

March 22, 2021, St. Benedict

1. **In 1945, Fr. James Keller, the founder of the Christophers, directed a request for advice to Monsignor Bartocetti**, an official at the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. The latter told him to read the 1659 directives and methods the Holy See gave to missionaries in China. Fr. James responded: **“Monsignor, that’s a long time ago!”** When I myself recently shared these directives with the Discipleship Group of the local parish here in Mission, one of them said, “Wow! These directives are almost 400 years old and still very relevant and practical for parish missions today!” For example, one directive reads: “By their natural dispositions and manners, they should be capable of accommodating themselves to others, they should be neither disagreeable to them nor offensive nor unpleasant to outsiders, but with the Apostle Paul they should be ‘all things to all men.’” It was as if the **Church had captured a ray of the eternal Gospel** in these words that can enlighten a missionary anywhere in any time or place.

2. **To renew anything in a lasting way means to see it as God meant it to be in the first place.** But how can we, blinded by our collective and individual sinfulness, do such a thing? A first glimpse of people and things in their original glory is given to us when we behold Jesus in his risen glory, radiant as a Bridegroom or as a Warrior, brilliant in his bright armour on the eve of a great and decisive battle. Yesterday’s words of the Gospel can give us a glance of this glory: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out and

I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself”(Jn 12: 31-32). Jesus enters into single handed combat with the devil in these last days before Easter. He does this to give us back the paradise we lost. He does it with the energy of a Bridegroom who wants his Bride back for himself! **He does so fully armed!**

3. **His armour and his methods are not like those of professional soldiers of today.** Instead of violence he uses a word of power. Instead of retaliation he accepts suffering, a special kind of breastplate, for the love of God. Instead of a gun he uses the sword of the Cross. But he is a master at ambush. On the Cross when the devil was certain that he had checkmated God, he was utterly defeated. Unless we unravel some of his plans and examine his careful preparation we can remain ignorant of his methods. Twice St. Paul exhorts us to put on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:11,13). The “whole armour”? What’s the whole armour? **The Cross is wisdom and training for hand to hand combat!** What does it look like? When young people see a man defeat his enemies with ease and grace, remaining above dirty tactics and underhanded manipulation, they say, “That’s really cool!” The monks of old would say, **“That’s wisdom!” How do we get it?**

3. **It is like that old manual of 1649 on missionary life we just spoke about.** When we read the old brown and brittle pages, we exclaim: “This guy lived so long ago and it is as if he had been living like us all the time! How did he get all this wisdom and learning?” But do you hear the deeper question you are asking? You wonder why someone can say something so long

ago and still make an impact on you today? Wisdom ambushes time by remaining above it; that is why it is so attractive. Wisdom gives the heart a stability amid rapid and dramatic changes. It remains steadfast in the Lord in the strength of his might. In Book of Sirach which we had last night for Vigils we read: **“Why do you say you are lacking in these things, and why are your souls very thirsty?** I opened my mouth and said, Get these things for yourselves without money.” (Sir 51:24-25). To get it we need a thirst for it. Start by wanting what is beautiful and does not change. Start young! His eye is already upon you. Persevere in this desire. **Be stubborn about nothing except what is unchanging.**

To renew anything is to see it as God meant it to be in the beginning. This is what Jesus proposes to his disciples today: “Truly, I say to you, **in the new world**, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne...” (Mt 19:28) He will remind us at the end of our days, “Remember when I called you to leave all things...” The stability of a monk is the exterior manifestation of his thirst for eternal, unchanging things; the restlessness of a monk is his longing for the eternal; the humility of a monk is his conviction that wisdom comes only from God; the liturgical prayer of a monk is the voice of the Bride charmed by the beauty of the Bridegroom; the labour of a monk is his enthusiasm to make real the beauty he sees in Christ; **the combat of a monk is his fight with his old self as he exchanges it for the new warrior in Christ.**

A monk needs to taste the Cross each day even as he tastes the Eucharist. A monk desires daily to receive the Cross even

as he desires to receive the Eucharist. A monk desires to live in the Cross even as he desires Jesus to live in him and he in the Eucharist.

St. Benedict’s Rule has two fulcrums – the work of God, which culminates in the Eucharist and the monk’s labour, which culminates in his configuration to the Cross. The Rule offers us these two simple paths to God, ever old, ever new, always standing above the changing times like a font of wisdom leading to God.