

**LOOKING FOR SANCTUARY:
LENT—EASTER 2008
AT MALMESBURY ABBEY**



A companion to Abbot Christopher Jamison's
Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life
Malmesbury Abbey's Lent Book for 2008

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WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY

During Lent 2008 at Malmesbury Abbey, we will be reading Abbot Christopher Jamison's *Finding Sanctuary*.

'The sense that the Christian monastic tradition has something special to offer is growing among contemporary people of all religious beliefs and those with none. To everybody's surprise, *The Monastery* [BBC, 2005] attracted an audience of three million viewers and was very favourably received by critics and public alike.'
(*Finding Sanctuary*, pp.1-2)

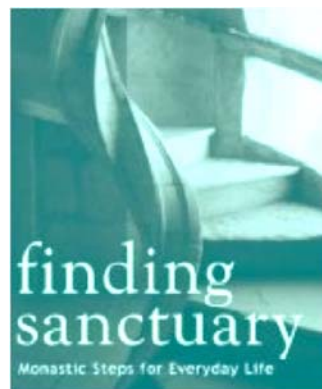
This little booklet is intended as an accompaniment to *Finding Sanctuary*, primarily for home groups, but individuals will find it helpful too.

Each page summarises, in bullet points, the main points of a chapter from *Finding Sanctuary*. Under the 'Meditate' heading are some relevant Scriptures, and 'Reflect' offers some basic questions to get some discussion going. And look out for the Yellow Sheet each week, which will provide a little bit more reflection & meditation material.

'we urge the entire community during these days of Lent to keep its manner of life most pure, and to wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times.'
(*Rule of St. Benedict* 49:2-3)

Malmesbury Abbey was once a Benedictine monastery, so in a sense, this journey is about reconnecting with our roots. I hope you'll find the spiritual 'wash-cycle' of Lent 2008 rewarding, and that as we ponder ancient wisdom in the modern world, we might hear afresh the awesome voice of God calling out to us.

James Pettit.



THE SANCTUARY AND BEYOND: Some Further Resources

If you get the chance, the BBC programme *The Monastery* is well worth watching. Also, you might be interested in reading *The Rule of St. Benedict* – Benedict's very own classic guidelines for (monastic) community life. It's full of Scripture and insight.

You'll find some useful things in Abbot Christopher's bibliography (p.181). The following are worth looking out for:

- Esther De Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of Benedict* (Canterbury, 1991).
- David Foster, *Reading with God: Lectio Divina* (Continuum, 2005).
- Anthony Maret-Crosby (ed.), *The Benedictine Handbook* (Canterbury, 2003).
- Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (Riverhead, 1997)
- Columba Stewart, *Prayer and Community* (Orbis, 1999).

Some relevant websites

(in addition to those recommended in *Finding Sanctuary*):

www.osb.org

www.worthabbey.net/bbc/index.html (Abb.Christopher's monastery)

www.burfordosb.org.uk (an Anglican Benedictine monastery)

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer/ for a rhythm of daily prayer on the CofE website.

On *lectio divina*:

<http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>

<http://www.ocarm.org/lectio/lecteng.htm>

Anything else? ask James, at jamesthemonk@gmail.com

STEP 7: HOPE

- Benedict told his monks to remind themselves daily that they were going to die. Far from morbid, this was because he wanted his monks to live with a sense of urgency & goodness of life *now*. ‘Death is the ultimate stripping away, and the ultimate encounter with God.’ (158--159).
- The Abbot tells the remarkable story of the Atlas Martyrs – a testament to hope (159-164).
- Religion causes...peace! Only three of the thirty-two wars in the 20th century had a significantly religious element. Our challenge is to create peace that is not simply the absence of war, but ‘the fruit of justice.’ (164-167).
- Abbot Christopher argues the world’s classic religions can fulfil the task of sustaining true sanctuary in the 21st century in new and creative ways. He cites some of the initiatives of John Paul II as an example (168-171).
- Finding sanctuary requires putting ourselves in a ‘context’ – what Benedict called ‘a school for the Lord’s service’ (170) – a place of prayer, community, obedience, silence, and of course, hope. ‘In the end we find sanctuary in God; he is our natural sanctuary.’ (171-172).

MEDITATE

Ps.146; Jer.31:1-6; Jn.20:1-18; Heb.12:18-24

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to this quote: ‘When anybody finds sanctuary they will also find an altar of sacrifice... finding sanctuary is also finding out what God is asking of us.’ (163-164).

