

Profession of Br Benedict Mary, OSB  
Homily Delivered by Abbot Michael Liebl OSB

It is easy to distinguish Benedictines from other religious groups inside the Catholic church. I don't mean by the habit which they wear. I don't mean by the age of the institution - the oldest religious order in the church. I don't mean by the apostolates which they undertake.

The Jesuits might be imagined as the church's professional class. The Dominicans might be considered the church's preachers. The Trappists might be thought of as the church's reclusive contemplatives. The Benedictines are just family. People come to a Benedictine community because they want to join a family. We live together. We eat together. We pray together. We share what we have with one another. We stay until we die. None of the other religious groups in the Catholic Church do quite the same thing.

For a Benedictine community, it is always a moment of great joy and special pride when another member is added to the family. It means that a man has chosen a way of life which embraces prayer to God, care for fellow monks, and service to the apostolates of the monastery and the people which those apostolates serve. It is a unique way of life. It has a certain mystique. It certainly has a certain beauty. For those embrace this way of life, we know that it is a challenge because it pulls us forward. It pulls us away from our weaknesses. It pulls toward one another. It pulls us toward God.

Those unfamiliar with Benedictine monasteries probably presume that they will see perfection as they peer in from the outside. Holy monks going about their work and prayer immersed in an aura of other worldly sanctity. Those familiar with Benedictine monasteries, and especially the monks who live in them, know that is not quite how it works. Like any extended family, monasteries have equal allotments of characters, sinners, saints and heroes. We have our strengths and we have our weaknesses. The wonderful charism of Benedictine life is that although no one individual in the monastery ever achieves either sanctity or greatness alone, as an entity united in work and prayer, we can all aspire to reach those goals.

The great witness of Br Benedict to all of us is a reminder of how much we stand in need of one another. I know that everyone in the community is impressed with the fidelity Br Benedict has shown both to prayers and to the work to which he has been assigned. All this in spite of the clear physical difficulties which he has to overcome. In fact we in this community are all greatly served by Br Benedict's example. I say this because there is not a single member of this monastery that does not have some handicap which he has to overcome. For the majority of us, our handicaps are just not as obvious in the physical way that Br Benedict's handicap happens to be. But I can assure you that every one of us in this community has some handicap. The real beauty of monastic life is that these handicaps are our means to wholeness. We actually rely on one another's limitations to call us out of our self preoccupation, out of our selfishness, out of our self centeredness. We rely on one another for care, for consideration, and for paths to holiness. Alone we always fail. Together we always succeed.

Br Benedict, as in any family, I can assure you that we will have our share of challenges and setbacks. I can promise you that we will have our moments of triumph and tragedy. But the greatness of the Benedictine way of life is together we can forge our way to that which is beyond us individually. So if you are willing to embrace this way of life, I invite you now to make your profession in presence of this community, in the presence of your family and your friends.