

# On the Gregorian Way

*Gregorian Reflections  
on the Apostolic Life*

*Novitiate — Part One*

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# 0. Introduction

Who can love what they do not know? The psalmist counsels us, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8), meaning “You will not get to know God’s goodness unless you taste it. Taste the food of life with your heart, and with that taste come to know and love its sweetness.” [1]

**W**elcome to the novitiate of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. You have taken steps through the postulancy, working with your mentor and other pastoral guides to establish a Gregorian Foundation. Now it is time to step forth on the Gregorian Way.

Novitiate brings with it this significant difference: in postulancy, you were exploring and engaging with the ethos of the Brotherhood without any required commitment; with reception into the novitiate, you have made an explicit promise, with God’s help “to obey those who are appointed over you.” Your brothers, who witnessed this promise, have pledged to support you in keeping it, and the work of this formation program is part of that support, as your mentor and other pastors and fellow-pilgrims encourage you as they journey with you on the Gregorian Way.

This promise allows you to live intentionally “as if” you were under the vows you hope one day to make. The novitiate embodies a commitment fully to “taste and see” if this way of life is right for you, living the responsibilities of the vows as fully as you can before you make profession to live under them in earnest.

You may be familiar with the custom of the “progressive banquet” — where participants have appetizers at one house, a salad at the next, then the main course, and so on through dessert. You are invited, welcomed, and encouraged to taste everything set before you in this progressive banquet. You will learn what things delight you, what you find difficult; what comes natural, and what you have to work at. It is our hope that you will come to know yourself, and the Brotherhood, better and better through the knowledge that comes with tasting, and come to love this community of faithful pilgrims, so that at the end of your novitiate

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1 Gregory the Great, Homily on Luke 14:16–24

you will be well prepared to join them in the profession of your vows.

The novice promise “to obey those appointed over you” anticipates the vow of obedience that — you, God, and your brothers willing — you will make in the midst of those brothers:

I make the vow of obedience to Christ, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, to the Rule of the Brotherhood, and to you the Minister General and other pastoral officials appointed over me, that I may lay aside self-will, and do only as God wills.

Note that the Rule of the Brotherhood comes third after Christ and the church — but that doesn’t mean it is any less important — and after all, it is why we are who we are as Gregorians. It marks the Gregorian Way within the breadth of Christian tradition. If we think in terms of the broad highway of the Christian faith, we might think of the Episcopal (or Anglican) Way as a lane on that highway, and distinguish the Gregorian Way within that lane, as a path or track marked out by the Rule. It has much in common with the many paths trod by other Christians but has its own integrity and identity.

This book is your guide to that path. In each chapter that follows, some aspect of the Rule of the Brotherhood will be the subject of exploration and reflection.

Note: the full text of the Rule is not included in this volume because, as with all the Brotherhood’s governing documents, it is subject to revision. For reference, you should consult the current version of the governing documents at the Brotherhood’s web site.

Each chapter is followed by a set of questions designed to spark your reflection. To begin to kindle your thoughts, each set of questions begins with a Gleaning — a short excerpt from the chapter, or from some other source related to its theme, displayed in a format like that of the “Note” just above. Regard the Gleaning as an object of quiet meditation for a few moments, before engaging with the questions that follow.

These questions should not be thought of as a quiz. There are no right or wrong answers — within reason! The goal is for you to explore and reflect, and to share with your mentor and the others

on your pastoral formation team, whatever thoughts the questions evoke, and indeed what further questions may come to mind as you reflect on them.

As you write your responses to these questions, aim for clarity and brevity, and above all *honesty* and authenticity. As noted above, this is not a quiz, nor is it an academic exercise, nor is it for publication. Only you and your formation team will see your reflections, and they remain confidential within that small group. Don't be afraid to say when something doesn't make sense to you, or which you find challenging or difficult, or with which you disagree, or where you feel that the path is unclear or the "fit" is not comfortable.

After each set of questions is an invitation to apply anything you've learned from the chapter toward goals for action in two specific areas, internal and external: your internal spiritual growth, and your external ministry in the church, the Brotherhood, and the world. These goals should arise from the material in the chapter, and perhaps describe some personal practice you wish to take up (or revive, if it is one you once practiced but set aside), some spiritual discipline you are inspired to undertake, some work or ministry you would like to engage in or expand. You might be inspired to do something creative: write a poem or paint a picture! And who knows what ministry you might want to explore in your parish, in the Brotherhood, or in the world we are called to serve.

You are invited to share a short statement about any goal you feel inspired to set for yourself, describing it briefly and with a few words about why you chose it, and how you plan to engage with it, in a sentence or two at most. There is no need to report on how you accomplish the goal itself, though if you wish to share this, please do so with your formation team. You also need not describe two or more goals (internal and/or external) in each chapter, or even one — particularly if the material didn't speak to you, the Gleaning didn't spark any ideas, or the questions failed to inspire. It may be that a chapter leaves you with no new ideas or inspirations, or you may feel you are already so fully engaged in a spiritual practice or a ministry that you do not feel it necessary (or wise) to take up another. If that is the case, say so!

But when you do feel inspired, please feel free to let your thoughts roam, and challenge yourself to set ambitious goals that will foster your growth.

Growth is the true goal — whether you continue on to profession of vows in the Brotherhood or not, it is our hope that you will grow as a Christian, and find your true path, even if it is not on the Gregorian Way: for we know that we are still together on the great pilgrimage that is the Christian Way.

No doubt you have experienced — and will continue to experience — some impatience with what must seem at times to be a slow process as you move from postulancy into the novitiate. There is a whole chapter on the virtue of patience coming up later in this volume; but until then, reflect for a moment on Saint Gregory’s thoughts about what it means to be a novice:

After we have built a wall, we don't put heavy weights of timber on it until the mortar is cured, lest, if weight be put on before it is settled, it cause the whole wall to collapse to the ground. And when we cut trees for a building, we allow the lumber to cure, to wait for the moisture of its greenness to be dried out first, lest, if the we try to build, and the weight of the building is imposed on them while still fresh, they bend due to their newness, and break and fall down from having been raised up prematurely. Why, then, should this not scrupulously be seen among ourselves, in terms of advancement, which is so carefully considered even in the case of wood and stone?[2]

Remember that the root of *novice* is *nova* — “new” — and you are still new to this way of life, even though there may be times when it feels as if you are treading on ground you’ve already traversed, maybe even that you are going in circles. This may lead you to wonder, “Why am I reading, reflecting, and writing about all of this again?” Consider the following little story:

A man longs to become a jade carver. So he apprentices himself to a master jade craftsman.

Every day he comes to the workshop, and the master asks him to sit and hold a jade carving, a different one each day, while the master talks to him. And every day the master tells him stories, about the great jade carvers of the past, and about the principles of jade carving, and about the particular piece of jade the apprentice is holding. Then he sends the apprentice home again.

This goes on for months.

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2 Gregory the Great, Epistle V.53 to Virgilius, Bishop of Arles

The stories fascinate the apprentice, and the jade carvings he has to hold are beautiful, but he's getting impatient by this time. He wanted to learn how to carve jade, not to sit and get lectured!

Then, one ordinary morning, the master hands him a carving. As soon as the apprentice touches it, he blurts out, "That's not jade!"

The master says, "Good. Now we can begin." [3]

Religious life, in large part, is about learning to tell when it's not jade — testing for the authenticity of the gospel at work in your own life, in your own behavior, in situations in which you find yourself. It may seem like a journey in circles sometimes, but the pilgrim path often takes such turns through familiar territory, and each time you pass that way you are invited to discover how it has changed because you have changed. Moreover, you walk this Way in company with all who have gone before, are walking now, and will tread the path in days to come. Blessings, and *bon voyage!*



# 1. The Vowed Life

**S**o what are vows? What does it mean to live them, with them, under them? — however you want to phrase the question. We all know those simple words — we've heard them often enough — poverty, chastity, and obedience. We'll explore the meanings of those individual words in the chapters that follow, but before we dive into those details, the first question has to do with what it is that makes these concepts — as *vows* — different from their exercise by other people in other contexts, and even by you as a novice living *with* them though not yet *under* them. Lots of people are poor, chaste, or obedient without making vows to behave in certain ways — so what's the difference for those who *do* make such commitments, promises, or vows?

This is one of those questions that hides its answer in itself: the difference between living with conditions and restrictions because of circumstances beyond our control, and *choosing* to commit to live with conditions and restrictions, lies *in the choice and commitment*. The vows are themselves what distinguish *committed* life from *circumstantial* life.

But that is not all: the other distinguishing characteristic of the vows as we make them in the Brotherhood is that they are not made — or lived out — in solitude or isolation. The vows are the glue that binds the community together with a common commitment to God and to each other in Christ, as *brothers* — members of a family not based on blood relation, but on mutual adoption, just as the church as a whole is a family united by baptism — the blessed company of all faithful people.

You may well have joined the larger Christian family in infancy — when your parents or godparents brought you into that fellowship through baptism, as they made promises on your behalf. Or you may have made a conscious choice to commit to the church at a more mature age. But concerning the Brotherhood, and the vows you look forward to making, there can be no doubt that you are making *a choice*, you are making *a commitment*, as indeed you already have in your first novice promise to obey those in pastoral positions over you. They, and the whole witnessing community,

have also made a commitment to you, to assist you in keeping your commitments, and to guide you along the path that may lead you to make the same vows they made.

In making such commitments, such vows, a brother makes a deliberate choice to relinquish the freedom to choose otherwise. Unlike a New Year's resolution, which is simply a promise to yourself — and easily dispensed by you, as it is very easy to let yourself off of any self-imposed responsibility — the vows are made *to* God and *with* the community that becomes the monitor and aid in helping all to keep their vows, offering dispensation in the name of God and the community only when circumstances beyond our control make it impossible to keep those vows.

It is hard — perhaps especially so in the Christian West — to relinquish freedom; and it is a bit paradoxical to relinquish freedom by a free act — for the vows must be freely taken and cannot be coerced or forced. The vows represent a form of *self-denial*, in keeping with Jesus' stunning demand, "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mark 8:34) The form of each brother's personal cross will differ — as each individual will find some aspects of the discipline of the vows more or less difficult — but the path, the *following*, will be the same, for the One whom we follow is the same for all. That commonality is symbolized in the profession cross that each of the professed brothers wear, as a symbol both of their vows and of the saving cross of Christ.

### ***The stations***

In a very real sense, the Gregorian Way is a subset of the Way of the Cross. It too has stations and signposts along the path we take as Gregorians, key characteristics, or markers that derive from, and are supported by, the vows.

□ The Gregorian Way — our particular path on the church's royal road — is first marked out by *service*, in keeping with Gregory's self-understanding as "Servant of the servants of God." That service takes many forms, made concrete in many ministries, within the church but also in the world, and all of these forms are strengthened and stabilized by the vows taken in and by the community. This service is our primary witness to our

commitment to God and humanity. As the Rule says, “A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer’s love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer, knowing that it is not he who shall finally bring the light, but only that he shall become a messenger for the One who is the light.” The vows support and empower that service, that witness.

☐ Second, the Gregorian Way is one of *prayer*; though again this prayer takes many forms, much of it common to the whole community, but much of it particular to the individual brother. While the brothers share in the Daily Office and Holy Eucharist as aspects of common prayer, each brother is also committed to private devotion and meditation, and this can take many forms, though there ought to be only one focus: God.

☐ The *humility* that gives glory to God alone — through mission, ministry, and prayer — is the third principal marker of the Gregorian Way. As Anglican divine William Law wrote in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, “We readily acknowledge, that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers; that in them we are to look wholly unto him, and act wholly for him; that we are only to pray in such a manner, for such things, and such ends, as are suitable to his glory.” One tactile reminder of this takes the form of the words that appear on the face of the Brotherhood’s profession cross: *Soli Deo Gloria*. As Law also said, “He, therefore, is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything...who serves God in everything.”

☐ The form of this service marks out the fourth station on the Gregorian Way: our service is *apostolic witness* and our vows are lived out, as the Rule states, “while living fully in the secular world.” We are neither hermits attempting lives of solitary holiness, nor spiritual athletes devoted to our personal salvation, but choose to work and walk in company with our fellow Christians, helping to bear the burdens we share on the way to God.

☐ At the same time, the vows have the quality of setting a seal on the commitments we make and the service we perform. The

consecration of the vows “makes the common holy” [4] — and *holiness* is a fifth signpost on the Gregorian Way. This is not the holiness of “holier than thou” as if to say the vowed life is somehow superior to the life of any Christian (though there was a time when the church taught just that!) On the contrary, the holiness inherent in the vowed life is not *better*, but it is *distinctive*. When the vows — through the help of the community — are working most effectively, brothers find themselves more deeply connected to their partners in ministry and those whom they serve. As many of our brothers have found, particularly in ministry with the homeless and impoverished, they find themselves being fed by those whom they set out to feed. This is part of the grace of holiness, that it transforms all that it touches, and binds it all in One. The holiness we experience comes to us from the One who is holy. As one of our brothers put it,

We as religious choose to answer this call by giving our lives over into God’s hands, completely opening ourselves up to the love and grace of Jesus Christ; not because we are better than any other but because we have come to the ultimate recognition of our own brokenness: a recognition of the futility of our actions apart from the presence of Christ. [5]

These are some of the signposts on the Gregorian Way: service, prayer, humility, witness, and holiness. Our Rule is shot through with these principles, like gold threads running through an embroidered vestment. Keeping an eye on them, with the knowledge you are far from alone as you journey in the company of many brothers, will help you on your way towards the day you make the vows, and come to live in, with, and under them.

For now, you are still trying them on, and this book is designed to help you in that effort. In the coming chapters we will explore the vows in detail, and how the vows are woven through the whole Rule of the Brotherhood. The more you engage, the more you will find if this is the vestment right for you, the journey you are called to follow, God willing, for the rest of your life, together with your brothers sharing the same vows.

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4 Jeffrey Rowthorn, “Lord you give the great commission,” Hymnal 1982 528.

5 Ciarán Anthony DellaFera, “Mary, Martha, & One Thing More,” *The Servant* #155

We as religious choose each other in community as companions on our journey towards peace. As tools for our journey we choose vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We learn to rely on these vows: we learn to give of ourselves, and to detach from our worldly attachments and addictions through *poverty*; we learn to love freely and unconditionally in grace through *chastity*; we learn to discipline and prepare our minds and bodies through *obedience*.”[6]

As our late brother Ron Fender said,

I never knew that the vow of obedience would give me such freedom; I never knew that the vow of chastity would allow me to love so many so well; and I never knew that the vow of poverty would enrich me so deeply.[7]

All of this is lived out in community, the community of our brothers as a subset of the larger community of the church. Our Founder Richard Thomas Biernacki once wrote:

To be part of a community of faith takes a specific personality that is willing to be with others. If you are centered in yourself or want victory for your point of view and yours only, you cannot be wise, nor can you be innocent. Only when we see that we are part of the body; only when we know our own sins as well as we think we know those of others; only when we see our own limitations; only when we rise above self in childlike innocence to desire the common good can we be truly wise.[8]

That common good is the gift and grace that comes from life in a community that finds its commonality in the vows and the Rule that articulates and describes them. The grace to live the vows will not come from you, but from God, God’s call and your response to God working through you and through the community of your brothers. As Richard Thomas further put it:

When God calls us, he has a particular purpose in mind, and he knows we have the capability to be successful, whether we believe it or not. Whether you think so or not, you do have what it takes to respond to God’s call. For as with Moses, God will give you the ability you need. Do not think that you are inadequate. God will make you adequate.[9]

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6 Ibid.

7 As quoted by James Patrick Hall in the video on The Rule, Part 1

8 Richard Thomas Biernacki, “Wisdom From On High,” *The Servant* #159

9 Richard Thomas Biernacki, “You Are My Friends,” *The Servant* #153

Perhaps we ought to add one more signpost on the Gregorian Way: *Trust*. Knowing that God is with you on this journey, along with your brothers bound by the same vows, can help lead you to the astonishing discovery, that

living in perfect love and perfect trust, we live more and more in the present day; we pass through the gates into God's Garden, and we discover that the path has brought us to the place we already knew — but a place transformed. [10]

It is easy to see the vows solely in negative terms, as the old joke put it, “No dough, no dates, no decisions.” But the vows are not best understood as stop signs on the Gregorian Way, but as directional signs to help us *stay* on the way, the way defined by the Rule. As one brother put it:

Fasting is not  
not eating,  
but sharing with the hungry.  
Poverty is not  
not having,  
but sharing with the poor.  
Chastity is not  
not coupling,  
but loving all in Christ.  
And obedience is not  
not willing,  
but willing as God wills. [11]

This is the path on which you have set your feet, walking in faith and trust, seeking one day to embrace the vows you now begin to explore as a novice. By God's grace, empowered by God's love, supported by pastors and peers, you will discover the truth expressed in the Preamble to our Rule, as you seek — through the vows — “to live in such a way that life would have no reason if it were not for the presence of Christ's redeeming love.”

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10 Donovan Aidan Bowley, “A Full Earth,” address delivered as part of a Creation Spirituality Workshop, Annual Convocation, 1992

11 Tobias Stanislas Haller, “After Isaiah 58,” *The Servant* #95

## The Vowed Life — Reflection Questions

The vowed life is a public testimony in the face of a world in need of God, but often unaware of its need. The vowed life is both a path and a vehicle, a way and a means — though not an end, for the only end is to further the mission of the church “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” (BCP 855) This public testimony through the vows is a sign and effective implementation — a *sacrament* — of God’s self-giving love.