PREFACE: HOW DID I GET THIS BUSY?

- Abbot Christopher discusses how so many of us feel so busy (13-16), and how this is driven by consumerist lifestyle (16-17). ‘British society now defines a person as a consumer...We are all customers now.’ (16)
- Often, the attempts to ‘get away from it all’ are more consumerism and other ways of being busy (18-19).
- And in case we’re wondering what on earth monks know about being busy, see pp.19-21!
- The antidote, suggests the Abbot, is finding sanctuary: a sacred space, a place of refuge (22-24). ‘Finding sanctuary leads us from the problem of busy-ness to a real spirituality that brings peace.’ (22).
- The doorway into this sanctuary is *virtue*, (25-29). ‘Virtue is the door into the sacred sanctuary because virtue is not a consumer product...Virtue is the recognition of the sacred in daily life.’(27).

MEDITATE

Pss.15, 24, 63; Ecc.1; Jn.14

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to this quote: ‘if someone says they are too busy, then either they *are* too busy, or they *think* they are too busy. Either way, the responsibility lies with them; they choose to lead a busy life, or they choose to think that they do.’ (14).

STEP 1: SILENCE

- The first step is silence, but even when we find silence on the outside, how do we deal with our thoughts, which are so ‘noisy’? (34-35).
- The Abbot describes the role of silence at the monastery (Carthusian as well as Benedictine), ‘silence is not an end in itself; it is there to let inner silence grow...so that the inner life might flourish.’ (36-40).
- For St. Benedict, the practice of silence is formational. It has something to do with *quality* of speech, and rather than tranquillity, it forces us to ‘wrestle with our demons.’ (40-42).
- A thought for those who have (or who work with) children: once they reach a certain age, the practice of silence is potentially beneficial for their spiritual health (42-44).
- The Abbot offers some practical suggestions for building quality silence into your daily routine, and what to do in the silence (44-49). But isn’t all this silence a bit self-indulgent? (see pp. 46-47 for the Abbot’s answer).

MEDITATE

Ps.46; Prov.10:19; Mk.1:35-39; Rev.8:1-5

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to the quote: ‘distractions inside my head are actually noises inside my heart: they are the result of the natural human condition – the condition of not having a pure heart. Purity of heart is the goal...’(48-49).

STEP 6: SPIRITUALITY

- ‘Since the 1960s increasing numbers of people have turned to spirituality rather than religion as a source of solace and to find sanctuary from the busy consumer world.’ (138-139).
- Abbot Christopher charts the history of spirituality, from St. Paul through to the 20th century (139-142). ‘Spirituality’ is now seen as private, separate to ‘institutional religion’, which has become optional (142-145).
- The Abbot redefines ‘classic religion’, reclaiming it as a broader and richer reality than that offered by many modern spiritual movements (145-147).
- Modern spirituality is increasingly ‘pick-and-mix’, where ‘spirituality shoppers’ take parts of other religions and build them into their own path, like consumers. But they ‘cannot escape the need for a wholesale commitment at some point; otherwise they stay at the point of religious shopper.’ Benedict touched on this in ch.1 of his *Rule* (148-151).
- Yet the impulses of contemporary spirituality have much to teach us. ‘At its best, classic religion is now a humbler affair, open to dialogue and development.’ (152-154).

MEDITATE

Ps.118:1-2; 19-29; Deut. 6:4-9; Matt.4:18-22; Rom.8:5-17

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to this quote: ‘the idea that true spirituality is private: this is very narrowing compared to the classic view that religion is a communal event lived out through public rituals and human relationships...’ (147).

STEP 5: COMMUNITY

- Abbot Christopher shows how ‘Community’ seems to have two meanings today, and people like to cash in on the good feeling generated by one meaning, when in fact they mean the other (112-115).
- Benedictine monks make three vows that all relate to community life: Stability (see 117-118), Obedience (see Step 2, above), and *Conversatio morum*.
- The Abbot describes *Conversatio morum* in terms of good conversation: high quality speaking & listening that enables people to contribute their full individuality, without individualism (119-122).
- A community works well when it is under a ‘Rule’ (or ‘way of life’). We see this in the example of Pachomius’ community, as well as in modern research (122-125).
- Conflict puts community to the test. Note the difference between ‘complaining well’ and ‘grumbling’ – which is ‘the greatest obstacle to true community living’ (125-127). Community has the potential to be sacramental (128-129).
- The community we build will be strengthened by ritual (129-132), and must embrace rich & poor alike (132-134).

