



The Skillfulness of Shepherds

***Gregorian Reflections
On the
Apostolic Life***



Novitiate: Year One

***First Edition
May 1, 1998
Karekin Madteos Yarian, BSG***

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Preface

Spiritual pleasures increase our inner longing even while they satisfy, because the more we savor them, the more do we perceive that there is something to be loved more. But when we do not possess them, we cannot love them, because their savor is unknown. Who can love what he does not know? The psalmist counsels us, *Taste and see that the Lord is good* (Ps. 34:8), meaning “You will not get to know his goodness unless you taste it. Touch the food of life with the taste buds of your heart, so that trying it may make you capable of loving its sweetness.”

*St. Gregory the Great
Homily on Luke 14:16–24*

Many of us come to religious life with a sense that it will supply something that seems to be missing from our lives: greater discipline; deeper community; clearer focus; or stronger support. Faithfully lived, religious life can and will assist in developing all these things for those who are called to embrace it. However, we cannot begin to know all that religious life will mean for us until we have actually entered it and committed ourselves to exploring it from the inside. You have offered yourselves to the Gregorian religious family and that family has received you as novices – persons deemed ready to explore our form of life as insiders. Now, you begin a living engagement with the Rule of the brotherhood of St. Gregory, a document that should come to play an increasingly important role in shaping your spiritual life.

Who, indeed, can love what they do not know? The Rule spreads a banquet for you: *The Skillfulness of Shepherds* is your tasters guide. Taste and see if you find it to be good. Savor the experience, digest it well, and draw nourishment from it. If some dishes seem bitter, do not be discouraged – even the Passover feast includes bitter herbs! Not everything that is healthful for us tastes good at the first sampling and your palate may need adjusting and refinement. Yet, given time and encouragement, perhaps you will be fulfilled at the Gregorian feast and find therein delights you never dreamed existed.

You are not dining alone: Jesus has provided the ingredients, your brothers have prepared the dishes, and many others are already at table to welcome you and surround you with their love and prayers. Come, sit down with us, and eat.

Your servant in Christ,

Francis Andrew, BSG
Director of Education
The Eve of Pentecost, 1998

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This work is dedicated to Ian Frazier.

Karekin Madteos Yarian, BSG

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Introduction

by Karekin Madteos Yarian, BSG

This discussion of our lives in Christian witness emphasizes what makes us continuous with the Christian tradition, and emphasizes our role in and among the community of the baptized. Yet it is also meant to demonstrate what it is that motivates, guides and sustains us in our ministry and, indeed, sets us apart in our vocation. (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

The Skillfulness of Shepherds was begun during my novitiate in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. More than anything it started as an attempt to clarify for myself what it means to live as an apostolic religious in a contemporary world. The initial piece was a poetic reflection, an address of sorts that spoke, from what I knew was true in my heart, to that part of myself that was still struggling to understand the new life I had chosen. It was very well received by members of the community and, subsequently, I expanded the writing to include a sort of educational manual on the discipline of contemporary religious life. The result is the book you are now holding.

The title “*The Skillfulness of Shepherds*” is a play on words from the *Regula Pastoralis* (or *Pastoral Rule*) of Saint Gregory the Great, the patron of our community. His original piece entitled “*On the Unskillfulness of Shepherds*” was an exhortation to pastors not to teach and preach what they did not practice. It was a warning against the dangers of bearing false witness, of setting a poor example for members of the church. In many ways *The Skillfulness of Shepherds* presents the same admonition. It is about Christian practice as reflected in the often obvious and sometimes subtle words of our Rule.

That Rule, the Rule of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, is the subject of this book. The purpose of the format you will find here is to guide the novice contemplating the vowed life into a fuller understanding of the Rule and its demands. The book is divided into two sections. The first section is a poetic reflection that is meant to be reflective reading material. In approaching your assignments, read the appropriate section before going ahead to the more detailed discussion of the topic in the second half of the book. The second part of the book *Reflections on the Skillfulness of Shepherds*, is a discussion divided into chapters that correspond with themes presented in the eight sections of the Rule. The chapters deal with a variety of issues ranging from the vows we profess to the virtues we are asked to cultivate. Following each chapter is a series of Study and Reflection Questions to guide the novice’s understanding of the topic of the chapter. In order to understand how to approach the exercises, please read “How to Use the Study and Reflection Questions” immediately following this introduction.

