

Monastic Liturgy 1

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone.

Great pleasure to have you here. I promise no big words today, but I'm going to speak in Latin. Preparing all this brought back some memories from when I was doing my doctoral thesis on 12th century monastic text.

I just remember the joy of going into the library and being handed an early 13th century, so a little bit late, manuscript and, you know, very precious taking it out of the box, putting it on the desk, and the lid fell off.

Bam! Under my care, you know, these wonderful dusty books. But it was always such a joy to open them up and really touch history. That's what I loved about doing my research was being able to open.

I usually thought 13th century. There were too many 12th century texts, so I was quite late in the day. Later, more contemporary texts. 13th century, you know. So, unfortunately, we were late.

[1 : 06] But being able to look at them and touch them and see the scribal errors in them and the little annotations in the pictures. They're living history. So, if anyone gets inspired to do medieval research, it's a wonderful, wonderful thing to do.

And I want to speak a little bit this morning about monastic liturgy from the point of view, really, of how it can affect our lives here and now. I'm one of the people who is deeply dismayed by anything contemporary in Christianity, even though I do the evening service.

I put up with it. No. But I'm trying to even create the evening service in a very deep kind of monastic sort of way.

And as I talk through this, I'm going to just relate a couple of stories of my own experience of having been in monastic houses. Obviously, studying monasticism, I did spend some time amongst monks and nuns.

Some of them were my supervisors. And also, what I needed to study were, tended to be housed in monasteries. So, I found myself bunged up in monasteries in Luxembourg and places like that.

[2 : 07] And, of course, in the end, while I was researching and studying, I found myself having some monastic experiences. And I think that the monastic round of the liturgy is something that's very important.

And the way it fits into the monastic life, I think it's important for all of us. The impression to be given may be that doing the liturgy is the purpose of a monastic life, kind of a monk or nun.

But that isn't really the case. That isn't the intention of St. Benedict. So, I'll be basing my comments on a few chapters of the rule of St. Benedict on the liturgy. I went on a retreat in North Wales when I was a minister in Wales, in South Wales.

My wife and I had just been on an all-inclusive holiday in Jamaica. And we flew back, and I was required, it was for all young ordinands, to go on a retreat in North Wales at a Franciscan house up there.

And so, I literally had to come back from the airport with my wife and children, brought them off home, and drive to North Wales. It just took about ten minutes. But, I remember going from this total luxury of an all-inclusive retreat in warm Montego Bay, Jamaica, with the beautiful coffee, that wonderful Jamaican blue mountain coffee, all the food you wanted, all the entertainment you could have, anything you wanted, and warm.

[3 : 28] I just remember warm. And then I had to drive to a shivery cold North Wales, and I was in this Franciscan house with a simple cell. I mean, I was in this cell with really simple furniture, and no entertainment, and that really bare minimum food, and that round of liturgy, and I was mad.

It just was too much of a contrast. And yet, in the end, we had to speak, we were there a week. I was somehow drawn in, back in, by the daily rhythm of that house, and even its simplicity and its chivalry environment.

I was drawn in, back into a tradition, a tradition which, for the Franciscans, goes back to the Middle Ages. And there's something about the rhythm of the monastic day.

With its round of the liturgy, work, and leisure, which I find very helpful for my own Christian life. So that's why I'd like to speak about monastic liturgy, and consider the ways in which that tradition might help all of us to grow spiritually.

And I'm going to be thinking about that really in two ways, in terms of how you might go on monastic retreats better, and how you might incorporate something of the tradition in your own daily life.

[4 : 45] I have been reading an article someone gave me, some of you may have read this, in The Economist, called Jesus CEO. Anyone read that? You will have read that. Very interesting.

It's about big Christianity in North America. Big churches, big business. Willow Creek, I think 30,000 a week attendance. Isn't that awesome? I mean, it's amazing.

User friendliness. The quest for total excellence. Food court. High technology. We should put a food court in out there somewhere. Sell coffee. Anything we have to do.

You know, we're going to have chief theological officers. They think David should be reassigned to the job of the chief theological officer of St. John. I don't know what that means, but I hope it carries a big expense account.

And yet, 1,400 years ago, building upon experience and tradition, a monk and abbot called Benedict compiled a rule for monks.