**1 — What does the vowed life say about individuality and community?**

**2 — The Brotherhood gives its members scope for personal interpretation of the vows and how they are lived out. What does this diversity say to you about the Gregorian Way?**

**3 — What does commitment to a life under vows bring out or challenge in your own personality?**

**4 — How will the vows help contribute to your participation in this community? In the world around you?**

**5 — What responsibilities, commitments, or vows already have impact on your life?**

**6 — What strengths of character do you bring to the vowed life?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

**Note: Before going on to the next chapter, you might like to view the first video on the Rule of the Brotherhood, “Of Vows.” It and the other videos in the series are available on YouTube via the Brotherhood’s webpage.**

## 2. Poverty

A brother makes the vow of poverty by dedicating a major portion of the fruit of his labor to the Church and to the Brotherhood.[12]

The Brotherhood joins the Episcopal Church in affirming that the tithe is the minimum standard of Christian giving. All members shall contribute at least five percent of their annual adjusted gross income to the Brotherhood. A postulant, upon admission, will contribute to the support of the Brotherhood at this level, or use the time of postulancy to reorder his stewardship in order to be able to do so by his reception into the novitiate.

All brothers are expected, in fulfillment of their vow of poverty as members of the Church and in acceptance of its discipline, to contribute no less than five percent of their adjusted gross income to the Church through their parish, diocese, province or national church.

As a further understanding of the vow of poverty, each professed brother will contribute one-half of one percent of his annual adjusted gross income to the BSG Benevolent Trust.[13]

**T**he first thing to notice about the vow of poverty is that it is positive: it is not about *lacking* something, but about *giving* something, dedicating a significant portion of your resources to the use of the church and the Brotherhood. By this giving *to*, a brother also gives *up* — surrendering control over a portion of his financial resources, so that their use can be determined by others: in this case, giving up (at least) ten percent of his income for the use of the Brotherhood and the church, and a further one-half percent for the work of the Benevolent Trust.

The vow of poverty reminds us of the truth expressed in the beautiful prayer often used at Compline, “that our common life depends upon each other’s toil.” (BCP 134) There is no such thing as a “self-made man” — and even the resources that come to us in the form of wages or salaries, earned by our own labor, could not have been earned were it not for the existence of the jobs we hold, or the institutions in which we do our work. Even the hunter-gatherers of human prehistory depended for survival on the natural fertility of the soil, the rains in their season, and the proliferation of wildlife.

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12 The Rule: Of Vows

13 The Customary: Of the tithe



Ultimately all of this great cycle of productivity and labor rests on the foundation of God’s providence; and brothers are reminded of this when they take the vow of poverty: “that it is only through Christ, who inspires both the will and the deed, that I am able to do any good at all.”

You will have reflected on the proportionality of our vow of poverty in *Gregorian Foundations* and will remember that it is in offering the portion of your resources that the whole is sanctified. You will also have begun the discipline of tithing during your postulancy — if you had not already been accustomed to that practice.

Now that you are a novice, it is time further to explore how giving up control over part of your resources can be a liberating, spiritual experience — learning, in a world dominated by consumption, what it is *to have enough*, in the knowledge that all things ultimately come from God. Poverty allows us to recall our essential dependence on others — and how all together depend on God.

You are probably familiar with the biblical verse used in some places at the presentation of the gifts, “All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.” (1 Chr. 29:14) The channel by which we give back to God is the church and the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood itself mirrors each brother’s individual practice by dedicating a portion of its combined resources every year to further work and ministry outside of the Brotherhood (though related to it, through the ministries of your brothers). This is a good example of the powerful multiplying effect that generosity — the expression of poverty — generates.

### ***What poverty implies and expresses***

This practice of poverty — understood as a cycling flow of resources from places of abundance to places of need — carries with it several implications.

☐ First, it allows us the time to engage with our resources, not just our finances but our skills and gifts and talents (some of which we use in order to generate our financial resources.) Helping a brother to develop and improve his skills and talents is a principal

goal and purpose of the Brotherhood, a central charism of its foundation. Originally the goal was quite focused and narrow:

to seek that sanctification to which God in his mercy calls us as Church Musicians, and in so seeking to attempt in all ways, corporately and separately, to show forth the Light of the World, bearing in mind the sacred nature of that vocation... Our work as Church Musicians should have this quality: that we keep in mind that we are exercising a God-given talent, and that this talent should, at all times, be used for the Glory of Almighty God. Our work in this vocation should be an oblation and a service of love to God and to our fellow man.[14]

This focus soon broadened to include all of the church arts in 1970, and further to include all aspects of ministry and service shortly thereafter. The vow of poverty was added to the Rule in 1978 as a way of reinforcing this notion of stewardship. Stewardship of skills and talents is an important aspect of the vow of poverty as the brothers express it in their work and ministry — individually and, especially, together.

Every brother is vital to the brotherhood and is an integral member of the body. Let none be lost through negligence, ignorance or pride; but let each be continually fortified and strengthened with brotherly love one toward another.”[15]

The care with which brothers mentor and encourage each other is a central characteristic of this stewardship of talents, rejoicing in each other’s gifts and celebrating them with gratitude.

☐ The second implication of wrestling with the disposition of his resources — including his talents — calls each brother to live in such a way that his manner of life doesn’t conflict with the best use of those resources and gifts. It is no good tithing if at the same time he neglects or avoids the works of justice, mercy, and faith. (Matt 23:23)

The vow of poverty is meant to help you engage in a proper stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. Living a life that is wasteful, a life that squanders resources, makes it impossible to apply those resources meaningfully and generously. You cannot give

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14 The Original Rule (1969)

15 The Rule: Of the life of the brotherhood

what you do not have — and this is especially tragic if it is due to wastefulness or carelessness.

So the vow of poverty is about setting *priorities*. As one brother put it, “Poverty leads me to change my priorities thoroughly from self-service to the service of others.” [16] Priorities and how they are met will differ from one brother to another, because each brother will have different resources as well as different demands on those resources. Each brother will also have different natural gifts (or areas in need of development) that might make stewardship of time, talent, and treasure more or less difficult. The goal is to help each brother find his way to flourish.

The taking of vows is the beginning of a very personal journey. Like a small seed that gets planted in the spring, a vocation must be loved and cared for, nurtured in times of drought and fed in times of blessing. Only after it has time to grow and mature will it begin to bear fruit. The greatest fruit of my vocation has been a growing sense of being at peace in Christ. To find myself in that place where I am able to recognize Christ in others and myself, and to take comfort in the understanding that with Christ, nothing more is needed. [17]

Without Christ’s indwelling help, poverty — as the Brotherhood understands it — cannot survive. When you take your place, kneeling before the Minister General to make the vow of poverty, or as you witness another brother do so, these words will ring true:

I make the vow of poverty, in dedicating of the fruit of my labor to the church and the Brotherhood, knowing that it is only through Christ, who inspires both the will and the deed, that I am able to do any good at all.

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16 Ælfred Bernard Dean, “The Spirit of Reconciliation,” *The Servant* #179

17 Ciarán Anthony DellaFera, “Mary, Martha & One Thing More,” *The Servant* #155

## Poverty — Reflection Questions

The vow of poverty is about setting priorities. These will differ from one brother to another, because each brother will have different resources as well as different demands on those resources. Each brother will also have different natural gifts (or areas in need of development) that might make stewardship of time, talent, and treasure more or less difficult. The goal of the Brotherhood is to help each brother find his way to flourish.

**1 — What is your understanding of “setting priorities” in relation to the vow of poverty?**

**2 — What are some ways you might integrate that understanding into your practice, apart from the tithe?**

**3 — How do you understand the concept of *sacrifice*? What might you sacrifice in order to live the vow of poverty most faithfully?**

**4 — The Gregorian theme of *servanthood* is supported by the vow of poverty. How do you see these working together in the community and in your own life and ministry?**

**5 — What barriers, if any, do you anticipate in living into the vow of poverty? How can your MP, formation team members, or other brothers help you with this?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 3. Chastity

A brother makes the vow of chastity as follows: Chastity is the decision to live with all in love, with respect for each person's integrity. It is not a denial of one's sexuality and capacity for love, but a dedication of the whole self to God: free from indecency or offensiveness and restrained from all excess, in order to be free to love others without trying to possess or control.[18]

I make the vow of chastity, in dedicating myself, my soul and mind and body, to the pure service of the love of God, that I may love others without trying to possess or control.[19]

**J**ust as poverty consists in large part in relinquishing control over part of our financial resources, chastity can be understood as relinquishing control over other human beings. If poverty is about how we treat our goods and our gifts, then chastity is about how we treat other people as people, fulfilling the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.

It is easy to confuse chastity with sexual abstinence — many people see them as identical. Clare Fitzgerald SSND, leading a workshop for the Brotherhood, shared the story of an elderly nun who late in life was taking stock of how well she had kept her vows. She shyly admitted to the occasional failing in poverty and obedience, but proudly proclaimed, “I’ve never had a problem with chastity; I have loved no one!” As one brother reflected,

This nun has confused love with sex. What she means to say is that she has never had a problem with celibacy, because she’s never experienced sexual attraction. This kind of confusion is rampant in our society. How many people out there are so hungry for love, so desperate for companionship of any kind, that they seek love in a sexuality run amok? They, and the nun, have indeed made exactly the same mistake, and with the same dangerous consequences.... Chastity is about setting us free to love everyone: to be available and ready to express God’s love to every woman, man, or child we meet.... One wonders how many people she could have loved, but did not, in fear for her chastity. Trying to preserve herself, she ends up wasting the capacity for love which God gave her.[20]

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18 The Rule: Of vows

19 The Rites of the Brotherhood: Life Profession

20 Thomas Bushnell, “Love is the greatest,” *The Servant* #203

The Brotherhood's view is that chastity "is not a denial ... but a dedication" of oneself, soul and mind and body, as a reasonable and holy offering, capable of sanctification in the proper exercise of the faculty that makes each of us most like God: the capacity to love. This is most especially the case as we learn the difference between *need-love* and *gift-love*. Such learning marks an important coming-of-age, and the vow of chastity is one way to help a brother committed to it in stewarding his personal growth, caring for himself while being profoundly respectful of others. In doing so, a brother can discover the freedom that comes with liberation from the neediness based in desire and passion, by understanding that, as a gift freely offered, love is not coerced or forced, but graciously and freely given.

God's great commandment is that we love others as we love ourselves, and this can be summed up in the word *courtesy* — a profound respect for others that allows them the same freedom we ourselves enjoy. The grace of love is that its expression in loving acts forms the substance of *what love is* — an act of the will to love the other as yourself.

A wise man once said, "I love my child because I kiss him, and I kiss him because I love him." Showing our regard for those we meet daily is not only courtesy but the showing forth of charity. Our vow of chastity is grounded in this charity and care for others — "to love others without the desire to possess or control." That is God's courtesy. [21]

### ***Will you love...?***

It is also worth recalling what love is *not* — at least as it is understood in the vow of chastity. Love is not mere affection and emotion; it is an act of the will. This is why a brother can make a vow concerning it. You cannot very well make a vow always to feel a certain emotion or experience a particular passion — after all *a passion* is literally something you *suffer*, something that happens *to you*. But love is an act of will — especially in response to a divine command — it is an action and attitude to which you can be committed, which you can choose to do.

We do not start by assuming that love must be an emotion, and concluding that Jesus' command for us to love is mistaken. We start

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21 Richard Thomas Biernacki, "Courtesy," *The Servant* #210

instead with Jesus' command to love, and from that command and his example, we work out what love is. So no, my friends and brothers, love is not sex, and neither is love an emotion. [22]

Chastity represents this choice, this commitment, to love others freely — expressing your own freedom, while respecting theirs. We choose to live with all in love, respecting each other's integrity, dignity and personhood — as beloved persons, not disposable objects. It has been said that idolatry is treating things like God, and that blasphemy is treating God like a thing. We dare not treat any who bear God's image as if they were things.

### ***Being true to yourself***

Living out this vow with integrity — as with all of life under the Rule — requires introspection and self-critique. The benefit of life in community is that it provides each brother with other brothers as guides and sounding boards as each tries his best to hold fast to the discipline of the Rule. This helps each to examine his life, his motives and actions. It would be foolish to ignore that this can be challenging, particularly in the areas of life touched by the vow of chastity, where deeply personal fears and needs are confronted and engaged.

Chastity disciplines all interpersonal relationships, sexual and social, and does so at what for most people is an intimately vulnerable aspect of personhood and personality. The vow of chastity moderates how a brother values himself and others, how he forms right relationships and makes right and respectful use of his own body in relationship to and with equal respect for others.

Such discipline can be especially difficult while we live in a consumerist culture, one that has commodified and monetized almost every aspect of the human person and interpersonal relationship, our “social networks” themselves having now been transformed into merchandise opportunities, our preferences and “likes” literally bought and sold on the open market. This atmosphere makes it easy to think in reductive ways about ourselves and others, regarding ourselves as consumers, and treating others as objects or services to fulfill our needs. Obviously those sexual

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22 Thomas Bushnell, “Love is the greatest,” *The Servant* #203

and social needs are real, and deeply felt. But the vow of chastity calls us to understand that desire does not grant entitlement to its own satisfaction. The vow challenges us and speaks to us as the Saint James did to his congregation,

You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. (James 4:2)

Living the vow of chastity will also take courage, in part because the challenges you face will not only come from within your own heart — its devices and desires — but from the world that sees value only in aggrandizement and acquisition, and commoditizes human relationships, social and sexual, and finds notions of chastity to be absurd.

When the world treats you poorly, it is because you are a visible sign of God's unconditional love for every person. That love is threatening to those who count love as something to be bartered, traded and contracted. But still the church, including each of us, must go on expressing the unbounded love of God, especially to those that the world excludes and rejects. It is because of this, Jesus says, that the world excluded and rejected him, and the better servants we are of God's love, the more the world will exclude and reject us.[23]

Chastity reminds us to ask ourselves about our own motives and needs in careful self-examination, and respectfully to ask others and always to seek their consent, lest we violate their personhood in asserting our own.

Many abuses of others start with a devaluation of ourselves, and this devaluation then seeps into our relationships with others. Our own insecurity or pride — the two sides of distorted self-knowledge — can lead us to misjudge others as we have misjudged ourselves. Chastity, especially as we live it out in community, provides us with the tools needed to learn a true assessment of ourselves, and hence a true assessment of others.

### ***Different paths on the same road***

Some brothers have found that they are called to celibate life. Others know that their call is to faithful partnership. Neither is a denial of sexuality, and in both manners of life the brother is

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23 Thomas Bushnell, "Conversion," *The Servant* #164



called, and pledged, to love freely, and without the “desire to possess or control.”

For ultimately it is God — who is Love — in whom we live and love, in whom we move and have our being. Chastity rests on our relationship with God in Christ; it is not an avoidance of intimacy for it begins in the intimate vulnerability of the soul that knows both its need of God, and its own worth as beloved by God. Chastity is *right engagement*, loving others as we love ourselves, treating others with the dignity we expect in return.

Jesus provides the model for this as in so much else, Jesus the Chaste One who loved all, who welcomes intimacy and offers himself to us as he takes us to himself.

Jesus comes to us in such an intimate and personal way we may feel shy about sharing that relationship with others. But that is simply how Jesus is: he calls us each by name, treats us each as if we were the sole object of his love. We can relish and enjoy that relationship but share it in the knowledge that Jesus shares himself with others too. his love is as generous, miraculous and abundant as the wine poured forth at Cana.[24]

In the knowledge that we are not the sole object of God’s love, we can join God in loving others as God loves them, treating them with the dignity due a child of God, a beloved of the Divine Lover.

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24 Tobias Stanislas Haller, “A Gift to Share,” *The Servant* #148

# Chastity — Reflection Questions

The decision to live with all in love is at the heart of the good news found in the Gospel. My willingness to live with all in love thoroughly changes me, not only how I see my neighbor, but how my neighbor sees me.[25]

1 — Please reflect on one of these two questions:

- ☐ ***If married or partnered***, how will the vow of chastity influence or change your relationship with your significant other?
- ☐ ***If single***, in what ways will living the vow of chastity change how you perceive or approach personal relationships?

2 — What connection if any, do you see between chastity and celibacy?

3 — How do you see the vow of chastity having impact on relationships other than intimate? In your family, work, parish, and the community?

4 — How will the vow of chastity affect your relationship with

- (a) your own needs and gifts, and
- (b) with God?

Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?

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25 Ælfred Bernard Dean, "The Spirit of Reconciliation," *The Servant* #179

# 4. Obedience

I make the vow of obedience to Christ, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, to the Rule of the Brotherhood, and to [you] the Minister General and other pastoral officials appointed over me in this life, that I may lay aside self-will, and do only as God wills.[26]

**M**any religious down through the ages have confessed that the vow of obedience is “the tough one.” While poverty has an impact on our possessions, and chastity strikes close to home as it touches on our emotions and even on how we use our own bodies, obedience cuts deeper — to the core of the willful self. As one brother once observed,

I’ve learned that poverty has little to do with being poor; chastity has little to do with sex; obedience has everything to do with being obedient![27]

Being obedient comes into play when we don’t want to do what is asked of us; that is the only time obedience becomes *real*, because it isn’t really obedience to do what we *want* to do. Obedience is the school in which we learn how to do what we *don’t* want to do by nature, inclination, or taste. It is the school that teaches us to serve — how to be *a servant*.

Obedience is the arena for the combat of wills — of your own will against the will of the church, the community, and those charged with your pastoral direction. It is the place where we struggle with thinking we each know better, or best; it is the forum in which all claims to superior insight are tested by the gathered assembly, all sense of “I know best” submitted to judgment and discernment, and sometimes to correction.

It is through the community and its counsel that we make ourselves open to the grace that God provides, as servants to each other and to the one who came to serve, and who gave his life a ransom for many — even to the point of allowing his Truth to suffer death upon the cross. Through the vow of obedience we choose to make our lives an example of service to others,

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26 The Rites: Life Profession

27 Ron Fender, from a Convocation presentation in 2007

submitting own sense of what is right in humility to the discernment of the community. Every action taken in community is necessarily relational — every act has an impact on someone else, serving and being served, permissions asked and granted at every step of the way.

