

Novena to Saint Benedict

«Let what has to be given out be given out and what has to be asked for be asked for at the suitable times», what needs to be done be done in the appropriate manner and time, «that nobody be disturbed and nobody embittered in the house of God».

Rule of Saint Benedict, chap. 31, with a small addition, which certainly correctly interprets the thought of Saint Benedict.

In preparation for the feast of Saint Benedict - July 11 - we propose this novena, especially to families that intend to ask for the protection of the saint of Nursia and who undertake to reshape their daily life according to the "architectural" lines dictated by him in his Rule.

Saint Benedict is not an architect only of the outer spaces of the house. He establishes the basic lines for ordering both the buildings, the times, the behaviors, and the inner dispositions necessary for a happy family life. No one lives alone and therefore Saint Benedict invites the members of the families to agree to order their daily life, both external and internal, according to the dispositions given by him in his Rule. In this novena we will remember, day by day, the main teachings of the saint of Nursia for a healthy and serene family life.

First day

The house of God.

The home of a family must be able to merit the title that Saint Benedict gives to the monastery he ruled: the house of God. Whoever enters our dwelling place must be able to exclaim, with full sincerity and amazement: «This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven!» (Gen 28:17).

For this to happen, everything must be done in the appropriate times and ways and with the appropriate dispositions of mind, «so that nobody be disturbed and nobody embittered in the house of God». A few words are enough to say this, but to do it...

Let us pray.

St Benedict, our protector, intercede for us so that this dwelling may truly become the house of God and the gate of heaven and obtain for us the grace of knowing how to follow your teachings, so that we may all collaborate with joyful self-denial to this holy end. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second day

The place of worship

In order to be able to pray properly, it is necessary that there be, in our house, a suitable place: what Saint Benedict calls «oratory», adding that it is «that it must be what its name says» (chap. 52). This means that we must take care that the relative space has all that is necessary to invite everyone to prayer. The tradition of the Church tells us what is needed for this: images, ornaments, kneelers, doilies, candles, flowers... everything that kindles in the soul the desire to pray. For this reason the space of

prayer must be cared for, kept in order and cleanliness and adapted to the different seasons of the liturgical year with the commitment of all the members of the family.

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, obtain for us the grace to be able to engage ourselves so that the place of prayer in our house be truly the sign of the presence of God among us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third day

The outer and inner dispositions of prayer

Saint Benedict teaches that public acts of worship must not be improvised, but that everything must be done with order and decorum; and he adds that not everyone, in common prayer, must read or sing, «but only those who may edify their hearers» (chap. 38). This means that the prayer must be well prepared, that is, the texts must be chosen with care, among the most beautiful ones of the Bible and of the Christian tradition, and must be read with expression; likewise the songs must be well chosen and well executed, in order to obey the Apostle's exhortation: «Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts» (Col 2:16). And can we not learn to decorate prayer books with artistic writing and miniature, as our fathers did? Or at least let us try to procure books that invite to prayer just for the beauty of letters and illustrations.

But Saint Benedict also exhorts us to approach God not only with words, «but with purity of heart and tears of compunction».

Let us pray.

Saint Benedict, our patron saint, obtain for us the grace to commit ourselves all of us to doing our best so that our prayer may be edifying for the beauty of words and song, and above all for the sincere participation of our heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fourth day

The time of prayer

Also with regard to the timetable Saint Benedict teaches that prayer must not be left to chance. On the contrary, it must have a well-defined place in the time of the day, no less than meals, so that the Lord is permanently present in our midst, and he strongly warns that prayer must never be neglected and must always have the first place. Every other occupation must be abandoned at the moment of prayer. The main times of family prayer are at the beginning and end of the day. It is good, in the evening, to make an examination of conscience and also, if it is considered appropriate, to accuse oneself publicly of disobedience to the teachings of the Rule.

Let us pray.

St Benedict, the Master of Prayer, obtain for our family every day to be enlightened by daily common prayer and to participate in it with sincerity of heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fifth day

The maintenance work of the house

«Ora et labora». Saint Benedict is not only the saint of prayer, but also the saint of work, and especially of the most humble work. Better than many others he understood the lesson of Jesus, when he washed the apostles' feet and invited them to follow his example of humble fraternal service. What Saint Benedict writes about the kitchen workers, applies to all the humble maintenance and care services of the house: «Let the brothers serve one another and let no one be dispensed from the service of the kitchen, except by illness or by a commitment of greater importance, for thus greater merit is acquired and charity is increased» (chap. 35). A dirty, messy house cannot be God's house! Paradoxically, one could thus overturn Saint Benedict's warning we quoted at the beginning: «what must be done must be done in the worst possible way and out of the right time, so that all be disturbed and embittered in the house of the devil». Those who despise domestic work, deeming it unworthy of a modern woman, deserve, returning home, to find everything immersed in filth and disorder! But the humble maintenance of the house, precisely because it is noble and necessary, must not be left on the shoulders of one person - especially of the mother - but, on the contrary, must be carried out joyfully by all, as Saint Benedict teaches, taking a regular turn.

