Benedict
Listen ...

Benedict lived over 1,500 years ago. He searched for God and chose a life centred around work and prayer. He wrote ‘The Rule of Benedict,’ which is still followed by people all over the world today.
Benedict and his twin sister, Scholastica, were born into a wealthy family in a little town in Italy called Norcia, in 480CE. Very little is known about his early life. It is thought that his father was a Roman civil servant and his mother cared for their large family.

The name Benedict means “blessed by God”. The twins were the youngest in the family and very much loved by their parents and older brothers and sisters.

Benedict and Scholastica grew to be caring and compassionate young people. They were excellent students and enjoyed having lengthy discussions about God. They loved each other dearly.

When Benedict finished school in Norcia his parents decided to send him to university in Rome. They wanted him to have a good education so that he would be able to get an interesting job and take his place in society. He studied philosophy and Greek and Roman literature.

At first, he enjoyed being away from home and studying with his friends. After a while, though, he became very disillusioned with the situation in Rome and wrote a letter to his parents explaining that he needed to get away and be alone for a while.
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Dear Mum and Dad,

How are you both? I hope you and all the family are well. I have been working very hard here in Rome at university. I like studying philosophy and I have been going very well in my Greek and Roman literature courses. However, I haven't been very happy lately.

There is so much violence and hatred everywhere. There is a shortage of food and Rome is a very dangerous place to live. My friends are all becoming very selfish and just want to be rich and famous...

I'm finding it all really difficult and I'm not sure I want to be a part of all this anymore. What's the point of studying for a job when everything is falling apart here? I just don't want to live like this!

I have decided to go away for a while – I am heading to Subiaco for some peace and quiet and to give myself some time to think things through.

I will keep in touch – please pray for me. Give my love to all the family and especially to my favourite sister, Scholastica,

Your loving son,
Benedict.
So, Benedict set off for Subiaco with a family servant who travelled with him as far as Enfide. While staying in the village, Benedict miraculously mended a dish which his servant had broken. He didn't like the attention this caused so he soon started out alone in search of complete solitude. He was looking for a place where he could be by himself and think about God.

After making his way through the mountains, Benedict reached a valley called Subiaco. It was here that he met a holy man named Romanus. As they walked along the road together, Benedict told him about how unhappy he had been in Rome and that he was looking for a quiet place to search for God. Romanus was a monk in a monastery near Subiaco and understood what Benedict was looking for. He asked Benedict if he would like to join him and the other monks in a life of prayer. Benedict thanked him, but was determined to search for God in his own way.

Romanus helped Benedict to find a small cave where he could contemplate in peace. Benedict took off his rich clothes and wore the simple habit of a monk. Romanus came every day with a basket of food for Benedict. He lowered it down on a rope with a bell. One day Benedict put a letter in the basket for Romanus.
Dear Romanus,

It is now almost three years since I left Rome and met you on the road to Subiaco. My time alone in the cave has helped me to realise many things. Firstly, I know I couldn’t have stayed here without your support and kindness. I understand now the wisdom of your words, and appreciate your guidance and direction.

After my experiences in Rome, I have come to realise that our way of acting should be different from the world’s way. The selfish and violent behaviour I saw there is not how a follower of Christ would act. Christ is in each one of us and every person we meet should be welcomed into our lives as if they were Christ himself. The love of Christ should come before all else. If we could live our lives this way, it would lead us to peace and eternal life with God.

I have also learned to listen to God – to listen with the ear of my heart. This means we should always have God at the centre of our lives and we should prefer nothing whatever to Christ.

Your brother in Christ,
Benedict.
The Monks

One day, as Benedict was meditating, a priest arrived. It was Easter Sunday and after sharing some time in prayer, they ate together. Not long after, some shepherds found Benedict’s cave. They too had been searching for God and were very interested in all that Benedict had to say. They asked Benedict for advice on how to find God.

Benedict agreed to share his wisdom and very soon, many others came to him. Monks from a nearby monastery heard about Benedict and asked him to come and be their abbot. The monks were from many different walks of life. Some were rich, some were poor, some were soldiers, farmers and travellers. Benedict treated them all in the same way and taught them about silence, work and prayer, and about living a balanced way of life. Benedict was so strict with them that they tried to poison him! After the failed attempt, he returned to his cave at Subiaco.