[5 : 42] It was not an innovative text, but built upon tradition and human experience to create a Christian form of community and life, which met some of the distinctive needs of his time, and yet, which strangely, perversely almost, in our age of change, continues to endure to this day.

And quietly and imperceptibly, against the noise and raucousness of Daisy's daily life, the monastic round goes on. And really not, in many ways, altered much by time.

And as such, I think, has something important to offer all of us in our daily life. You see, it's about kind of the depth of every day, rather than the glitz of today.

One of the conspicuous characteristics of monastic culture in the medieval West is the liturgical round of the day. The rule of St. Benedict is a 6th century monastic guide, which addresses itself to Kennebis, Kennebiters.

That is to say, monks living together in community, doing their service under a rule and an abbot. There are two forms of monks. One are Kennebiters, and the other are Anchorites, or hermits.

[7 : 03] You have hermits living in the desert, living in isolation, and Kennebiters living in communities under a rule and an abbot. And it is that form of monasticism which the rule of St. Benedict addresses.

At the heart of this monastic life is the relationship with the abbot, and the day is structured around prayer, worship, study, and manual labor.

The spirituality of the monk is to be that of an obedient listener and follower in practice of the word of God. And the monk needs a concrete expression of that attitude, which is made available in obedience to the person of the abbot.

But the staple of Benedict monastic spirituality is the opus de, the work of God, the divine office.

This is the monk's chief work, though not his only labor and not his constant preoccupation.

Nonetheless, the rule orders the opus de, the work of God, the daily round of the liturgy in chapters 8 through 19 of the rules. It is unlikely that Holy Communion, the Eucharist, was celebrated in Benedict's monastery, except on Sundays and feast days.

[8 : 19] This is not a community of ordained men. This is a lay community. It is the divine office that is the staple of Benedict's monastic spirituality.

And as I say, in exploring this part of the rule with you this morning, my desire is to place before you aspects of this practice which might be helpful for you and for me. Monastic culture seems to most of us to be remote, perhaps exotic, certainly quite strange, and utterly different from our own lives and experience.

So I will tell you that I spent some time with some friends of mine who were monks at San Anselmo in Rome, which is a big Benedictine center on an old garbage heap.

It was a Roman garbage heap, which is now, there's a monastery on top of that. In Rome, it's a monastic studies center where Benedictines go. The food was fantastic. But I just remember swimming in their swimming pool with a bunch of monks, thinking, there's something strange about this.

Why am I in a pool with a bunch of monks? It's just, oh, right. So, you know, it's not that strange. Monks do go swimming, after all. However, I would want to argue with you.

[9 : 29] You know, if we go back to Benedict's text, which is where I want to go today, remember that 6th century. So there's hundreds of years of development and corruption and all sorts of stuff going on in between that.

But we go back to Benedict's wonderful text, which I love so much. In that form, Benedictine monasticism, in its purest form, is simply a way of life appropriate to its time, Christian life appropriate to its time.

Benedict's desire in establishing a community of monks was to establish a school, a place where men could be schooled in the Christian life and the Word of God.

The monastery was to be a place of training and practice. It was not an escape from the world to simply escape for its own sake. It was a safe place, a place to go aside, a place where we might learn to serve the Lord.

After all, the monastery is described in the rule as a school of the Lord's service. And that's what it is. It is a place of learning the Word of God. And, of course, the process of learning in the Middle Ages, in the early Middle Ages, was really different from what you might understand just today.

[10 : 42] It's actually just a simple work of scholarship, of learning your text and writing them down. And that is simply it. And that is really a tradition which continues, certainly in medieval scholarship today, computers notwithstanding.

The monastery was a place of training and practicing and learning. The rule opens with these words. *Asculta, Ophelia, praecepta, magistri, et inclinae aurum cordis tui, et admonitionem pi patris libenter excipi, et efficaciter compli.*

Sorry if my pronunciation was bad there. I haven't spoken Latin for so long. Listen, my son, to the precepts of the Master, and incline the ear of your heart. Welcome the admonition of a loving Father, and put it into practice.

We're called to listen. We're called to learn. We're called to turn our hearts. And we are called to practice. The monastery is a place of learning, and a community where what was learned was practiced.

I suggest the Benedict Monastery was something of a boarding school. There's nothing to say that the monks, you know, who do you picture monks to be? It must have been a range of men of various ages.