Those committed to the Gregorian Rule have chosen to follow that Rule as a means of living into God’s service. It is the essential component of our unique vocation and the sustaining force that shapes our understanding of ministry. It is the vehicle by which we seek to find God and to discern his will for us. It

cannot be understated that a full and comprehensive understanding of it will be essential for successful participation in the community, for the Rule “provide[s] a frame of reference that not only dictates our new life in Christ but also ensures that this new life can be supported.”

As an Appendix to this book, you will find the Rule of BSG. An Index follows so that at any time during or after your formal formation you can reference topics related to the apostolic life. As you read and meditate upon what you find here, it is my hope that you will identify with some of my struggles and find comfort in some of the peace and resolution I have found in my journey with this community. It is also my hope that each of you will find your own way to live in the joy of God’s service, and that at the end of your formal formation work you will find yourself prepared to express and share that experience with others you meet along the way. I pray for your continued happiness and fulfillment as you travel. God bless.

Karekin Madteos, BSG

How to Use the Study and Reflection Questions

The purpose of the reflection questions at the end of each section is to aid you, the novice, in the development of a deliberate way of living out your vocation in the Gregorian context. The structure and content of the exercises attempt to be thought-provoking without being leading. There are no correct answers. The questions attempt to help you formulate a sense of *practice*, as the meaning and context of the Rule develops in the process of your reflections throughout the formation program. Each chapter's exercise is structured in the following way:

First, there is the “**Focus.**” This is a brief statement relevant to the topic of the chapter. In some cases, it is taken directly from the chapter itself. In others, it is taken from Scripture, the Book of Common Prayer, the documents of the community, or was designed by the author simply to provide supplemental information integral to the full understanding of the subject matter as it relates to the community. The Focus is not meant to be exhaustive of the topic or even necessarily the subject of your reflections. It is simply intended to give a brief opening statement to begin your process of reflection on the topic of the chapter. There is no writing involved in this section. You should treat the Focus as a beginning point for contemplation of the subject and spend some time with it before you go on to the next section. All quotations from other material are in italics and are immediately followed by the appropriate references. All Scripture references are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted, and are followed by a contextual reference that states who spoke the passage and to whom.

After the initial Focus, there are several questions under the area of “**Personal Development**” to help you reflect on some of the deeper aspects of the topic in question. The purpose of these questions is to help you in the development of your personal “theology” regarding the Gregorian way of life and the religious life in general. Your written answers to these questions should be brief, no more than one or two paragraphs. The questions are structured in such a way as to be revealing, and, as such, many of them are of a personal nature. They are meant to help you reflect on your own interior movement, however, you need not share the depth or the specifics of that movement with your formation sponsor unless you feel comfortable doing so.

Please be concise and clear in your responses. Developing a clear understanding of the vowed life in the Gregorian context, and being able to convey that information in clear and authoritative ways will be essential to the religious in his/her witness in the church and in the world. Please be certain in your responses that you clarify those aspects in which you believe your personal interpretation of Gregorian ethos may diverge from that generally understood by the community.

The final area of the Reflection questions is concerned with “**Goals.**” Essentially, this section is concerned with the development of a concrete plan of action for incorporating the fundamentals of the Rule into your life before you reach profession. This section concerns three major areas of import in your religious life. The first is personal Spiritual Growth, the second ministry to Church/Parish Life, and the last ministry within the community itself. It is not necessary to set a goal for each of the three categories in each chapter of the material. The resulting work may be too much and you may not feel that each chapter applies to each category. Choose your goals effectively.

Your stated goals should address what plan of action, task or personal challenge you are willing to undertake for the purpose of incorporating the understanding you’ve developed in each section of the material. These goals can be approached in the form of a personal discipline, a special project or short-term ministry, a personal devotion, or any creative endeavor that will help you focus on the theme of the chapter. Some may be inclined to write a poem, paint or draw a picture or take a quiet day. The choice is yours. Be as creative as you would like to be.

Your response to each of the three areas should be no more than one or two sentences each. State the goal and your reason for choosing it (i.e. what you think it will show you). You need not submit any further material upon completion of each task or special project unless you desire to do so. However, you and your Formation Sponsor can feel free to discuss these endeavors at any time, and in fact are encouraged to do so.