### ***The interwoven vows***

In this, the courtesy of obedience can be seen as related to the vow of chastity — obedience is *chastity of the willful self*. It is a check on the kind of personal *autonomy* — self-governance and self-determination — that is so highly prized in our commodified and independent world; so that obedience can also be seen as related to the vow of poverty — obedience is *poverty of self-determination*.

The public profession and practice of these three interwoven vows — poverty, chastity, and obedience — is a challenge to those who live them, but also a challenge to that commercial, hedonistic, and independent world. In that world, calling anybody to be answerable to another provokes an immediate, “You’re not the boss of me” response — a rejection of the gracious opportunity to serve in a mutually responsible community. The inhabitants of this worldly world do not want to hear this invitation, regarding it as a threat to their existence and identity, which they wrongly assume rests in their autonomy from others.

We who live these vows know the truth of Donne’s famous dictum, “No man is an island” — that we become most truly ourselves in our relationships with others. It is part of our witness in living out our vows that we offer testimony to a preoccupied and busy world, a testimony based on the gospel call to serve one another as Christ served us.

The world will not stop talking long enough to hear the gracious possibility offered to it: the world will not open its ears or turn its eyes to hear or regard anything but its own interests and preoccupations. The world needs a wake-up call. If we in the church are faithful in proclaiming the story in word and action, the world may stop its chatter for a moment and overhear; that’s how it worked on Pentecost, and it can again. [28]

Obedience confronts the societal value placed on self-assertion, offering in its place the gospel value of mutual service in community. It is, ironically, more *social* — for individuals become more truly themselves as members of a society than as isolated ciphers. Obedience resonates with the ringing tone of the Southern African concept of *ubuntu* — “I am because we are” — for it is in the community of *all* that *each* finds true identity.

What happens when this fails? What happens to the world when community is sacrificed to self-interest, when obedience is rejected in self-assertion, when the deadly sin of pride displaces the virtue of humility? Isn't this the choice that lies at the heart of the old, old story of the human fall from a state of blessed relationship with God, with peaceful harmony between human beings? Self-assertion is the literal Genesis that lies at the heart of the choice to disobey God, at the heart of the choice to envy a brother, at the heart of the curse of submission to domination, at the heart of the first human actions to go by the name of *Sin*.

Facing the reality of sin allows us to accept its consequence: responsibility, and the vows are crucial reminders that we are responsible for how we treat our possessions, how we treat our bodies, and how we treat each other. The vow of obedience most especially reminds us of how we are responsible to each other — that those who serve are responsible to those whom they serve, and that those in positions of authority are responsible for the demands they make and the commands they issue. As G. K. Chesterton put it,

Tie in a living tether the prince and priest and thrall,  
bind all our lives together, smite us and save us all. [29]

The journey on the Gregorian Way invites us to submit our will, the “devices and desires of our own hearts,” [30] bound together in love and service to each other, to the Brotherhood, to the church — and beyond that to a world that awaits a gospel word and witness.

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29 G. K. Chesterton, “O God of earth and altar,” *Hymnal 1982* 591

30 The General Confession in the BCP's Rite I offices and Penitential Order

That gospel witness is twofold: of ready obedience in response to the gracious exercise of authority; and for those in authority, the consciousness of responsibility, for however high their position, they know that they are answerable to higher authorities still. At the highest point is Christ himself, who emptied himself to take the form of a slave (Phi. 2:7), who washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13) — thus setting the example for all leaders and all servants. To be in authority is ultimately to be responsible to everyone.

The vows form the edges and safeguards on the Gregorian Way, our way of seeking and serving, not as autonomous individuals but as brothers in community with a common mission. The vows are not the journey, but the framework that make the journey possible, the curbs that define the road, and keep us on the right track. They are what constitute the community as an *order* — devoted to orderly work together for the good of all, rather than independent striving after personal success. The vows are what bind us to one another in love and service.

## Obedience — Reflection Questions

Obedience is the decision to lay aside self-will and to accept submission to an authority other than one's own. We are called to place our trust in an authority that may sometimes interfere with our personal priorities or even, potentially, personal convictions.

**1 — How do you think the vow of obedience will conflict with your sense of autonomy? your ambitions? your beliefs?**

**2 — In what circumstances, and why, do you think disobedience might be appropriate? How do you reconcile this with the vow of obedience?**

**3 — How do you see obedience taking form in your life as it relates to the four-fold authority laid out in the vow formula:**

- (a) Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior;
- (b) the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church;
- (c) the Rule of the Brotherhood;
- (d) the Minister General and other pastoral officials?

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 5. The Baptismal Covenant

Life under vows in the Brotherhood does not replace the commitment made in Baptism, although it marks out a particular way of living: the Gregorian Way. Life under the Rule is a specific form of the baptized life.

**T**he Rule of the Brotherhood is the form by which we, as individuals and as a community, live as Christians. Our every action is informed by what it means to be members of the Body of Christ, but also given a particular meaning as Gregorian friars. It is vitally important that this meaning — what our lives and testimony communicate about the Christian life — be truthful and authentic. The Christian life is not about appearances and intentions, but about substance and action. The Rule gives us specific tools and directions for giving substance to our Christian commitment, and the specific actions that fill the hours, days, and years of our Christian life. It does not *amplify* the terms of the Baptismal Covenant, but it *specifies* how we live them out.

One of the crucial aspects of that Covenant is its call to self-dedication, particularly in its call to service. The Brotherhood's Rule offers us specific forms for our service and dedication to take. It names the ways and means by which — through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience — we transform our possessions into gifts, our passions into charity, and our wills to service. The Rule is much more than a catalog of obligations: it is a reflection of the baptismal identity we share as children of God and messengers of the gospel. "A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer," [31] by work in "...service to our fellow man." [32] We do that in a community which

- ☐ continues "in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers" (BCP 304)
- ☐ mandates reflection and repentance, so that when we "fall into sin" we will "repent and return to the Lord" (BCP 304)

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31 The Rule: Of the life of a brother

32 The Rule: Of work as an apostolate



- ☐ proclaims the gospel “by word and example” (BCP 305)
- ☐ “seeks and serves Christ” (BCP 305) “in every man, woman, and child, no matter who they be... and... greet[s] that Christ with the open arms of love” [33]

Like most Christians, we choose to live “fully in the secular world.” [34] This means that our example must be genuine, for it is on display. It must be more than a mere display, however; the service and the sacrifice must be real and concrete. Our Christian witness, testimony that we live in relationship with God and each other in Christ, will be received as true only to the extent that it *is* true. Nothing is more transparent than hypocrisy or false piety. Our Founder writes:

We will only be great if we continue to grow and to be true to the ideals of our foundation. All of us as Christians will only be great if we continue to serve and love God. [35]

The affirmative promises made in Baptism are the positive responses to the three challenging questions, “Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?” (BCP 304-5) The Rule itself affirms that the vow of obedience is to Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior. We cannot profess such obedience to Jesus as Lord if we do not acknowledge him as Lord and Savior of all, nor can we place our trust in him if we do not understand him as our Good Shepherd, with faith in him to lead us on our journey.

The Baptismal Covenant is a call to a manner of life, and the Rule specifies — for us — how that life is to be embraced and lived: in the Gregorian Way. Your baptism marked the beginning of a life-long journey — profession of vows in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory will, God willing, set you on a course that you will follow for the rest of your life.

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33 The Rule: Preamble

34 The Rule: Of the work of the Brotherhood

35 Richard Thomas Biernacki, “Second Sight,” *The Servant* #151

## The Baptismal Covenant — Reflection Questions

*From the Baptismal Covenant — (BCP 302-305)*

Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness  
that rebel against God?

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world  
which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

. . . . .

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers ?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin,  
repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News  
of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being?

**1 — How is your life different because you are baptized? How would it be different if you weren't.**

**2 — How do you see the Baptismal vows and covenant reflected in the Rule? Check through the points listed above, in comparison with the text of the Rule.**

**3 — How might the Rule help you embody and keep some of these promises?**

**4 — What will your witness under vows communicate to others about the vocation of Baptism and the particulars of the Gregorian Way?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 6. In the World but Not of It

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (Jn. 1:10)

There are some who are able to live the religious life even in the secular world: but there are many who are unable to be at peace with God unless they give up all things.[36]

**T**he phrase that forms the title of this chapter is one of those Christian clichés like “Love the sinner but hate the sin.” Neither of these clichés is biblical, and both of them represent poor summaries of the gospel. They may contain a germ of truth but can also lead to a plague of false conclusions and misunderstandings.

So what nugget of truth can we strain from the cloudy waters of this pious phrase — “In the world but not of it” — what can it say to us without leading us off the path and into the weeds?

Obviously, anyone who exists is “in the world” — even God in Christ, as shown in the prologue to John’s Gospel cited above; and it is perhaps best to take Christ himself as our model. Christ’s “being in the world” is the central and necessary meaning of the Incarnation. The reality of the Word becoming flesh stands in opposition to any notion that Jesus was simply some kind of spiritual being, a projection or avatar, rather than a man of flesh and blood, living as Emmanuel — God *with us*.

At the same time, Jesus is not “of this world.” Although he derives his human nature from his mother Mary — as the Chalcedonian definition affirms (BCP 864) — Jesus is also fully divine. He has a unique both/and quality that is at odds with our tendency to think in terms of either/or. His kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 8:23, 18:36) even as it comes into being in his presence in the here and now (Lk. 17:21, Mt. 18:20). Most importantly, as he affirms, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (Jn. 9:5) He came to bring light to the world; he is that light on earth, even as heaven itself is illuminated by the lamplight of the Lamb of God. (Rev. 21:23)

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36 Gregory the Great, Epistle III.65, to the Emperor Maurice, 592 AD

Perhaps only Jesus himself can be understood as the nugget of Truth in this catchphrase; only he can truly be completely in and yet not of the world. We as Christians seek to model our lives on Christ, the light of the world, but every brother of this community is at the same time called to the humble admission that even as he witnesses to Christ, he does so “knowing that it is not he who shall finally bring the light, but only that he shall become a messenger for the One who is the light.”[37]

This would seem to be as far as we dare push the cliché, “in the world but not of it.” The citation from Gregory the Great at the head of this chapter supports the idea that it is possible to live religious life “in the world,” and that flight to the monastery is a particular refuge for those called to it — but even they are not pure spirits but creatures of flesh and blood; even the most austere and ascetical monk deceives himself if he thinks he is somehow not both *in* and to a very large extent *of* this world.

Abba John the Dwarf once said to his elder brother, “I want to be a free spirit, like one of the angels, who do no work other than offering ceaseless worship to God.” So he left skete and went off into the desert. A week later he returned, and when he knocked at the door, his elder brother called out from behind it, “Who are you?” John replied, “I am your brother, John.” But his elder replied, “Oh, no; you couldn’t possibly be John. John has become pure spirit, like an angel, and is no longer of this world.”

The Gregorian affirmation that we are “living fully in the secular world”[38], and that many of us have completely secular jobs and worldly professions, should serve as a preventative against adopting a pietistic or phony attitude towards the world. Rather than pretending to be pure spirits, we are called to bring a gospel sanctity to our worldly lives and work, affirming that “Work, being our share in creation and partnership with God in that creation, can be sanctified.”[39] Our apostolic work is to and in the world, just as Christ’s Incarnation and mission was to and in — and for — the world God loved so much that the Word became flesh.

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37 The Rule: Of the life of a brother

38 The Rule: Of the work of the Brotherhood

39 The Rule: Of work as an apostolate

Still we are called through our baptism to remember our citizenship in the heavenly kingdom that comes into being even in the here and now through the proclamation of the gospel, and the apostolic work committed to our hands. The vows support us in this, reminding us we are to have a light grasp on the things of this world:

- ☐ Through the vow of *poverty* we learn detachment from things, even as we make use of them — things possessed *for* our good, but us not possessed *by* them — not transforming “supplies for the journey into hindrances to arrival at the journey’s end.” [40]
- ☐ Through the vow of *chastity* we learn that proper self-control takes the form of relinquishing control over others.
- ☐ And through the vow of *obedience* we learn detachment from our own self-will.

These detachments allow us a degree of perspective, a place to stand to offer a critique of the world and its follies, without fooling ourselves into thinking that we are self-appointed other-worldly prophets, pure spirits or pious know-it-all’s without a stake in the world to which we are inescapably connected. We dare not enact the holier-than-thou attitude of the pious religious leaders who contended with Jesus. We are called to model his engagement with the world as it is — in fellowship with sinners striving to be saints.

It is crucial in this to retain a sense of humility regarding the church’s own less-than-perfect — and sometimes scandalously imperfect — performance. We will represent a flawed, wounded, and broken Body to the world, a world which has rightly rejected the errors and crimes of the church, crimes all the more despicable because they were carried out by those who bear Christ’s name. Being “in the world” as we are may allow us to serve as a bridge or advocate — and a penitent — for the church in this regard.

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40 Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule* 3.26

The church never serves its best interests when it places itself outside of and above the human condition. We are God's hands and feet and voice among God's people, but that potentially exalted view of ourselves can easily lead to scandal. We need to remember who we are, where we came from, and whose we are. If we can do that humbly, deeply embracing the attitude of forgiveness that Jesus still teaches us, readily admitting that we will make mistakes and we will fall short of God's mark for us, then we can perhaps lessen the evil power of scandal to injure the church when it comes — as surely it will. [41]

Recall that Jesus himself was a “scandal” to many. His struggles — with his family, with his disciples, with the pious and pedantic, with the Jewish and Gentile authorities ending in his passion — show us the struggle we face in being authentically in the world without becoming worldly. He is our example in this as in so much else, and the commitment to our vows gives us a means to follow in his footsteps.

Those footsteps have been followed by many other Christians, both in monastic life, and in apostolic traditions. We continue our journey in continuity with them, and in fellowship with the whole broader community of the church. This fellowship can motivate and sustain us, as we recognize the kingdom of God being made real where the two or three are gathered in his name.

Our Rule provides the daily structure through which I am reminded that I am not alone. This is the comfortable reminder that I seek. And, because this structure reminds me of Christ's presence in my actions — Christ's need of my actions in order for his truth to be known — I am able to be of service to others.... Because I am reassured of Christ's nearness, I have been open to the needs and the opportunities for service which have come to me. [42]

For we are not exiles or orphans, but ambassadors of God's kingdom. We exist for a purpose — God's purpose: the sanctification of all. (BCP 374) We are in and of a world that God loved so much that he saved it — and we have been saved as part of that world and commissioned to assist in spreading the word of salvation.

Being in the world — and being of it while keeping it at arms' length — has taken and will take many forms.

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41 James Teets, “Scandalous!” *The Servant* #157

42 James Teets, from a sermon at his installation as honorary canon, Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, San Pedro Sulas, Honduras

We have brothers who are teaching about God and the church in ways which do not involve a lecture hall. We have brothers who teach about holiness in their daily lives and at work. There are those, in fact, teaching daily by their very example in the world.[43]

**Christ stands as the supreme example: when Pilate cynically asked him, “What is truth?” Jesus remained silent in words, but eloquent in the Word made flesh, a perfect example of humanity. We follow that example not by lecturing to others about what is good or right, but by witnessing to the gospel, using words if necessary.**

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43 Richard Thomas Biernacki, “Preach, Teach, Heal,” *The Servant* #160

## In the World but Not of It — Reflection Questions

The family of faith exists not only for its own good and pleasure, but in order to nurture and strengthen its members to reach out in love to those outside its present circle. As Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple put it, “The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.” By serving those who are not yet part of the family, we extend that family in the ministry of reconciliation. *By living no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us, we cooperate in the work of the Holy Spirit, his own first gift to those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.* What we have, we have for others, as we are often reminded in the Noonday Office: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*[44]

**1 — How does the apostolic nature of the Brotherhood confirm or contradict any previous notion you may have had of religious life? How does it challenge your idea of *community*?**

**2 — What ministry or gift do you bring that you can offer in testimony to the gospel? Can you offer it in a worldly context?**

**3 — Where do you find the greatest need for detachment from worldly things?**

**4 — Conversely, where and how do you feel most called to engage with the world in ministry and service?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**



# 7. Quietness

A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer...[45]

**I**n this in the following chapters we are going to take a closer look at the characteristics of a brother's witness, enumerated in this clause from the Rule. We have been looking at some of the content of that witness — the What — but now want to turn to some of the ways in which that testimony is presented — the How.

We pledge to witness to Christ's love with quietness. This might at first seem contradictory — as it could be said that quietness finds its perfection in silence. Sometimes, as Jesus did before Pilate, it is enough simply *to be*, to *stand* as an example, in a wordless testimony, to stand and be counted.

Surely there is a time to keep silent, but there is also a time to speak, and when we do so the manner of our speech should be calm and clear. There is a gentleness to our testimony, one that arises from firm conviction. Unlike the preacher who wrote in his sermon notes, “Weak point... bang pulpit,” we can rest assured that when we have confidence and faith, there is no need to shout the gospel truth, but calmly to proclaim it in such a way that the form of the message matches its content. We are called to speak words of love in a loving way; and when it is time to speak words of correction or warning, to do so with that same heartfelt love. Although the hellfire and brimstone preacher may excite the congregation, such emotional excitement soon passes; a calm and quiet testimony to the greatness and glory of God will reap a more secure conversion.

Our outward quietness ought not to be thought of as a gag or silencer, as a restraining zipping of the lips; rather our outward quiet manner should arise from our inward quietude and settled confidence. Our outsides should match our insides: and cultivating inward quietness is the best way to ensure that our out-

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45 The Rule: Of the life of a brother

ward speech will reflect that quality. We are called to cultivate quietness in thought, word, and deed.

