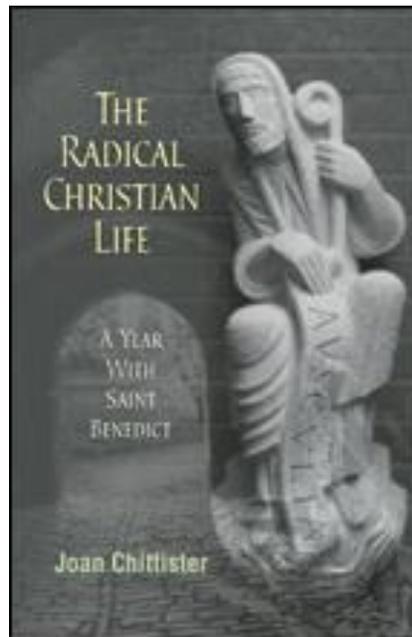


Discussion Questions

The Radical Christian Life: A Year with Saint Benedict



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Introduction

QUESTION:

1. In the introduction of the book, Sister Joan challenges the reader: “Our task now is to be radical Christian communities—in the here and now...” From this initial chapter, what did you learn about what it takes to be a radical Christian community in these times? What values do they embody? Is there an example of a radical Christian community you feel most called to?
2. Sister Joan calls the Benedictine tradition “an ancient model” of “living otherwise” in the midst of a collapsing society. What is it that draws you to this ancient model?
3. Sister Joan offers several pillars of Benedictine spirituality: creative work, holy leisure, stewardship, community, humility, and peace. Which one of these is the easiest for you to commit to? Which one of these is the hardest for you to commit to? Why do you think that is?

Story 1: January

The Mending of a Tray: A Call to Good Work

QUESTIONS:

1. In this story, Sister Joan suggests that “we must be menders of what is broken in society, not its judges, nor its mocking observers.” What are you called to mend in your life? What around you is broken, or who is in need of healing, that you can offer your presence and gifts to?
2. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
3. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 2: February

Scholastica and Benedict: A Call to Conversion of Heart

QUESTIONS:

1. This story teaches that “law is never greater than love.” Benedict learned that when Scholastica insisted their conversation continue, despite his instinct to follow the traditional rules. What is a story from your life that taught you that “law is never greater than love”? Who taught you?
2. Scholastica’s power in the eyes of God, and in the life of Benedict, shows the spiritual strength of her leadership. Who has been a model for women’s spiritual leadership in your life? What did you learn from her/them?
3. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
4. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 3: March

Cave and Romanus: A Call to Silence and Sacred Leisure

QUESTIONS:

1. Under the pressure of expectation, Benedict retreated to a cave where he could spend time with himself and God alone. When you feel overwhelmed, where do you go? What space of silence or solitude grounds you in those moments?
2. Romanus provides Benedict with food so that he may stay on his journey in the cave. Who has provided you with essential support during trying times for you?
3. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?

4. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 4: April

Poisoning of Wine: A Call to Purity of Heart

QUESTIONS:

1. When Benedict takes on leadership in a community and brings unwanted change, the brothers attempt to poison him. Rather than rebuke or punish them, Benedict decides to leave and return to his solitude. If you were in that situation, how would you have reacted? How do you wish you would react?
2. One reoccurring theme of this chapter is change. Sister Joan writes, “Change is one of the constants of life. It is also one of the most difficult elements of life.” How do you deal with change? What helps you overcome resistance to change, in order to embrace it?
3. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
4. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 5: May

Placid and Maurus and the Movement of Monastery: A Call to Community

QUESTIONS:

1. This story is distilled down to two words for Sister Joan: “love listens.” Responding to varying desires and opinions, Benedict was able to listen to his brothers’ concerns while staying firm in his own. How have you listened to and been changed by the relationships in your

life? What has listening to others' needs taught you about yourself?

2. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?

3. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 6: June

Near Drowning of Placid: A Call to Friendship

QUESTIONS:

1. In this story, we are shown that we all need each other. Placid was getting water for the community when he gets pulled into the lake, so Benedict blesses Maurus, and Maurus saves Placid. Friendship within community calls us to support and uplift one another, helping each other become our best selves. What wisdom figure in your life has called you to your best self? Have you acted as a mentor to any younger people? If so, have they taught you anything new?

2. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?

3. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 7: July

Founding of Monte Cassino: A Call to Prophecy

DIVIDED LOYALTIES:

1. At the summit of Monte Cassino, Benedict overturns the temple dedicated to the Roman god of war and instills his own monastery dedicated to life and peace. This change was not easy, nor welcomed by the locals, but he stood by it and slowly brought them along.

Importantly, he did not simply destroy the old, he actually offered a new vision and direction. How are you called to create something new, and needed, in your community? How might you bring people along through the challenge of change?

2. Sister Joan challenges us to think of the idols in our own life. She says, “Name three things you cling to—clothes, money, position, control, a person—because your life would have to change substantially if you ever had to give them up.” Who could we become if we give up our idols? What is the alternative vision of life you could replace them with?

3. Sister Joan states, “Don’t think for a minute that you will get through life without having to make a choice between idols and ideals.” Have you faced this crossroads yet? What did you do?

4. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?

5. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 8: August

Totila the Goth: A Call to Humility

QUESTIONS:

1. In this story, Saint Benedict sees straight through the façade into the truth of the matter. Sister Joan concludes: “People see through us when we pretend to be what we are not.” She also states, “Being free to be ourselves is one of the great achievements of life.” How has the value of humility helped you let go of false clothes or stories you put on yourself, and embrace your true self? Alternatively: with whom, or where, do you find the freedom to be yourself?

2. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?

3. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 9: September

Agapitus and Vials of Oil: A Call to Stewardship

QUESTIONS:

1. This story reveals challenging messages to us: “It says everything we have belongs to the poor. It says the challenge of leadership is to lead us to live beyond ourselves. It says those who give to others will be filled themselves with whatever things they need.” Have you experienced a sense of abundance, even when you’ve given something away?
2. What might you be called to give away to those in need around you? Are you willing to actually do it? If not, what is holding you back?
3. Sister Joan applauds Benedict’s anger as a holy act. She quotes Templeton, who said: “If we had been holier people, we would have been angrier oftener.” Answer her provocative question: “What is going on in the world that you should be developing some anger about if the world is ever going to be a better place to live?”
4. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
5. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 10: October

Goth and Poor Man: A Call to Peace and Nonviolence

QUESTIONS:

1. Saint Benedict faced down a cruel man by the name of Zalla not by responding to his anger, but by freeing the farmer whom he had beat, bound and tied. By responding with kindness, Benedict had disarmed Zalla's rage. What would you do in that scenario? What gives you the strength of spirit to respond to such hate with love?
2. Sister Joan says: "Kindness is a strong and valiant virtue that we have turned into plastic and social grace. Kindness is what saves lives and gives love to the dead of spirit and the dark of heart." Where have you seen true kindness in your life? Who exemplifies this practice for you?
3. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
4. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 11: November

Child Raised from the Dead: A Call to Justice and Compassion

QUESTIONS:

1. Learning from the story of Saint Benedict bringing a child back to life, Sister Joan suggests that "It is not our job to work miracles but it is our task to try." If the challenge or social issue seems too great, are you quick to give up? Or do you do as Benedict does, and try regardless?
2. Death, while a necessary part of life, is never easy. However, Sister Joan says, sometimes it may "be the beginning of new life in us." When has the death of something or someone led you through a transformation or even to new life?
3. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
4. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?

Story 12: December

World in a Ray of Light: A Call to Contemplative Vision

QUESTIONS:

1. Saint Benedict's contemplative life, and the story of how he "saw the whole world as in a single ray of light," calls us to embrace our own visions. As Sister Joan states, "The spiritual life enlarges a person's vision. When we begin to see as God sees, we see far beyond ourselves." Has contemplation led you to see in new, and expanded, ways? What vision do you want to share with the world? Will you share it?
2. Which daily quotation or question inspired you the most? What is that teaching you?
3. Which daily quotation or question challenged you the most? What is that teaching you?