

REFLECTION FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

February 10, 2016

When I was a sophomore in high school at St. Benedict Academy, one of my favorite classes was biology. Ours was the first class to move into our “state of the art” biology lab back in 1960! Our biology instructor was Sister Rosalyn Soller, OSB, who lived and breathed her subject. She was extremely knowledgeable with the exciting new concept of DNA which I remember well...and that will be the foundation for another reflection.

I remember being fascinated by her presentation of the concepts of “tropisms.” The simple definition of “tropism” is the “involuntary orientation by an organism that involves turning or curving.”

I would like to suggest that the Benedictine life is replete with tropisms and I will consider three of those in this reflection for Ash Wednesday.

Chapter 49 of the Rule of Benedict directs members to “make known to the prioress what she intends to do (by way of resolution), since it ought to be done with her prayer and approval.” This Ash Wednesday at Morning Prayer I had the privilege of receiving the resolutions of the community. We were invited to consider our resolutions in the light of the three pillars of Benedictine life: **prayer, community, and ministry.**

And returning to the concept of “tropism” it seems to me that our attention to these three pillars, while not always involuntary, will indeed involve “turning or curving.” And perhaps that is what our life and our vow of fidelity to the monastic way of life is all about. We are invited to fullness of life by deep commitment to prayer, community and ministry.

In our effort to “seek God,” the goal of our Benedictine life, we are called to a community of others who also seek God. Community is a circle that encompasses and encircles our lives. Our day to day rubbing shoulders with one another, our care for and interest in one another, our care and attention to those who are sick or hospitalized, our forgiveness of one another, our prayer for and with one another draw us in to that circle of community and can make it all makes sense. How will the resolutions that we put forth for this holy season deepen our commitment to community living? What resolution or resolutions to this pillar, community, have you asked the prioress to bless? How will your resolution bring you to the “joy of Holy Easter”?

Commissioned for ministry we find ourselves in the midst of God’s holy people. Whether our ministry finds us quietly working at small jobs in our rooms, or more actively with a wider circle of others, what Benedictine values do we bring to the “work of our hands?” What attitudes of care, concern and commitment are enfolded as we move from task to task, from one focus to another? Are we conscious of building the kingdom wherever we find ourselves, whatever the moment happens to present to us? Moment by moment, day by day, ours is the beautiful responsibility to extend the creative touch of God to the ministry to which we have been called.

Pulled and curved by prayer is a tropism which underlies every single thing we do. Our attention to Opus Dei, the “work of God” is a deep and profound responsibility as well as a unique privilege. As young people say today, “how awesome!” What is it that you have challenged yourself to do during this

Lenten season which will allow you to “prefer nothing to the Love of Christ” that is deepened at each moment of prayer?

During this season of Lent each of us, in one way or another, is being pulled, attracted, nudged and urged toward the inclusive circle which might be called Benedictine life. In a recent presentation to Benedictine prioresses, Sister Karen Joseph, OSB, challenged us to “live the Benedictine life with all our effort and energy, with a full embrace.”

I would like to think that our Lenten resolutions around prayer, community, and ministry will enable us to do just that.

I began this reflection with a brief biology concept on “tropisms. And while the particular concepts of geotropism: involuntary turning toward the earth, thermotropism, an orientation to warmth, and phototropism, being pulled toward the light, are interesting and important biological concepts, what can be more important to our lives than being pulled toward prayer, community and ministry?

May our journey this Lent find us pulled, curved and directed to the joy of Holy Easter.

Happy Lent!