☐ *Quietness in thought* acknowledges our being in the Presence of the One whom we serve, and like good servants we are attentive to listen to the voice of that One. Like Moses, when we tread on holy ground in God's presence, we remove the shoes of outward activity, content to stand and wait for our instructions. In the depths of our interior life, we choose to restrain the chattering of our monkey minds, to attend to another who speaks in our hearts. We enter our inner room to pray (Matt. 6:6) and listen for God speaking to our heart in silence upon our beds. (Ps. 4:4) Inner quietness opens us to awareness of the Spirit hovering over us, calming the troubled and chaotic waters of our busy minds.

☐ *Quietness in word* is a mark of assuredness that doesn't need to shout to be heard, but also of deference that stands ready to be corrected or better informed. Our knowledge is partial, and we dare not anoint ourselves as infallible prophets, self-appointed judges busily correcting other people's faults. A quiet word is more likely to bring healing than is a bombastic tirade. Our own quietness of speech can be an invitation to others, not only to listen carefully to our message, but also to model their speech in similar quiet ways. The late Brother Roger of Taizé was known for his very quiet preaching, and the quietness of his voice drew people in as they leaned forward to catch his words. Even in a crowded cathedral his quiet voice would murmur, and the assembly would hold its breath, bound together in quietness.

☐ *Quietness in deed* flows from the quiet, confident knowledge of the universally available grace of the gospel. When James proclaimed, "faith without works is dead" (2:26) he affirmed that the gospel Truth is manifest in action. Brothers do not merely speak from a lofty podium, but walk the Christian pilgrimage in their Gregorian family, and in the company of the whole church — not as coaches standing on the sideline urging others along, but as companions bearing each other's burdens on the road itself, serving as examples by practice as well as preaching — if not more so. As our Founder once wrote,

When you say your office in public, on the train or bus, in your workplace off in a corner during a break — you are teaching those around you that it

is possible to pray in the world. When you reach out to someone in difficulty and your hand touches theirs, you are healing. Remember the ministry of silence! Preaching takes words; teaching takes words and actions. Healing takes a touch or the meeting of the eyes. That's all.[46]

Quietness in deed is characterized by a kind of shyness — the opposite of being on show and exhibiting our piety. It is one thing to be witnessed praying in public, it is quite another to set out praying with that in mind. A brother prays on the train or bus because that is where he happens to be at the hour of prayer most convenient to him — not to provoke either derision or admiration. To be quiet in deed is to focus on the purpose of the deed, and not its side-effects; to leave that to God. Our quiet deeds should not call attention to ourselves — if the deed has merit, let that merit be given to the deed rather than the doer, and above all to God, to whom alone glory is due.

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46 Richard Thomas Biernacki, "Preach, Teach Heal"

## Quietness — Reflection Questions

The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (Isa. 32:17-18)

**1 — How do you experience quietness? Do you have a “quiet spot” — physical or mental?**

**2 — In what ways do you try to practice quietness of thought? of word? of deed?**

**3 — How do you balance the tension between practice and preaching in your life?**

**4 — Where are your strengths in communication? Your weaknesses or “growing edges?”**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 8. Patience

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! (James 5:7-9)

**P**atience is a rare virtue in our hasty and demanding age. We are accustomed to issuing curt orders to Siri, Google, or Alexa, or pressing a key or flipping a switch to engage an immediate response. Yet this is also the age of call waiting, being put on what seems like perpetual hold as we await customer service from half-way around the world, of tending our devices to spoon-feed them the latest software updates. In the era of tech, there is a lot of room for the exercise of patience.

How much more room for patience does the Christian life provide? In this as in so much else, we have Jesus as our model. His patience, even in relation to us, is profoundly respectful — Jesus does not force himself on us, “for force is not of God.” [47] As one of our brothers writes, Jesus reveals

patience that does not impose itself on its beloved, patience that waits, and hopes, and prays for what can only be offered willingly and openly. Jesus waits for an invitation; a “Dear Jesus, please do something with this hurt,” or simply, “Dear Jesus, help me, please.” [48]

At the same time, the gospel shows us that Jesus himself struggled with patience: on numerous occasions he reveals his impatience with his disciples as they are so slow to understand his teaching; more importantly he reveals impatience with himself and God, as he wrestles with the hard mission ahead of him, saying,

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! (Lk. 12:49-50)

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47 Bland Tucker’s translation of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, *Hymnal* 1982 489

48 Ronald Augustine Fox, “No honor for the prophet,” *The Servant* #184

This shows us that Jesus wrestles with the same stressful temptations to impatience that we are likely to suffer — impatience towards our selves, towards others, and even towards God. That last can be the hardest, but it is amply attested to in the cries of Job, the Psalmist, and even Christ himself. “How long, O Lord?” is the common cry of all humanity, the humanity Jesus shared with us.

### ***The three forms of patience***

Still, in the midst of the storm of life, we are called and invited to the calm of patience — with ourselves, with others, and with God.

☐ Cultivating *patience with ourselves* rests on accepting our limitations. Our time of life is finite, and even were it infinite our individual skills and talents are limited, and our shortcomings or weaknesses limit our capabilities even more. Patience can grow out of a serious stock-taking, an honest assessment of our skills and our weaknesses, together with careful planning and management of our time. Sometimes patience will help us realize we simply are not able to do a given task, and perhaps never will be able to do it. This is not to say we shouldn't aim high, but — as with Jesus' example of the king leading an army or an architect planning a tower (Lk 14:28-32) — we need to be realistic about the resources at our disposal, particularly our own human capabilities, before we allow ambition to make us impatient with ourselves.

☐ Cultivating *patience with others* is a natural development that grows out of being patient with ourselves, and with our experience of the patience God shows towards us. Few hypocrisies are worse than being gentle with yourself while being hard on others. We have a word from Jesus on this, in his parable about the steward who was forgiven a large debt but refused to forgive someone who owed him far less. (Mt. 18:24-34)

One reason we find it easy to be patient with ourselves, to let ourselves off the hook, is that we know ourselves, and all of the extenuating circumstances that we blame for our failures; we don't even have to think about them because we know them, and don't have to explain them to ourselves. We are generous in allowing ourselves to put responsibility for our failings on circum-

stances beyond our control. To pick up the examples cited earlier, the king and the architect — whose own responsibility for bad planning leads to failure — will both find it very easy to put the blame on the troops or the contractors; for some people, it is always somebody else's fault, and never their own. It is very easy to fail to apply the same generous attitude to others; rather than assuming that someone has failed to accomplish a task for reasons beyond their control, we put it down to some innate character flaw, to rudeness or incompetence. How much better always to assume that others face the same difficulties we do, and treat their failures as due to circumstance rather than choice.

After all, we don't always know ourselves well — especially our faults and failings — and often fail to acknowledge that the reasons for our failures stem from our own inadequacies. And if we do not know ourselves so well as we think, we dare not assume that we know others well at all. Given that lack of knowledge *of* others, we should defer the judgment that arises from impatience *with* others, and learn that by being patient with them, we can learn greater patience with ourselves. When we see another person's weaknesses, rather than judging them, we can pause and reflect — as in a mirror — and see the same failings in ourselves.

☐ Finally, we are called to *patience with God*. We ought not presume to judge God or find God inadequate, but we often chafe with anxiety when we feel our prayers are not answered. Few things are more productive of anxiety than the Silence of God. Perhaps, however, it is not that God is silent, but that we have grown hard of hearing. Perhaps by becoming impatient with ourselves and others, we have lost the practice of patience with God — which goes by the names of Faith and Hope. Focusing on the work at hand — for the fields are ripe with grain and the harvesters are few — we can learn patience with ourselves and others and come to embrace God's will in God's good time. As the Apostle Paul urged the Romans, "Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer." (12:11-12) Hands and hearts busy in service to God and to others, following the Rule with focused devotion, will be too busy for impatience.

## Patience — Reflection Questions

O tarry and await the Lord's pleasure; be strong and he shall comfort your heart; wait patiently for the Lord. (Psalm 27:18)  
To be a brother is ... to live humbly, with patience and in service... (The Rule: Preamble)

**1 — What does this Gleaning say to you about God's role in patience?**

**2 — What makes you impatient? How can the Rule help?**

**3 — In what ways does a community act as a school of patience? How does it challenge you?**

**4 — People often think of life in terms of "Things I Must Earn" or "This Is My Education" or "My life is my job." How do these apply (or not) to your practice of patience?**

**5 — Do you find that you chafe when called to be silent? Or when others are silent (including, it seems, God) when you feel a word is needed?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**



# 9. Humility

*To be a brother is to be a healer.* Brothers plant seeds of healing to which God gives growth. Brothers set bones and bandage wounds but it is God who heals. The act of reaching out, the planting of the seed, may not bear fruit for many years and the brother may never know the importance of his actions; but in humility and trust he moves on to bandage other wounds, to touch other hurts.[49]

**W**e know that everything we value about ourselves — our skills, our talents, our faculties — comes from God. That knowledge should make us thankful and also keep us humble. The healer in the citation above knows that he only holds that title as a convenient point of reference — he knows that the healing is actually the work of God, and that the “healer’s” role is as a humble assistant in the process. As noted in an earlier chapter, there is no such thing as a self-made man: everyone’s success depends upon others, and ultimately it all depends upon God, through whom alone we “are able to do any good at all.”[50] Humble recognition of this truth is essential for the healer, and the one being healed.

In Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs, the first few steps in the healing process require one to admit one’s powerlessness over illness, and to ask God, in humility, to remove it. Everyone whom Jesus healed knew their need of healing. Yet in our society of rugged individualists, where “God helps those who help themselves,” it is difficult for us to admit our need for the healing love of God, or our dependency on others for that love — even though this is where the healing process begins.[51]

As the sickness of sin derives from self-centeredness, humility is, as the old hymn reflected, medicine “to heal the sin-sick soul.” Humility is the act of placing oneself in perspective with others and with God.

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49 From a 1987 General Chapter workshop on the identity of Brother as Bridgebuilder, Friend, Proclaimer, Healer, and Harvester. Reported in *The Servant* #115

50 The Rites: the vow of poverty

51 Christopher Stephen Jenks, “Healing Inside Out,” *The Servant* #130

That perspective must be honest, based on a real assessment of where one stands in a society and in a community. While presumptuous pride is offensive, smarmy false humility may be even more creepy. We likely remember the loathsome Dickens' character Uriah Heep bowing and scraping and mumbling about how "umble" he is. Self-deprecation can become a strange form of pride, and even the best of us need to be reminded not to exaggerate how "lowly" we are. TV journalist Tim Russert told of his meeting with Pope John Paul II, who greeted him saying, "You're the man from NBC. They say you are very important!" Russert responded, "Your Holiness, you and I both know there is only one important man in this room." The pope smiled knowingly and nodded, "Right..." [52]

So, humility can be a squishy virtue: claim it, and you lose it! The truly humble are those who don't even think about it, but who simply demonstrate it through their unselfconscious deference to others, not putting themselves either forward or backward — but just doing their work quietly and patiently, as good and effective servants. After all, the best waiter is not the one constantly asking you what you want, bowing and scraping and thereby calling attention to himself, but the one whose service is transparent, and who somehow arrives with what you want before you even think to ask.

The squishiness of this virtue can be a danger to us on the Gregorian Way, as it can be to any Christian pilgrim. The moment we think, "Look how humble I am" we become like the man who says, "I used to be conceited, but now I'm perfect." We can fall into the temptation of seeing ourselves as holy people — beyond our baptismal holiness, that is — and sometimes this can come at the insistence of others who project their need to be near someone whom they perceive to be especially holy. This is where outward symbols — the habit, being called "Brother" — can be snares to catch us in the tangle of pride. People may well expect we have answers about God, about the church, even about their own personal spiritual needs and desires. It is vitally important to our own spiritual well-being, as well as that of those who might ap-

proach us with their questions and expectations, that we admit our lack of knowledge or expertise rather than attempting to take on a role for which we are not equipped — especially when others assume we are.

It may be helpful to recall that when you entered the postulancy, the Brotherhood informed those in positions of spiritual leadership in your local church (your parish clergy and bishop) that membership in the Brotherhood confers no special or particular skills-training or license, and that all such training or licensing for ministry is the responsibility of the proper local authority in the parish and diocese. The Brotherhood, in its own exercise of humility, knows that it exists to *support* its members in their own ministries, but has no authority to *confer* or *license* those ministries.

In the same way, a wise brother will know when to say he does not have a particular skill or knowledge, humbly admitting his limitations rather than being flattered by the assumptions of those seeking his help or advice.

This is why we are reminded of our call to be *servants* — and not just servants, but servants *of servants*. It is an exercise in humility to take the lowest place — not consciously so as to make a point of being lowest, nor in the hope of being raised up or not being humiliated by having to move lower, but unselfconsciously finding ourselves in the natural place for those who actually are serving others; and stepping aside altogether and admitting it when we lack a given skill even to serve.

We cannot do this on our own; as with all good, this comes by grace, as a gift, to be placed in a situation where we can become transparent servants — all of our work focused not upon ourselves, but upon the work and those being served. A philosopher once said that a person's highest joy was the satisfactory exercise of his skills — and serving in a task for which you are equipped can bring joy when the focus is on the service and the one being served, rather than on the servant.

This brings its own challenge — when a brother *does* have such a talent or skill, and is placed in a position of leadership or authority; and learning to retain humility while exercising authority is

impossible if we have not learned humility in inferior roles. As Gregory the Great wrote, “You can not learn humility in a high place if you have not restrained your pride in a low one.” [53] The secret, as Gregory learned and taught based on his own reluctant transition from the monastery to the throne of Peter, is to treat all offices as ministries of *service*, even the highest as service to all — placed in a position of oversight, not to lord it over others, but better to see the needs of the whole body, and to respond to those needs in humility.

The Brotherhood seeks to follow this model in how it approaches its own internal leadership. Although he once went by the title *Superior* the principal pastor of the community is now called *Minister General*, and each province is led by a *Minister Provincial*. All of these are pastors ministering to those in their care, and all share the same identity as *brother*.

It is of course suitable to exercise humility in recognizing and celebrating the commitment made by brothers senior to yourself, in particular those who have made life profession, and “that those who have by the grace of God made this dedication of themselves are due respect worthy the dignity of their consecration.” [54] However, as our Customary points out [55], recognition of one’s length of time in the community — by seating in choir, order in receiving communion, and choosing officiants at the office — is for practical reasons, not to imply any spiritual superiority. This reflects Gregory’s teaching that hierarchy exists solely for the good order of the work of the whole:

God has so ordained that there should be different degrees and distinct orders, so that, while the lesser should show reverence to the greater, the greater should equally love the lesser; that a bond of peace may arise from diversity; and that each of the several tasks may be duly carried out. For otherwise, the whole could not exist; without, that is, the reciprocity of difference empowering the unity of the parts. Furthermore, we learn that creation cannot be ruled, or thrive, in a state of absolute equality, by the example of the heavenly hosts, constituted in ranks of angels and

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53 *Pastoral Care* I.9

54 The Constitution XII.D.2

55 Of seniority in the liturgy, and Of the officiant at the offices

archangels, manifestly unequal; but differing in power and rank one from another. If among these — who are without sin — there is such evident distinction, who among sinful humanity can refuse to submit willingly to this order of things which even angels obey? This is how peace and charity embrace each other mutually, and the sincerity of concord remains firm in the reciprocal love which is well pleasing to God.[56]

As an example of this, while the community recognizes the faculties conferred on the clergy among us, and we rejoice as a community when they make use of those faculties in our common worship, they receive no particular pride of place on account of their role in the church, and no special titles or forms of address intrude upon the fraternal identity that all share as brothers, for all are joined as companions on the Gregorian Way. The Minister General wrote of our humble walking together like this:

The pilgrimage of faith was never meant to be an individual journey for any of us. The community to which we belong and are pledged is what we have searched out. We are reminded of this every time we approach the altar at the Eucharist. This life of Jesus was given to us to be shared — not denied. By taking care of each other and not denying each other, we continue Christ's life within each of us. We need each other. We need the perseverance of our brothers and sisters.[57]

Humility is the grace always to remember this fraternity, this gracious interplay of serving and being served, not as an exercise of *power over* but a joyful companionship of *walking with*. This is what Christ did in coming to us as one of us, coming to *serve* and wash the feet of his followers. We can literally do no less than emulate the one who took the lowest place, so that he might raise up all.

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56 Gregory the Great, Epistle V.54 to the Bishops of Gaul

57 Richard Thomas Biernacki, "Peter's Denial," a sermon delivered at a gathering in Western Louisiana

## Humility — Reflection Questions

Tell the humble that when they abase themselves they ascend to the likeness of God; tell the haughty that when they exalt themselves they imitate the fallen angel. What is more debased than haughtiness... and what is more sublime than humility...?[58]

What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

**1 — Briefly describe how you see the difference between humility and humiliation. How are either operative in your life?**

**2 — How does your understanding of humility affect your relationships with God? With yourself? With others?**

**3 — Does the passage from Micah 6:8 challenge or reinforce your understanding of these relationships? Why and how?**

**4 — How does your understanding of humility reflect the motto, “servant of the servants of God?”**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 10. Charity

*Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est.*

Where true charity and love dwell, God himself is there.[59]

The greatness of charity allows the image of one absent from us to be present as an image in our minds; it unites, through love, what is divided; it clarifies what is confused; it establishes relations between things that are unequal, and brings to perfection those things that are imperfect. The excellent preacher rightly calls charity the bond of perfection, since even though the other virtues can produce perfection, only charity binds them together so that they can never be lost from the heart of one who loves.[60]

**E**ver since the Industrial Revolution mechanized the commercialization of the world, the word *charity* has suffered, reduced almost entirely to the idea of giving money or second-hand goods to some worthy cause or needy individual. Anyone who has been around the church for a length of time has seen the phenomenon: someone gets a new fridge and the old one gets donated to the church! Think about what that says: it wasn't good enough for me anymore, but it's fine for the church. God gets the hand-me-downs.

