11th July - Saint Benedict (c.480 – c.550)

The new Pope recently chose the name Benedict*. So who was the original St. Benedict?*

Benedict was an abbot and author of the famous Rule that bears his name. Because of his Rule, Benedict is also the Patriarch of Western Monasticism, and Patron Saint of Europe.

Surprisingly little is known about his life: born at Nursia, Benedict studied at Rome, which he then left before completing his studies to become a hermit at Subiaco. After a time a community collected around him, which he organised into twelve monasteries, each of twelve monks. After an attempt on his life, Benedict moved on to Monte Cassino, near Naples, where he wrote the final version of his Rule, and lived for the rest of his life.

Benedict's Rule is justly famous and respected. Drawing freely traditional monastic teaching from revered monks like Basil, as well as others such as the Desert Fathers and Augustine, Benedict created a inclusive and individual directory for the spiritual and administrative life of a monastery. Benedict's rule is characterised by prudence and moderation within a framework of authority, obedience, stability of residence and community life. Benedict's great achievement was to produce a monastic way of life which was complete, orderly, and workable. The monks' primary occupation was liturgical prayer, complemented by sacred reading and manual work of various kinds.

Bendict's own personality shines through this Rule: wise, discreet, flexible, learned in the law of God, but also a spiritual father to his community. Benedict's Rule came to be recognised as the fundamental monastic code of western Europe in the early Middle Ages. Following this Rule, monasteries became centres of learning, agriculture, hospitality, and medicine.