

Monthly Oblate Reflection - January 2018
Borrowing from Benedict's Rules to Change the Way We Make New Year's Resolutions
By Robert Sosa, obOSB

The three most common New Year's resolutions we make each year are 1. Eat healthier, 2. Get fit, and 3. Save money. Among the resolutions we break most often are, you guessed it, 1. Eat healthier, 2. Get fit, and 3. Save money. This according to *Statista* and to *Time* magazine, two online portals providing statistics.

In fact, almost all of the New Year's resolutions we make we break. We mean well, but often we don't do well. It seems, also, that we're better at making and keeping the promises we make *to others* than those we make to ourselves. Promises to others tend to hold us accountable, while promises to ourselves tend to be more fragile. Perhaps one way of keeping our resolutions is by *changing the way* we go about making them. Maybe Joan Chittister's book, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, can help.

Her book lists and explains in lay terms the many "Rules" St. Benedict wrote between AD 480-550 to guide the life of Benedictine monks living in monastic communities. The strand that binds each chapter in the book is Discipline. A life well-lived, according to Benedict, requires Discipline.

Most of us obviously don't live in monasteries, but we do live in communities. And maybe we can borrow from Benedict's rules to help make resolutions we can commit to. The reason they'll stick is that they will be made *in community*, as Benedict did, in union with others. So that the resolution won't just be about "Me." It will be about "Us." Some examples:

1. From St. Benedict's rules for **The Proper Amount of Food; The Proper Amount of Drink; and Times for Meals** (rules 39-41), a New Year's Resolution can be made that could sound like this: "Beginning now, we will sit together as a family for the evening meal at least once a week." Keep the meal simple: a main course and one side dish. Encourage meaningful conversation. When appropriate, talk about God. Ask of everyone at table, "What's the best thing that's happened to you in the last few days and what did you learn from it?" Then truly listen to the responses.
2. On Benedict's rule of **Restraint in Speech** (rule 6), a New Year's Resolution could be this: "I will not gossip nor speak uncharitably of others - I just won't. Doing so makes *Me* look bad, not *Them*."
3. On Benedict's rule of **Distribution of Goods According to Need**, (rule 34), a Resolution could be: "I will pray 'unceasingly' for the marginalized, for immigrants, the poor, the sick, the hungry, the imprisoned." Go online and type in "Christian" or "Catholic Social Teachings" and see where you can advance those teachings as a volunteer. There are opportunities in almost all communities. So resolve now to make things happen, to change things for the better.

Here's to "Us" resolutions made the Benedict way!
Best wishes and a Blessed and Happy New Year!