This is a tragic attitude, an inversion of what charity should mean, and a good diagnosis for the spiritual illness of self-interest and possessiveness. For charity in its original sense is an outpouring of generous love, not a stingy second-hand grant of things I don't want or use or value any more. True charity is ultimately the gift of the best — the love of God in Christ, the greatest gift. For *charity* — as richly hymned by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 — is the greatest of all virtues, the love without which all else is worthless.

True charity is the sister of the vow of poverty, for when we understand our possessions and what we truly need — as opposed to what we may want — we can be empowered to practice a stewardship of abundance that gives generously of the first fruits instead

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59 Early Latin hymn, translation by Joyce MacDonald Glover.

60 Gregory the Great, Epistle V.53 to Virgilius, Bishop of Arles

of second-hand from the sparse leftovers. Charity emerges from an attitude that says there is more than enough for all to share.

We are called to recognize that all we possess comes to us — even what we work for or inherit — from some source outside ourselves. Part of our thanksgiving — giving thanks for those sources, giving thanks for those from whom we inherit, giving thanks for those for whom we work, and giving thanks for the ability to apply whatever skills we have in productive work — takes the form of giving back, of giving away, not just what we don't feel we need, but what we choose to consecrate as loving gifts. This is where true charity begins.

As charitable people we reflect the charity of God, which is not just the overflow of God's abundant excess, but forms the substance of God's being, which is Love, through and through and down to the last drops of blood shed on the cross. It is true that God is abundant beyond all reckoning, and we are finite — yet the finite can reflect a glimmer of the infinite, a narrow snapshot image of the unimaginable panorama, just as a hand-mirror can reflect a fragment of the sky. When we give generously in charity, even though we give only in part, we reflect the generosity of God who gives totally. As one of our brothers reminds us,

Our God is a God of abundant blessing and not of parsimonious stinginess, a God not of crumbs and crusts but of marvelous abundance, of multiplied loaves, and bread showered from heaven enough to feed a people forty years.[61]

The Christian life on the Gregorian Way is meant to proclaim God's loving abundance to those who most need to hear that word of grace, that gift of charity. Doing so in concrete form, by providing out of our abundance for the needs of the hungry, the homeless, the distressed, the abandoned, fulfills the mandate to charity. Jesus is, after all, the one who commanded, "You give them something to eat." (Mt. 14:16)

The Brotherhood's Rule reminds us that "a brother will use the talents given him by God in his service in the work and worship of the church. A brother shall use these talents to the best of his

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61 Tobias Stanislas Haller, "No Boundary to Grace," sermon for Proper 15a



ability in the apostolate and ministry to which he is called.” [62] In observing this aspect of the Rule, we recall that our talents and skills are “given... by God” and that our call is to use them to the best of our ability. The clear implication is that we only have the skills or talents so as to put them to use. This is the mandate of stewardship, the call to charity: that all that we have, all that we are, comes to us as a gift to be shared.

Charity is also marked as a mirror of the divine by the manner in which it is given: not grudgingly, but freely, openhandedly. True charity reflects God’s gracious coming to us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8) — God’s love is unconditional, and our charitable outreach ought also be given without expecting those who receive it even to be thankful, much less to conform to our notions of what they ought to do, or how they ought to behave. Unlike God, we are imperfect givers, as much as those who receive what we offer are imperfect recipients. We bear each other’s burdens and imperfections as our abundance supplies their need, giving from what we have received from God, to the extent we are able, without expecting that we can fulfill and satisfy every last need they might have.

A sister put it this way, in relation to the ministry of healing:

As healers and helpers... we cannot do everything for our charges, we cannot take the burden of their afflictions on ourselves, but that’s all right, because Christ has already offered to do that and he will. He will, especially when we allow others the grace of accepting in their own way the gift of God’s healing, for it’s their acceptance, their faith that brings true health. As fellow sufferers, we may accept the unique healing that God has prepared for each one of us, knowing in our hearts that by our acceptance our faith has made us well.” [63]

Reflecting God’s generosity in our charitable outreach — as individual brothers and as a community through the grants we make each year to ministries nominated by our brothers — is not an end in itself. Charity always reaches beyond the giver, the gift, and the one who receives, as burdens are shared, and the work of God proceeds.

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62 The Rule: Of the work of the brotherhood

63 Susanna Bede Caroselli, CSSG, “Parents and Healers,” a homily on healing

## Charity — Reflection Questions

We are called to extravagant love for our Lord and others, sharing and giving from our alabaster jars of the nard of love, the unguent of life, the ointment of charity and mercy which will, of course, be replenished and renewed when we use it, like the flour and oil in the jars of the widow of Zarephath. The more we give, the more there will be. And you know if the jar had not been broken and the anointing not done, it would not have been the story that it became for John and the other evangelists; it became gospel when it was broken and used.[64]

**1 — What negative feelings or connotations does the word “charity” hold for you? What positive?**

**2 — Who deserves charity? Why? Is anyone undeserving? How would you tell the difference?**

**3 — Can charity contribute to “enablement” — inappropriate care that perpetuates someone’s self-destructive or addictive behavior — instead of empowerment? How do we know the difference?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

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64 Rodney R Michel, “Remember the Jar,” *The Servant* #241

# 11. Courage

Courage has been described as making the decision not to live without fear, but to live in spite of fear. As Christians, we have come to a place that demands more courage of us than we, perhaps, are ready to acknowledge. For we are asked to be companions and friends, not simply of each other, but of the living God; and to live our lives in such a way as is pleasing to him who is greater than all things. Again, we are called to remember that we have never been asked to be successful, only faithful. [65]

Courage is fear that has said its prayers. [66]

**F**aithfulness often requires the virtue of *courage*. The Brotherhood's Founder, in the citation above, highlights the fact that Christians dare to believe that God has, in Christ, chosen to treat us as friends. (Jn. 15:15) That is a courageous statement. Author Annie Dillard once noted the temerity Christians have in worshiping God, in daring to draw near to the Divine Presence without wearing crash helmets. We are courageous to do this in the knowledge that God, like the metaphorical lion Aslan from C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series, "isn't safe; but he's good." And the goodness of God is shown in large part by the gift — through the Spirit — of the faithful courage we need to walk with God. The courage to be with God comes from God, for it is God who has declared us friends.

It takes another kind of courage to walk the Christian walk in a world that is less and less Christian than it was even 50 years ago. Almost every aspect of your life on the Gregorian Way will be looked at by your secular friends as slightly odd if not downright crazy. While some of us can still dimly recall when churchgoing, for example, was the normative behavior for almost everybody, even so basically a Christian act as going to church on a regular basis now sets you apart from the majority of your peers in the secular world. That you will, as a Gregorian, choose to dedicate hours of your time each week to prayer, to meditation, to the study of Scripture and other spiritual works, and to public wor-

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65 Richard Thomas Biernacki, from an archival interview

66 Dorothy Bernard

ship, will be seen by many as a complete waste of your time. And that you devote a considerable portion of your financial resources to the support of the church and this Brotherhood may equally seem — in this moneygrubbing world — to be a pitifully foolish squandering of your hard-earned income.

Let's face it, however — such scorn is a very gentle form of martyrdom; no Gregorian friar is likely to be stoned or burned at the stake in witness of obedience to the Rule. Still, the scorn or derision we might encounter calls for courage in response, the courage to respond with love, in spite of insult. One brother writes: "We have been called to be among wolves, called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." [67] We can do this with the strength that God provides, primarily through the gift of courage.

Courage is what allows us to sustain the challenges we face, not just from others, but as we wrestle with our own doubts and fears. We have a great Companion in this: "Go to dark Gethsemane" if you want to see an example of courage at work in the face of adversity. God knows our pain and suffering, inflicted on him by his own people, his own disciples — not just in the betrayal by Judas, but in the fears and failings of the sheep who were scattered when the shepherd was struck, who denied and abandoned Christ as he offered himself to death on the cross.

One who walks the Christian path in this day and age, especially one who walks in religious life under a rule, will face this struggle and need this courage to bear with the expectations our friends and companions may place upon us.

When you find your fears, your frailties, your incapacities, and your failings overwhelming you, join yourself to Jesus in all your humanity, and reach out to God and one another in prayer. [68]

Courage, then, does not mean not having fear, but facing that fear, working through that fear, to emerge on the other side of that fear. Courage also does not mean facing your fears or your needs alone, as if everything had to be done by you alone.

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67 Thomas Joseph Ross, *Trials and Tribulations*, *The Servant* #154

68 Ciarán Anthony DellaFera, *Beginning Again*, *The Servant* #164

Courage involves the work of discernment and understanding, for the greatest power of fear is the unknown and undiscerned; and when the nature of the fear and the need are known, you can assess your resources and know when to call for help — courage sometimes takes the form of a cry for help, in the knowledge that you cannot save yourself on your own.

One of our brothers, suffering through the terminal illness that eventually took his life wrote:

In order for others to be able to give, to give what is needed, those needs must be made known. We need to confess our needs. Sometimes, allowing others to minister to us is one of the best ways to minister to them. We give others the opportunity to do that which is helpful and which will help them. [69]

Courage is the aspect of faith that keeps faith strong in the face of doubt and fear. When we are tempted to lose trust in God's gracious goodness, to doubt that God wills the best for us, courage is God's gift to restore our confidence.

### ***The vows as courageous response to fears***

Abraham Maslow wrote in the midst of the World War II about what motivates people: What are the needs that drive human behavior? Some are essential to life: food, clothing, and shelter; then comes the need to feel safe and secure; then the need for affection and society; out of that comes the need for esteem and recognition; and finally the need to become all that we believe we are capable of being. (It's not as if this was all discovered in 1943 — Aristotle made similar observations millennia ago.)

Courage confronts the fear of losing the ability to satisfy any of these needs. Courage is the gift to recognize that fears are often unfounded: that our desires for more often blind us to seeing when we have enough. Faithful attention to the vows will help us.

- ☐ Courage — supported by the vow of poverty — helps us keep the perspective that recognizes we often have *more* than we need, not less — even if we don't have as much as we'd *like*.

- ☐ Courage — supported by the vow of chastity — helps us to recognize that we are loved by God, and that the love we show is a gift given to others, not a demand we place upon them.
- ☐ Courage — supported by the vow of obedience — helps us to temper our ambitions within a fellowship and community in which all are devoted to the same purpose: the glorification of God alone.

In the midst of this busy world, we are called sometimes to stand in courageous stillness — simply *to be and to become*. God has prepared for us more than we could possibly ask or imagine — and will give us courage to face the fear of our needs not being met.

When we stand in silent courage — listening courage — we will find reassurance arise within us, for we will know that we stand in God's presence, together with our companions in a common life dedicated to God. In that common life, we take further courage from each other, as we listen to and learn from each other, in the ebb and flow of grace that supports us even as it challenges us to more devoted work.

Courage is the choice to live in faith instead of fear, allowing faith, not need, to be the chief motivator of our lives. Maslow and Aristotle notwithstanding, the Christian life is not a life of need, but of *gift*, not of fear, but of courage. We choose this path, to walk apart from the rat race of the dog-eat-dog world, the world of consumption, and control, and self-will. We choose instead the way of poverty, chastity, and obedience — encouraged by the example of our Savior, and the witness of our companions on the Gregorian Way.

## Courage — Reflection Questions

We need to cultivate a particularly Christian form of courage — a courage that is different from ordinary, run-of-the-mill courage. Christian courage flows out of the love that we are called to have for every man, woman and child we encounter. It is a courage that flows out of the love we have not just for our most intimate family and friends, or our tribe, our culture, or our nation, or our religious community. It is the courage born of the love Jesus calls us to have even for our bitterest enemies. It is the love that Stephen showed not just for the widows and orphans of Jerusalem, but for those who were stoning him to death, including a man named Paul who was holding the cloaks of his murderers.[70]

**1 — What are your greatest fears, and how do you find the courage to face them?**

**2 — How can the community help you in finding that courage?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

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70 Christopher Stephen Jenks, “Steadfast Faith,” *The Servant* #188

## 12. Prayer

Prayer changes the world, and it changes what is possible to God. It creates an island of relative freedom in a world gripped by an unholy necessity. A new force field appears that hitherto was only potential; the entire configuration changes as the result of the changes of a single part. An aperture opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom. The change in even one person thus changes what God can thereby do in that world.[71]

God's call to us to pray is neither whimsical nor irrelevant to God's work with the world. It is not a matter of receiving compliments, nor is it a reminder service informing God of what needs to be done in the world. Rather, prayer is God's invitation to us to be willing partners in the great dance of bringing a world into being that reflects something of God's character.[72]

**P**rayer is a central element in the Christian life, and in the Gregorian life as one form of Christian life. This prayer is verbal and mental, private and public, uttered as a spontaneous cry and recited in the most solemn and ceremonial liturgy. It is not just an action but an attitude. Prayer is nothing other than our relationship with God.

All of the virtues discussed in the foregoing chapters — quietness, patience, humility, charity, and courage — can and do exist in the secular and unbelieving world. But prayer can only exist for those who have some sense of God, at the very least who know their need of God — for that sense and that need are the seeds of relationship. You can hardly have a relationship with someone whose existence you deny — and though it has been observed that there are no atheists in foxholes (as threat to life and limb somehow wrench a prayer from the most doubtful and unbelieving heart), the seeds even of doubt and need can grow and flourish and bear fruit the more you acknowledge your relationship with God, in prayer.

At the same time, our prayerful relationship with God is supported by those virtues:

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71 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*

72 Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *In God's Presence*



- ☐ *quietness* allows us to pray in the stillness of our hearts
- ☐ *patience* strengthens us to wait on God and to listen for God's guidance — which will often come through other brothers, and not when we expect it
- ☐ *humility* allows us to approach God with a receptive and open attitude, with open hands and open hearts free of ambition or pride and ready to serve
- ☐ *charity* impels us to remember the needs of others in our prayers, drawing them into relationship with ourselves and with God
- ☐ *courage* fortifies us with perseverance to continue to witness to God working in our lives and in the lives of our companions

While prayer is supported by these many virtues, it also takes many forms. Not all of them are verbal — in fact it is a great mistake both in the church and in the secular world to imagine that prayer only exists in formal, verbal constructions. A Coptic bishop who was studying for his doctorate at an Episcopal seminary once noted, “In your liturgies, even close to the very end, you will say, ‘Let us pray.’ Well, what have you been doing up to then?” Part of our Episcopal tradition is the relative wordiness of our liturgical prayer, inherited in large part from Thomas Cranmer, who seems to have thought that anything worth saying once was worth saying twice. It is easy to come to think that prayers require words.

But just as the human mind has a deep subconscious pool of pre-verbal and nonverbal emotion and imagery, so too prayer has a deep life that underlies the verbal forms of petition, intercession, adoration, and thanksgiving. That deep pool is the life that is oriented Godward — the intention to be in relationship with God — and it is from the depths of that pool of intention that prayer arises, whether it takes verbal form or not. Some of the most eloquent prayers may consist of grace-filled action that expresses our relationship with God and our neighbors.

That relationship is aimed towards connection and unification — the fulfillment of that for which Jesus himself prayed: that we all

might be one, just as he and the Father are one. Jesus is the perfect pray-er, offering the perfect prayer, in part because he is the unified One in two natures, human and divine, the relationship between the two perfected in the one mystery of the Incarnation. As one of our brothers writes:

Jesus prayed as you and I do — ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ Jesus in all his humanity and in all his divinity reached out for the very same lifeline available to us: prayer. Prayer is our invitation to God to come into the world and work miracles through our humanity.”[73]

What Jesus experienced in his own substance, as living prayer, we emulate in our aim and intention to realize our relationship with God in the act of prayer. We bring all of ourselves before God and offer them to God, in our feelings and our thoughts, in deeds as well as words, in our pains and in our joys. We aim to fulfill the great commandment to love God with our whole self, with mind, heart, soul, and strength; and we hold up our neighbor in prayer with that same love.

This is not a matter of skill, but of honest relationship. To *be* as God *is* may well require not training in some skill, but training in letting go of all skill, of all art and artifice, to pray the prayer of a child who comes to God in just the way God has said we must come. Prayer becomes part of who we are, and it suffuses our daily lives, not as a special formal performance separate from our lives, but as a constant, gentle background melody underscoring everything that we do — conscious of the presence of God around and within us. It is not just the recital in the concert hall, but the humming as you fold the laundry.

This is not to say we do not also exercise ourselves in formal prayer — the Daily Office and the Holy Eucharist provide a framework for our daily and weekly lives. We cultivate a strong sense of community intercession, sharing prayer concerns for our brothers and those whose lives we touch in our families, work, and ministry. But these are the outward form of something that plumbs much deeper and rises much higher — our relationship with God. It is that relationship that makes our ministries more

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73 Ciarán Anthony DellaFera, “Beginning Again,” *The Servant* #164

than an exercise in social service. It is what allows our secular work — in the bank, the school, the household, the office, the hospital, even in the prosaic aspects of work in the church — to become prayer-full, as prayerful and full of the presence of God as Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection was able to make cleaning the pots and pans in the monastery kitchen.

In the midst of our workaday world it is good to recall how it can be enriched by prayer with the knowledge of God's presence. Recall that the paradise of Genesis was not a place of idleness, but a place of work: not a forest from which indolent idlers were to pluck ripe fruit, but a garden which the first humans were charged to tend and maintain — and the first failing of Original Sin was reaching for the fruit they had not tended. Adam and Eve were meant to work with God, in the presence of God, in relationship with God. Their fall lay in going their own way, and they lost the blessing of the consciousness of God's presence thereby.

But because we are children of the Resurrection — Restoration of the Original Blessing — we can live and work with the restored consciousness of God's presence, consciousness of our relationship with God, as each work we do is sanctified and becomes prayer. As one of our brothers writes:

One of the secrets of faith is that the Garden has not been taken away! It surrounds us and is part of us, as is God's love, but we are most of the time locked away from that incredibly powerful cognition of God's presence in ourselves and others by our own actions and state of mind. [74]

Prayer is our way to orient our minds and hearts Godward, our eyes open to God's presence. The exact form of prayer is not what matters — only the content, which is Love. Look, God is standing at your side right now, smiling down upon you as you read. Knowing that is prayer.

