

RB 32 The Tools and Goods of the Monastery

Benedictine spirituality is as much about good order, wise management, and housecleaning as it is about the meditative and the immaterial dimensions of life.

Benedictine spirituality sees the care of the earth and the integration of prayer and work, body and soul, as essential parts of the journey to wholeness that answers the emptiness in each of us.

In RB 32 the tools are no longer a metaphor for the spiritual life. Now it is a question of the concrete implements themselves, and it seems like their very use is an aspect of the spiritual life. Things are not “merely things” but part of God’s creation to be revered and carefully maintained.

Tools literally iron tools of the type used in the garden and kitchen.

In the 6c such tools were expensive and relatively scarce, hence the concern for their care and inventory.

RB 32.2 They are to be collected after use. It is an important aspect of common life that each member not have a complete set of personal tools but share them with the rest.

RB 32.3 Throughout Benedictine history, the cellarer has generally kept this kind of inventory. Someone must be monitor of the common property.

Each person can at least be careful not to leave the things used in worse condition than when they were obtained for use.

RB 32.4 It is not a fault to soil the tools, for that is inevitable in serious work. Rather, the fault lies in leaving them unclean, since iron rusts when left soiled. Benedict equates tools with liturgical utensils.

¹Regarding the goods of the monastery, whether it be tools or clothing or anything else, the prioress should choose members of reliable life and habits, and ²she will, as she sees fit, entrust them these objects to be cared for and collected. ³The prioress will keep a list of these things, so that when the members succeed each other in their assignments, she will know what she gives out and what she receives back. ⁴If anyone neglects the goods of the monastery or fails to keep them clean, she shall be reprimanded; ⁵if she does not improve, she is to undergo the discipline of the Rule.