

From Behind the Abbey Walls: 13 September

Greetings! By way of introduction, I am Br. Finnbar McEvoy, novice at St. Mary's Abbey. This reflection will share a snapshot of life here in the abbey. For me in this period of novitiate, I am focused on my formation in the monastic way of life and have given up daily activities like a job, traveling, going out in order to discern whether God is calling me to live my life as a monk.

As a novice, I have been forming the habits of work and prayer, *ora et labora*, that balance Benedictines are known for, which help me test whether this life is for me. If so, these habits will also support the work of ministry, teaching, ascetic practices that go along with monastic life. I am an early riser by habit so I wake up before our morning prayer, and I use this time to practice *lectio divina*, a period of reading the Bible in order to encounter Jesus in the Word. At 6:30, we gather in the Abbey Church for our morning prayer, Matins, finishing up a little after 7. We then head downstairs for a breakfast in silence, and then most guys go off to work in the school or a ministry at a nearby convent. For me, I take the time for private prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, a run around campus, or checking out the newspapers in the community room.

Around 9, I meet with my Novicemaster, a senior monk, for class. So far, we have investigated various aspects of monastic spirituality, the Rule of St. Benedict, our congregation's laws and customs. I have also had a class on monastic history from the origins in the 2nd and 3rd centuries to the present day. These classes offer me knowledge about the monastic way of life by study and conversation with a senior monk. Around noon, the community gathers for Midday Prayer and lunch.

In the afternoon, usually some errand/work to do for the abbey. These vary day to day with some longer projects in the Abbey Sacristy and the Novitiate Library. With any free time in the afternoon, I will read for class, read for fun, walk around campus, or employ the monastic practice of *restio divina* (a nap). We gather for evening prayer, Vespers, and Mass at 5. Following Mass, we have informal recreation time with the community, mostly to chat about the day over snacks. Then we head into dinner where we have table reading while we eat and then conclude with a reading from the Rule of St. Benedict. We prayer Night Prayer, or Compline, together, and our work for the day concludes around 7. The rest of the evening I will read, relax, catch up with friends.

Occasionally events or tasks might take me out of the abbey, but most days looks the same. If you wonder if I could get bored, that is exactly right. If I weren't bored, I am either extremely holy or doing novitiate wrong. I have spent most of my life in school, and especially as a teacher it was easy to attach myself to the role of teacher, to feeling useful for something. Here, my first *job* in the Abbey is to be present, to allow the Spirit to work on me. I summarize my shift in focus during this time in the following way: away from finding out *who I am* from *what I do* towards asking what I should do based on who I am, who God made me as. Soon enough, this period will come to an end, and I will find myself busy again. I think the point of this period is to let those habits, that daily routine, become engrained in me that my work flows from it, is enlivened by it.