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74 Donovan Aidan Bowley, "A Full Earth," address delivered as part of a Creation Spirituality Workshop, Annual Convocation, 1992

## Prayer — Reflection Questions

Q. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.

Q. What is Christian Prayer?

A. Christian prayer is response to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.[75]

1 — Given what was said about prayer in this chapter, can you think of an example of prayer as a response to God “by deeds... without words?”

2 — Name some ways in which you pray to God without words. What makes these into prayer? What forms of “word” prayer do you favor?

3 — What do you find most challenging about prayer as an individual? As a communal activity? What do you find the most rewarding about each?

4 — Before getting to the questions below, write your own prayer, asking God’s blessing for one of your brothers in religious life, and for their ministry. Then write a prayer asking for God’s blessing for you in your walk on the Gregorian Way.

Then answer these questions:

a. Which prayer was easier to write? Why?

b. Is it difficult to pray for yourself? Why or why not?

5 — Share any experience of a time when you felt you could not pray. What, if anything, were you able to do instead of praying? How did you find your way back to prayer?

Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?

# 13. Our Common Life

It is the obligation of the Brotherhood to support the work of a brother in his own witness to the gospel. Every brother is vital to the Brotherhood and is an integral member of the body. Let none be lost through negligence, ignorance or pride; but let each be continually fortified and strengthened with brotherly love one toward another.[76]

For in truth, unity of minds in charity has power to unite more than bodily presence can.[77]

**R**eligious community holds an unusual place in the range of human relationships. At one pole is the family into which people are born, and of which they become members through circumstances over which they have no control; and with very few exceptions, they remain members of that family regardless of what they do, even if they cease all external activities connected with it. At the other pole is the circle of friends or fellow-workers with whom people associate by choice or circumstance, due to common interest or labor, human affection, and the need for companionship. Membership in such a circle is impermanent; though some friendships may last a long time, they do so on a voluntary basis, because the friends want to remain friends.

Religious community takes a bit from both poles: it inclines towards the permanence of a family, but each member's entry is voluntary on the part of the one entering, and discerned and approved by the community. Perseverance in membership is due to the member's continued choice to remain faithful and the community's ongoing support in that faithfulness, by example and encouragement. Religious community, like the church itself, is an *adoptive* family, a family *into* which there is a transitional phase — postulancy and novitiate — before entry into full membership at profession of vows, which may be further sealed by means of life profession. And just as the body of the church pledges to support each newly baptized person in their life in Christ, and welcomes them into that fellowship, so too the

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76 The Rule: Of the life of the Brotherhood

77 Gregory the Great, Epistle to Columbus (III.48)

members of the Brotherhood pledge — as part of their own vows, as expressed in the Rule cited at the opening of this chapter — to work with all diligence, “fortified and strengthened with brotherly love” to support their brothers with attention, discernment, and humility as guards against “negligence, ignorance and pride.”

The decision to remain united in community, and the actual work of remaining in community, takes all of the virtues we’ve looked at in the foregoing chapters. This may be especially true for a community like the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, because we do not share a common domicile — we have to find other ways to nurture and strengthen the bonds of affection, the consciousness of community and commonality; although we also can rejoice in not being constrained in a hothouse of petty antagonisms such as can arise in an enclosed or cloistered setting.

The unity of our fellowship is based on the love we share under a common bond and life under a common rule, not because of a common domicile. There is an old saying that “a house is not a home”; and as Gregory the Great observed,

I myself give thanks to Almighty God, that distance does not separate the hearts of those who truly love each other mutually. For although we are far apart in body, we are present with each other in charity. [78]

We are a network of peers, bound by the unity of charity in which each is answerable to all; not a hierarchy of slaves only answerable to unaccountable masters. Even as a novice, you are accompanied in your journey by brothers who serve as mentors, guides, and supporters — with the purpose of helping you discern your own authentic path, even if it turns out in the end not to be with the Brotherhood.

### ***Love at work***

The primary sustaining force for the life of the community is the love the members feel for God and each other — but such love is more than a mere feeling or emotion, it is a work of the will. In this way religious life mirrors marital life, which requires more than romance to sustain itself over the course of a couple’s life. It

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78 Gregory the Great, Epistle IV.31 to Theodorus, physician to the Emperor

is no accident that the life vows made by a brother are symbolized by the same wedding band a spouse wears; and that it is presented and received with these words:

Receive this ring as the symbol of your life profession of vows. God grant you many years of service to the church. Be ever mindful of the promises you have made.

*The newly life professed brother says*

O God, who has given me grace to wear this ring as a symbol of my life profession, give me the strength to persevere in my vocation, all the days of my life.

C.S. Lewis once wrote that the difference between lovers and friends is that lovers focus on each other, drawn to each other; but friends look to some common focus, and it is the common focus on something else that nourishes their friendship and draws them together. It is helpful to recall that the life profession ring does not bind the brother to the Minister General, or to any other individual member of the community, but that all who wear that ring — and those who have yet to make a final commitment — are each and all bound together by the common focus of our love for God in Christ. He is the great spouse to whom we all are joined. We are One in him; and it is because of him that we love each other as brothers in community.

That love is nourished in our common pursuit of living our Rule. Through this loving work we are daily recalled to consciousness of community, which though separated by miles is living a common life, united in our activities and our aims. The love that binds us is at work as we say the Daily Office, as we partake of the Holy Eucharist, and perhaps even more in the down-to-earth communications, phone calls, and e-mails that keep our spiritual social network alive and strong; and perhaps most especially in our mutual prayer with and for each other.

These daily recollections are further strengthened by the special times when we gather face-to-face, either in provincial retreats, or in Convocation and Chapter. These times together give us the opportunity for fellowship and strengthen our bonds of affection as we worship together in one place. The text of our Gathering Service reminds us that we echo the fellowship of the apostles on the day of Pentecost — and that what bound them together was

not their personal friendship or attachment, but their common unity as witnesses to Christ, strengthened and confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is God who has brought us together, and it is God who will strengthen us to persevere.

While our Annual Convocation is a visible and tangible reminder of our existence as a community — a time for study, fellowship, refreshment, and joint reflection — it is also good to remember that this gathering *is not* the community. Convocation is one of the *tools* used by the community, but the community itself finds its realization in the day-to-day work of the brothers in their own ministries, in their own localities. Like the church itself, we are marked as *being sent* in mission. It is in dispersion that the bulk of our work is done, in keeping with our founding as apostolic servants to the church. This is why Convocation ends with a reminder and consecration of our mission, in a liturgical benediction and sending forth. It is the love of God that calls us together, and it is for the love of God that we go forth, strengthened in that love as a community even when we are not gathered in each other's presence; for we know that it is the presence of God, whom we will encounter in our mission fields, who makes us One.

God's grace in this, as in all else, is a gift. We have been blessed to receive something that many Christians will never experience — a community of faith that transcends the comfortable pew and the familiar stained-glass window, the coffee hour, and the concrete sense of place. We have, instead, a fellowship built on a stronger foundation than even the greatest cathedral — the foundation of a common rule of life, of mutual commitment, of selfless service, of humble gratitude — and loving brothers working and walking together on the Gregorian Way, under the grace of God.

That grace continues beyond our temporal fellowship. As our Founder wrote

Many years ago a sister of the Community of the Holy Spirit told me that the Brotherhood would be truly great when we had a brother in heaven. [79]



Our first brother to depart this life was John Nidecker, who died in 1988. Since then more than a dozen have joined him, and more will follow, for death is part of life. Just as the life of each Christian is “changed, not ended” [80] in death, so too the life of the Christian community is not ended but changed. The church’s members walk the earth, and rest in peace; and we trust that the saints are keeping their watch and supporting us with their prayers. Through them, the Brotherhood transcends time and space.

### ***Living and loving with difference***

Once upon a time there were two monks who shared a humble desert dwelling. One day, the first monk said to his companion, “Why is it that we do not argue as other men do?”

The second said, “I do not even know what it means to argue.” The other said, “Let me, say, set down this brick; and I will say, ‘This is my brick,’ and then you will say, ‘No; it is mine!’ And then we can have an argument.” “Very well,” said his companion.

So the first set down a brick between them and said, “This is my brick.” The second said, “No; it is mine!” To which the first responded, “Well, if it means so much to you, then take it.” [81]

When people share a common life, differences are bound to arise from time to time. The strength of their bonds of affection should shape how those differences are addressed. It is “good and pleasant” when brothers dwell together as one — but the Psalmist surely knew the reality of conflict in community, even to the point of betrayal by his own familiar friend who had walked with him in the house of God. [82]

The Brotherhood recognizes the reality that differences will arise, and it has known times of dissension and disagreement — sometimes even to the point of angry departures. There is a tragic dimension in such failures of charity and humility, and it is our responsibility to guard against them, and to work through our differences with love, patience, and respect.

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80 Preface for the Commemoration of the Dead, BCP 382

81 From the collected sayings of the desert fathers and mothers

82 Psalms 133 and 55

Several mechanisms are in place to help in that regard. Most importantly, any amendment to our Rule requires an overwhelming majority. In addition, many decisions in the life of the community are not made through an up-and-down vote, but by means of a consensus process in which each brother is able to express the *strength* of his opinion on a scale from zero to ten; and if instead of a bell-shaped curve centered around a high number — indicating a strong consensus to act — there is a valley between strongly opposed positions, the community can agree to defer action to another time.

Consensus is also required for profession and life profession. When you are prepared in your own mind, at the end of your novitiate, to petition Council for permission to make your first profession, Council will reach a consensus by the method described above and, if it affirms your request, petition the professed members of your province for their consent. A similar process occurs at life profession. This is not unlike the process by which the church chooses its bishops, in order to ensure a high level of agreement not just at a local or personal level, but holistically throughout the fabric of the whole body.

Learning to live with differences of opinion and submitting your own will to that of the community when things do not go the way you would like them to, are both important skills reflective of all of the Christian virtues. If the Brotherhood is to be a school of charity, it is incumbent upon us all to learn the art of loving disagreement as well as faithful agreement.

## Our Common Life — Reflection Questions

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*  
(BCP 134)

**1 — Every member who enters the Brotherhood changes it. Where have you seen this happen?**

**2 — In what ways can the community nourish and uphold you in your own witness to the Gospel?**

**3 — What does the prayer above (an option at Compline) mean to you? How does it apply to the Brotherhood?**

**4 — Not all are able to maintain their commitments to the Rule or the community. They may be released or withdraw from membership. Have you experienced this, and how did it make you feel? Do you see such departures changing the community?**

**5 — What are ways you can contribute to a sense of fellowship in the day-to-day mission of the community?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 14. A Visible Witness

Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets. (Luke 20:46)

**C**hristians long ago adopted external, visible symbols by means of which to indicate they were members of the church. In times of persecution, these symbols were subtle indicators to those in the know rather than public proclamations: the symbol of the fish — a Greek acronym for Jesus Christ the Son of God; or the knotted strings or bumpy rings that served as rosaries when protestant extremists persecuted Irish Roman Catholics; or the subtle cross patterns tucked away in the corners of Japanese Christian homes during the years of oppression. In more tolerant times, a cross as a pin or a pectoral, or a sticker on the bumper (still in the form of that ancient fish), serves to declare that the wearer or the driver is a Christian professing their faith openly.

Two questions arise: is this declaration true? and is it clear? How often does the gold cross take on — or convey — more of jewelry than of gospel, some nice present on a delicate chain given and received with very little thought about giving or wearing the symbol of Christ's death to the senior prom; and does the bumper sticker's presence remind the driver to adopt a manner of driving marked by respect and courtesy, or earn disrepute when the same driver flips off another, or nudges down the shoulder to sneak onto the exit ramp ahead of the crowd? Any use of Christian symbols requires authenticity and clarity; otherwise the symbol borders on scandal or blasphemy.

Members of religious communities usually — but not always — have an additional means by which to communicate their membership in that community: the habit. So characteristic is the custom of wearing a habit that an old joke suggests one of the first steps in founding a community is acquisition of a sewing machine. This raises the question of authenticity, especially in our day when most religious “habits” are not in fact the “habitual” or regular dress of the members but reserved for special occasions. Because of this, the habit becomes more consciously sym-

bolic, making a statement or sending a message. The meaning it is intended to convey becomes all the more important.

In the case of the Brotherhood, there was no special habit at the beginning.

When the Brotherhood was founded on September 14, 1969, in the chapel of the Monastery of the Visitation, Riverdale, New York, the new community envisioned its mission and ministry as an ecumenical order for organists and so was clothed accordingly; the four original brothers wore black cassocks and the organist's surplice with open sleeves, and the chaplain presented each of them with a cross suspended by a cord. These four crosses — the only ones in that design — were created and inscribed by the Sisters of the Visitation, with an obverse inscription of "Soli Deo Gloria" and a reverse of "S. Gregorio Magnum." [83]

Back in those days, almost anyone who saw a brother in an organist's surplice could know they were organists — but would not know they were living under vows, since lots of people wear neck crosses (although the tradition reserves them to religious and bishops, and to bishops largely because in the early days they were nearly always monastic.) So a feeling arose that a more distinctive habit was in order; when introduced, it was in a severe black form, and it was only after a few more years that the community adopted the present habit with white tunic (originally draped at the shoulders with a capuche) and brown scapular. The move away from the strictly work-oriented nature of the organist's cassock and surplice was clearly a conscious decision to make a statement.

Which raises the question of clarity: is the habit an *effective* symbol? What does it say to the uninformed? Does it communicate what we mean it to communicate?

We have acknowledged that in common with almost all modern religious communities, our habit is not our normal street dress. When and where we wear it is a conscious decision, a choice to remind ourselves of things as we wear it, and communicate things to others by wearing it. The habit has meanings for us which will not be evident to anyone outside of the community. Although

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83 James Teets, "A Record of Evolution," *The Servant* #226. This article is commended to you as a detailed history of the development of the Brotherhood's habit

these *private* meanings derive from a long tradition, and anyone familiar with that tradition could well understand these meanings, for the most part the habit will say only one thing to the outside world: this is a church person.

For many, the assumption will be specific — and wrong: this is a Roman Catholic church person. It is no secret that many Episcopalians are unaware of the existence of religious communities in the Episcopal Church. The habits worn by members of these religious communities can be effective means of correcting that ignorance — but only to the extent that people stop and ask. It isn't unusual for people to think you are a visiting Roman Catholic even in an Episcopal parish church.

This can become “a teaching moment,” and forms a part of our testimony to the gospel — that religious life can be and is being lived out in this Anglican context — and we are here to prove it! We will often be called on to expand upon it, because even among Episcopalians familiar with traditional religious communities of our church, the next question after learning that you are a Gregorian friar may be, “Where is your house?” This will present you with an additional teaching opportunity, to share the good news about *apostolic* communities in the Episcopal Church.

All of this goes to show that the habit does not communicate its meanings (that is, what we intend by it) *on its own*. It provides an opportunity to *witness* to those meanings, and it is incumbent on all of the brothers to be able to do so when the occasion arises.

So, what does the Brotherhood intend to say by means of the habit and its various parts? The best way to grasp these meanings is to look at the rites of the community, the words which are used to consecrate the various parts of the habit, and the words used as they are presented to each novice and professed brother.

☐ *The cross* has two forms: the postulant / novice cross, and the profession cross. There was a time when they were all made of wood, identical except for the inscription “Soli Deo Gloria” on the front of the profession cross. At one point Chapter adopted a silver chain for the profession cross; and at a later date still the profession cross was rendered in metal — the existing wood crosses for postulants and novices being retained and still in use.

The Brotherhood cross in both forms is blessed with the same words, to be “a symbol of the saving death of Christ our Lord.” It is a reminder that beyond all else, this is what the cross *is*. It is not a piece of jewelry, an adornment or an accessory. It is why we are what we are.

The officiant presents the postulant / novice cross with these words: “Receive this cross, that in all things you may be mindful of Christ.” This is what the cross *is for*: it is there to serve as a reminder, as an effective symbol communicating Christ to us and to all who behold it.

Finally, at first profession the officiant presents the profession cross in these words, “Receive the cross of the Brotherhood, that in all things you may glory in the cross of Christ alone.” The newly professed brother responds, “O God, who has given me grace to wear the cross of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, give me grace to be worthy of the vocation to which I am called.” This is ultimately what the cross *is for us*: the words of the officiant remind us of the Brotherhood’s motto inscribed on the front of this cross, and the purpose for which it is given, that we may give glory to God in all that we do. The brother’s response pledges him always to wear the cross in a worthy manner. For the manner in which we wear the cross will determine in large part how effective it is as a symbol in all it is meant to convey — as with that bumper sticker, if we behave badly while wearing the cross it will reflect not only on us but upon that cross, bringing contempt on us, on the church, and on Christ.

As you know, a postulant has no habit apart from the cross, and even for a novice or professed brother the cross is the essential element of the habit — this is why brothers are encouraged to wear the cross with street dress, and are required so to do when wearing clerical attire. If there is any time you might be inclined *not* to wear the cross, you have an opportunity to self-examination: is it purely practical, or is there some other reason? And is that reason worthy?

☐ **The tunic** is blessed, “that our brother may be clothed in humility and know the joy in obedience that is given to every child of God.” It is presented with these words, “The Lord clothe you with grace, that you may walk steadfastly in righteousness.”

Because the tunic is presented at the novitiate, the form of the blessing reminds the wearer of the promise of obedience he has made, and that it is essentially an alb — the baptismal garment common to all of God’s adopted children. The words of the presentation remind us that it is bestowed with a purpose, like the grace of God itself, which is meant to bear fruit, and not be buried away hidden. We are dressed in our work clothes, ready to do the work of righteousness.

