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“As you enter a house, wish it peace” (Matt 10:13).

We commemorate St. Benedict (480-547), the founder of Western monasticism and the patron of Europe. His life of prayer and labor renewed a world crumbling under the weight of corruption and violence by anchoring it into a network of monasteries that became centers of agriculture and knowledge at the beginning of the so-called “Dark Ages.”

By preserving the best of ancient learning and infusing it with the Gospel, Benedict and his twin sister, Scholastica, helped evangelize and unify society to form Christendom, a broad culture organized by feudalism and ruled by the church and the emerging nation states.

History reveals the presence of grace in the great shifts and epochal change that renew life to make it relevant to the needs of each age. Monasteries stabilized the world in a time of chaos. Other movements and organizations inspired new forms of Gospel living to meet the growth of cities, universities and new technologies. The church has always flourished when it provided support for both change and stability.

Today’s scripture readers capture this encounter between grace and culture. The great famine that brought Israel to Egypt in the story of Joseph was one chapter in a narrative that later required Moses to lead God’s people out of Egypt, where they had become slaves. This time of trial prepared them for the Exodus, the founding event and basis for the Covenant that united the Hebrew tribes into what later became a kingdom.

Jesus' mission to evangelize the world meant the expansion of the Covenant beyond Israel. We sense the urgency and tension of this movement in Jesus' instruction to his missionaries. The Kingdom of God was at hand, and it represented a revolution in how people understood the absolute graciousness of God, who was welcoming the whole world to the feast of divine love. It was time to grow, not withdraw. The peace of Jesus is both comforting and dynamic, a source of security but also meant to be extended to the margins and to places of suffering and uncertainty.

How blessed we are to know God as Providence, a creative force within history that is always responding to need, both preserving and changing, found in contemplation and in action. We rest secure in God's love, but only to be sent to explore the power of love, to bring mercy wherever there is need.

The Kingdom of God Jesus preached is a work in progress. Faith rests at anchor until it is called to set sail in holy adventure.

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