[12 : 01] But there's nothing to say that the monks were established older men rather than young men or even teenagers. Indeed, Benedict provides for the discipline of boys and youth.

So I suggest to you that the abbot and his authority is something of a housemaster, actually, who's having to keep some very truculent young charges in line. The monastic culture of the times that we see in the rule of St. Benedict clearly presupposes a degree of literacy and the ability to write.

Not writing in the sense of composing, but of writing down words. This was an age in which books could only be procured by copying them down.

You could not go to a store and buy a book. If you wanted to have a copy of the Bible or of anything else, you needed to write it down yourself. You would borrow a copy from someone, write it down, and then steal the copy and keep it for yourself.

So the learning of text by heart is really integral to Benedict's rule. The expectation that one will sit and listen to a text read aloud in liturgy and store the information in the heart and apply it in your life.

[13 : 16] This runs through the rule. The rule of St. Benedict provides a curriculum for study. He talks about the importance of studying the Old and New Testaments, the Orthodox and Catholic Fathers, the conferences and institutes of Cassian, and the lives of the fathers and the rule of Basel.

These are the texts the monks had to read, they heard them read out, and they copied them down. I'm sorry I'm causing 21st century copies.

Every time I lean forward, I'll move that, and that'll be better. Daily reading and the practice of reading was part of the life of the monastery, and it was part of the daily round of the liturgy and worship.

And when you read through the rule, as I say, you can imagine an abbot residing over a very human community of men of various ages, something like college or university or boarding schools. Not really a retreat from the world per se, but a place where learning can proceed unimpeded. Indeed, in the absence of institutions of higher learning, this is a time when Roman authority has crumbled away, an insecure time.

[14 : 25] Monasteries were institutions of learning and literacy. And as such, the daily round of the monastery was a very important part of the formation of the monk.

That daily round of liturgy, of hearing worship, of hearing the word being read out, and singing through this altar. Benedict's final community, of which he was abbot, was at Monte Cassino outside Rome.

I don't know if anyone has been there. It's very famous for a battle during World War II. It's an amazing site to go to. It was a time of international insecurity. Roman authority was in full retreat. There was no national army, no mounted police to keep order. So life was dangerous. Barbarian hordes were on the move. Often it was only the local bishop who really had the authority to negotiate with incoming and outgoing barbarians.

And so the move away from the city into a monastery, the move into remote places, to monastic communities, is not, I think, to be interpreted as an esoteric flight, but as a sensible precaution, a finding of physical safety in a tumultuous world.

[15 : 35] And in a time of agrarian crisis caused by the breakdown of society and movement, Benedict's community was envisioned as essentially an agrarian unit, reducing all of its own needs throughout the year.

They were farming communities based on the land. So the famous enclosure architecture of the monastery, again, needs to be interpreted as a safety measure in an uncertain world.

You couldn't just call out the police if something went wrong. You had to build a defensive kind of house to live in. Yet I want to go back to that opening sentence and lay it before you as a challenge. *Asculpta, O feely, praecepta, magistri.* Listen, my son, to the presets of the master and incline the ear of your heart. Welcome the admonition of a loving father and put it into practice.

Listen. Put it into practice. See, my challenge for you today is to put it into practice. See, that's the purpose of the monastery, to be a community, to be a school of the Lord's service, a place where together we put into practice what we learn.

[16 : 46] And as such, I see great parallels between the community of a monastery and a community like this, the St. John's. This is a school of the Lord's service also. But when in your own life do you put into practice your spiritual life?

When does it happen? When does it happen? When does it give your spiritual life the traction it needs? When does it happen? We talk about it. When do we do it? What is the rule by which you are going to live so that every day your spiritual life will be given traction, energy, forward motion? By that I don't mean the great wonderful pizzazz of PowerPoint presentations and excitement that comes from going to big services all the time. But rather the daily ramp of spiritual discipline and growth.

When will it happen to you? For the monk it was when he joined the monastery and placed himself in obedience to an abbot. What about us? What about now? What are the disciplines of daily life that you have in your own spiritual life that you are implementing that are helping you grow spiritually now?

While looking at the worship in the rule of St. Benedict I'd like to suggest that this expression of monastic culture offers us some important structures which we could all implement in our lives which would help us listen and practice.

