



St. Benedict and St. Scholastica Founders of Benedictine Monasticism

Excerpts from *St. Benedict and St. Scholastica*, by Sr. Margaret Clarke, OSB:

Benedict, whose name in Latin means "Blessed," was born to a Christian family in the mountains to the northeast of Rome (A.D.480?). The Roman Empire was crumbling and the Goths and Vandals controlled Italy. As a youth, he was sent to Rome for schooling and there experienced a religious awakening which caused him to renounce corrupt secular society and to join a band of Christian ascetics. He later became a hermit, living in the hill region of Subiaco. His fame as a holy person grew until he was importuned to become the abbot of a group of monks, who eventually became so peeved by his reforming zeal that they attempted to poison him. Benedict left them to their evil ways and began organizing groups of his own followers into small monasteries. In about A.D. 529, he and a few disciples came to the mountain above the city of Cassino where they established the monastery now known as Montecassino. This is probably where he wrote the monastic *Rule*, the only document which remains to us from his hand.

Scholastica is, according to tradition, the twin sister of Benedict. She is a shadowy figure whom we know from a single charming story in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604). She led some form of consecrated life with a group of Christian women. Gregory tells us that yearly she journeyed to meet her brother at a small house midway between their residences. On one momentous occasion, as evening fell, Benedict packed up his monks to return to the monastery from which, according to his own *Rule*, he was not permitted to be absent overnight. Scholastica begged him to make an exception and stay over so that they could continue their holy conversation. When Benedict refused, Scholastica wept and prayed and immediately such a torrent of rain fell that no one could leave the house. As Gregory says, the woman's prayers prevailed with God because her love was the greater.

When Scholastica died, Benedict had her body brought to Montecassino and placed in his own tomb. Scholastica's name means "she who has leisure to devote to study." Some skeptical historians have suggested that she is only a literary device: a personification of the Benedictine practice of reflective study. She remains very real, however, to Benedictine women, with the reality which can transcend simple historical existence, as a model of the feminine aspects of Benedictine monasticism, and an example of the power of the soul who loves God.