



Essential Monastic Wisdom: Writings on the Contemplative Life

Hugh Feiss

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"Listen!" is the first word in the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Monastic life is a training in the art of listening, which begins in silence, develops in attentiveness, and is perfected in communication. . . . Silence is a dwindling resource in the contemporary world . . . and it is usually the first impression of visitors to a monastery. . . . The principal enemy of interior and exterior silence for most of us is our own tongue. Perhaps we fear the emptiness within us."

-- from *Essential Monastic Wisdom*

A retreat to this kind of disciplined silence, attentive reverence for life, and whole peaceful living is why Americans are signing on in droves to yearlong waiting lists for the chance to spend a weekend at a monastery. Discard the silly images of humorless Mother Superior and emaciated monks in hair shirts; what people are seeking in the monastic experience is the chance to peel away life's accessories and gaze consciously into the woods of their present life and the horizons of their future. There is something powerfully authentic about a spiritual tradition grounded in centuries of experience and not manufactured twelve weeks ago and marketed in a series of seminars.

In *Essential Monastic Wisdom*, Fr. Hugh Feiss introduces you in one great omnibus to the rich history, traditions, and essential values of Christian monasticism. By exploring the daily activities in the monastery, the character traits that the monastic orders inculcate in their members, and the passions of desire and love that animate their lives, Fr. Feiss presents to us practical insights for balanced and satisfying living. Lessons drawn from fifteen centuries of monastic scholarship and reflection are arranged by topics such as prayer, hospitality, discernment, peace, leadership, and love. Brief essays at the beginning of each section provide a historical and theological context for the readings that follow and suggest how the lessons of the monastic way can provide guidance in everyday life.

These texts reflect both the diversity and continuity of the cloister through the ages, from the pre-Benedictine reflections of Antony and Pachomius, St. Bede, the renowned Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar, and the medieval writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen and St. Gertrude to twentieth-century scholars such as Thomas Merton and Esther de Waal. Emphasizing those aspects of the monastic tradition with the most direct relevance to daily secular life, Fr. Feiss facilitates a conversation between these great monastics and contemporary men and women who might like to meet them.

While *Essential Monastic Wisdom* is rooted in Christianity, the book is intended for all readers with an interest in the lessons and values of monastic life, regardless of their religious convictions.

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