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, pray for us so that, following your teachings, we may learn to bow down to serve our family members and all men, embracing even the most humble and despised works, certain that in so doing we imitate Jesus closely, who did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for all men. Grant that our dwelling be resplendent for that decorum which can be obtained only by humble and patient work, carried out in a spirit of collaboration and obedience to those who run the house, so that our dwelling may be visibly the house of God, and not the house of the devil. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sixth day

The beauty of the house

Not only the place of worship must shine with the beauty that reflects the glory of God, but the whole house. The first indispensable step of the beauty of the house is humble domestic work, but it already leads us to the threshold of that care of beauty that then flows into the properly artistic decoration of the house. This commitment also serves to make our home the house of God and we must therefore cultivate the gifts that God has given us to learn to decorate our home with artistic works of all kinds. Saint Benedict does not speak explicitly of this, but from his care for the order and decorum of the monastery the monks throughout the centuries have developed an immensity of realizations in all fields of decoration. Let us not neglect this aspect of our daily commitment, which must be spent first for our family and only after for external activities.

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, obtain for us from God the grace to put the talents that he gave us first at the service of our family, to make our home, for whoever is welcomed in it, the shining house of God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Seventh day

Hospitality

Saint Benedict says that in the monastery guests are never lacking and recommends to welcome them as if they were Christ himself, with a special care for the poorest. He orders that there should be a suitable place to receive guests and pilgrims and he wants that «in it there should be beds equipped with everything necessary and the house of God should be governed wisely by wise people» (chap. 53). In this too, therefore, we see the house of God. It would be desirable that in our homes there should be suitable rooms to accommodate, without danger to the family, even strangers, in need of shelter. All this must not be improvised but, as Saint Benedict teaches, it must be well regulated by a wise administration. This service is not always possible for a family today, but we must have, in any case, the care to share, in the wisest and most effective ways, all the gifts that God has given us, and that we have cultivated thanks to the good administration of our family life, with the needy and suffering people with whom Providence puts us in contact.

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, you who have recommended to welcome the poor as Christ himself, lead us to know how to share wisely the goods of the house of God with the poorest and suffering. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eighth day

What we read, look at and listen

Saint Benedict writes: «Let it be the books of divine authority that are read at night office, alike of the Old Testament and of the New; and also those expositions of them which have been compiled by the most renowned of the orthodox catholic fathers». This indication can be extended to what, in one way or another, constitutes the cultural interest of the family. Whether it be books, or newspapers, or TV shows, or Dvds or other, in the house of God should not be allowed content or images immoral or contrary to right thinking and good taste. For this it is necessary to cultivate education according to the good traditions of peoples and the teaching of the Church, of saints and sages. It is not an easy task today, among the many pitfalls that easily penetrate everywhere with the modern means of communication, but a task of absolute and primary importance. Let us therefore try to do our best and entrust ourselves to the protection of Saint Benedict.

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, who fled the false school of the world to create an alternative school, full of wisdom and holiness, protect our home from the intrusion of unhealthy and degrading messages and do that we can cultivate, despite the hostility of the times, the beautiful things that human ingenuity has created, that are useful to life and that bring us closer to God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ninth day

Charity between us and towards all

Today's unbridled individualism leads to endless conflicts, not only in society, but also in the home. St Benedict, opposed to the dissolution of the society of his time, wanted instead to create communities and families in which reign love, peace, collaboration, humble mutual service, the renunciation of one's own selfishness. With these words he concludes his Rule: «Just as there is an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to life eternal. By most fervent love therefore let monks exercise this zeal, that is, let them see to it that in honor they prefer one another. Let them most patiently tolerate their infirmities whether physical or of character; let them compete in yielding obedience; let none follow what he judges convenient to himself, but rather what he judges convenient to another; in chaste love let them exercise fraternal charity; let them fear God; let them love their abbot with sincere and humble affection; on no account let them exalt anything above Christ; and may He bring us all alike to eternal life».

Let us pray.

Holy Father Benedict, in this world of conflict and dissolution, not only social, but also familiar, obtain for us from God the gift of peace, concord, mutual love, founded on humility, fraternal service and renunciation of our selfishness, Grant that our family, raised in the house of God according to your wise and holy dispositions, may never be dissolved, and that from our dwelling the example of love and peace may spread around us throughout society. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Conclusion

Prayer for the Feast of Saint Benedict

O God, who have chosen St Benedict Abbot and have made him master of those who dedicate their lives to your service, grant us too to put nothing before the love of Christ and to run with a free and ardent heart on the way of your precepts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.