As with any previous work in your formation within this community, please submit your responses in a timely fashion. It will ultimately make these formation exercises more effective if they are approached with care and diligence. Rushing through them will defeat the purpose of developing a strong understanding of the Rule. You will be well served to remember that profession is not the goal but the starting place of the journey to God’s service. We hope that this process of development will leave you well prepared to start that journey, and we are pleased to be your companions as you answer your vocation. God speed.

Karekin Madteos, BSG

The Skillfulness of Shepherds

The Vowed Life

And so you've chosen to live a
life in vows.
What does this mean...in a world
where no one promises
and no one any longer demands?

You have chosen, in fact,
to offer your life to God
and to be mindful —
ever mindful — of
his presence in your daily
activity.

No longer is it necessary to
believe
that you must stay
within the cloister,
on the holy mountain,
to be near God
to aspire to be holy.

You've made a promise
to seek and serve Christ
as in your Baptism.
To seek and serve
as an equal among equals,
a brother among brothers
in the world,
consecrated and, yet,
not set apart.

You have taken vows —
made promises in a place
where promises still mean
something...
in that heavenly space
inside yourself
where God dwells,
and only you and he together
know whether or not you are
willing to keep them.

You have chosen
not a better life, but
a different one,

a life bound to God
by binding yourself
to a community of faith
under the same vows,
the same promises.

You have, in essence,
offered...
to be poor in spirit
as the Christ was,
to be chaste in your motives
as you deal with others,
and to obey the will of God
reflected in community -
in its function,
and its structure.

These vows may not
change your life
any more than any other
Christian's.
They may, however,
change your perspective.

The light that shines
through you
as you look upon the world,
secure in the embrace
of the Body of Christ,
illuminates the faces
and the places you encounter;
revealing the glory
of all of his Creation;
making a different world, and
mystifying each experience.

This is your vocation...
to sanctify each human
experience
by participation in it...
to bring your wholeness
to the mundane,
to bring an awareness
of the light of Christ
into the reality of your existence,
thereby touching
the lives of others

and healing the broken.
Build your bridges
and go forth!

Poverty

The Rule itself
overflows with poverty,
the poverty of spirit
that the Lord requires.
Within the vow
there rests the kernel
that blossoms into the truth,
the truth of Christian giving.

More than a law,
its spirit
speaks of generosity
and of perspective —
nothing that you have
is truly yours...therefore
give back to God
what already belongs to him.

What a myriad of ways there are
to seek poverty
in a world that too many call
the “real” world.
What is true in any event
to a Christian
is illusory for some,
are you surprised that it should
be
as such...the other way around?
You’ve probably already
come this far
having had such a realization.
The world does not offer much
to those with sights set
on as lofty a goal as yours...
to seek the Lord
and will to be found!

So how do you approach
this poverty...
when your struggle is
the common struggle...
to survive in a world
that relies on the material

to provide security?
How do you decide
what your needs are,
when you live your life
somewhere on the edge
between the cloister
and the railroad flat?

Much like the community,
could you be called
to abandon the illusion
of “ownership”
so prevalent in a
consumerist society?

May it be that you are called
not to value “opinions”
for the sake of having them...
not to allow the evening news
to determine how you see the
world
on any given day?

For you to find your poverty,
your bliss,
is only a matter
of choosing Love
rather than envy...
of choosing Love
rather than disillusion...
of choosing Love
instead of settling for
love.

Jesus the Christ will
gladly help
as you struggle with
the buyers and the sellers,
with those who peddle dreams
disguised as needs.

As you meditate upon his words
and his example,
as you enter fully into
your relationship with him
and others,
you will discover that
the source, your sustenance,
is as close as saying “No”

to prepackaged happiness —
and saying “Yes” to taking
each new experience on its
own merit...
or taking each new thing
and evaluating it
in terms of this:
How much
will it add to your relationship
with him?

Chastity

How well Our Lord knew
how we would struggle...
coming to terms with our most
primal self, the only need
we truly have — to
experience Love.

Live in hope and freedom
with one another!
You are called to this
and to this alone.

What God asks
is to have a right perspective...

