

So many of us live hectically busy lives, rushing from one thing to the next. We feel overwhelmed. We spread ourselves too thin. We're on edge, battling to fit everything in. We get to the point where we find it hard to get enthusiastic about anything.

Jesus calls us to stop, as he did to Martha – take time to reflect and to rest. We heard in the passage from Exodus that God actually commands us to rest, to take a Sabbath. This morning is that opportunity to stop for a little while, and to take stock. Not, in fact, to beat yourself up about the time you wish you spent doing things with and for God, but in fact, to be kind to yourself. To be generous to yourself.

There are many different ways to do this. One helpful way to find that balance in your life is to examine the different aspects of your life in the light of the teachings of Benedict. The Rule of St Benedict was written 1500 years ago. It's a very short book, and because it is so brief, sensible and very understanding of human nature, it is still as relevant and as meaningful today. In the prologue, Benedict says he intended to prescribe "nothing harsh, nothing burdensome" for his followers. It helps one to find God in the ordinary, the everyday – through a balanced life of prayer and work.

In her article, "The Rule of St. Benedict", by Sister Jane Michele McClure, OSB, says:

"The wisdom of Benedict's Rule lies in its flexibility, its tolerance for individual differences, and its openness to change. For fifteen hundred years, it has remained a powerful and relevant guide for those who would seek God in the ordinary circumstances of life.

When Benedict wrote his Rule, society seemed to be falling apart. Though materially prosperous, the Roman Empire was in a state of decline. After Benedict's death, barbarian hordes would overrun Europe and the very survival of Western civilization would be called into question. Benedictine monasteries- with their message of balance and moderation, stability, hospitality, and stewardship- were credited with the preservation of Western culture, and Benedict himself was named patron of Europe.

Benedictine values are as necessary today as they were in the sixth century. In an era of countless personal and societal sins - materialism, greed, prejudice, hatred, violence, and the destruction of the earth and its resources - Benedict's Rule remains a powerful alternative, another way of viewing life and people and things that finds meaning in the ordinary and makes each day a revelation of the divine."

Christians have followed the Rule of Benedict because its discipline, by bringing balance to one's life and good stewardship of one's time, allows one to bring worship, spiritual reading, prayer, work, recreation, time for family and time for service to other people all into balance in one's life. Today, as often our work does not involve physical labour, we need to include exercise into the equation.

Sr. McClure continues:

"Prayer, in a Benedictine monastery, was to consist of the *opus Dei* (the work of God — Psalms recited in common) and *lectio* (the reflective reading of Scripture whereby God's word becomes the centre of the monastic's life). Prayer was marked by regularity and fidelity, not mood or convenience. In Benedict's supremely realistic way, the spiritual life was something to be worked at, not merely hoped for."

Hospitality is in the spirit of genuine acceptance and caring for each person. As St Benedict put it in the often- quoted passage, "Let everyone that comes be received as Christ".

So, how do we go about creating a rule of life? Firstly, we have to have an objective look at the patterns in our lives at the moment. We're going to do an exercise to establish just that. If we can see that our lives are seriously out of balance, then we need to use creativity and discernment in working out a new rule. This is a very personal process. A good rule of life will bring awareness of Christ into every aspect of your day.

Most importantly, a rule of life has to be realistic. One cannot change completely overnight. Change one thing at a time and live with it for a while. There is a very real chance of failure if one creates an unrealistic rule that is impossible to live by, and that will burn you out. A rule of life must also take personal relationships into account. What are your primary responsibilities to your spouse, your children, perhaps dependent parents? All of this needs to be taken into account.

### **Life assessment:**

On the sheet of paper, fill into each of the boxes which activities happen on a daily, a weekly, a monthly or an annual basis. If you go to home group twice a month, put 2x behind that in the Monthly box. Think creatively – I find people often forget to fill things in. Easter Services, with renewal of vows, for example.

You'll see there are categories over the page –

(S) Study and Education, (F) Family Life and Fellowship (H) Hospitality and service (committee work, newsletter, library, mentor, tea fellowship host, etc.) (P) Prayer and worship (R) Recreation (W) Work and (E) Exercise. Mark each activity with a category code.

In order to get a sense of the balance of your life, in the pie chart over the page create six segments, one for each category, that are proportionally representative in size to your life.

As I said – this is a personal exercise, although you may wish to discuss this afterwards with a friend or a spouse. The questions you need to ask yourself during the next week are about whether you are happy with this picture, or whether you wish to change this balance. Spend some time thinking about it and praying about it. There are some good books in the library you may wish to consult.

This is a journey we're all on: and you'll find your rule is a working document, one that will need to be revised annually, and that needs to change as you change, year by year.

**DAILY**

**WEEKLY**

**MONTHLY**

**ANNUALLY**



**S = Study and Education**

**F = Family Life and Fellowship**

**H = Hospitality and service (committee work, newsletter, library, mentor, tea fellowship host, etc.)**

**P = Prayer and worship**

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**E = Exercise**