



The early chapters of Genesis...are...a revelation...of God's view of the universe and of His intentions for man... God made the world as a garden in which He himself took delight. He made man and gave to man the task of sharing in His own divine care for created things. He made man in His own image and likeness, as an artist, a worker...the gardener of paradise.

— Thomas Merton in "The General Dance,"  
*New Seeds of Contemplation*

As Thomas Merton wrote, we are intended to be gardeners—ones who cultivate a life of prayer which prepares the soul (our soil) to listen, as Saint Benedict says, "with the ear of our heart." Cultivating a life of prayer through practice allows us to become the fruit, which looks like a sacramental way of life. No more, no less.

The Benedictine mantra, *ora et labora*, meaning "prayer and work," provides us with a trellis on which to grow our spiritual life and community. This ancient practice—given to us through the monks and nuns who live this organic life of prayer and work—is a rich heritage, or we might say rich soil, in which to plant ourselves. Combining prayer and work gives us the proper mixture to grow our lives fruitfully, feeding ourselves and others with spiritual food.

We might reflect on our lives individually, but also our lives in community: communally in parishes, through the metaphor of a garden. Are we truly tending to the garden? Are we preparing the soil, looking inward, contemplating with our minds falling into our hearts? Are we allowing ourselves to experience Christ amongst us? At the very center of our soul the essence of Spirit dwells in us, resting in God—in the Garden of Eden.

— **Michael Trent Thompson**