We are asked to decide
to live with all in love,
respecting each other’s
integrity, each other’s
personhood. To seek
for dignity and not
to objectify.

To live in Chastity
is to commend yourself
body, mind and spirit
to the care of your Creator.
As God is now the ward
of all that you possess,
treat these gifts with dignity
and integrity.

Be open to the call,
the possibility,
that you are called

to a singleness of purpose...
of relationship...
with the God who loves you.
For as some are called
to a covenant relationship
with another person,
others are drawn
to be covenanted
to God alone.
This is the celibate life...
What a gift to be so chosen.
What a joy to receive.

Also difficult, however,
is the decision
not to attempt
to possess the ones you love
or to nurture their dependence
upon you.
This is the root
of oppression,
to diminish another’s humanity
by disabling rather
than empowering.

This is where
true chastity begins...
to dare to love
bearing witness to
your whole self,
and the completeness
of your relationship,
in the light of
the Living God.

Sexuality is a gift
and may be shared
between two people
when the intensity of their love
extends beyond a
simple expression...
into one more complex.
You must decide
whether that love
warrants such expression.

Whether called to celibacy,
or fidelity to a partner,
it will require a sacrifice of will

and a dedication of purpose.
Be open to the call
and respond according to God's
whispering.

Stir up no storms in your heart
as you contemplate
relationship...
And whether you are called
in one direction or another,
listen only to God
and remember the key,
to respect the dignity
of the human person.
This includes you too!

You are dedicating yourself
body, as well as mind and
spirit...to
a nurturing Creator.
So that you might become
more fully human...
neither diminished
nor exalted, but
free and joyful
and ready to abandon yourself
into his embrace.

Obedience

The whole of your life
from this point on
will be viewed from the
perspective
of the servant
living in the sight of his master.
What frightening images come to
mind
when you think upon the word
"obedience," as
countless generations
of tradition fall...
weighted and heavy
upon your shoulders,
upon your sense of
independence?

The truth is
that your life is not your own
nor was it ever...really.
You have made the vow
to follow this realization
to whatever ends it leads.
As you, daily, are
confronted with your peers...
with those at work or
in the home...
be mindful that
"anything" does not go
as it may have before.
Let it be as though
you ask a silent permission or
"by your leave"
before any undertaking...
keeping in conscious contact
with your Reality.

Your direction, your compass,
is the holy Gospel.
Let it be your nourishment as
well.
Let your will be guided by
the wholesome example
of our Lord Jesus,
that you may know
the will of God, and
not let your ego be bruised
by the relinquishment of "self".

And pray, always pray
to remain teachable,
to place the needs
of the whole, the community
above your wants.
Learn to tell the difference.
Be mindful and respectful
of those who have gone before
you
and give them, and all others
the same deference
that you would offer Jesus
for he is with them.

If you have the grave misfortune
of being one of those
who wields authority, and who

suffers the obedience of others,
appreciate the sacrifice of will
that you may demand of them,
and pray to be made worthy
of such a mighty weight.
Exercise authority
with prudence and temperance
...never demand respect.
Earn it instead.

The Baptismal Covenant

Are you any different
from any other Christian?
Do not be tempted
to believe
that the religious life
is more than...
or better.
It is not a deeper
Christian commitment
than for one who
wholeheartedly
lives out the Baptismal
Covenant.

You have chosen a
different life...
to live out that same
Baptism...
in a family of choice
under a common Rule,
a different expression.

You have bound yourself
to a discipline
and to a certain kind
of sacrifice. But ask yourself,
“What does the Lord require?”
Has he asked a sacrifice?
Explain to yourself
what it is...for
others will surely ask.

As a religious in the world,
without such things as
goods in common, or
without the cloister
and regular hours

of prayer in the choir...
without abandoning the world
what has been your sacrifice?

You may be inclined
to say...
“my acts of charity...
my hours of devoted work
for the church and for
humanity
...these are my sacrifices.”
But do you not gain satisfaction
from the work you do...
is there not a sense of
accomplishment
for helping your fellows?

Herein lies the question
of your commitment
to the spiritual life,
what sacrifices are you
willing to make
as a religious in the world?
Herein lies the answer.
The life you’ve chosen
in the world...
may be a bigger challenge
than the safety of
the cloister.

