**Chapter 2: Qualities of the Abbot**

January 11, May 12, September 11

*Furthermore, anyone who receives the name abbot is to lead their disciples by a two-fold teaching: they must point out to them all that is good and holy more by example than by words, proposing the commandments of the Lord to receptive disciples with words, but demonstrating God’s instructions to the stubborn and dull by a living example. Again, if they teach their disciples that something is not to be done, then neither must they do it, “lest after preaching to others, they themselves be found reprobate” (1 Cor 9:27) and God some day call to them in their sin: “How is it that you repeat my just commands and mouth my covenant when you hate discipline and toss my words behind you” (Ps 49[50]:16-17). And also this: “How is it that you can see a splinter in another’s eye, and never notice the plank in your own?” (Matt 7:3).*

The rule now moves further into the practicalities of leadership. Leadership is not just words, it is ‘more by example’. The Christian and Benedictine leader would agree with the management maxim ‘don’t ask another to do what you are not willing do yourself’.

Benedict emphasises that a leader’s teaching, by action and word, must be grounded in their own way of conversion. Upon their election as abbot, this way of conversion becomes the example for the community to follow. Conversion, as a life-long process, is all about a change that happens within us. Words and action are born in the experience of this change. The heart of the Gospel is about this change, one from fear to love. As we undergo this change, attention (that all important spot-light of the mind) orbits around, and then coalesces with the love at our centre.

Meditation facilitates this coalescing of love and attention. When a community meditates together, this coalescing becomes harder to avoid. In a meditating community, the leader must be experienced enough in this contemplative practice; it is part of their example.

The abbot in the rule is well down this path of conversion. As one embodying Christ, the Christ which all the members are asked to uniquely embody themselves, the abbot has taken to heart the heart-felt words of Jesus: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel [the good news]!” (Mark 1:15). The Kingdom of God is love alive in mind, word and action.

The abbot never stops being a community member. Leadership is a role that can move from person to person, however the process of conversion need never stop for any of the members. This means we are all seeking God first. Only the divine life can complete us. Being a member of a community of love, regardless of role, is about the clarifying of means and ends: divine love is the end, an end always active and with us; the ways in which this love is revealed to us are the means.

Love becomes active via attention. It is the way we are loved uniquely. Parents, the leaders of their family community, will love one child differently from another, depending on personality and circumstance. A manager, wanting equity and the best from their staff, will do the same. Love is what love does and love does uniquely.

Leadership in the Rule, and spiritual leadership generally (where ever it is happening), is observant of the small stuff, that is, the small ordinary ways of people that, over time, give an indication as to their mindset and way of living. Then, depending on the circumstance, and the person or people involved, a wise combination of words and action can be used as the invitation to integrity and life.

Rather by authenticity in love, we should grow completely into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, fitted and joined together, through every ligament making its own contribution, according to the proper function of each individual part, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16, RNJB)