Prologue.]

The opening word, "Listen" (Obsculta), and the instruction to "incline the ear of your heart" set a contemplative tone for the entire Rule, prioritizing a receptive interior posture over active speech.

Hopefully, this jogs in your mind what our introductory Lecture spoke about...quiet, listen rather than discursive (audible) prayer.]

Chapter 7: Humility

The first step, then, of humility is if one set the fear of God
always before his eyes and...be always mindful of everything that
God has ordered...

Let him at all times account that he is a man beheld always by
God in heaven and that whatsoever he does in any place
is seen by the divine watchfulness and is at all times reported to
God by the angels.

(Constant Presence):

The first step of humility requires monks to keep the "fear of God"...knowing that we should always be "constantly mindful" of God's presence.

Chapter 20: Reverence at Prayer

[This chapter begins with the analogy of how we might approach a human king or person of great importance...]

...how much more must supplication be made with all humility and purity of devotion to the Lord God of all?

And let us bear in mind that *it is not in much speaking that we are graciously heard...And so our prayer should be pure and short, unless it is prolonged as a result of the infusion of divine grace.*

THE END OF THE PROLOGUE

But if our wish is to have a dwelling-place in His kingdom, let us remember it cannot be attained unless one run thither by good deeds...

[This sounds very "works" oriented, but then you must keep reading...]

Those who fear the Lord *are not puffed up by their own good observance of rule, but reckoning that the good in them could not be wrought by themselves but by God...*

Just as the Apostle Paul attributed nothing to himself...but said: "By the grace of God, I am what I am."

...and **whatsoever our nature does not make possible let us ask the Lord to direct that the help of His grace shall supply.**

Our final reading from The Rule comes in Chap 73...the final chapter.

Chapter 73:

NOT EVERY ASPECT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS LAID DOWN IN THIS RULE

For those who hasten to the perfection of conversion, there are the teachings of the holy fathers...which brings a man to the height of perfection...[the Conferences](#) of the fathers and...their lives and also the Rule of our holy father Basil...

[And so here, at the end of The RULE of Benedict, he is directing the brothers to read John Cassian's *Conferences*.

In my Ph.D. work I read both Benedict AND Cassian and somehow missed this!]

Questions:

1. Do these "Rules" seem like "works?"
2. What do you think of how Benedict lays out ALL of these Rules, then urges the monks to fall on the grace of God?
Does that seem contradictory to you?
3. Why does Benedict speak about prayer, yet he does not explain *contemplative prayer*? Rather he points the monks to Cassian???
Why doesn't he just explain it in the Rules?