You are called to live
in the world for Christ
and not for yourself.
The Rule says as much...
“To God alone the Glory”!
How profound a challenge
to keep your motives in check,
and to maintain the right
perspective...
in all things.

As your Baptism unfolds
with each new step you take,
living fully in the Spirit
....and She in you,
you will enter more deeply
into that interior place
where between you
and your Creator,

you can make the choice
of what your personal sacrifices
must be, for you to be whole...
to find your completion
in him.

In the World and Not of It

You will hear this phrase
as long as you live
a life consecrated
to the service of God...
and yet, you will not know
quite how to define it,
that feeling of
being a citizen
of another country.

It is far more than
non-attachment to
the things of this world.
More importantly, it
is the non-attachment
to its objectives.
While some around you
strive to fill their coffers
with admiration and
esteem...
when they chase
security and safety,
as they yearn for power and
control...you, dearest friend,
must quietly seek for God.

Do not disdain the world
as some would have you...
it is, after all, full of the beauty
of God's own Creation.
But always live as though
you are a guest here...
of some unseen host.
Be careful not to wreck the
house
or leave messes behind you,
replace the things you use
and always ask permission
to speak candidly
to your fellow house-mates.

Never presume
to tell others how
to run their lives.
Feel free to name truths
as you see them,
with great kindness
and generosity.
Make your observations
by the light of God's truth,
but never try to
rearrange their furniture,
or judge their decor.

Live your life as such
until its end...
and then, quietly
put your affairs in order,
leave a gift for your hosts
and depart...holding onto
gratitude and love
for their great kindness...
having put up with you
for so long.

Quietness

The grace of your vocation
is to be rooted in the Gospel,
therefore, never
offer an opinion, unless
it is solicited...and
only then, orient it
towards the words and deeds
of our Savior Christ.
It is not enough
to be well-versed in Scripture
but to be well-versed
and well-adapted
to the objectives of God
and the establishment of
his kingdom.

Idle gossip and
senseless chatter
are in violation of the ideals
of poverty and
chastity.
Implicit in those vows
is the relinquishment

of a need
for too many words
or to be heard
as though the opinions really
matter
from your limited perspective.

Patience

My dear brother...
there is no longer any rush
to achieve goodness
by thought, or word, or deed
before the passage of time
comes to its predetermined end.
You are loved, as all of
his children are. And so,
above all be patient with
yourself.
Be gentle with yourself,
and thank God for his kindness.

Even from our birth
we will tend to fall down
and be given the grace to stand
again,
and your life will be
a living out
of this same pattern
of growth in holiness.
You will stand and fall
and stand and fall
and may someday learn
to walk.
Most days you will be carried
and occasionally,
by virtue of your prayer,
will sometimes carry others.

Be patient with others
and realize, when
some may offend,
by behaviors other than
your own,
that you only know
a piece of their picture...
their story.
If you know your own mind
then you may, perhaps,

teach it. But if you recognize,
as you must, that you
know only very little...
listen and learn
from one more humble
than yourself...
the person who has no facade
the person who is more honest
in the eyes of the Creator...
is perhaps the one
who bothers you the most.

Another's defects are only
the mirror of your own
reflected more honestly
without your "self"
to hide behind.
As you go through life
trying to be
a good brother...
keep in mind that others
will struggle as well
to make a good impression
upon you.
Endeavor, always, to
be honest.

Wait upon the will of God!
And, remember, you already
have
what you've prayed for...
and you do not really lack
anything you yearn for,
but God...who is good...
has already bestowed it upon
you,
you just don't see it yet.

Humility

Never over-value
the esteem and praise of others,
this can only lead to danger.
The fruition of humility
is that your own esteem
comes by virtue of being
pleasing to God.
Despite Hollywood's

romantic notions,
being a religious
is not a glamorous life.
It is, in fact,
peculiar.
Take no pride in your position,
but be content to be loved
by God alone.

Be ready and mindful
of the magisterial authority
that others will invest you with.
They will give away to you
power, and project
all of their past and
present experiences of faith upon
you.
Don't judge the person
but be reluctant to accept
the full weight of that authority.

All of your companions'
preconceptions and ideas,
issues and experiences
with the church,
will be placed upon your
shoulders.
Accept this with great reluctance
and with great humility.

