



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Passing of our Holy Father Benedict
March 21, 2026
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Proverbs 2:1-9
Psalm 16
Ephesians 6:10-13
Matthew 19:27-29

Today we commemorate the Solemnity of the Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict. As I prepared for these reflections, I found myself wondering what does St. Benedict's death, nearly fifteen hundred years ago, tell us about what it means to be living monastics in the first half of the twenty-first century? Living monastics who are—all of us—moving toward death.

The starting places for these reflections were the obvious sources—the *Rule of Benedict* and the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, as well as the readings for today. In exploring these, I recognized in the death of Benedict the theme of community that winds itself around so much of what we do and say about being Benedictine. And I also uncovered a single-minded search for God that is enhanced, rather than threatened, by the idea and proximity of death.

Benedict, of course, does not write about his own death in the *Rule of Benedict*, but does discuss death in several places. The most familiar one—and honestly the only one I could remember without actually consulting the Rule—is his dictum to “keep death daily before our eyes,” which appears in the chapter on the Tools for Good Works. Death also makes an appearance a couple of times in the chapter on Humility where Benedict ties it to obedience quoting Philippians 2:8 “Christ became obedient even to death” and to the willingness to embrace suffering and injustice again quoting scripture this time from Romans “For your sake, we are put to death continually.”

In all of these cases, it is clear that Benedict fears death, but not in a way that leads him to avoid it or try to mitigate its import. Instead, his references to death suggest he believes we should allow the fear of death to give us the impetus to strive toward deeper unity with God, particularly through the communal virtues of obedience and humility. From the perspective of the first reading, in the Rule, Benedict invites us to let death lead us to the search for wisdom and understanding and to act on that wisdom and understanding. As he says in the prologue “while we are still in this body and have time to accomplish all these things by the light of life.”

In the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, he narrates the death of Benedict, “Six days before his death he ordered his tomb to be opened. Soon he was attacked by fever and was weakened with severe suffering. As the illness grew worse every day, he asked his disciples to carry him into the oratory. There he strengthened himself for his departure by receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. While the hands of his disciples held up his weak limbs, he stood with his hands raised to heaven and breathed his last breath amidst words of prayer.”



Benedict did not allow his impending death to separate him from God in prayer, and it is the community that supports him in this prayer. The image on our worship aid depicts Benedict's monks holding him up. This image of course harkens back to Aaron and Hur holding Moses arms up as Joshua battled the Amalekites.

This imagery of battle ties back to the second reading and the idea of God as a mighty power and the necessity of "arming" ourselves for the struggle—the concept of standing firm, of resisting and holding ground. Benedict, of course, refers to these very verses in the prologue inviting us to return to God "armed with strong and noble weapons of obedience."

While war and battle metaphors leave me cold—especially in these days of so many unjust wars of dominance—I can allow the image of Benedict being supported by his community members to orient himself toward God to point beyond these concepts. The tools for drawing his strength that Benedict is using in both this image and the prologue are not weapons of dominance but the support of community and obedience, and these speak to me deeply. Largely because—and I'm sure this is true of most of you—I have had the same experience of being supported in prayer by community, albeit metaphorically, in this very chapel.

All of this leads us inevitably to the Gospel. Peter, as impetuous as always, demands that Jesus reassure him that this life that the disciples—that we have chosen—with all of its struggles, is going to be worth it. Jesus assures him that it will indeed; that through this life, we will inherit eternal life. A Benedictine life of humility, obedience, and community promises nothing less. As Chapter 72 of the rule suggests, "Let them prefer nothing to Christ, and may Christ bring us altogether to everlasting life."