**Chapter 2: Qualities of the Abbot**

January 14, May 15, September 14

*The abbot must always remember what they are and remember what they are called, aware that more will be expected of one to whom more has been entrusted. They must know what a difficult and demanding burden they have undertaken: directing souls and serving a variety of temperaments, coaxing, reproving, and encouraging them as appropriate. They must so accommodate and adapt themselves to each one’s character and intelligence that they will not only keep the flock entrusted to their care from dwindling, but will rejoice in the increase of a good flock.*

Other wisdom traditions have a similar approach to that of Benedict and the rule: what can be taught and how it is taught is shaped by the temperament and capacity of the student. All the best teachers are flexible; they adapt methods so that what they can give has the best chance of being heard and lived. For example, Confucius says: ‘*yin cai shi jiao’* (‘depends aptitude give teaching’) – how the teaching is given depends on the aptitude of the student.

Spiritual leadership is not cookie cutting; it is not mass-producing others for the nominated task at hand. The discovery and development of gift comes first. In this way, the person has grown into the task, the mission, the responsibility for which they are suitable because – deep down – they are drawn to it, having discovered their agency for it. Inner giftedness is the truth of us waiting to be crafted and expressed; it is experiencing our own unique justification in the Sprit, a mysterious sense of charism for the times.

The contemplative leader has experienced this process of discovering their own inherent giftedness. They have found that their gift is to lead others to who they are and to God. They show us, in example and word, that we and the Divine are in each other, and that expressing gift is to live this human and divine communion. This is what it is to be called a human and spiritual leader; they re-member us to ourselves as they live who they are.

In the rule, the discovery and expression of gift is done in an atmosphere of hospitality and practicality, where a balance between discovery and expression has the best chance of being maintained. As we live and pray together some develop a love for cooking, others for writing; some for guiding, others for gardening; one for coordinating, another for administration, another for music – and so on. And who says there need be just the one gift per person? What is given is consistent with temperament and ability.

What is common for us all is the unfolding of the gift of meditation in our lives. Not only does shared silence reduce the occurrence of competition and jealousy, meditation also teaches us to attend to the heart: that space within where gift is revealed.

Coming to our senses, we see the deeper purpose of gift: that it be given to others in the service of practical love. The chapel, the kitchen, the garden, the study – in all and more of these places loving happens. Community becomes an experience of who we are and what we can do for others.

A well lead community is a place where giftedness is free to be discovered and explored; be it the community monastic, a family, a school, a parish. The community becomes attractive to others as a place of balance in which the heart can be heard.

Having different gifts according to the grace given to us: maybe prophecy in proportion to our faith, maybe serving in ministry, maybe teacher in teaching, maybe the encouraging person in encouraging, the generous person in simplicity, the leader in enthusiasm, the compassionate in exercising compassion. Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil; stick to what is good. (Romans 12: 6-9, RNJB)