In your vocation and ministries,
do not seek positions of authority
or of great and
public visibility...
unless you are called.
Remember Gregory,
who shuddered to leave the
cloister
for the highest seat in Rome.
You do not represent the church
as an institution...
but the Christ
as a friend and companion
accessible to all.

Make the words,
"I do not know"
a regular part of
your vocabulary...

and never be afraid
to show deference.
It is not coy, or an indication
of low self-esteem to do so,
but let your heart
always ponder God
and when he speaks through
others
recognize him and answer.
Always strive
to value silence
for that is where,
in your darkest hours,
you will find him.

Remember that you are,
in spite of your new vocation,
still sinful, still afraid.
To find humility...recognize
your powerlessness
in the face of that sin,
and rejoice for the grace of
God...
that he has called you
to his house and
to his service.

Humility, in essence,
is the recognition
of what and who
we really are...
followed by
a sincere attempt
to become what God
intends for us to be.

As a famous holy man
once said...
try to avoid at all costs
seeing yourself
inside your head,
as on a TV screen,
in the beatific vision...
gazing upon God in prayer.

Charity

Charity is the act
of giving the all

of ourselves, to the
glory of God and
the benefit of others' growth.
Remember that
your sense of need
will indeed diminish
as your prayer grows.
As God sustains you
with the myriad of blessings
such as a home
and food, and clothing...
do not ever be afraid
to share your good fortune.

In the true spirit
of Christian life, open up
your heart and home
to those who may need.
The ministry of hospitality
is not limited to
the Benedictine
or the Franciscan,
but is essential,
to all Christians
and all holy people.
Set apart, each day,
a portion of your benefit
in preparation for those in need.
When Christ knocks on your
door
tomorrow or thereafter
feed him, clothe him
give him what is rightly his.
Like the Jews, waiting
for Elijah,
set an extra place at table
if you are so inclined...
in memory of those who lack
the very blessings that you have.

Be a good steward
of the gifts of God's Creation.
Give of your time
and talents...in your ministry
in your home and
in your community.
Bless your friends with kindness,
and when just one lacks
the presence of family...

make him your own,
for as long as he needs
and it is a comfort to him.

Do not take hostages
by your kindness.
Expect no appreciation
or anything in return.
And yet, to expand the kingdom
ask your beneficiaries
to promise if they can
that one day, when they are
able...
and they meet someone in need,
to do the same, and
to remember you in prayer.

Courage

You, my brother,
will be asked to be courageous
in ways you never realized.
You will need
daily to confront
the complexity of
a world in flux...
and to do your utmost
to embrace a certain
simplicity
for the sake of God.

It is not an easy task
to be in the world
and not of it...
to see more than
an easy answer
to a complex question...
and, yet, simplify your
responses
as Christ would have you do.

Ours is a Creation
still groaning with
the pangs of birth,
of growth...of
becoming.
The world is full
of pain and anxiety
and fear...and

your companions in it
suffer so.
To suffer through it daily
and not turn to run
to the enclosure of the cloister
will require great strength.
Pray always for the strength
of him who called for you.

Our is a world
full of symbols and signals
and messages and noise
all crying out
consume, consume,
achieve, do, become,
louder and more frantic
until the moment came...
when, as all of us had done,
you learned not to
pay attention or
not to hear.
So overcome are the senses that
you can lose the single skill
so necessary to your ministry...
the ability to listen...
to be present.

The burden of courage is yours,
and the world will rely
upon you,
to be available...
to listen to their pain...
allowing them to invite you in...
and not to run away.
It is no small task...
as your brothers know well...
and they will hold you up,
along with God,
as you struggle with the weight
of so profound a duty.

Yet nothing weighs so much
as a life devoid of
gratitude and joy.
There is no pain so great
as holding a sparkling treasure,
so beautiful as yours,
and keeping it inside
afraid to share it

with those who need its light.
No loneliness is so profound.

Walk forward
dear and gentle warrior...
wearing Christ as a garment
confront your fears
and then help others to the light.

Prayer

Be still...
for a moment.
Listen for him,
attentive and ready
for what I AM says
in the silence.
This is your vocation
to live in relationship
with your Creator.