[18 : 06] And these include a daily round of worship of the recitation of psalms of meditation on scripture and don't get me wrong I'm talking about that in the western sense not eastern and of course private prayer.

Let me think a bit about the liturgy in the rule of St. Benedict now. Chapters 8 through 20 of the rule of St. Benedict contain the arrangement of the Psalter for recitation at the Divine Office by day and by night.

The basic plan is that the Psalter with its 150 psalms be chanted every week and begun afresh every Sunday at Matins. Let me say that again because I think that is the most important thing of all. The basic plan is that the Psalter with its 150 psalms be chanted every week. I don't think that's such a big deal, do you? Some of the major houses it became every day.

That really is getting out of hand every week. And right there you see if you recite the Psalter every week you can certainly imagine the effect that that would have on your spiritual life.

[19 : 12] It would change the environment in which you exist. The Psalms are distributed between the hours. You may be familiar with that terminology. The hours of the office which are prime, ter, sext, non, and compilin and the major hours of lobs and vespers and the night office.

Now for Benedict, the liturgy was only a part of the whole life directed towards God. Certainly it was the best part but it was only a part of the whole life directed towards God.

As I said, these were agrarian communities. They had to get on. They had to provide for their needs. They couldn't spend their time sitting around in the church worshipping all day long. Not in Benedict's era, anyway.

So, you know, this is not about a flight from work. They had to work. But the day was interspersed with liturgy. And it is the continuous round of the psalmody which gives the monk a rich and deep knowledge of the culture which they would have been absorbing almost unconsciously.

When you read the gnastic text from the medieval period, especially when they didn't really have punctuation as we understand it, what is striking is the way in which scripture, but particularly the psalms, are integrated into their text.

[20 : 28] Often spontaneously, sometimes without the author, even realizing what he was doing. Scriptural phrases and expressions run through their monastic text because monks absorb so much of the psalter over the course of their daily lives.

And chapter 9 of the Rule of St. Benedict mentions the other basic elements of the author. He says, The books to be read at Matins shall be the inspired scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also the commentaries on them which have been made by well-known and Orthodox Catholic fathers.

So what this means is that monks would hear lections from the Bible read continuo throughout the year. And I think, in a way, there's a wonderful thing there. This is really in our prayer book daily liturgy as well, the morning and evening prayer round.

So you find yourself reading in the monastic thing whole chapters of scripture, not small, little, bite-sized chunks. It can be very depressing when you read entire chapters of Job, but nevertheless, when you hear big chunks of the scripture read out every day, it's quite different than when you hear small chunks read out.

The monastic day then included seven services plus the night office. And the basis of this day is the biblical phrase, seven times a day I shall praise thee.

[21 : 49] And then it's in Psalms and also, and in the night I will rise and worship thee. Psalm 16, sorry, chapter 16 of the Rural St. Benedict is this, how the work of God is to be performed during the day.

And Benedict writes this, seven times in the day, says the prophet, I have rendered praise to you. And he says, now that sacred number of seven will be fulfilled by us if we perform the offices of our service at the time of the morning office, of prime, of terse, of sext, of non, of vespers, and of complains.

Since it was of these day hours that he said, seven times in the day I have rendered praise to you.

For as to the night office, the same prophet says, in the middle of the night I rose to glorify you.

These are both quotes from Psalm 118. Let us therefore bring our tribute of praise to our creator for the judgments of his justice at these times. The morning office, prime, terse, sext, non, vespers, and complains, and in the night let us arise and glorify him.

So to pull that together, the hours as mentioned above are prime, terse, sext, non, complains, laud, vespers, and the night office. Now those names are simply the Roman names for those hours of the day.

[23 : 06] It's seven times a day and once at night. Does that sound onerous to you? Good heavens. What a weak link you are. Now many of these services are very brief because you just have a few psalms and a reading.

They're not all hour long worship. Now that expanded over time. The essence is a very brief service to most of them. The major hours are a little longer. Many of them are quite short.

And the minor hours, they're just a little more than a psalm or two. The major hours take longer. But it must be remembered that although the Opus Dei was the cream of the monastic life, it was not the whole of the monastic life.

