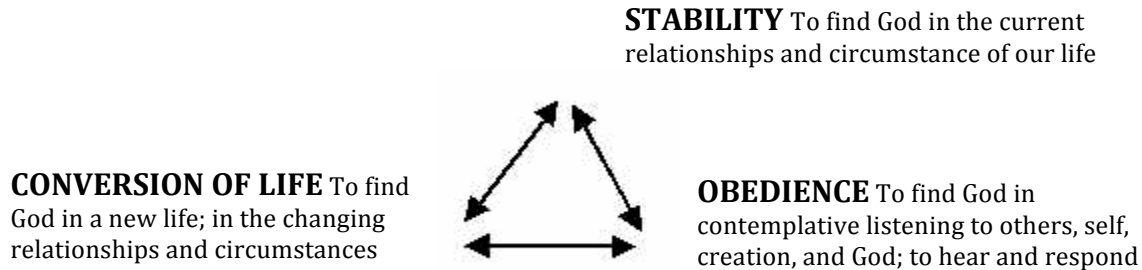


The Benedictine Promise and the Dynamics of the Spiritual Life

I want to begin with looking at the elements of the Promise and the dynamics among those elements in a living community of people.



Each element of the Promise is rooted in recollection and has certain internal dynamics. In stability, obedience and conversion of life there comes an awareness of God's presence. Speaking of it in general usage rather than in relationship to the spiritual life Edna O'Brien, an Irish writer, said "Recollection ... is not something that I can summon up, it simply comes and I am the servant of it." It is the Spirit praying within us.

The Promise draws us into recollection of aspects of God's presence. Each also carries within it dynamics that can draw us into maturity in Christ.

	Recollection	Inner Dynamics
Stability	God in this community, these people, this situation	Entering into a deeper acceptance of self and others; turning away from illusions drawing us into boredom, resentment, a desire to escape. Learning about the grumbling of our hearts, about how and why we flee self, others and God.
Obedience	God in this "word" to me	Living in the reality of death and resurrection, of losing life to find life. Learning to live in relationship, to listen deeply, to respond.
Conversion of Life	God in the new community, in the new life	Being on the journey that calls us into continuous change, a life-long process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Learning to find joy in the new life instead of weeping for the life that has passed or never was.

In the parish's life as a community these elements of the Promise will touch and press upon one another. The static parish might find a new stability out of having listened and responded to its own fears and longings; that is to say out of being obedient and open to a new life. The excessively anxious-to-please parish might experience a conversion of life if leaders establish the stability of the Prayer Book Pattern (Eucharist, Office, Personal Devotions). Living for a time in the Rule may allow the space for the Spirit to move and be noticed.

Parish development leadership involves seeing the dynamics as they exist in the parish and acting to shape parish life so the needed balance exists in its structures and processes.

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