

Readings: *Proverbs 2: 1 – 9; Psalm 33 (34): 1 – 10; Matthew 19: 27 – 29.*

Benedict was born in central Italy in about AD 480, shortly after the deposition of the last Western Roman Emperor. Italy and the whole of the Western Empire were subject to barbarian invasions, civil wars, and the widespread destruction of civilised life.

While studying in Rome Benedict was so distressed by the immorality of society that, aged about twenty, he abandoned his studies and moved to live as a hermit in a cave near Subiaco, an abandoned city about thirty miles east of Rome. He was joined by a number of disciples, who lived partly as hermits and partly as a community. Local opposition, possibly including an attempt on his life, led Benedict to move to Monte Cassino, near Naples. There, over a number of years, he compiled his Rule – the work that embodies his influence on Church and society.

The Rule sets out to provide a framework for life in community, based on the daily round of prayer, sacred reading, and manual work. It provides for all 150 psalms to be sung each week, spread over the eight daily services, which together make up the *Opus Dei* – the work of God.

In the Prologue to the Rule Benedict writes *'We must establish a school of the Lord's service; in founding which we hope to ordain nothing that is harsh or burdensome. But if...there be some strictness of discipline, do not be at once dismayed and run away from the way of salvation, of which the entrance must be narrow. But as we progress in our monastic life and in faith, our hearts shall be enlarged, and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness of love in the way of God's commandments; so that, never abandoning his rule but persevering in his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall share by patience in the sufferings of Christ, that we may deserve to be partakers also of his kingdom.'*

The wisdom and moderation of the Rule has inspired numberless communities of men and women to adopt it as the foundation of their Christian discipleship.

Benedict died at Monte Cassino on 21st March in about AD 550. Because this date always falls in Lent his feast is observed on 11th July – a date said by some to mark the translation of his body.

In 1964 he was declared the patron saint of Europe. Since that time five others, from different parts of the continent, have been joined to Benedict as patrons of Europe.