Benedict's rule is a practical document and monks had to maintain the life of the community. They had to rely solely upon themselves for food and supply. They needed to copy text and so they needed flocks for the parchment.

They even had to make everything. They even had to make their own ink. Imagine a monastery is a huge self-sustaining organization. If they were going to have the books they needed, they needed to have the flocks so that they could make the parchment.

[24 : 12] They needed to make the ink and they needed to write everything down. It was a huge enterprise. And so the Opus Manum, the work of your hands, really occupied the major part of the day. But the purpose of the monk in Benedict's rule was to be a student, not professional excedent of liturgy.

This changed down the ages so that by the central Middle Ages, a monk in a major house like Clooney would spend a much greater proportion of the day involved in liturgy offered on behalf of donors. But that is not Benedict's conception of the monastic life.

Prayer at certain hours is like continual prayer. The function of the hours of prayer is not to dispense from the duty of continual prayer, but to recall it to memories and to fulfill it.

See, the monk is called to be a man of daily prayer, of constant prayer. And the hours of the liturgy are like a summons back to prayer. And in the silence of the monastic day, in the silence of the work, what the monk is supposed to do is take the scripture upon which he has been singing and thinking during the worship and meditate them, meditate about them during his manual labor.

And that is the glory of, I think, the monastic day and of having regular points of liturgy throughout your day. When you absorb scripture and recite it, you begin to become part of you and become part of you.

[25 : 40] And you take that away and you chew over it while you're working. You chew on the scriptures during the whole of your day. That's really the monastic understanding of meditation, by the way, the Western. It's not about emptying your mind, but filling your mind with the scriptures and chewing on them, thinking about them.

And I think that is a quality that is often lacking from our spirituality that's sense that I read the scriptures and chew on them all day long. That's meditation, chewing over the scriptures. And I think that actually you might find yourself doing that if you're leading a Bible study.

You have to prepare in advance, as I know you all do when you lead Bible studies because this is St. John. And you have to think about it. You have to chew on that scripture. It's the same job that we have to do when we're preparing sermons.

And we have to start by reading our passage on Monday and chew on it all week long. Thinking about it, reading it, working on things, working on commentaries, but we've got to chew over that passage.

See, it's this vocal recitation of the liturgy that I think is so important. Reading through the Psalms and then thinking through them throughout the day. Let me tell you a story about what I find helpful about going to the night office.

[26 : 49] I spend some time in a monastery, a Cistercian house up in Leicestershire in England. And they did the whole, they did the entire monastic thing and the night office. And I found it very terribly helpful waking up in the night office.

I hated doing that at first. And it's not the kind of routine I was in. You just have to go to bed a lot earlier. But I remember waking up to go to the night office. And I found, after a few days, was that if I was walking from where the guest house was over to the church, I remember there was a wood kind of over there.

You know, we're in a wild place. It's just a Cistercian house. And I remember I kind of managed to attach a lot of the fears and tensions that I had in my heart and in my life to that wood. And I remember being really afraid of it.

And I was in that context of kind of daily worship and being in that routine that gave an opportunity for some of the tensions and fears that were kind of just residing below the surface of my life to be expressed and to see them there.

And then in the middle of the night, when you're doing the night office, there's really nothing left except you and the office. It's terribly helpful. It's not about being all dressed up and looking your best at church.

[28 : 00] There's nothing. And in a Cistercian house where there's, you know, austerity. I mean, Cistercians are very austere, so the decoration was no more than room 100 here if there was a church. There's nothing to look at, not a stained glass window, not a statue, nothing to look at.

And as such, it kind of took away some of the barriers between myself and being honest with God. As such, I think it's terribly helpful. And at, you know, two in the morning, you really know who you are.

You see yourself in all your glory. You know, it's the real you. Let me read to you a bit more about the order of the psalms. This is what this worship looks like. This is chapter 17.

How many psalms are to be said at this hour? Because the office was to be performed by vocal recitation. In the rule of St. Benedict, the liturgy consists of an uninterrupted succession of psalms and readings.

Before and after the psalmody, secondary elements such as versicles, hymns, lessons, long or short response series, canticles, and litanies, whose careful enumeration fills up chapters.

[29 : 09] They were all added. But it all reinforces the impression of a continuous sequence of texts said aloud and listened to. And that to me is the essential thing.

