

## **The Rule of Saint Benedict On Humility – the Ninth Step**

The ninth step of humility is that one controls the tongue and keeps silence until asked a question; for the Scripture shows that “In a flood of words, you will not avoid sinning” (Prov 10:19) and that “the talkative one goes about aimlessly on the earth” (Psalm 139{140}:12)

In case we haven't already gotten the message, we are reminded again that Benedict has a lot of concern about our use of speech and what our speech indicates about our interior disposition. In the first steps of humility, the person comes into a realistic understanding of how to relate to a God who holds power over our life and our eternity. With this in mind, we can come to a realistic understanding of the littleness and sinfulness of our own personal existence. On the other side of that, we can gain a realistic understanding of our place in human community. Immediately after this, Benedict returns to what we might call a realistic understanding of how well we relate to those others through our communication.

Those who have mastered the self through the earlier steps will manifest that peacefulness in their way of speaking. Step 9 suggests that, with this new and improved sense of self-possession, we become more aware of the problems our speech causes. I know that in my own life I frequently regret having blurted something out that I should not have said or that causes misunderstanding and hurt. As the quote above reminds us, the more we talk the more trouble we can get ourselves into. If one has come this far on the road of humility, lots of excuses to talk have been purified and eliminated; criticizing, grabbing attention bursts of anger or petulance, needing to have the last word (or any word). When a sister was asked about the secret of her happiness, she said that her serenity came when she realized she didn't have to have an opinion about everything.

*Can I try to pay more attention today to how much of the conversation is my own talking?  
What kinds of things do I like to talk about; how valuable are they to my spirit?  
How comfortable am I with silence when I am with others?*

*(St. Benedict's Rule; An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary by Judith Sutura, OSB)*