

THE KEYS



Church of St. Peter the Apostle
Anglican Catholic Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic States
www.dmas-acc.org

The Rev. Peter Geromel OHI, Th.M, Rector
January 2022
<https://stpetersacc.org>

The Rector's Ramble (In and Out of Brambles)

Prayer Methods 2 - Methodology of St. Jerome.

We continue to look at various methodologies pertinent to our spiritual lives and developing St. Peter's parishioners as Prayer Warriors to the Nth degree! In a sense, we have already covered much of Eastern monasticism in previous newsletters in which we have talked about the notion of Hesychasm, or Prayer of the Heart. In this month's newsletter, I'd like to look at Western Monasticism just prior to the Benedictine tradition, which tradition so amalgamates the other prior traditions as to become the dominant strain of Western Christianity, at least, prior to the coming of the Dominican and Franciscan orders.

Before the Benedictine tradition there were many different monasteries with many different traditions in Italy, North Africa and Gaul (France). The Abbot made the rule and adjusted it as necessary, and the monks had a tendency to float from one monastery to another just as they had floated from one school or philosopher to another in the previous era of classical pursuit of learning. Indeed, this is a bit of St. Augustine's own story before he settled on Christianity and monastic life – he floated around and studied. St. Benedict put the coffin nails into the feet of monks, often young men like St. Augustine with active minds, like wealthy college boys out and about at graduate school. No, St. Benedict offered them the rule of Stability, to take vows and stay in one monastery for life. Prior to this, I suppose, if one found that a rule didn't suit or changed, or the Abbot changed, one could move on.

The tendency in the West was for the aristocracy or old patrician class, now Christian, to enter into the monasteries and there they preserved the Classical tradition of bygone days, and this continues until quite recently, when the Mother Superior of a convent was often of noble birth. In this way, monasteries became woven into the fabric of the ruling order as Europe muddled its way through the so-called Dark Ages and beyond.

In the midst of an earlier era, St. Jerome (d. 420 AD) makes the following mention of a sort of rule when he writes to a certain Demetrias: "In addition to the rules of psalmody and prayer, which you must always observe at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, at evening, at midnight, and at dawn, you must determine how much time you will give to the learning and reading of Scripture. When you have spent your allotted time in these studies, often kneeling down to pray, as care of your soul will impel you to do, have some wool always at hand; shape the threads into yarn. By observing such rules as these you will save yourself and others." This is a curious statement perhaps intended for the fairer sex but points to a really healthy form of prayer – nervous Nelly and her knitting needles? In a sense, yes! Perhaps that is what St. Jerome means. After all, Western monasticism has a strong focus on what Benedict later called *Ora et Labora* – work and prayer – and we see this here in this curious piece of advice.

We often think that our role when praying is to sit in some kind of Christian version of the Lotus position, hands folded, kneeling or sitting in a pew, wrapped in prayer and ecstasy. Moments like these are few, actually. We are, by nature, active creatures – to a greater or lesser extent – depending on our personalities. Sure, we must know how to settle down and pay attention (that much is clear to any rationale child) in order to have an orderly prayer life. Yet, we are not called to absolutely be without a certain measure of the fidgets if that is our personality. Where is your stress ball? Where is your little finger strengthener? Where, might I ask, are your knitting needles? They can be two swords to parry the assaults of the evil one during prayer whilst he is causing you to become distracted because he *knows* your nature is of an active and highly-distractable kind. *Pax et Bonum*. Peace and Blessings!

News and Information

Vestry meets January 19th. There will be mass at 7 PM followed by the meeting.

Epiphany, January 6th, there will be noonday prayer and then a Festive Holy Eucharist with blessing of Holy Water at 7 pm.

The Conversion of St. Paul will be celebrated on Tuesday, January 25th, at Noon.

