

SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



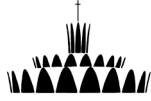
Study

"Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading.... From the fourth hour until the time of Sext, they will devote themselves to reading. But after Sext and their meal, they may rest on their beds in complete silence; should a brother wish to read privately, let him do so, but without disturbing the others." Rule of Benedict, 48

For Saint Benedict there were basically two kinds of work: the work of the hands and the work of the mind. Both play an essential part in the life of a monk. As monks we are involved throughout our lives in an ongoing search for God. A considerable part of that search involves an ongoing search for truth: an attempt to understand in ever greater depth our God, ourselves and the world in which we live. Part of that understanding comes to us through the study of the various disciplines - the sciences, literature, philosophy, history, mathematics, etc. - and particularly those disciplines for which we have a greater aptitude or to which, under monastic obedience, we are directed. But as Christians, and even more so as monks, the larger part of our grasp of reality comes from our attentive listening to the mysteries that God has revealed to us in his own Word, Jesus Christ. Though truth, wherever it is spoken and understood, frees us from the slavery of error and illusion, it is the Word of the living God, studied in theology and pondered daily in prayer and spiritual reading, that brings us the freedom of the children of God: "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31)

As we attend to the Word of God and allow it to deepen our understanding of the world, we become more possessed by the Spirit of Jesus, sent to lead us into the fullness of truth. It is this truth, studied in the scriptures, pondered in silence, proclaimed in the liturgies, that we receive with joy and, through our teaching, our preaching, our counseling and our friendships, hand on to others for their greater freedom.

The theme of study naturally brings up the question: What course of studies does a person take when he joins a monastery? The answer to this question will depend partly on whether he hopes to go forward to ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood. The vocations to the monastic life and the



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priestly life are separate and, since the Second Vatican Council, an increasing number of those called to the monastic life have felt no call to the priesthood. During his first year the young monk, or novice, will be learning about what the monastic life involves. He will have classes on prayer, on the Rule of Saint Benedict, on the nature of religious life, on the psalms. If he is preparing for ordination his further studies will be tailored to his own needs and to meet the requirements for ordination. This will normally involve taking some philosophy courses before going on to four years of theology. If he is not to be ordained he will still embark on a program of theological studies worked out in collaboration with the Abbot and the Junior Master that will deepen his understanding of the scriptures, of theology and of the religious life.