Texts that are said aloud and listened to. Chapter 17. How many psalms are to be said at these hours? writes Benedict, we have already arranged the order of the psalmody for the night and morning offices.

Let us now provide for the remaining hour. At prime, let three psalms be said separately and not under one glory be to the Father. The hymn of that hour is to follow the verse inclined unto my aid, O God, before the psalms begin.

Upon completion of the three psalms, let one lesson be recited, then a verse. The Lord have mercy on us and the concluding prayer. It's very short, right? Three psalms, hymn, the reading.

The offices of terse, sext, and non are to be celebrated in the same order. That is, the verse inclined unto my aid, O God, the hymn proper to each hour, three psalms, lesson, and verse.

[30 : 13] Lord have mercy on us and concluding prayer. If the community is a large one, let the psalms be sung with antiphons, but if small, let them be sung straight through. Let the psalms of the Vespers hour be limited to four with antiphons.

After these psalms, the lesson is to be recited, then the responsory, then the hymn, the te diem, the verse, the canticle from the gospel, the litany, the Lord's prayer, and the concluding prayers.

Let Compline be limited to the saying of three psalms, which are to be said straight through without antiphons. And after then the hymn of that hour, one lesson, a verse, the Lord have mercy on us, the blessing and the concluding prayers.

So you get a picture of the kind of outline of Benedictine worship. It involves the recitation of psalms, the reading of lections, the singing of the traditional hymns, like the te diem, some antiphons, the Lord's prayer, and concluding prayers.

So there's space given in each service for personal prayer. Benedict doesn't really want people to go on at great length, but there is a sense of the community rising together for silent prayer that's fervent and then going.

[31 : 27] You get a picture there of Benedictine worship. It is about the recitation of scripture and the hearing of scripture, two things being put together. I've got a wonderful quote here from chapter 8.

It says this, In winter, prudence it takes that the brethren shall rise at the eighth hour of the night so that their sleep may extend for a moderate space beyond midnight, and they may rise with digestion completed.

Those brethren who need a better knowledge of them should devote the time that remains after vigils to the study of the psalms and lessons. Study. From Easter to the first of November, let the hour of rising be so arranged that there be a very short interval after matins, listen now, in which the brethren may go out for the necessities of nature to be followed at once by laud, which be said at dawn.

Notice, please, what Benedict is saying here. There is an emphasis upon human needs, sleep and digestion and whatnot, and this is not about being a spiritual superstar.

It is about living every day. It's not about, you know, putting on a great show. This is a literate culture, and monks who do not know the psalms and lessons are to spend time after matins to study them.

[32 : 49] Actually, the word for study in Latin is *metatapio*. It's the word used in that part of the text, to meditate on them. So it says, to meditate in Latin means to chew over the images of a cow chewing its cud.

And that is the Western understanding of the practice of meditation. It is not the emptying of the mind, but the occupation of the mind with the scriptures. As I say, they will not have been able to have had personal copies of the Psalters.

They will not have been able to have personal copies of the Book of Common Prayer. See, it's a technology of a later age to be able to produce that. Monastery, if it was lucky, would have been able to have one copy of the Bible, one copy of the Psalter.

And so memorization, meditation, was a necessary part of the learning that the monks did in the community. They had to memorize the text. Of course, they did in the long run, saying it every week.

While the monks were literate, literacy had a different complexion than it does for us today. Reading was for them primarily an oral, aural activity. That is to say, when anyone read, they did not read silently as we do, but read out loud.

[34 : 00] In another monastic text called the Rule of the Master, which is a little earlier than St. Benedict, but same kind of generation, the deans of the monastery are instructed to quieten the monks down if they got too noisy during their reading and disturb the others.

Because you can imagine a bunch of monks as they were reading together, there would have been a hum of them reading. They would have read out loud. And as the monk read out loud and listened himself to the reading, see he's speaking the words and he's hearing the words and so internalizing the word of God as he reads it out.

It's very different from our process of reading today. And I think it's quite important, you see, the daily round of the liturgy isn't just about sort of executing a liturgy.

It's a way of internalizing the scriptures into one's life, learning the Psalter, hearing the word of God read out loud. And in turn, the monks had to practice during their study time the psalms so that they might memorize them.