MEDITATE

Ps.133; Deut.31:9-13; Jn.17:20-23; 1 Cor.12:12-27

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to the quote: ‘our reactions to other people teach us a good deal about ourselves.’ (115-117).

STEP 2: CONTEMPLATION

- Prayer is the simple act of addressing God: ‘you’, rather than ‘him’. St. Benedict’s aim was to pray constantly, in the sense of continually keeping the memory of God alive in the heart. (52-56). ‘If you can do this, then you have found sanctuary, no matter where you are physically or indeed mentally.’ (55).
- There are two recommended ways of meditating: repeating a phrase slowly; and slow reading (56-60). ‘In meditation, preparing your mind and body is done not as mental and physical exercise, but primarily to allow you to speak to God and finally to let God speak to you.’ (58).
- Abbot Christopher challenges our reading – what we think it is, and how we do it (60-63). Then he explains *lectio divina* (‘sacred reading’), with some basic guidelines (63-66).
- Finally, the Abbot discusses what happens when our ‘meditation’ moves into ‘contemplation’, with some help from Teresa of Avila (67-70). He leaves us with a challenge: ‘The authenticity of your meditation will be tested in your daily living: in your patience, your sensitivity to others and your readiness to live with integrity.’ (67).

MEDITATE

Ps.19; 1 Kgs.19:1-13; Matt.6:9-13; 1 Thess.5:16-18

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to this quote: ‘prayer can include silence, anguish and ritual, as well as recitation of “a prayer”. This leads to an important conclusion: not all prayer involves “saying prayers”.’ (54).

STEP 3: OBEDIENCE

- Abbot Christopher asks some tough questions about freedom and obedience. Freedom of choice is a core value of modern life, yet for many, ‘free choices are driven by obedience to a hidden agenda.’ (72-75).
- The Abbot explains why ‘obedience is potentially the greatest expression of human freedom’ (75). True obedience is about listening carefully, then choosing whom to follow – a double freedom (76-77).
- Obedience is about mutual love, ‘to choose freely to set aside your desires for the sake of the other’, and the exercise of conscience (77-79).
- This raises the issue of control. Do we seek to control our lives with the ‘masks’ we wear? If so, are we really being true to ourselves, or are we enslaved to the agendas of others? (79-82). The Abbot refers us to Thomas Merton (83-85).
- Obeying our own desires has serious effects on the way we treat people and possessions. For this reason, an honest awareness of personal sinfulness can be a helpful reality check (85-87). The Abbot commends the search for God’s agenda, through prayer. Find that, and you find your true self (88-89).

MEDITATE

Ps.119:1-16; Ex.19:1-6; Lk.18:9-14; 1 Jn.3:21-24

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to the quote: ‘In order to become myself, I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be.’ (see pp.84-85 to put this in context).

STEP 4: HUMILITY

- Abbot Christopher explains that humility does *not* mean being passive, introverted, or timid. Nor does it mean ‘humiliation’ – something quite different! Humility is more about a quality of life, and a state of mind (92-94).
- At the root of the word ‘humility’ is Latin *humus* (‘soil’/ ‘earth’). So, to be humble, is to be down to earth! ‘This leads into being realistic, honest, and truthful.’ (94-95).
- Research has shown that humility even helps a business excel; ‘at the heart of a truly great business, there is a lack of busyness and the presence of a humble, determined visionary.’ (96-98).
- The longest chapter in St. Benedict’s *Rule* concerns humility (ch.7), which he describes as a ladder with twelve steps. As Abbot Christopher warns us, they make tough reading for modern minds, but at the top is God’s perfect love. A humble heart – in the true sense – raises us to heaven (98-100).
- The Abbot takes us swiftly up the ladder’s twelve steps. They are too long to summarise here, but well worth reading about and grappling with (100-108).

MEDITATE

Ps.131; Prov.11:2; Lk.14:1-24; Phil.2:1-13

REFLECT

1. What, if anything, did you find exciting, or useful, or insightful in this chapter? Why?
2. What, if anything, did you find confusing, or troubling, or disagreeable in this chapter? Why?
3. Respond to this quote: ‘the ability to be content whatever happens to you is the fruit of great self-awareness. Even when status is taken away, the humble person can live fruitfully and happily’ (105).