

Ora et Labora

After you are ordained a priest, you have to do what is called a “mass tour”. You say your first masses and your masses of thanksgiving at places of particular significance for you. I was able to say mass here at st. peters and at st. Vincent liem Church. But in the last week I got a chance to celebrate mass at the place where it all began: Seminary of Christ the King, Mission, BC.

The amazing thing is when I asked the monks if I could celebrate a mass of thanksgiving, they allowed me to celebrate mass during a live-in weekend. A live-in weekend is a weekend when boys from outside of the seminary are thinking about whether God is calling them to enter into the high school seminary. This was amazing because 16 years ago I was at a live-in weekend which inspired me to enter into the seminary and now 16 years later I was speaking to the next generation of kids thinking about entering. I did not plan it that way but the providence of God is amazing.

That is why this memorial is significant for me today. The memorial of St. Benedict. Who knew that a monk 1500 years ago could have such an impact on my life today in 2019. After living with the monks for three years in high school and breathing their spirituality and way of life, I want to share an insight that has stuck with me.

The insight is this: Ora et Labora. Pray and work. That is the motto of the Benedictine monks. Pray and work. The monks begin their prayer time at 5:05 AM each day except on Sunday they get to sleep in until 5:35. It is definitely not a life for the faint of heart, but there are several periods of prayer throughout the day which are interspersed with labora, work.

But the beautiful thing I have come to realize is that the monks really live prayer AND work not prayer OR work. Their lives of prayer are not separate from their work. They pray in such a way that they fulfill the work of God and they work in such a way that it becomes a prayer. The prayer is meant to orient the heart each day with praise, singing and chanting the psalms, praising God and this overflows into their work which becomes another way of expressing praise.

Everyday may seem repetitive but one of the monks explained it in this way. Repetitiveness can be seen in a circular format or in can be seen in a spiraling

format like a spiraling staircase. In some ways, you are repeating the same point upon the circle on one plane yet on the vertical plane you are ascending higher and higher. There is a repetitiveness which is monotonous, but there is a repetitiveness which is ascending, sanctifying, glorifying. Each day is new opportunity to grow in the praise of God.

So for many of you who are not monks, you still live a repetitive life. You wake up, go to work, drive home, have dinner, spend some time with family, go to bed and repeat for 5 out of 7 days. Yet is your life of repetition one of monotony or sanctity? Is your repetition in a circle or spiraling towards heaven?

So you may not be giving praise to God at 5:05 AM but you are here to give praise to God. To orient the rest of your day: Lord, how can I praise you through my work today? How can I increase in giving glory to you? So if we truly enter more deeply into the praise of God in mass—because in it's essence that is what it is, a thanksgiving sacrifice of praise—the more we enter into the praise of the mass the more we will enter into our daily lives with more praise where our live becomes one of prayer and work, ora et labora.