So it's daily recitation of scripture, daily hearing of scripture. The liturgy is very simple. It's a course throughout the day. Not long liturgy, often quite brief.

[35 : 08] Two or three psalms and a reading and a hymn. And yet, throughout a daily cycle, a daily rule by which they were learning the scriptures, hearing them, singing them, quite a different process perhaps from what many of us live today in our busy lives.

Were they any less busy then? A Benedictine community at Benedictine time would have been quite occupied with the agrarian round of having to keep alive, having to run their farm and their community.

And yet, they took that time. It was part of their rule to spend that time in the *opus days*. So what might we do about that today? I've got a few points of conclusion for you which I think might be helpful.

The first is go on monastic retreats if you don't already. People don't know how to go on monastic retreats by five. Evening service, we have a retreat every year which isn't a retreat at all. It's a house party which we have a great deal of fun.

We don't do any retreating whatsoever except that we go away and eat food. When I was doing my doctorate I got to study with Jean Leclerc who was one of the great Cistercian scholars and he was a monk in a place in Luxembourg.

[36 : 17] And I went there to study with him for about ten days one year. And I had an amazing time. My purpose in going was to study with Jean Leclerc and hopefully get some of his glow.

But I ended up having a retreat really and a silent retreat quite unexpectedly. But it was obvious I was in Luxembourg everybody spoke French and I could do the welcome on board announcements in Air Canada but that's about it.

And there I was. And so he sent me to work because I was there to work with him and I was there before Christmas there was hardly anyone else in the monastery no other guests. And he sent me to work on the research at hand and I remember the books he piled in my cell were extraordinary.

And back then there was microfiche things I was looking up in Latin in a microfiche machine so it was before a laptop in my life anyway. So I had to work very hard and I had to work in Latin. I was working. And yet I did the liturgical round with the monks and so began to kind of live a monastic life for ten days. And what I noticed happening in that period was that first of all the words of the psalm began to take up residence in me.

[37 : 28] It began to occupy my mind and my heart even if they were in French. I kind of liked it in French. And another thing that happened as I mentioned earlier when I was talking about being in Leicestershire I found and I quite didn't expect this tension and sin and fear started to surface.

Things that I kept locked away. things that I kept down. Well I found that they were coming out. I would wake up in the middle of the night and very suddenly and find myself my heart would be beating and something that I was afraid of something existential or something essential to who I am would surface.

And I think it was being in a different place and working hard and being silent. Hearing the scriptures and reciting them that began to work in my heart.

I've been on silent retreats with churches before that were very strange in which people first of all you'd be really silent during meetings we'd just look at each other over our coffee and not talk or we'd walk around being quite silent and bored.

Actually I don't think that's the monastic ideal of a silent retreat. If you go on a retreat there is great benefit from being silent but you need to come prepared to worship and to work. And I think the best thing to do if you go on a retreat is to come prepared to study because that is the ground of the monastic life that combines work and study.

[38 : 47] And it is in the combination of labor and certainly study is a valid labor in a monastery of all places and worship and silence. There's just huge benefit in that.

And I think it's worth going and doing properly. So don't go to a monastery and have a party and bring sherry with you. Go prepared to work and be silent and allow the rounds of the liturgy to affect you.

Secondly, I want to suggest that it is important for you to pray the hours of some kind. Now I'm not saying that you should suddenly start praying seven times a day and in the middle of the night and do liturgies all day long. Some theological students like to do this religiously and it's very difficult to sustain on your own.

Especially if you go to a monastery and you come back all fired up and it's so marvelous and when you do it on your own it's quite discouraging really. I don't necessarily think that you should pray seven times a day and in the night but I do think that all of us need to have a rule of life that you will adhere to in your daily life wherever you are whatever you're doing.

That means that you will pray at set times throughout the day and that you will decide upon a daily routine of psalm reading and prayer that will not deviate for any reason whatsoever.

[40 : 01] I think having set times of prayer throughout the day is important because it liberates us from the tyranny of the here and now. It liberates us from the tyranny of the important and it roots prayer and the word of God in your daily life.

Monks talk about the terror of the bell because when the bell rings you have to drop what you're doing and go to the church and pray. So should we. And it might not be seven times a day it might be three or four and not for hours either for a few minutes.