Remember, however,
that your relationship
with him...will only be
as honest as your relationship
with your fellows, and
the same holds true
the other way around.
If you listen to your brothers
and sisters in this world
and respond to them
with honesty, you will
understand the complexity
of your relationship
with the Father...and
the many ways he speaks.
If you are honest with God
about yourself and
all of the struggles, pains
joys and celebrations
of your spirit...
then you can be real
and true with those about you.

There is a mystery in
that inner room
wherein dwells the
Spirit of God,
closer than breathing,

closer than feeling...
and your job, your
true vocation...
is never...never to try
to explain away that mystery
but to enter into it
as into darkness,
with a friend
holding your hand...
leading the way.

In those moments
when you find yourself
anxious and rushed
moving through the world
at twice the pace...
curl your toes beneath you
feel the ground, the floor,
and remember where you are
in the present moment...
you are not merely a thought
in God's Mind...but
an experience...
pause to let him catch up and
enjoy you.

When you pray...
do what you will.
Speak, listen, laugh out loud
cry...work, smile at a stranger,
sit in the lotus position,
sing, chant, bow a thousand
times..
it makes no
difference but that
your spirit does it with you,
through you...in the moment.
Be present for the Lord your
God...
as he is present for you.

Our Common Life

There is profound love
in our life as a family...
but as you now realize
it requires great strength
to maintain your family ties
when you live scattered,

a Diaspora household.
It only serves
to illustrate, how awesome
is the love of brother
of sister...bound
under a common oath
to love and serve the Lord
when, in spite of
worldly distractions,.
they are there for you
in Spirit and in prayer.

There are many ways
to proclaim
in this global village of today,
the nurture of community
without the necessity
of a common house.
A prayerful attention
to your Daily Office,
frequent intercessions,
and painstaking observance
of the Rule...all serve to bring
into your heart each day
the knowledge of what it is
that makes you indispensable
to this family of God.

When you lift up *your* voice
in prayer to the Lord,
you lift up *our* voice
and become a part of
the chorus, singing
his praises with the angels
and affirming that
you are not, indeed,
ever alone really.

Communicate frequently
with this family of faith...
make visits as often
as you are able...
and live each day as though
they are by your side.
They are.

A Visible Witness

You are choosing
to bear a witness
to the glory of Christ
not to the glory of
the brotherhood.
You have done this
by changing your life
to live within the Gospel
its truths...
its joys...
and its eternal rewards.
Because you made this choice
you are given new clothes
like a newborn child.
You have not earned
the right to wear the habit...
but you have been given
the privilege,
by virtue of your consecration
as a servant of God.

This habit exists
to draw attention to God
and not to you,
although it will do both.
Whether you wear it daily,
or only rarely,
do so with discretion.
Take care of it
for it belongs to him,
and if you cannot be the same
without it as within...
do not wear it, for it becomes
a danger, or at the very least
a costume.

Wear your cross
with dignity and grace
ever mindful of its weight.
There will be days
that it seems too heavy
even to place around your neck.
Take it up as Christ did
and, though you may falter
as did your Lord,
someone will be there

to help you along
and ease the burden for you.

Worship

Remember that your life
is a liturgy and not
the other way around.
Your entire existence,
in this capacity,
is an offering
and a thanksgiving
to the Lord.
Do not neglect this
for the sake of
overindulgence
in participation,
but be mindful that
in the House of God
your worship with
the community
makes you a part of the family.
Rather than setting you apart,
or worse yet, above...
it makes you accessible
and lovable, not
laudable.

If it must be so,
to preserve your integrity,
choose anonymity
in the midst of the congregation
until you are established
as a simple Christian -
before a shepherd.

As you listen to the Word
and as you sing, or dance
or pray or praise,
in all your acts of worship...
do not strive to be heard
above the rest...
but let your voice meld
with the countless
generations...in the
beginning, now
and forever...
one voice, one Creation.

Be wary of theatrics
and countless genuflections
they only distract
rather than serve...
but let your economy
of movements and oblations
come from the heart,
spontaneous and free...
free from dangerous expressions
of piety.
Give all you do
a meaning, let all things be
significant because you
have thought them through.

Listen to each word
as from the mouth of God...
take none for granted.
Say each prayer
with careful deliberation
so you realize, firsthand,
what it is that you are asking.

