

# St. Benedict

Feast Day: July 11th

Patron Saint of Europe and Students

St. Benedict, was born, Benedetto da Norcia; believed on March 2nd, 480 AD and died March 21st, 548 AD to a Roman noble of Norcia. His twin sister was St. Scholastica.

Young Benedict went to Rome to finish his education with a nurse/housekeeper. The subject that dominated a young man's study then was rhetoric -- the art of persuasive speaking. The power of the voice without foundation in the heart was the goal of the student's education. His fellow students were educated, and wealthy, and spent their time in pursuit of pleasure not truth.

Benedict watched in horror as vice unraveled the lives and ethics of his companions. Afraid for his soul, Benedict fled Rome, gave up his inheritance and lived in a small village with his nurse. When God called him to leave this quiet life for an even deeper solitude, he went to the mountains of Subiaco. He lived as a hermit under the direction of another hermit, Romanus.

One day, the Devil presented Benedict's imagination with a beautiful, tempting woman. Benedict resisted by rolling his body into a thorn bush until it was covered in scrapes. It is said through these body wounds, he cured the wounds of his soul.

After years of prayer, word of his holiness brought nearby monks to ask for his leadership. He warned them he would be too strict for them, but they insisted, they tried to poison him when his warning proved true. The monks attempted to poison Benedict's drink, but when he prayed a blessing over the cup, it shattered.

Benedict left, and another set of sincere followers joined him. He set up twelve monasteries in Subiaco, where monks lived in the separate monasteries.

He abruptly left the monasteries after envious attacks of another hermit.



## MAJOR SHRINE

*Monte Cassio Abbey,  
Italy*

- Birth March 2nd, 480 AD
- Died March 21st, 548 AD
- Canonized by Pope  
Honorius III in 1220 AD
- Twin of St. Scholastica.

In Monte Cassino he founded the monastery that became the roots of the Church's monastic system. He gathered his disciples into one whole community instead of many small ones.

Benedict had holiness with the ability to lead. His beliefs and instructions on religious life were collected in what is now known as the Rule of Saint Benedict, still directing religious life after 15 centuries. Benedict put what he had learned about the power of speaking and oratorical rhythms in the service of the Gospel. He understood rhetoric was as much a tool as a hammer was. Benedict did not shun rhetoric because it had been used to seduce people to vice; he reformed it.

Benedict realized the strongest and truest foundation for the power of words, was the Word of God itself:

*"For what page or word of the Bible is not a perfect rule for temporal life?"*

He had experienced the power of God's word as expressed in Scripture: "For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

For prayer, Benedict turned to the psalms, the very songs, and poems from the Jewish liturgy that Jesus himself had prayed. To join our voices with Jesus in praise of God during the day was so important that Benedict called it the "Work of God." And nothing was to be put before the work of God. "Immediately upon hearing the signal for the Divine Office all work will cease." Benedict believed with Jesus that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

In Benedictine prayer, our hearts are the vessel empty of thoughts and intellectual striving. All that remains is the trust in God's providence to fill us. Emptying ourselves this way brings God's abundant goodness bubbling up in our hearts, first with an inspiration or two, and finally overflowing our heart with contemplative love.

In this lectio divina, he and his monks memorized the Scripture, studied it, and contemplated it until it became part of their being. Four to six hours were set aside each day for this sacred reading. If monks had free time it "should be used by the brothers to practice psalms." Lessons from Scripture were to be spoken from memory not read from a book. On Benedict's list of "Instruments of Good Works" is "to enjoy holy readings."

One time, a poor man came to the monastery begging for a little oil. He was refused by the cellarer, as they only had a little left. Angry at this distrust of God's providence, Benedict knelt to pray. A bubbling sound came from inside the oil jar. The monks watched, as oil from God filled the vessel so completely that it overflowed.

Benedict died on March 21st, 543 AD only a month after his sister St. Scholastica. It is said he died with high fever on the very day God told him he would.

St. Benedict is often pictured with a bell, a broken tray, a raven, or a crosier. He was canonized by Pope Honorius III in 1220 AD. St. Benedict feast day is celebrated on July 11th.