



11 July

# Saint Benedict, Abbot

Secondary Patron of the Congregation

*"There was a man of venerable life, blessed by grace and by name ..."* So begins St. Gregory the narrative of the life of St. Benedict, collecting the testimony of immediate disciples.

Benedict was born in Norcia (Umbria), around the year 480. Educated in Rome, he began his hermit life on a cave at Subiaco, *"preferring nothing to the love of God."* Disciples came to him, but shortly after, Benedict had to leave Subiaco with them and moved to Monte Cassino. There he wrote his monastic Rule and died in 547.

**The Rule of St. Benedict: A Gospel path and a way of life.**

**Father Coudrin**, our founder, wrote in 1797, in the first "Reglament" that he gave the new community: *"In Jesus we find everything: his birth, his life and death, that's our rule"*. But it soon becomes clear to the two founders that they needed to rely on a confirmed tradition to initiate their followers and to structure their foundation.

The Benedictine Rule, reread by the Trappist Augustin de Lestrange (Abbot at Valsainte, in Switzerland), will be the tutor of the young Congregation. In the beginning, it was applied to the letter: the observance comes first. Gradually, development led our Founders to maintain its spirit but into a decidedly missionary project.

Thus, Fr. Coudrin, is still clear in one of his letters about somebody who wanted to enter the Congregation: *"We're not monks"*. However, on February 11, 1826, in a circular letter to the Congregation, after rejoicing in the happy news of the first group of missionaries leaving to the islands of Hawaii, he writes:

*You know, beloved brothers and very dear sisters, that the Rule of St Benedict is the foundation of ours. We invite you to read and meditate often, before God, the Rule of this great patriarch of the monks of the West. Above all, we recommend you to read chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 19, 20, 33, 34, 54, 68, 71, and 72 of the Rule of St Benedict.*

*It is there that you will learn to esteem and practice that holy virtue of obedience, which must be such that as it were at the same moment the master's commandment is given and the disciple's work is completed, the two things being speedily accomplished together;*

*humility, (which) is that a monk be content with the poorest and worst of everything ; which means that he considers himself lower and of less account than anyone else... with the most heartfelt inner conviction, and which leads us to reveal to our Superior our most secret thoughts and faults, because we see ourselves as incapable of guiding ourselves ;*

*that fervor in prayer, which inspires in us a deep recollection in the presence of God and of his holy angels ;*

*that poverty of spirit, which allows us to have nothing of our own, since we do not live according to our own choice, and which maintains peace and union because it is without grumbling or objection ;*

*that submission of heart and spirit, founded on confidence in God, which means that the religious for love of God, submits himself to his Superior in all obedience, and does not find anything impossible in obedience ; and that he never looks at the one who commands, but only on God, who is approached by the way of submission ;*

*that interior silence, which means, as the prophet says, that I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue ;*

*finally that ardent zeal, which separates from vices and leads to God. St Benedict, whose expressions we love to use, continues by saying that "this zeal, therefore, the brothers should practice with the most fervent love.*

*Thus they should anticipate one another in honor, most patiently endure one another's infirmities, no one following what he considers useful for himself but rather what benefits another ; tender the charity of brotherhood chastely ; fear God in love ; love their Abbot with a sincere and humble charity ; prefer nothing whatever to Christ".*

With this Circular letter and with the commentary of the Good Father on the Rule of St. Benedict, as well as with chapters he recommended to read, began the Constitutions for long time.

The recommendation of our founder is still relevant for those considered apostolic religious life not as a series of strenuous activities, but as a way of life according to the Gospel in the service of its proclamation.