

A Day in Subiaco

Eternal God, our companion and guide. You were present for St Benedict and for St Scholastica when they sought you here. We thank you for the enduring legacy that these, your faithful servants, have bequeathed to us and to your whole church. Help us to seek and find your presence with us this day, that we may find rest for our souls and a renewed desire to serve in your name and for your glory. We pray through Jesus Christ, our friend and brother. Amen.

Getting to Subiaco

A day trip to Subiaco from Rome means an early start. Make your way to a Metro B train station – the Colloseum stop is the closest to the Anglican Centre in Rome. Travel to Ponte Mammolo and from there buy a Cotral bus ticket to Subiaco. Be aware that the bus tickets need to be bought inside the actual station Ponte Mammolo, and that the ticket office is in an upstairs area. We nearly missed the bus! The bus trip winds through country roads and villages and is a reminder that there is much more to Italy than Rome.



Approaching the Monasteries

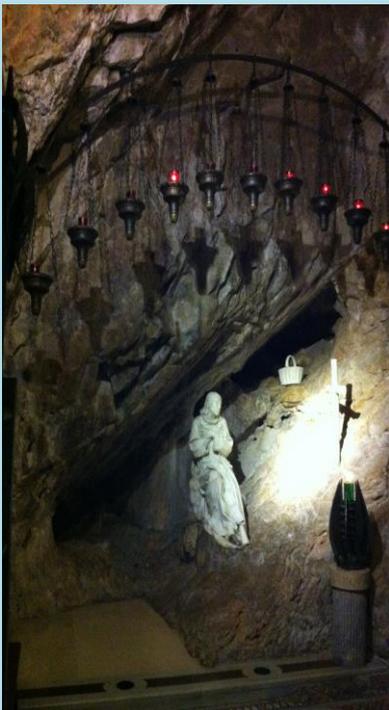
When you reach Subiaco, take time to assess your return travel options, and your options for travelling the 5 kilometres up to the monasteries. There are plenty of food outlets in the village itself – we found a beautiful bakery with excellent bathroom facilities and apart from simple snack food and a water bottle didn't need to take much else with us. At most times of the year sunscreen and a sunhat are essential and in the cooler months make sure you have a warm jacket and maybe hat and gloves.

For those using public transport there is no taxi service in the town so there are two options for making your way to the monasteries. The first is to catch a local bus – these leave intermittently so check times at the Information Centre which is just around the corner from the bus park. On a good day, and for those with a moderate level of fitness and comfortable footwear, the walk is a gradual uphill climb, mostly on the road but in the latter section on good quality tracks.

Before arriving at the monasteries, seek a Benedictine state of worship and contemplation, an openness to God's touch and a desire to be with him in heart, mind and body. For those driving, find a quiet place in the township and be still and alert to God within and around you. Pilgrims who are walking may like to walk in silence.

You may already have read about Benedict and Scholastica, reputedly twins and the children of a wealthy nobleman. Consider the circumstances of their lives and the ways in which they supported each other in their commitment to serving Christ. What was it that disturbed Benedict so much that he devoted three years of his life to a hermit's existence in a lonely hillside cave? We know that townsfolk lowered food to him for the sustenance of his body. What sustained his soul and spirit through the quiet, the loneliness, the darkness, the physical discomfort? What were/are the fruits of this action which appears so extreme and so sacrificial when we contemplate it from a 21st century perspective?

Wilderness Experiences



Wilderness experiences are threaded through both Old and New Testaments and provide opportunities for us to focus our attention away from the demands of daily life and towards what God may want or require of us. Matthew (Chapter 4: 1-11) and Luke (Chapter 4: 1-13) provide strikingly similar accounts of Jesus' time in the wilderness and of the temptations he experienced. For Jesus, the wilderness experience was a preparation for three years of ministry. For Benedict, his withdrawal to Subiaco was also a time to seek God's will and purpose for his life, and to be strengthened for his ongoing ministry. This patient God-centred approach is in stark contrast to those of us who leap impulsively into new situations, make quick judgments and rely heavily on our own wisdom and intuition.

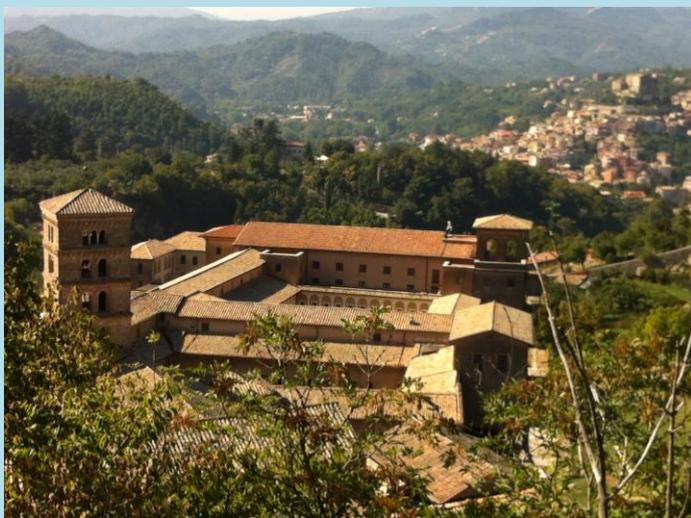
The gospel accounts of Jesus' temptations and responses centre around three aspects of a faith-filled life: our physical need for sustenance; the importance of worship; and the nature of our relationship with God.

1. Physical sustenance and comfort can easily become a primary goal for our lives, especially those of us who rarely experience 'going without'. Benedict

was ministered to by local shepherds, enabling his body to survive three years of isolation, but his Rule emphasises the importance of looking to God for the things that really matter. We often struggle to truly believe that the Word of God in the scriptures and in Christ, the living Word, will sustain us in all circumstances including beyond the grave;

2. Worship of God and service to him are to be at the heart of our daily life and work. This doesn't necessarily mean withdrawal from the demands of family, community and church life. Rather, our lives in all their simplicity and complexity should bear witness to the love we have for God and his for us. Brother Lawrence, a remarkable Benedictine, encapsulates this when he encourages us to "practice the presence of God";
3. The kingdom, the power and the glory are God's and his alone, and there is no sense in which we can grasp these for ourselves. At the same time, our all-powerful God is vulnerable. Like the most loving of earthly fathers and mothers, he is Abba who deals tenderly and compassionately with our needs, and loves us beyond our capacity to understand.

These three truths are likely to have been at the heart of St Benedict's prayers and reflection, his doubts and struggles. In this place of remembrance, let them guide you as you wait upon God and practise his presence.



Re-entering daily life

We have Benedict to thank for some of the greatest treasures of our faith community and of our civic life. In particular, his insistence on rhythms of worship and prayer within a context of daily work and communal life is an enduring gift for us to enjoy and share. This is readily available to us through the legacy of the daily

office, the Book of Common Prayer and our own New Zealand Prayer Book.

As you return home, think about what you have experienced and come to understand through your visit to Subiaco. What legacies from St Benedict or St Scholastica do you already enjoy? Is there potential for these to be shared or pursued more intentionally? What steps might you take to incorporate some key Benedictine principles into your home/family life, or your worshipping community?