

STABILITY

Wednesday, November 30, 2022 at 12:03PM

From: "Means of Grace, Hope of Glory"

<https://www.orderoftheascension.org/means-of-grace-hope-of-glory/2022/11/30/stability.html>



The Benedictine recognition of the role of stability is not a piece of idealism, it is essentially realistic. Everyone needs to feel at home, to feel earthed, for it is impossible to say, "who am I?" without first asking, "where am I? Whence have I come? Where am I going?" Without roots we can neither discover where we belong, nor can we grow. Without stability we cannot confront the basic questions of life. Without stability we cannot know our true selves. For we are pulled apart by so many conflicting demands, so many things deserving of our attention, that it often it seems as though the center cannot hold. Esther de Waal, Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict.

Three mornings a week Sister Michelle and I read from *Seeking God* before we do Morning Prayer on Zoom. The quote above was today's reflection.

Some years ago, I was offering a presentation on Benedictine spirituality and parish development at a clergy gathering in an East Coast diocese. I was making use of the Promise of obedience, stability, and conversion of life to explore parish dynamics. We were looking at how parish life gets confused and distorted when the elements of the Promise are out-of-whack. Heads were nodding (in agreement, not sleep!). A priest in the back of the room asked a question. It was really a statement of annoyance and correction. "I don't understand your emphasis upon stability. Isn't the Christian faith all about change?"

I was honestly stunned. All the signs of agreement from the group had lulled me into a place of cozy security. How could a priest not get what Benedict was up to, what de Waal was saying?

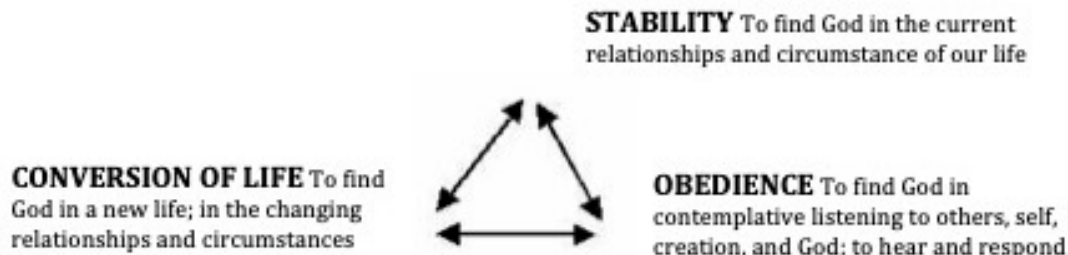
I don't remember exactly how I responded. My "fall back" was often this quote from de Waal. It captures the interplay of the three elements of the Promise.

I have to stand still where the real issues have to be faced. Obedience compels me to re- enact in my own life that submission of Christ himself, even though it may lead to suffering and death, and, conversatio openness, means that I must be ready to pick myself up, and start .all over again in a pattern of growth which will not end until the

day of my final dying. And all the time the journey is based on that Gospel paradox of losing life and finding it. ..my goal is Christ. Esther deWaal

My annoyance with the priest was off-set by recalling how not too many years before I could have said what he said. I had an activist history—civil rights, anti-war, and community organizing. The Episcopal Church was becoming more and more liberal. I would have had a difficult time seeing any incompatibility between the Faith and the Democratic Party platform. It was the culture I lived in. The air I breathed.

The three elements of the Promise name a dynamic that is within each of us as well as within our parish communities. The priest in the back of the room that day wanted to resolve the tension in himself and the church by giving himself to “change.” Others have tried to settle their discomfort by giving themselves to obedience or stability. I don’t think this is something we “resolve.” Life in Christ involves reflection, discernment, and responsible action. We tilt toward one of the elements for a time as we seek balance and maturity in Christ. But the other elements of the Promise remain active in us.



On this, the Feast of Andrew, I was drawn to consider how the Promise showed itself in his life—the stability of village life and a vocation, obedience to a call, a new life that in time had its own stability.

So, no resolution of the paradox.

I will offer a few thoughts for your reflection.

Regarding obedience-stability-conversion of life, Esther de Waal writes about the paradox of Christian life as including our living in the tension between stability and change, action and contemplation. She also proposes that it is in the context of stability and obedience that forces arise in the common and personal life that call communities and individuals to move forward in the Christian journey. Conversion springs from lives of stability and obedience. Of course, it’s also true that stability and obedience will be deepened as conversion takes hold. Fill All Things, R. Gallagher, 2008.

Here are three quotes from the section on stability in the Rule of the Order of the Ascension.

What is it then to be stable? It seems to me that it may be described in the following terms: You will find stability at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere, that you do not need to see him elsewhere, that he is here, and if you do not find him here it is useless to go and search for him elsewhere because it is not he that is absent from us, it is we who are absent from him. Anthony Bloom

Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives. ..And when that person moves away, someone else arrives immediately to take his or her place. Parker J. Palmer

We must endeavor to carry on our work. ..God expects this of us. The Church at home, which sent us out, will surely expect it of us. The universal Church expects it of us. ..The people whom we serve expect it of us. We could never hold up our faces again, if for our own safety we all forsook him and fled, when the shadows of the passion began to gather around him in his spiritual and mystical body, the Church in Papua. Philip Strong to the Clergy, 1942

You can find more on Benedictine spirituality in [Shaping the Parish Resources](#).

rag+