

On the vine

A Longer Read: Treasure in my pocket

In our 17th July issue of Grapevine, we revealed how lockdown has certainly been a time of growth for the Benedictine Companions of the Abbey at Milton.

The community is still young - this November will mark 2 years since they were founded. Guided by the Rule of St Benedict and with their spiritual home at Milton Abbey, the Companions are a dispersed community of men and women, lay and ordained, who live out Benedictine life in families, communities and work places across Dorset and further afield.

Recently, the Revd Andy Muckle joined this community, and here he reflects on becoming a Benedictine Companion of the Abbey at Milton.

Of the many memories I have of my time at theological college, being in the darkened Upper Church for Compline would be one of them. Sitting in your seat, eyes tightly closed in contemplation, the hushed silence would only be broken by the shuffling of seats or the occasional monastic snore before you would hear the slow padding of the superior towards the lectern. After a brief clearing of the throat, the measured but slightly hesitant northern voice would begin:

“A reading from the rule of St Benedict...”

The theological college I attended was the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield. It styles itself as ‘A college like no other’ as it has the unique position of sharing its life with the Community of the Resurrection which was founded by Charles Gore in 1892. The Community is rooted in the Anglican tradition and formed in a Benedictine round of prayer, ministry and hospitality underpinned by the vows of Stability, Obedience and Conversion of Life.

Even if it can't be appreciated at the time there is a gradual osmosis that occurs while you are at Mirfield, the Benedictine vows inform and deepen your formation because even though you are not preparing to join a religious community, your experience of college is framed within these vows. The so called ‘Common Life’ of college is about how share life together and in that the Benedictine vow of stability is so important because gradually (and sometimes painfully) we learn to stay the course and to worship, work and live alongside each other even when we grate against each other like two bruised stones.

Part of the Common Life is also how we come to appreciate Christ in each other. As we listen to Christ and listen to each other we slowly start to make the next step of listening to Christ in each other, for obedience is rooted in a heart that listens, as St Benedict starts the prologue to his rule, ‘Listen, Child of God...’ All these things and more lead to the slow but sure conversion of life as the trajectory of our lives becomes progressively more directed towards God.

Looking back now with the wisdom of hindsight, something must have rubbed off on me during my time at Mirfield, even if I did not appreciate it! At one of the Diocesan Clergy Days a couple of years ago, I picked up a small leaflet on the Benedictine Companions of the Abbey at Milton and read it with interest as I was feeling some spiritual restlessness at the time, as if I needed

something to slot into place. However, like so many things the leaflet got somewhat buried in the general devastation of my study, not quite forgotten but not quite followed up either.

It was not until I was mid conversation with my Spiritual Accompanier that the penny dropped into place. Her words mid-flow - "Oh that's the Benedictine in you" - both shook me and at the same time crystallised so many thoughts and prayers. The answer to some spiritual searching had been there all the time. The experience of discernment alongside the Companions has felt remarkably comfortable, a bit like slipping back on a glove that you have mislaid a while ago, and to be admitted as a Companion on St Benedict's Day is an experience I will always treasure.

What I love about St Benedict's wisdom is that it is not ethereal or ephemeral, it is practical guidance for living a life of faith in the world today with those you are called to live and minister alongside, and so each morning I read a small portion of the rule and smile at the wisdom and perspicacity that echoes down the centuries.

You might even say I have rediscovered the treasure in my pocket, which was always there, the treasure of the Rule of St Benedict.