Eventually more people heard of Benedict and came to listen to him. He became the leader of another community of monks and was known as Abbot Benedict. Soon after, the monks built an abbey to live in. They prayed seven times a day and worked in the fields growing food and studying scripture by hand-writing copies of the bible that were beautifully illustrated.

When the monks joined the abbey, they took vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life. This meant that they promised to live in a community for the rest of their lives, to be open to change and to listen to the word of God in their hearts, in nature and in everyone they met.

Benedict began to write a Rule to help them all live lives directed towards the search for God. Being the abbot was not always easy for Benedict, and he faced many difficult times as the leader of the community. The Rule was written to assist everyone to live together in peace.
My dear Brother Monks,

I have been thinking for a very long time that if we are to live together as a peaceful community, there are some rules we should follow so that everyone is taken care of. I have written a little rule for us – nothing too difficult to follow, something we can all achieve if we support each other and work together. Here is some of my Rule:

Everything should be arranged so that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak have nothing to run from. RB 64

Regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected. RB 31

If you desire true and eternal life, then keep your tongue free from vicious talk and your lips from all deceit; turn away from evil and do good; let peace be your quest and your aim. (Ps 33[34]:14-15) Prologue 17

All guests who present themselves should be welcomed as Christ. RB 53

Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. RB 4

If we follow this Rule, we will be able to have love in our lives, peace in our hearts and all go together into eternal life.

Your Brother in Christ,
Benedict

PS. RB means Rule of Benedict!
Benedict remained very close to his sister Scholastica all throughout his life. When he went to Monte Cassino she lived as a nun in a nearby convent. Each year he would come to visit her and they loved to spend their time talking about God.

Benedict had a rule that the monks must return to the abbey each night. On one particular visit, Scholastica begged him to stay so that they could talk more about being with God in eternal life as she knew that she would die very soon. Benedict refused and got up to leave. Scholastica quietly began to pray to God that Benedict might stay. A mighty thunderstorm broke above them and Benedict was unable to leave. They spent the night talking and praying.

A few days later, as Benedict was kneeling in prayer, he saw a white dove outside the window. He knew then that his sister had died.

Not long after, Benedict himself became ill. He asked to be taken to the altar and there, supported by his brother monks, he died whilst in prayer. He was buried under the altar at Monte Cassino.

Benedict founded many monasteries and is thought to have written his Rule at Monte Cassino. Many sought to follow the way of life set down in his Rule. It has been handed down over the centuries and today, because of this, many women and men continue to live a life of work and prayer dedicated to God.
**Timeline**

**480**
- Benedict is born in Norcia, the son of a Roman noble. He spent his childhood in Norcia with his twin sister, Scholastica. He enjoyed school and later attended university in Rome.

**500***
- Benedict leaves Rome, abandoning his studies and the wealth of his family and friends. He found Rome to be decadent and immoral.

**503***
- Benedict leaves Enfide with one of his family servants. Here, Benedict performs his first miracle, restoring to perfect condition a dish broken by his servant. The notoriety of this miracle causes Benedict to flee.

**504***
- Benedict becomes a hermit, living in a cave near Subiaco. His servant does not come with him, so he is cared for by a monk named Romanus, who lives in a monastery on a nearby hill. Romanus gives him a monk's habit and visits him regularly to bring him food.

**507***
- After three years of solitude, the monks at a nearby abbey ask him to become their Abbots. Benedict tries to reform the monastery, but fails. After the monks attempt to poison him, Benedict returns to his cave. The raven, often pictured with Benedict, is said to have saved him from being poisoned. Benedict becomes known for his sanctity and character, as well as performing miracles.

**510***
- Benedict is sought out by people to offer guidance. In these years until his death, he helps build 12 monasteries in the region and lives in the thirteenth with monks that he believes are able to live by his Rule and be instructed by him. Along with the monasteries comes much responsibility, including the establishment of schools for children. He spends his days living out the monastic life he envisages in his Rule.

**543**
- Benedict dies at Monte Cassino. His feast day is 11 July, and he was canonised in 1220 CE. He is the patron saint of spelioists, spelunkers and farmers. Pope Paul VI made him the patron saint of Europe in 1965.
BENEDICT

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Benedict presents the story of the life of St Benedict through simple narrative and letters to his family and friends.

It features beautiful watercolour images of Benedict, produced by Irene Mok, a Good Samaritan College ex-student

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