

THE FIRST RULE

Christianity is all about transformation. We believe that in Jesus Christ we have been given the power to live full, rich, meaningful lives. The call to discipleship is the call to a new style of living. It isn't just about what happens when we die. Rather, the process of transformation has already begun. The pilgrimage has begun and we are on the road together.

How is it then that we can be 'transformed'? It is a matter of faith? Or perhaps right thinking? Is it belonging to a community of faith or even a particular church? What about doing good things and living a good life? All of these things are important, if not essential. They are part of the journey and serve as guideposts when the road is difficult or when we get lost or are afraid to continue.

But I for one, have found one practice to be absolutely essential for my well being. For me, it is life changing and transformative. And I have a hunch that it is something which in most ways can apply to people of any faith tradition, and perhaps even to those with no active faith or religious connection.

St. Benedict lived in 6th century Italy. He is regarded as the founder of the monastic movement, a part of Christianity which for centuries served as the very backbone of the Church. His celebrated "Benedictine Rule" was an effort to organize everyday life around fixed times of prayer, work, study, service and rest. He believed in balance and structure. Many thoughtful people are still drawn to Benedict's system of living, whether or not they live in a monastery or convent.

In his Rule, Benedict begins very simply, "Live this life and do whatever is done, in a spirit of **thanksgiving**.and come to comfortable rest in the certainty that those who participate in this life with an attitude of Thanksgiving will receive its full promise." He calls this the First Rule.

Those of us who follow the Rule of Benedict have come to embrace the very simple practice of pausing several times each day to reflect and to express gratitude. Expressing gratitude has the absolute power to transform! It is an amazing thing to observe. In giving thanks, we are reminded of the people and things we take for granted. Being thankful and expressing gratitude has the effect of reshaping our attitude. "Those who participate in this life with an attitude of Thanksgiving will receive its full promise."

Why not give it a try? Establish a couple of times during your day when you can call a time out, take a break, and reflect. Recall what has just happened in your day. There will be many things you will remember as happy moments. It will be easy to be thankful for the good things and the blessings.

But what about the problems, disappointments, and conflicts of our lives? Well, for example, if you are driving around and can't find a convenient parking place, you might want to remember that you can still get out of your car and walk! Walking is very good

for us! There might be a time in our lives when we won't be able to walk. Can we not be thankful that we have the good health, mobility, and freedom to walk? Instead of being grumpy or feeling that life has been unfair, we are reminded of the joy of mobility.

For many Christians, this is the season of Lent. Traditionally, for many, this means 'giving up' something. I have a better idea, a "take on", not a "give up": take on intentional gratitude. It is the First Rule. It has the absolute power to transform.