Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



This icon by Benedictine Sr. Paula Howard was inspired by a mural at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas. The feast of St. Scholastica is Feb. 10. (Courtesy of Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica)



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February 8, 2024

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Because I'm a Benedictine sister, St. Scholastica has always played a big role in my life. Like many of my contemporaries, I delight in the story of Gregory the Great, which states that Scholastica received an answer to her prayer because she loved more. For those of you unfamiliar with the story behind this saying, I will briefly summarize it here.

Benedict and Scholastica, who were siblings (some traditions say twins), would meet once a month in a guest house between their two monasteries. They would pray and have spiritual discussions together. On one such occasion, Benedict was going to leave since it was against the rule of his monastery to stay away from the monastery overnight. Scholastica wanted him to stay the evening to finish their conversation, so she prayed that he would stay. After her prayer, a violent storm came, making it impossible for Benedict to leave. He asked, "Sister, what have you done?" She replied, "I asked you to stay, but you would not. I prayed to God, and he answered my prayer." That led Gregory the Great to say that God answered her prayer because she loved more.

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But what does it mean to say she loved more? I see it as meaning she valued relationships more than rules. She valued her relationship to God and her relationship to her brother. Rules were important, but not more important than being present to her brother and to her God. God answered her prayer because God knows what is most important. God knows rules will remain and will be followed, but not at the cost of relationships.

This is a reminder to me when I think I need to spend more time working in the office or need to complete some task. When someone steps into my office and wants to talk, I need to stop my editing, my typing or whatever else I am doing. Even if it interrupts my thoughts or keeps me from finishing that last sentence or completing the editing I am doing, I need to give my full attention to the person who comes in. If I fail to do this, I am telling the person what I am doing is more important than they are. They may only stay for a few minutes or they may stay for an hour, but the

work I am doing will still be there. (Often I have found that the work is easier to complete if I do leave it for a while.)

An adage, credited to the Gen. Douglas MacArthur, states that, "Rules are meant to be broken." The quote may mean different things to different people, but to me it means that sometimes we need to break away from the rules. If we always stick to the same rules, the same routine, the same path, nothing new happens. Our horizons expand if we are willing to sometimes go against what rules say or what has always been. If we never shift from what has always been, we make no headways. We see no new paths, no new insights.

Our world needs people who are willing to see beyond what the rule says and what has always been. Women are these people. They listen with the ear of the heart, with compassion rather than judgment. They hear what is beyond the words and are open to follow where that may lead.

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Perhaps Scholastica knew that she would die in a few days and that she and Benedict would never have a chance to share again in the same way, or perhaps she knew in her heart that they were not finished sharing what needed to be said. Waiting until another day would lose the intensity of that particular moment. I like to think that she knew her relationship at that moment was more important than making sure Benedict returned to his monastery. Perhaps she knew that her words might inspire something new in her brother, that they might open him to a new way of looking at the monastic world. Maybe she knew, too, that his words might spark a spiritual growth within her and help her grow in her relationship to God.

On this feast of St. Scholastica (Feb. 10), may we all look to her as a woman of faith and love, as a woman willing to risk breaking the rules to make something better happen. May she inspire us to weigh following the rules with reaching out in love to whatever God may be challenging us to do.