It might be that when you sit down at your desk in the morning you read a psalm and a passage and say a short prayer. Same again at coffee time or lunch time before you go home before you go to bed.

Set up a rule like that so that prayer takes its unalterable place in your life. It doesn't have to be hours. See this isn't about being a superstar. This is about every day for the rest of your life.

One of the things I found that made me I found quite extraordinary about the monastic thing was that you're in this round every day. It began to dawn on me after a few days that if I was living in a monastery I would be involved in this round of worship in an unalterable way every day for the rest of my life.

[41 : 21] It's an extraordinary thought isn't it? It liberates you from the here and now. It sets you on a much deeper course. So I suggest that you pray the hours. Set up a rule of life.

And in that you really need to work your way through the Psalter and incorporate that into your life. You really need to find a way to be incorporating the word into your life in an active way.

I find reciting it singing it writing it down all those activities which would go on in a monastery to be vital. Something more than passively hearing it or just reading it quietly to yourself. You need to absorb it. Thirdly pray the office. I dare say that if you demanded it we would feel obliged to lay on the daily round of morning and evening prayer here at St. John's but no one demands it.

I was forced to do it in Wales every day and no one came then but we were forced to do it anyway. And I found that quite helpful because you just in the busyness and rush, rush, rush of life you have to sit down and you have to do the office.

[42 : 28] There are some morning Bible studies which I think approximate a morning office with breakfast and I like that. I don't think it has to always be in the church and kind of dull or quiet. Perhaps we should all agree that we're going to do muffins in morning prayer on Mondays at 7 in the morning or 8 or 9.

I don't know. Perhaps we should all gather in the library for evening prayer at some point. We're quite slack on that. Maybe you should demand it. Say we demand it and then you have to come every day for the rest of your life.

Because we are very busy people. We have many busy things. We live very high speed lives. And there's something very important and very good about slowing that down to sit there and pray do a short liturgy and to say I'm going to do this every day for the rest of my life.

Agitate and I know Dr. Packer will appreciate this. Agitate for a return to morning prayer. Everyone looks very puzzled by this. Well, some morning prayer really has gone out of the church.

We do morning prayer services here but some morning prayer went out when the BAS came in back in the 80s. I was the organist at St. Augustine's in Marple back in the 80s when the BAS came in and we sang morning prayer every other week and it was much hated by the leadership.

[43 : 42] And this was to be discarded as soon as possible. And yet, in a church there where the preaching was liberal and really unmemorable, it was morning prayer, some morning prayer that nurtured my soul.

And I still remember what I sang. The thing about when you put scripture to music and sing it, you learn it because it's so active. And that's why I think the genius of this kind of liturgy is singing recitation teaches you scripture.

And when you attach it to a tune, it takes a place in your mind and heart that is very difficult to shake off which is why when I go jogging I still sing the T-DM all these years later.

And I think there is something we might be missing out on by not singing the Psalms and the Canticles. Now it is true that they're very hard to learn if you're not an Anglican by birth and perhaps it is not very seeker friendly. But men and women have been learning to sing the Bible for centuries. I think they can continue to learn to sing the Bible. And there is a difference between sitting in church and hearing Psalms sung for you and singing them for yourself.

[44 : 48] It's a huge difference. So agitate for a return. And if we can't do it in the morning we'll just have to do something else. We'll start some other time. But there is a glory to singing the scripture. We should be active participants in the liturgy of our church.

Not recipients. Now I am not advocating that anyone become a monk or a nun. Although many of my best friends are in monastic orders and are amongst the most terrifying people I know I do not advocate this lifestyle for most of us.

But in an age of Jesus CEO where bigger is better where various sections of the church from liberal to evangelical feel the need to rewrite the script to throw out the tradition to sugar coat the message and project it on walls with PowerPoint I stand firmly in the old curmudgeon camp.

Let our approach to growth as Christians be the old fashioned way. The way of everyday prayer and study. The way of everyday worship and the recitation of scriptures.

Of a rhythm of life which incorporates the scriptures into my life so that they become woven into my mind and my soul. Of a discipline in which I submit to a rule from which I cannot deviate.

[46 : 03] Let Benedict speak to us from centuries past. *Asculta Ophelia Praecepta Magistri et incline oram cordis tui et admonitionem te patris libenter exquie et efficaciter comple.*

Listen and practice. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.