

A Good Neighbor: Benedict's Guide to Community

Robert Benson

On-line Discussion Guide

A BEGINNING

- On page xi, Benson writes of his calling: "I am called to live a life of work and family, art and prayer, in the world outside the walls of a monastery." To what are you called? Do you feel that you know to what God has called you?

A LONGING FOR COMMUNITY

- In what ways do you currently participate in "real" community? In what ways do you not?
- On page 6, Benson discusses the many definitions of the word "community." Grab a couple of different dictionaries or on-line sources, and compare the various ways of defining the word. Which ones make the most sense to you? Which definitions best describe what you want in your life?

HEROIC HUMILITY

- Benson briefly contrasts the meanings of "humility" and "obedience" (pp. 24-5). Do you feel that they are similar? Are you better at one than the other? Is it possible to be better at one than the other?
- Benson writes throughout this chapter about humility, suffering, and confession. He says that Christian community cannot really happen unless these things are being practiced. Do you agree?

A READY MERCY

- Benson reflects at the opening of this chapter: "A posture of honest humility increases the likelihood that we will begin to really see and hear what is going on within and around those to whom we have been given and who have been given to us." (p. 39) What would be some synonyms for "humility," as it is understood in this context?
- What does it mean to "act with mercy"? What does the Rule of St. Benedict say on the subject?
- When are you able to easily act with mercy? When is it a lot harder for you?

A WIDER WELCOME

- Make two lists. The first list is those ways in which you are welcoming right now. The second list is those ways in which you do not live a life of welcome as you think you should.
- Is your community all on one “side of town”? What does this mean in your current situation in life?

THE ACT OF CARING

- Who are the people that Jesus told us to care for? Do you think that it’s enough to care for them by giving to church or benevolent organizations?
- What benefits might we miss out on if we only care for the hungry, the thirsty, those in prison, widows, etc., in those “indirect” ways?

LIVING FOR OTHERS

- This chapter opens with a quote from Annie Dillard: “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” Is this good news for you, or not so good?
- Reflect on the simple but profound sentences from the Rule that Benson offers on pages 84-6. Which ones speak most clearly to you right now?

Send us your thoughts and comments about this book. We love to hear from you!

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