☐ **The *cincture*** is derived from the standard secular belt of a medieval pauper — a mere rope around the waist. Our version has two forms, one for the novice with knots only at the ends (or ending in frayed tassels), and the other for the professed which has three knots towards one end, representing the three vows. The form of the blessing is identical for both, asking “that our brother may be bound with the strong Name of God against all evil and impurity.” The form of the presentation is almost identical, differing only by one word. The novice’s cincture is presented, “May you be girded about with strength and upheld to do God’s work in the world,” while the professed brother’s form substitutes “God’s *will*” for “God’s *work*.” This emphasizes that the professed brother is now engaged with and by his vows, by an act of his own will submitted to the will of God. The literal binding on of the cincture is a reminder to restrain his self-will, and place himself under the authority of God, answerable to the community. And many a professed brother can attest that the feeling of the knots that symbolize the vows is a constant reminder as they knock against their shins.

☐ **The *scapular*** derives from another ordinary secular article of clothing, the apron. As such it symbolizes manual labor. The form of blessing says as much, invoked so that “our brother may always be kept in the life of dedicated service, and that all may be done to the glory of God alone.” The presentation with the words, “May God direct the work of your hands this day and always” should be sufficient to drive the point home — this is a sign of service.

☐ Finally, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, the ***life profession ring***, derived from the secular wedding ring, is blessed “as a symbol of God’s all-encompassing love, and as a constant reminder of the vows made final this day.” The officiant



presents the ring, and the brother receives it, with this interchange:

Receive this ring as the symbol of your life profession of vows. God grant you many years of service to the church. Be ever mindful of the promises you have made.

O God, who has given me grace to wear this ring as a symbol of my life profession, give me the strength to persevere in my vocation, all the days of my life.

This ring serves the same purpose as a wedding ring: to remind the brother of the vows made to God in the presence of the community. As the old folk song about the “ring that has no end” reminds us, these vows are intended to be lasting and final.

### ***All dressed up***

This is the habit, and these are the parts of which it consists. The question is, when should you wear it? The only time the habit is required is at certain functions of the Brotherhood, particularly at liturgies in which the habit is bestowed either on a novice or a brother making profession. Brothers often wear their habit at Convocation, and when gathered for retreat on a provincial level. Some brothers wear their habit in their home parish when they are functioning in the liturgy — although the habit is not a liturgical vestment; it is the equivalent of the secular clergy habit, the cassock (though most clergy, like most religious, no longer wear such a habit “habitually”). That being the case, if a brother is an altar server in a parish with a standard dress code of cassock and cotta, and if those in charge of the ceremonial approve of the brother wearing the habit as a server, he should also wear a cotta over the habit. Choir dress would include a surplice over the habit, in situations where a secular cleric would wear cassock and surplice. (Since the tunic is essentially an alb, some of our priest brothers will wear a chasuble over the whole habit when celebrating the Holy Eucharist.)

The fact is that none of these habits — the Brotherhood’s habit or the cassock of secular clergy — are daily dress. They become almost entirely symbolic means to communicate that one is a brother, or a cleric, and there are appropriate times to do so. For instance, if brothers are invited to process in a diocesan liturgy or

serve outside their home parish at a diocesan convention or other function, wearing the habit can be a testimony to their presence in the life of the diocese.

However, wearing the habit outside of the liturgy or other church contexts raises the question of how useful the habit is as a communication tool. People will bring their own baggage to their understanding of what your habit means — and most times it will be wrong. So consider the effectiveness of such “witness” — especially if it is likely to be misunderstood. It is your responsibility to take advantage of any such public encounter that stems from curiosity about the habit you wear: to teach, to pray, and to attest to God’s blessing.

### ***Other outward signs***

☐ A few brothers who make use of the ***rosary*** or other form of ***prayer beads (or ropes)*** as a devotion also wear the beads or ropes as part of their habit. Such things can be helpful in prayer, but if one does not make use of them for that purpose, they ought not be worn — again, they become bling rather than blessing, and do not witness to the truth of your own devotional life.

☐ Several brothers also wear the ***zucchetto*** — a small skull cap covering the top of the head. Originally this was meant to protect the scalp left bare by the tonsure, the part of the head shaved in the antique profession liturgies. Even though we no longer shave the head, the zucchetto symbolizes the same dedication. If a brother chooses to wear one in the liturgy, he should know the few rules concerning when to take it off: remove it during the preface and replace it after the ablutions; it is also removed in any liturgy where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. As with the habit, wearing the zucchetto in public will likely lead to more miscommunication than otherwise, as most people will think it is a yarmulke. So bear that in mind.

☐ Many brothers also wear a ***witness shirt*** — a short hooded tunic in brown or white. These were originally designed by the Trappist monks to wear when traveling or leading public programs. They are practical for all sorts of situations, and like the habit can be conversation starters.

## ***Of signs and signing***

Finally, this is a good place to mention two other external signs — but ones which have nothing to do with how you dress. This concerns the postnominal letters that follow your name, and indicate you are a member of “BSG” — at present introduced by the “n/” that marks you as a novice. These will also present an opportunity for educating others: some will think they represent some kind of academic degree (“Bachelor of Sacred Geometry”) or an affiliation with Battlestar Galactica!

The other outward sign concerns how you make use of “Brother” or “Br.” Remember, this is not a title, or a part of your name, but a form of address, and should be used in places where forms of address are used. It should not form a part of your signature — any more than “Mr.” or “Dr.” would be — and should be used in exactly the same way: mostly for other people, not yourself. It is the postnominal “BSG” that indicates you are a Brother — and there is really no title that goes with that calling.

## ***A final hard thought***

In conclusion, recall that all of these outward signs are meant to reflect an inner reality. Do not risk becoming like those who loved to dress in long robes to receive respect and adulation. The bluntest way to put the question is: would you want to be part of the Brotherhood, taking on all its responsibilities and duties, if there were no outward and visible sign that you were a brother? Would your work and life speak for itself?

## A Visible Witness — Reflection Questions

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Mt. 6:5-6)

**1 — Reflect on how it felt the first time you wore your habit after entering the novitiate.**

**2 — If you have worn your habit in public, do you notice any reaction from people around you? What was the difference between the reactions of people who know you and the reactions of strangers? Why did you choose to wear the habit in this setting?**

**3 — When do you think you will be inclined to wear your habit or the witness shirt? When not? What are your reasons for making that decision?**

**3 — Do you believe that religious clothing conveys a sense of the authority of the person who wears it to those around him?**

- a. If it does, what kind of authority does it express and are you prepared to take ownership of it?
- b. If it doesn't, what do you believe religious garb says to people?

**4 — Concerning your cross: what message do you want to convey when you wear it?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 15. Worship: The Holy Eucharist

All people are called to worship the Lord, taking joy in doing so. Unfortunately, for many Christians this service becomes servitude, often dull and unhappy. We should want to praise the Lord with hearts full of gladness! [84]

Given that worship forms a central role in the Christian life, and that service in liturgical worship has always been so important in the ministries of most of our brothers, it may seem odd that it has taken this long to get to the topic. It may be that it goes without saying, given its centrality and importance. But it is high time to say something and to reflect about what worship is and the place it holds in the life of the brothers and the Brotherhood.

The first thing to note about worship, in the Holy Eucharist and the Daily Office, is that it is *corporate*. It is not a form of individual private devotion but of communal prayer; it is also usually — and in the Holy Eucharist, always — public. A priest or bishop never celebrates the Eucharist alone — a server at the very least is required; and even when you say the Office alone and in private, you are joining countless others in a common prayer.

That common prayer is shared by the whole church — and even though Gregorians may have their own particular customs when gathered for the Eucharist or the Office, these customs are particular to the Brotherhood in the same way similar customs are to any given parish. Our common worship does not set us apart from the church but reaffirms that we are united with it — not just in terms of the current authorized worship formularies, but in a tradition that goes back thousands of years. We worship as *part of* not *apart from* the church. That *being part of* finds its greatest culmination in the Holy Eucharist, to which the remainder of this chapter turns.

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84 Richard Thomas Biernacki, "Reflection on Psalm 100," *The Servant* #240

## ***Brothers and bread***

Christ's coming is always within. He comes from above, but he appears within. He enters us as we feed on him. He comes into our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our being. He dwells within us always. We must never lose sight of him... and see him in the Eucharist. As he is lifted up, he draws us all to him — daily, weekly. He is with us as we can exclaim, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia!" [85]

The community we celebrate in the Eucharist transcends time and space in a way unlike any other ritual or ceremony. In this liturgy we reaffirm our continuity with Christians going back to the apostles gathered with the Lord in the upper room, and ever since throughout the world. This is a good reminder that the path we follow as Gregorians is simply one track on the broad highway, running alongside, sometimes crossing, sometimes overlapping with the tracks of countless other Christians who have gone before us, walk with us now, and will come after.

And here, in the Holy Eucharist, we rest for a time with our Lord, responding to the invitation to eat at his table. In this celebration we consume the Word of God in two forms: in the text of the Scripture "inwardly digested" and in the substance of Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of Christ. The words of Scripture enter our hearts and minds, and the Body and Blood enter our bodies, literally becoming part of us through the Holy Spirit. As one of our brothers wrote:

The Holy Spirit descends upon us and upon the gifts we offer in a sacrifice of thanksgiving in and for the mercy of Christ, in which we partake of that holiness, and are made holy and one, even as God is holy and one — and then we are equipped to go forth for service to the wounded world. That is what we do when we gather at this table to share our daily rations, our fast-like feast, the pilgrim food we feed to one another until the bridegroom comes. [86]

As we receive communion, perhaps most so when we do so gathered as a visible community at Convocation, we can be more conscious of that community, remembering that our reception of

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85 William Bunting, "Christ will come again," *The Servant* #99

86 Tobias Stanislas Haller, "Heart of the Matter," *The Servant* #164

this Holy Food is not simply an act of private, personal devotion, but a corporate act. The next time you receive communion at Convocation, take a moment to reflect on those present with you as they go to receive their portion of the Holy Gifts; do this in your parish, too, and appreciate the presence of your brothers and sisters as living bearers of the most precious Body and Blood. As Canon Edward Nason West used to teach, after we receive communion we should genuflect to each other in recognition of Christ's presence within each of us. (This is not likely a custom the Brotherhood will ever adopt, though it appears in later years a custom arose spontaneously whereby brothers would bow to one another as they formed a line going up to receive Communion.)

### ***By week and by day***

The Rule calls us to participation in the Eucharist at least once in each week, and if possible each day. *Possible* is a word that requires some unpacking — in its most literal meaning it may be physically possible, in an urban setting, to find a parish with a daily Eucharist; but it may be terribly inconvenient or disruptive to one's work or family life to adopt a strict and literal understanding of *possible*. In a rural or suburban setting it may be far less possible, without extended travel. There is no question that the Brotherhood joins the church in maintaining that the Holy Eucharist is "the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's day and other major Feasts," and that the regular services appointed for daily use are those of the Daily Office, about which more in the next chapter. (BCP 13) A brother is vowed to commit to maintaining such a schedule of observance at the very least, taking advantage of the daily Eucharist when he can do so in an unhurried and reflective way.

The Rule also requires a brother properly to prepare (and give thanks) for the Eucharist, but it offers no additional direction as to the form or content of this preparation. There is a wide range of traditions concerning preparation for the Eucharist, from a regimen of fasting and prayer, to simple centering and anticipation making use of the Liturgy of the Word as preparation in and of itself.

In terms of “giving thanks” it is good to recognize that the Eucharist itself is the Great Thanksgiving, but again there are a number of traditional forms of giving thanks for the Eucharist — from a moment of quiet reflection to a formal prayer. A brother should make use of the forms of preparation from his tradition; or if he has none, speak with his mentor or his Minister Provincial or other spiritual advisor and try one or more of the many forms available; perhaps beginning with the forms of prayer available in the Book of Common Prayer beginning on page 833.

The important thing is to remember that the Eucharist is a gift — the greatest gift, and it is to be received with thanks, not anxiety, perplexity, or pride.

For there is knowledge that comes from using your head, and knowledge that comes from eating bread. And this is where the Holy Eucharist comes in. Like the bishop who when asked if he believed in infant baptism replied, “Believe in it? Why, I’ve *seen* it!”—we do not simply believe in God and his Son Jesus Christ; we have not even merely *seen* him. We — who believe — have held him in the palms of our hands, taken him into our bodies, and been nourished with the bread that gives life to the world.[87]



## The Holy Eucharist — Reflection Questions

The Holy Spirit descends upon us and upon the gifts we offer in a sacrifice of thanksgiving in and for the mercy of Christ, in which we partake of that holiness, and are made holy and one, even as God is holy and one — and then we are equipped to go forth for service to the wounded world. That is what we do when we gather at this table to share our daily rations, our fast-like feast, the pilgrim food we feed to one another until the bridegroom comes.[88]

1 — What does “feeding one another” mean for you?

2 — What are ways we feed one another outside the context of the Holy Eucharist? How do you believe the Eucharistic feast enables you to do that?

3 — What does it mean to be “bread for the world” ?

4 — This chapter reflects on some of the issues about attending a daily Eucharist “when possible.” Where do you find yourself with regard to this *possibility*?

5 — Do you have any particular form or preparation for the Holy Eucharist?

Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?

# 16. Worship: The Daily Office

When we sing the Psalms, we remember all that our carelessness has brought on us, or our effort has secured, or divine providence has granted to us, or slippery and subtle forgetfulness lost to us, or human weakness brought about in us. [89]

**T**he Daily Office, centered on the recitation of the cycle of the Psalms and the ordered reading of the Holy Scriptures, has formed the meat and potatoes of the worship life of almost all religious communities from the very beginning. This is no less true of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, even though our opportunities to share the Daily Office in choir are far less frequent than it is for those who live in a monastic setting. In our “monastery without walls” we are more like the mendicant friars or missionary Jesuits — more likely to recite the Office at a physical remove from others. Still, we are bound by the knowledge that other brothers have been or will be saying the same words — though physically separated in space and time, we are united in the substance of this worship.

Christians have been doing this for centuries, picking up a tradition from our Jewish forebears. This sanctification of the daily round of life has been carried out in some form for millennia, an insistent rhythm mirroring the cycles of the cosmos, the cosmic dance of the sun, moon, and stars, as the earth pirouettes to sun itself on all sides each day, and the moon revolves each month, and both patiently process around the sun year by year.

The Brotherhood sanctifies each day through the four-fold form of the Office restored to us in the 1979 revision of the Book of Common Prayer, which added Noonday and Compline to supplement the longstanding practice of Morning and Evening Prayer. Because we make daily use of the Noonday Office, our customary expands the Psalter to provide more variation, making use of Psalm 119 extended over each week, with additional psalmody for the days when Psalm 119 is used at Morning or Evening Prayer.

We use the classical Anglican monthly cycle for the recitation of the Psalter, in the course laid down by Thomas Cranmer in the first Book of Common Prayer. This form is preferred for several reasons. First, it includes some of the Psalter passages omitted in the BCP lectionary's seven-week cycle. This allows us to take John Cassian's advice cited at the head of this chapter, and to face those hard nuggets of frail human reality that make the psalms a challenge. It is commendable, of course, to read these passages of anger and cursing not as self-justification with someone else in mind, but to consider how it might feel to have them directed against yourself, and your own failings!

This cycle also gives us the opportunity to experience the sometimes dissonant intersection of feasts with penitential psalms — much as one can enjoy the dissonances of passing notes in a Bach chorale. The dissonances we encounter in this orderly reading serve as reminders that at the heavenly scale our cycles of prayer mirror, the orderly laws of gravitation and of physics, as they work upon the substance of the cosmos, will sometimes have the effect of wiping out the dinosaurs.

Second, it has the practical advantage of not requiring additional page turns — one of the reasons Cranmer first introduced it, as he noted in the Preface to the first Book of Common Prayer (that it took longer to find your place than to read what was there when you found it!).

Beyond these daily and monthly cycles, we are also caught up in the yearly procession of the church's stately march from Advent through Christmas and on beyond to Epiphanytide, the season that stretches out towards or shrinks away from Lent depending on the date of Easter. That feast's date is still determined by the moon, in relation to the spring's equal balance of day and night — so linked are we still to the heavens' movements. Then on we run again to bright red Pentecost and thence through the greenery to Holy Cross, the year fully marked and quartered with ember days, and finally back to Advent once again, our year draped with liturgically colored prayer all along the way.

## ***Together or apart***

The Daily Office forms a major part of our Gregorian lives whether we are gathered in Convocation or retreat, or in our diaspora throughout the world. Visitors and friends have expressed surprise at how quickly the brothers are able to sing the offices together with little or no rehearsal even though we have been apart for from six months to a year. This is a true sign of a common spirit, but also of the faithfulness of the brothers saying the Office on their own and continuing to use the authorized forms as required by the Rule.

Faithfulness in praying the Daily Office is important to the life of the community and to each of its members. It binds us together whether we are physically in the same place or separated by miles and hours. It binds us to the church and its traditions, in forms passed down for millennia, authorized by the church to which we promise our obedience. It is not about uniformity for its own sake, but uniformity for the sake of our brothers in the community — and our many sisters and brothers in the church — that we be at one with them in prayer.

As you sit to pray the Daily Office, with a page-worn book or an app on your iPhone, in your living room or in a quiet corner, on the subway, or in a pew of the church before the communal worship begins, no matter the hour, someone else in the breadth of Christendom is offering the same sort of prayer as you, perhaps another of your brothers in this community — or perhaps someone who may one day become your brother, drawn by this prayer. As you open your lips to proclaim God's praise in the morning, or bid God guard you sleeping by night, you are not alone — the Office assures you there is no such thing as a solitary Christian.

## The Daily Office — Reflection Questions

We thank thee that thy Church, unsleeping  
while earth rolls onward into light,  
through all the world her watch is keeping  
and rests not now by day or night.

