

visit of Totila, King of the Goths, in the year 543, when the saint rebuked him for his wicked deeds, and predicted the time of his downfall including not only the loss of his kingdom but also of his life. Totila's visit to Monte Cassino in 543 is the only certain date we have in the saint's life. Abbot Tosti, following others, put the saint's death in the same year. Just before his death we hear for the first time of his sister Scholastica. "She had been dedicated from her infancy to Our Lord, and used to come once a year to visit her brother. They met for the last time three days before her death, on a day when the sky was so clear and no cloud was to be seen. The sister begged her brother to stay the night but he refused. She made her prayers to Almighty God, and a tempest of lightning and thunder, with an abundance of rain fell, so that neither Benedict nor the monks with him, could leave. Three days later, Benedict beheld the soul of his sister, ascend to heaven in the likeness of a dove.

Perhaps the most striking characteristics in St. Benedict are his deep and wide human feelings and his moderation. The former reveals itself in the many anecdotes recorded by St. Gregory. We see it in his sympathy and care for the simplest of his monks; his hastening to help the poor Goth; spending the hours of the night in prayer on the mountain to save his monks the labor of carrying water, and to remove from their lives a "just cause of grumbling"; staying three days in a monastery to help to induce one of the monks to "remain quietly at his prayers as the other monks did", instead of going forth from the chapel and wandering about "busying himself with worldly and transitory things". St. Benedict is always portrayed as a quiet, gentle, dignified, strong, peace-loving man who by the subtle power of sympathy becomes the center of the lives and interest of all about him. We seen him with his monks in the church, at their readings, sometimes in the fields, but more commonly in his cell, where frequent messengers find him "weeping silently in his prayers", and in the night hours standing at "the window of his cell in the tower, offering up his prayers to God"; and often, as Totila found him, sitting outside the door of his cell, or "before the gate of the monastery reading a book".

St. Benedict's portrait of an ideal abbot is found in his (Rule, 64): the abbot should always be doing some good for his brethren rather than presiding over them. He must be learned in the law of God, chaste, sober, merciful, prudent, and charitable. He should not be jealous, violent, over anxious, obstinate, or prone to suspicion, otherwise he will never be at rest. * (excerpted from: www.newadvent.org)

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Saint Benedict of Nursia

Feast Day: March 21



***Patron Saint of
Europe, Kidney Disease, Poisoning and
Schoolchildren***

St. Benedict of Nursia

*St. Benedict is the founder of Western monasticism. He was born at Nursia, Italy circa 480; he died at Monte Cassino, Italy in 543. The only authentic account of the life of Benedict of Nursia is contained in the second book of St. Gregory's "Dialogues". It is more a character sketch than a biography and consists, for the most part, of a number of miraculous incidents, which although they illustrate the life of the saint, gives little help towards a chronological account of his career. St. Gregory's authorities on Benedict's life were related to him by the Saint's own disciples, viz. Constantinus, who succeeded him as abbot of Monte Cassino; and Honoratus, who was abbot of Subiaco when St. Gregory wrote his "Dialogues".

Benedict was the son of a Roman noble of Nursia, a small town near Spoleto, and a tradition, which St. Bede accepts, makes him a twin with his sister Scholastica. His boyhood was spent in Rome, where he lived with his parents and attended the schools until he had reached his higher studies. Then "given over his books, and forsaking his father's house and wealth, with a mind only to serve God, he sought for some place where he might attain to the desire of his holy purpose; and in this sort he departed [from Rome], instructed with learned ignorance and furnished with unlearned wisdom" (Dial. St Greg., II, Introd. In Migne, P.L. LXIV).

Benedict does not seem to have left Rome for the purpose of becoming a hermit, but only to find someplace away from the life of the great city; moreover, he took his old nurse with him as a servant and they settle down to live in Enfide, near a church dedicated to St. Peter, in some kind of association with "a company of virtuous men" who were in sympathy with his feelings in his views of life. At Enfide, Benedict worked his first miracle by restoring to perfect condition an earthenware wheat-sifter (*capisterium*) which had accidentally been broken. While traveling from Enfide to Subiaco to escape the notoriety which his miracle thrust upon him, he met a monk named Romanus. They discussed the purpose which had brought him to Subiaco, and Romanus gave him a monk's habit. For three years Benedict lives a solitary existence where he matured both in mind and character, in knowledge of himself and of his fellow-man, and at the same time he became not merely known to, but secured the respect of, those about him; so much so that on the death of the abbot of a monastery in the neighborhood of Vicovaro, he was asked to come its abbot. He reluctantly agreed. There lifestyle

however, was not as strict as his, and the experiment failed. The monks tried to poison him, but failed and he returned to his cave in Subiaco. From this time on, his miracles seem to have become more frequent, and many people, attracted by his sanctity and character, came to be under his guidance. For them he built 12 monasteries, in each of which he placed a superior with 12 monks. With the establishment of these monasteries began the schools for children; and amongst the first to be brought were Maurus and Placid. For the remainder of St. Benedict's life he spent his time realizing the ideal of monasticism which he has left to us drawn out in his Rule of St. Benedict. We do not know how long Benedict remained in Subiaco, but as pressures began to mount on the Saint and his lifestyle, he left Subiaco and went to Monte Cassino.

There was an ancient chapel at Monte Cassino in which the foolish and simple country people, according to the custom of the old Gentiles, worshiped the god Apollo. Benedict sets the temple of Apollo on fire and builds the oratory of St. Martin: and where the altar of the same Apollo was, he made an oratory of St. John: and by his continual preaching he bought the people dwelling in those parts to embrace the faith of Christ.

A characteristic feature of Benedictine houses is that members take up any work which is adapted to their peculiar circumstances, that is, any work which may be dictated by their necessities. Thus we find the Benedictines teaching in poor schools and in the universities, practicing the arts and following agriculture, undertaken the care of souls, or devoting themselves wholly to study. No work is foreign to the Benedictine, provided only it is compatible with living in community and with the performance of the Divine Office. This freedom in the choice of work was necessary in a Rule which was to be suited to all times and places, but it was primarily the natural result of what St. Benedict had in view, and which differs from the founders of later orders. These later founders had in view some special work to which they wished the disciples to devote themselves; St. Benedict's purpose was only to provide a Rule by which anyone might follow the Gospel counsels, and live, and work and pray, and save his soul. From Monte Cassino St. Benedict founded another monastery near Terracina, on the coast, about 40 miles distant. St. Gregory also gives us many examples of Benedict's gift of prophecy. The most celebrated is the