



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Solemnity of the Passing of Saint Benedict March 21, 2006

In answer to Saint Peter's question, as we have just heard in that gospel, Our Lord says that whoever follows the way of perfection which he teaches will receive eternal life in the age to come, and in this life a hundredfold more than what he has given up. Saint Benedict is declared by the Opening Prayer of the Mass to be a Master in this way of perfection. So it is no wonder that today, when he passed from this life, he passed to eternal glory, but also that, already in this life, as the great monastic teacher Saint Aelred of Rievaulx says, "he lived in his heavenly homeland in thought and longing." This was the hundredfold reward he already enjoyed in this life.

It can indeed be said, I believe, that this was Saint Benedict's specific calling, to live in heaven already in this life, insofar as this is possible for any human being by the Lord's grace. So it is the specific calling of all his spiritual sons and daughters, all those who are called to the Benedictine life. In the Church some are called to preach, some are called to teach, some are called to minister to those with this or that specific need, some are called to work to conform temporal realities to the Gospel, and so on. Benedictines through the ages have done many of these things. But we can say that, at least according to the mind of Saint Aelred, what Benedictines are specifically called to is, by the grace of God, insofar as possible to live heaven on earth. As he says, "although we are not yet in full reality in the place where [Saint Benedict] has gone, we are there in hope and in love, for as our Redeemer says: *Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.*" Already to live in the end of the age, already to live in heaven, already to begin to see – but yet here as through a glass darkly – this is the Benedictine vocation, this, and the sharing of this, through preaching, teaching, ministering, hospitality, Christian friendship and communion, the sharing of this with all who in one way or another are drawn to the monastery, who in one way or another come to it.

What a blessed vocation it is! Yes, at the beginning of this life there are the hard and rough things, the difficulties, the narrow way. But if, by the Lord's grace, we persevere, then the hard and rough things begin to become smooth, the difficulties begin to disappear, the narrow way becomes exceedingly broad, in the words of Saint Benedict, our hearts expand with the inexpressible sweetness of love and, in the words of Saint Aelred, we, like Moses, pass to the sight of the wonderful vision, of the glory of God on the face of Christ, and of the blessed angels and saints continually on fire with love of him.

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