As o'er each continent and island  
the dawn leads on another day,  
the voice of prayer is never silent,  
nor dies the strain of praise away.[90]

**1 — What do you find the most challenging about the Daily Office? Most rewarding?**

**2 — Are you conscious of others praying the Daily Office as you do? How does the experience differ when you are at Convocation?**

**3 — Do you prefer using a book or books for the Office, or do you prefer the Daily Office app or webtool?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

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90 John Ellerton, *Hymnal 1982*, 24

# 17. The Writings

A brother shall set aside two hours or more in each week for the study of Holy Scripture or other material on the spiritual life.

The example and teachings of our patron, Saint Gregory the Great, shall be held in high esteem by each brother. A portion of his biography or his writings shall be included in the annual reading of each brother, to be assigned by the Minister General at Annual Chapter. [91]

The Word of God is, as it were, a kind of river that is both shallow and deep, so that a lamb may wade, and an elephant may float at large. [92]

**C**hristians inherit our connection with the written word from our Jewish forebears, for whom what we call “The Old Testament” formed a library with three sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. Our “New Testament” is appended as a library of Sacred Story (the Gospels and Acts), Letters to the early Christian communities, and one unique book of Revelation. Together these writings — with a few additions or deletions depending on the tradition — make up what we Christians call “the Bible” or “The Holy Scriptures.” The church as a whole reflects on these texts in the context of worship in the Holy Eucharist and Daily Office, but how individual Christians read and reflect on these sacred texts on their own is left up to their personal discretion.

Except, of course, when a Christian is a member of a community such as ours, which requires two or more hours a week committed to the reading and study of the Scripture, or other spiritual material. In addition, as Gregorians, we look to the writings of Gregory the Great as sources of inspiration and reflection.

## ***The Bible and other spiritual works***

In one such Gregorian writing, our Patron makes the following personal commendation concerning study of Scripture:

I have one complaint against you; namely that you have received from God the gifts of genius, wealth, mercy, and charity, and yet you are unceasingly busy in worldly affairs, and neglect to read the words of your

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91 The Rule: Of private devotion

92 Gregory the Great, the introductory Epistle to his *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, IV

Redeemer daily. For what is the Scripture but a kind of epistle of Almighty God to his creature? Surely, if you were to receive letters from an earthly emperor, you would not delay, you would not rest, you would not give sleep to your eyes, until you had learned what the earthly emperor had written to you. Well, the Emperor of Heaven, the Lord of men and of angels, has sent you his epistles for your life's benefit; and yet, my dear one, you neglect to read these epistles ardently. Study then, I beg you, and daily meditate on the words of your Creator. Learn the heart of God in the words of God, that you may yearn more ardently for the things that are eternal, that your soul may be kindled with greater longing for heavenly joys.[93]

While Gregory commends daily reading, there is no set pattern for how a brother might choose to read and reflect on the Scriptures apart from the Office and Eucharist. Some might set up a time — during Lent for example — to read through the whole Bible. That sounds ambitious; but as the Bible is about a thousand pages long, one can manage to read the whole text through the forty days of Lent at the rate of 25 pages a day. Another option is to include an additional reading in the Daily Office (from the alternate year) — though it is important to note that even the modern Daily Office lectionary doesn't include the entire text of the Bible. Or one might follow some other arrangement of suggested biblical readings, perhaps on a particular theme; or participate in a Bible study group in a parish setting or a clericus.

Another option is to dive deeply into some particular portion of Scripture, a book or section of a book, making use of a commentary as a guide. Recall, however, that this study is not primarily intended as an intellectual exercise, but as an enrichment of one's spiritual life, informed by the Scripture. At the opposite pole from a more studious approach, one can relish and savor shorter sections of Scripture through *lectio divina* — a particularly meditative rumination on the text.

When it comes to “other material on the spiritual life” the field of religious literature lies open before you: works of scholarship, historical analysis, biblical archaeology, devotion, philosophy, theology, and spirituality — to say nothing of the possibility to explore spiritual and religious traditions outside of the Christian stream.

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93 Gregory the Great, Epistle IV.31 to Theodorus, physician to the Emperor

How you choose to chart such an exploration is up to you; though it is always appropriate to ask for a recommendation from your mentor, minister provincial, a member of the education committee, or another brother, or from someone outside of the Brotherhood whose opinion you value.

However you choose to engage with the Scripture and other spiritual materials, the time spent will bear fruit in proportion to the intention you bring to the work. Take the time to reflect and, as the language of the old collect suggests, “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” what you read and study — so that it may nourish you and become part of you. Our reading and study is to a purpose. As our Founder wrote in 1980:

Each time we read, mark and inwardly digest the words of the Gospel, we must be responsible to the truth which the Holy Spirit unleashes. If we are to change anything in ourselves, our churches, or our world, we must be dedicated to serve.[94]

### ***The life and work of Gregory the Great***

Every year, a portion of Saint Gregory’s writing is assigned for our communal reflection — often from one of his forty gospel homilies, a copy of which was presented to you on your admission to the postulancy. This passage may or may not be a focus of reflection at a Convocation, or at a provincial retreat.

You are welcome to read other writings by Saint Gregory, and there is much to choose from, and many biographies devoted to his life and ministry. Here is a list of his major works — most of them can be found online (in somewhat old-fashioned translations) and a few have appeared in print in modern editions.

- ☐ Epistles: Pope Gregory corresponded with bishops, clergy, monks, and political leaders. Letters to Augustine of Canterbury give a view of the origins of the English church.[95]

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94 Richard Thomas Biernacki, “Responsible to the Truth,” *The Servant* IV.6

95 Some of his letters were dramatized in the video at the BSG website, “Scenes from the Life of Gregory the Great,” including his correspondence with Augustine of Canterbury, and the convivial Bishop of Salona.



- ☐ Homilies: the forty gospel homilies and homilies on the prophet Ezekiel
- ☐ Dialogues: an early biography of Saint Benedict, and stories of the miracles and wonders performed by early saints
- ☐ *Regula Pastoralis*, variously translated as *The Book of Pastoral Care*, or *Pastoral Practice*, is his reflection on what it means to have the charge of a community, as a bishop. It became a classic of Western Christendom.
- ☐ *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job (Moralia in Job)* is a massive commentary on this poetic book of the Bible, one of the longest commentaries ever written on a single biblical book. It was praised for centuries as a treasure trove of reflection on the historical, allegorical, and moral meanings of the text. A modern translation has been produced by Cistercian Publications, in six volumes.

You will likely find in Gregory a mix of old-fashioned piety and very perceptive psychology. Like the members of the Brotherhood, Gregory lived an amphibious life — a person of deeply contemplative prayer finding himself living in a very secular and political environment. Learning how he managed to retain his faith and enrich it — and that of those around him — may help you to do the same.

## The Writings — Reflection Questions

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*[96]

**1 — What differs in your experience of Scripture in public worship as opposed to individual study and reading?**

**2 — When does Scripture speak most effectively to you?**

**3 — What other kinds of “material on the spiritual life” do you read and study? What do you derive from it?**

**4 — What has been your reaction to reflection on the assigned readings from Saint Gregory?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 18. Meditation and Reflection

A brother is required to meditate for fifteen minutes in each day unless he is to hear or deliver a sermon or homily on that day. [97]

A brother shall make a careful examination of conscience as to his observance of the Rule and report as directed. He shall heed any counsel which may be given to him as a result of this report. [98]

Brothers shall take regular opportunities for reflection and self-examination, under the guidance of the pastoral officials of the community, who may provide resources and direction to assist them in the exercise of this spiritual discipline. The traditional Ember Days are particularly appropriate occasions for such reflection and dialogue.

The report required by the Rule (Of individual renewal) shall be made at a mutually agreeable time, at least annually, and in person if possible. Ministers Provincial shall report to the Minister General, and other brothers shall report to their Minister Provincial. The Minister General shall report to a chaplain or spiritual director chosen by him, who need not be a member of the community. [99]

Associated with each annual chapter meeting shall be the Annual Convocation of the Brotherhood. All brothers and postulants are required to attend. Council may call other Convocations of the community, attendance at which shall not be mandatory. [100]

## ***Meditation***

**L**ike personal prayer, meditation takes many forms, and not every form is suitable to any one individual. Although the form of meditation called for in the Rule is not specified, a clue to the original intent may lie in the proviso concerning a sermon or homily. That is, if a homily or sermon is regarded as a reflection on Scripture or some other topic, a meditation might be such a similar reflection carried out alone. If you have heard or delivered a sermon or homily on a given day, you will have fulfilled this requirement of the Rule.

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97 The Rule: Of private devotion

98 The Rule: Of individual renewal

99 The Customary: Of reflection and response

100 The Customary: Of personal and corporate retreat

Original intent aside, there are clearly many other ways to meditate than through homiletic reflection on Scripture. Meditation, as a discipline, transcends our own religious tradition, and for some other traditions it forms an even more central part of religious practice.

Some Christians make use of the wisdom from these traditions and meditate in forms of adapted from yoga or Zen Buddhism, but one need not go to such sources in order to mine the rich vein of meditation — there is a rich lode of meditation native to Christian spirituality.

Some people prefer to meditate on a single word or phrase, or an image or object (such as a cross or icon); others may find listening to (or performing) music — expressly sacred or merely calming and centering — to be the most effective means by which to find an inner core of peace in a busy world; still others prefer to place themselves into an imaginative narrative, to picture themselves vividly as part of a gospel account, as an onlooker or a participant; still others favor *lectio divina*, by which they slowly digest and ruminate on a passage of sacred text. You may prefer journaling, or writing poetry, as a way to meditate.

Still others make use of physical movement — adopting Eastern forms such as yoga or Tai Chi, or just walking (formally in a labyrinth, or just on the streets or in the fields), or even jogging.

You may find yourself choosing from all of this smorgasbord of possibilities, not having any one preferred form of meditation. All of this can fulfill the requirement of the Rule to spend fifteen minutes a day in some form of meditation — whatever works for you.

How you define that “work” is also up to you. Are you seeking a quiet time to relax your racing thoughts, or are you seeking to stoke the flames of inspiration? Meditation can do both of these, and you may find there are times you incline to one more than the other. The important thing is the discipline of faithfulness — having the time set aside, regardless of how you choose to fill it, regardless of the form or manner of meditation that you find conducive to your own spiritual well-being.

## **Reflection**

The unexamined life is not worth living. [101]

The harvest of the spiritual life is found in self-examination. If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, it is important that we know ourselves — our needs and hopes and failings — in order effectively to meet the needs and hopes of our neighbors and live charitably with their failings.

The Brotherhood provides ample time for exercising this skill, as well as tools and assistance in learning and continuing the practice: through periodic introspective review of your own living with the rule, personal review in dialogue with the pastoral official to whom you report, and corporate review and reflection in the community setting of retreat at Convocation.

The personal report at the Embertide is subject to the direction of the pastoral official to whom you make it. It may take different forms from province to province and from time to time. An “Embertide Report Form” is posted in the Education and Formation section of the Brotherhood’s private website, and it may provide some food for thought; it may even be commended as an explicit form for this reflection at the discretion of the pastoral official to whom you report.

Having an opportunity for a face-to-face conversation with your BSG pastor, as the Customary requires, will also provide you with time to reflect in direct dialogue. This can happen in the province, or as part of a Convocation, or at another time as convenient. Note that the Customary accepts that having this time “in person” may not always be possible — and the use of technology can provide for personal contact even over long distances.

Finally, the workshops provided at Convocation often focus on particular aspects of the Rule — the vows in particular — and provide for an even wider sharing and reflection of experiences, concerns, and challenges among all gathered.

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101 Socrates, in Plato’s *Apology* 38a5-6

## Meditation & Reflection — Reflection Questions

For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act-- they will be blessed in their doing. (James 1:23-25)

**1 — What form(s) of meditation do you practice?**

**2 — Are there any forms of meditation you avoid, or find uncomfortable?**

**3 — The Rule implies a relationship between meditation and preaching. How does this mesh with your own understanding?**

**4 — When you reflect on how you have lived the Rule thus far, what issues confront you?**

**5 — How have you experienced engagement with the pastoral official to whom you report?**

**Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?**

# 19. Work and Sanctity

A brother will develop the talents given to him by God in his service in the work and worship of the Church. A brother shall use these talents to the best of his ability in the apostolate and ministry to which he is called. [102]

Work, being our share in creation and partnership with God in that creation, can be sanctified. All labor is equal in glory, honor and importance and the work of a brother should bear these qualities. Keeping in mind that all talents are gifts of the Holy Spirit, the work of all brothers must be to the greater glory of God. Work is an oblation to God, as is service to our fellow man. We must therefore give the best that we can offer. [103]

These two clauses from the Rule encapsulate the paradoxical nature of the Brotherhood. An earlier chapter noted the folly of imagining that anyone could actually withdraw from the world, as if they could — or should want to — cease to be a part of the interconnected reality of humanity. The Brotherhood does not see work as a burden to be rejected, but as a form of cooperation with God in building the creation, by which we become God's partners in that work. Harking back to the story of Genesis, we willingly accept the call to tend the garden, and the blessing of the ability to work.

While the Brotherhood embraces and affirms the importance of a brother's work in and for the church as an apostolate, ministry, and calling, the community also affirms that all labor partakes of glory and honor, and that all work and service becomes an offering to God — that the capacity to perform secular work is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and is equally to be undertaken to the glory of God alone as any solemn liturgy. Like Brother Lawrence sanctifying the kitchen as he prayed through the dishwashing, Gregorians work to sanctify and bless all the work they do. As Teilhard de Chardin wrote almost a century ago:

Within the church you can see all kinds of groups vowed to the perfect practice of this or that particular virtue: mercy, detachment, liturgy, missions, contemplation. Why shouldn't there be people vowed to the

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102 The Rule: Of the work of the Brotherhood

103 The Rule: Of work as an apostolate

task of exemplifying, by their lives, the task of making human endeavor holy? ... people who would devote themselves, in the fields of thought, art, industry, commerce, politics..., to carrying out these demands – the basic tasks which form the very backbone of human society? ... Right from the hands that knead the dough, to those that consecrate it, the great universal Host should be prepared and handled in a spirit of adoration.... May the day come when people, awakened to sense the bond linking all the movements of this world in the single, all-embracing work of the Incarnation, become unable to take up any of their tasks without illuminating it with the clear vision that their work – however elementary it may be – is received and put to good use by a Center of the universe. When that comes to pass, there will be little to separate life in the cloister from the life of the world. And only then will the action of the children of heaven (at the same time as the action of the children of the world) have attained the intended fullness of its humanity. [104]

This concept of working in both sacred and secular contexts goes back to the foundation of the community. Few church organists are able to make their work at the console their only livelihood; many work as church musicians for stipends that are small by comparison to what they might also reap from secular work. Such were the first members of the Brotherhood, including our Founder, whose resumé included working as a florist.

Through its history, the Brotherhood's members have worked in almost every secular occupation imaginable and have included firemen, doctors, nurses, actors, financial advisors, attorneys, tour guides, construction workers, salesmen, bankers, farmers, teachers, and even a White House aide. In all of their work, these brothers have chosen to follow the two mandates of the Rule: to do their work to the best of their ability, and to sanctify that work as done to the glory of God. This latter means holding themselves and their coworkers to high ethical standards, as well as finding ways to witness to their faith to the extent their workplace standards permit. That can be a challenge, but the best witness may be through good behavior and hard work, and a willingness to listen to the concerns and cares of those with whom one shares a workspace, and to treat them as if they were your brother or sister – even if they are not members of the Body. As a brother wrote:

In my secular work for New York's largest theater ticket brokerage, I determined to witness to Christ in my business relations and as a



counselor to my colleagues...with a certain amount of effectiveness and satisfaction. [105]

When it comes to service in the church — a pillar of the Brotherhood’s charism and purpose — most of our brothers serve on a nonstipendiary or volunteer basis, taking on tasks alongside their fellow parishioners, in liturgy, music, and education, and also in the governance of the church on vestries, diocesan commissions, and at General Convention. Some brothers serve in salaried positions as church musicians, and some as deacons (most of whom work on a volunteer basis), and as priests. They too are often called to volunteer positions in church governance in their diocese, at General Convention, and in the Anglican Communion. Whatever the work, the brothers seek to hold to the same standard of excellence and humble service, giving glory to God.

### ***Integrity and integration***

The Benedictines adopted a rule that balances physical, mental, and spiritual work in relatively discrete portions, like three separate spheres arranged side by side, literally apportioned through the hours of the day. Our Rule seeks to do something else: to find the hidden unity of these three spheres held within each other with a common center, like Dante’s image of the Trinity at the end of his *Divine Comedy*. Our goal is to grasp that the Spirit gives life not only to its own domain, but to the physical and mental as well.

In all our work, in the church and in the world, all of it united by our personal and corporate journey on the Gregorian Way, we are called and equipped by God to witness and to serve: the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience will inform and form the work we do, shaping it with the graceful contours of quietness, patience, humility, charity, and courage — until transformed into a prayer uttered by many voices: to God alone the glory.

## Work and Sanctity — Reflection Questions

Nothing is more certain than that human action can be sanctified. “Whatever you do,” says Saint Paul, “do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And the dearest of Christian traditions has always been to interpret those words to mean: in intimate union with our Lord Jesus Christ.[106]

1 — How do you demonstrate holiness of life in the work place?

2 — Where do you find it most difficult to reconcile your work with the concepts of sanctification outlined in this chapter?

3 — How do you relate your “work” to your “ministry?”

4 — Do you see your work as an offering?

Goals: What internal and/or external goals do you set for yourself?

## Afterword

You have come this far in your journey on the Gregorian Way, but the road is not ended. It continues to provide you will a vista and a challenge, time to grow in companionship with your brothers. Through the rest of your novitiate you will continue to live with the vows, preparing to take them at the end of this stage of your journey in the faith and the community.

Always know that you have the prayers and help of your brothers to support you. God bless you now and always.