

## **Ignatius, I'd Like you to Meet Benedict (or how a Benedictine Came to Love Ignatian Spirituality)**

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It's not something that fits neatly into a resume. "Ten years' experience as Benedictine oblate, with a skill set including silence, meditation, and an emphasis on listening" would be a great conversation starter at an interview, but didn't exactly fit the job I was applying for when I first began thinking of working at Xavier. Yet, I have no doubt that the formation I have received as a Benedictine oblate had a lot to do with my being drawn to Xavier. I knew how highly Jesuits valued education, but most of all how they believed in forming the whole person, not just educating someone for a job. As a good Benedictine, this was probably what hooked me in. The Rule of St. Benedict is all about being "a school for the Lord's Service" where your life of prayer and work, lived out in community, forms you to love and serve God and others with your whole self.

In one of our AFMIX gatherings, we talked about an important aspect of diversity work – looking for commonality amid diversity -- as the beginning of understanding and community. So, as a way of framing what I have learned, I'd like to share what it is in the Jesuit tradition and in Xavier's own values that I share as a Benedictine.

1. **Jesuits, Xavier, and Benedictines all love deep listening.** The very first verse of the Rule's Prologue says "Listen, my son, to the words of a father who loves you" and the theme of listening – to God, to those we are accountable to, and to each other – is repeated in the Rule over and over again. Benedictines like to talk about how the Latin word "obedientia" (from which we get our English word "obedience") originally meant "listening", and in Benedictine spirituality obedience has a lot to do with listening to the needs, views, and feelings of others. This kind of "listening" is part of what helped the Jesuits adapt to so many cultures in their missionary work, and how we at Xavier build community and encourage diversity.
2. **Jesuits, Xavier, and Benedictines all love radical hospitality.** "Let all guests who present themselves be welcomed as Christ" (ch.53:1) says the Rule, and by inference this is applied in Benedictine spirituality not just to guests in a monastery but to welcoming others in all aspects of our lives. This is a central aspect of the diversity that Jesuits and Xavier strongly foster. It is a core value of both traditions that no one should ever feel left out, unheard, unseen.
3. **Jesuits, Xavier, and Benedictines all love life-long study.** The Rule provides time each day for reading and study as an expected part of everyday life. There is even a monk appointed reader each week to read to the other monks during meals, and oblates and religious today still follow the custom of studying a book on religion or spirituality during Lent. The Ignatian tradition, and Xavier in particular, also forms people to be seekers for life, to never take it for granted that you know enough, to see continual learning as a duty to enhance one's understanding of God's natural world and of other people and cultures.
4. **Jesuits, Xavier, and Benedictines all believe passionately in the importance, dignity, and sacredness of all forms of work.** The motto of the Benedictines is Ora et Labora (Work and Pray). Everyone's work, from the porter to the Abbot or Abbess, is recognized and respected, and everyone takes their turn working in the kitchen and at tables, because all are expected to serve. Xavier and Ignatian spirituality also teach not only a strong work ethic but respect for all the contributions made to the community, and respect for workers from all walks of life.

5. **Jesuits, Xavier, and Benedictines all believe that some form of prayer or meditation discipline must be foundational.** “Before you begin any good work, you must pray to God to bring it to perfection,” Benedict teaches us (Prologue, verse 4). Each spirituality has its own disciplines, whether it is the Examen and the prayerful discernment of the Ignatian tradition or the Twelve Steps of Humility and Daily Office of the Benedictines. Though they may differ in structure and emphasis, these disciplines foster our relationship with God and allow God to work within us. Members of the Xavier community, whatever their beliefs, are encouraged to make reflection or prayer part of their approach to their work and life.

There are of course many differences between Benedictine spirituality and Jesuit spirituality as well. As a Benedictine working at a Jesuit university, though, these five commonalities are what really stand out for me – and there may be more that I have yet to recognize and explore. The two traditions, though they may emphasize different aspects, complement each other beautifully. I could never have known when I made my commitment as a Benedictine oblate that it would one day play a part in leading me to Xavier, but I am very glad it did.