

the Gift of SAINT Benedict



INTRODUCED BY VERA A. HOLYHEAD SGS
ILLUSTRATED BY LYNNE MUIR

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mobility rather than stability is a characteristic of much contemporary life. We move to second, third or more careers, we buy and sell and move house more frequently; business people may take intercapital plane flights several times a week; the phones we carry are mobile. But what is significant for our spiritual life is the restlessness of spirit that is a familiar experience for many. *Acedia* was the name given by the ancient and wise monastic writers to this restless living.

St Stephen Harding said that stability is ‘to be a lover of the Rule and of the place’, and to allow oneself to be formed by these until death. For the women and men who profess this vow, it does not necessarily mean lifelong physical stability in one monastery, although for some communities the latter is their particular expression of the Rule. Whatever the external expression of stability, the most important aspect of this promise is always the deeper stability of heart, the commitment to a continuing search for God in a particular way of life, and a readiness to sink one’s personal roots deep into a community, standing firm with its members in the concrete realities of everyday life.

These realities of course will change, and so paradoxically the vow of stability is also a promise to accept change. Benedict encourages his monks to listen every day to the new ‘today’ of God’s voice. He quotes the Matthean parable of the wise person whose house remained strong and secure through flood, wind and storm, because it was built on rock. Those for whom the word of God is the foundation of their lives will withstand life’s battering.

On the edge of an Australian city, the bodies of more than a hundred street kids who found no security, no gentleness, no purpose in life, lie in a cemetery under mounds of red earth. Nothing marks their graves, just a warning about snakes and a few rabbit burrows in a stretch of dry, cracked earth. They were homeless in life, unnamed and unclaimed even in death. For them, 'home' was about relationships denied, abused, seduced. 'Who am I?', and 'Where am I?' are related questions. Unanswered they can have tragic results. Stability well lived can witness to the significance and possibility of belonging, which so many people, both young and old, are seeking.

The newcomer to the monastery was required to run the gauntlet of a year's perseverance and patience while his potential for the life was mutually discerned by the community and himself. For Benedict, perseverance is another definition of stability: an ability to keep on going through the desert stretches of our lives, firstly, by abiding in the God of steadfast love who is committed to the world in Christ and, secondly, through the encouraging companionship of those who take up the cross of Christ daily and follow him.

Stability demands patience with oneself, with others, with God. It is an active waiting like that of a pregnant woman who is 'expectant', hopeful, ready to suffer birth pangs for the joy of bringing a new life into the world. The truly patient monk, says Benedict, will certainly share in the sufferings of Christ, but will also experience the joy of new birth... into his kingdom.

THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT 58.17


The one to be received (into the monastery),
however,
must first promise his stability, fidelity to the
monastic life and obedience
before all in the oratory.



THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT Prol 22

If we wish to dwell in the tent of his kingdom
we shall not arrive
unless we run there by good deeds.





stability

THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT Pro1 33

Thus the Lord says in the Gospel:

‘Whoever hears my words and does them

I liken to a prudent person who built a house on a rock.

The floods came, the winds blew and battered that house,

but it did not collapse because it was founded on rock’

(Matt 7: 24–25).

stabilitas



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THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT Prol 49-50

But as we progress in the monastic life and in faith,
our hearts will swell with
the unspeakable sweetness of love,
enabling us to run the way of God's commandments.
Then we will never depart from his teaching
and we will persevere in his doctrine
in the monastery until death.
Likewise, we will participate in the passion of Christ
through patience
so as to deserve to be companions in his kingdom.



habitate

THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT 72.5


They should bear each other's weaknesses
of both body and character
with the utmost patience.



THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT 4.78

The workshop where we should work hard
in all these things
is the monastic enclosure and
stability in the community.





stability

THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT 7.42

Moreover, those who maintain patience
in the face of setbacks and injustices
fulfill the command of the Lord:

When they are slapped on the cheek,
they present the other one as well.

When someone takes their shirt,
they give up their coat as well.

Pressed into service for one mile, they go two.

stabilitas



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THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT 58.9

If he (the one seeking admission to the community) promises to persevere in his stability,
after a period of two months
let this Rule be read to him straight through.

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