

How to navigate life and allow the joy of heaven to be present to us here on earth, with this week's collect in mind and the search for peace which constitutes the Benedictine life, if one dares to sum it up so easily. How to be happy in one's vocation? And not feel guilty when one is! These thoughts inspired by a talk or, better, a demonstration, given to us yesterday and the day before by Ka-yee on the origin and development of Chinese script or character, in both senses. What was initially a blur of arbitrary squiggles started to make sense as she went through each character's development going back about five thousand years. Now, I'm sure to get the detail wrong and will need to be re-schooled in this but the character for love began as two hands reaching out towards each other with the symbol of the heart in-between. Interestingly, when Johan googled 'love' to illustrate the initial invitation, she was given the character for love now used by the communist regime post 1948. The two hands are there but the heart is missing. Now, if there's one thing the Benedictine way of life can be proud of, it's the balance between the heart and the head which the Rule insists on: that reaching out towards one another, not only in formulating words, but in actions, too; that compassion in which love truly consists; that sharing of one another's pain; that grounding in all the physicality of service without which love, and the Benedictine life, loses its savour or, just as well, its saviour. This is Christ at the heart of all we say and do and brings us peace. Ka-yee can again correct me on this, but the character representing mind is derived from that for a field and combined with that of the heart: the mind, then, as a field that has to be cultivated by love, once again bringing heart and head together. We didn't get on to the symbol for peace and its pre and post 1945 representation, so there's much room for further schooling. It's a beginning, just like the Benedictine life. We are being schooled in love and have no meaning otherwise. It's a joy – or something is not happening. And brings peace.

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