



ASH WEDNESDAY REFLECTION 2/14/18

The basket placed near the tabernacle this morning is filled with envelopes full of good intentions. Each of us, in composing our resolutions, took the first steps of the journey of Lent. The stepping stones we tread are not new to any of us.

What more can or might we do? Only our hearts, open to the Spirit, can lead us on gently to the “added measure.”

I don’t believe that Benedict, who seemed to seek moderation in all things is suggesting difficult measures, just an “added measure.”

As a community we are focusing on an “added measure” of prayer, community, ministry, fasting, almsgiving and silence. And perhaps our focus simply means attentiveness.

Attentiveness to our commitment to prayer might simply mean presence, punctuality, and preparation –“nothing harsh” as Benedict notes in another place in the Rule. As we continue to sing and pray with one voice, each of us can inspire and be inspired by our personal and communal commitment to community prayer. None of us is alone as we pray together. And, of course, our personal prayer also supports and enhances our prayer together—our added focus during Lent can only lead to the glory of God—That In All Things God May Be Glorified.

An added measure of focus on community can mean so very many things: caring and concern in both small and magnanimous ways, whether seen or unseen, whether acknowledged or not, we reverence the person of Christ in one another, quietly, reverently, sincerely. The call to focus on community seems to be reflected in our commitment to fidelity to the monastic life—each moment of each day. We are reminded again in the Rule, to “never turn away from anyone who needs our love.”

Recently I was drawn to Chapter 4 of the Rule and as I read it the thought came to me that “the tools” can help to direct us in our Lenten focus. We are reminded to: love fasting, do not pamper yourself, refrain from too much eating or sleeping; renounce yourself in order to follow Christ. Any one of these

“tools” easily provides us with an added measure, but nothing too harsh.

We are invited to relieve the lot of the poor, of those in need. Our generosity to the St. Vincent de Paul group at St. Andrew Parish in Butler, PA, will be a community focus and practice of this useful tool.

Regarding silence, Benedict calls us to guard our lips from harmful or deceptive speech and to prefer moderation in speech. Benedict then goes on to devote a whole chapter (six) of his little rule for beginners to silence, encouraging us to have an “esteem for silence.” All of this not for silence for its own sake but for the benefits not only to the individual but for the community as a whole.

The tool that we are given on prayer sums up the reason for prayer, namely, that we place our hope in God alone and the suggestion, listen carefully to holy reading. Benedict then goes on to devote thirteen chapters of the Rule to prayer, almost twenty percent to this most important topic, can it be any less important to us...an added measure, but nothing, too harsh.

We are encouraged to respect the elders and to love the young; each one of us falls somewhere in that spectrum, relatively speaking. The basis of community is the mutual respect and love to which we are called...each day, an added measure.

The Rule does not have a specific section on ministry and yet a few short lines in Chapter 4 probably says it all: relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, go to help the troubled and console the sorrowful.

We have forty days ahead of us, the ashes have been placed on our foreheads and we have the choice to respond to the invitation: each of us having something above the assigned measure to offer to God with the joy of the Holy Spirit. So that we may look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.

We have the tools, the gifts, the example and support of one another and our own personal integrity.

As I offered your resolutions this morning, I prayed for each of us, that our Lenten journey be holy, peaceful and full of the nearness of divinity. Thank you for your commitment.

Happy Lent (and Happy Valentines Day!)

-Karen Brink, OSB