God will surely speak to you
and through you
as the Creation itself
praises...
through the blessing
of its Creator

The Holy Eucharist

It is not everyone
who has the chance
to enter into Eternity
and celebrate with God.
What a joyful thing
to sit at his table
with all the saints
who have ever been
or will be again
and be nourished by
the word...
and fed by
the Word.

What an honor
to be called to
the greatest of all banquets...
as lavish as his Love
and as simple as
the gifts of bread and wine
offered up to God
by a carpenter and
his friends.

You are called to participation
in this greatest of mysteries,
called by Christ, weekly and
even daily,
to remember him.
It is your thanksgiving and
the center of your life
as a religious...
as a Christian.

In this action
Christ in his mystical body
offers Himself,
in the mystery of
a living sacrament,
to God the Father of All.
This same Christ,
is the same offering,
not different,
because of its
eternal nature.
You are a part
of that offering,
in that you offer Jesus
and he offers you
when he offers Himself
to God,
because he has
identified Himself with you
and given you his Spirit.

This donation of self
is a way of life
for the Father, for the Son
and it is for you to be present
and offer yourself...
it is your right
it is your privilege.

The Daily Office

How the Office will
bind you to this your family...
Oh, what joy in knowing
that as you pray it
others are too...
in an unbroken line
that follows the Sun
across the heavens
and traverses the history
of our tradition.

There is great comfort
in the familiar words,
and each time you say them
you will most likely
hear your brothers' voices too,
echoing responses
and Amens.

Don't merely say them
but pray them,
this is their joy and their power.
Let the words fall from your lips
not like stones, but
as drops of water...
refreshing your thirst
and watering the earth.

By virtue of
their appointed times,
let them consecrate each day
to the glory of God,
and energize your spirit
to answer your calling.

There may be times
when the words seem empty
and the road to prayer dry.
Remember that you
are not alone in this.
So little time
in the day...to fulfill
the hours of prayer...
makes it easy to forget
or to lose the zeal

to perform the "Holy Work".

But across the miles
let the voices of
your brothers
call you to your duty,
into the presence of
your family.
Respond with certainty
that you are carrying a torch
that illuminates the world
with his light...
and become his willing
messenger.

The Scriptures

Somewhere in the pages
of the Book,
among the beginnings
and the begats...
you will find your Lord.
As you study the words
and worlds that brought
you into being...
Christian child, learn
to distinguish the message
from the words...for
God does not speak by Scripture
but through it.

The history of your salvation
from "in the beginning..." until
this moment, as you read
these words
is contained in the Book —
disguised,
like the Christ
among your suffering brethren.
As Jesus is the moment
when the Book ends,
so you are the experience
that continues the story...
a moment in time
with him...in
his work toward the kingdom.

Someone once said,
"The Bible is the manger
in which the Christ is lain...
but let us never forget
that there's a whole lot
of straw in that manger."
Be wary of the ways
that the book can be used
as a tool in the hands
of the marauding.
Be responsible with its words
and use its message
to bring peace...
never dissension.

Try not to get stuck
in that place
which says..." this
can only be one way,"
for what makes the Book alive
is that it speaks to many
in the ways in which God calls...
each to his own level
of understanding.

The Scripture is your guidepost.
Read it often...
become friends with those
who have made their home
there.
Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and
Rebecca,
Mary, John, Paul...learn your
lessons
from these your elders.
Listen to those who knew him,
to those who struggled to find
him...
they've come a long way
to tell you their stories...
be grateful and humble
for they've chosen you
to be their confidante.

Meditation

Once or twice a day
sit, quiet down, and
enter into the presence

of the Divine.
It's just a matter
of pondering the Creation
not trying to sort it out.

Watch a flower or a bird
experience their own reality...
wonder about trees
and what they really think,
make a list of things
you're grateful for,
pretend you're a stone
sitting on a hill,
watch a roaring river
and wonder where its home is...
picture all the people
who've taught you
things invaluable.

Ponder what
Mary or Martha
would think about
the world today...
marvel at the miracle of birth...
of people or of stars,
go to the beach
and make sand castles
with a child named Jesus,
or watch a sunset
with the Lord, and
let him wrap his arms
about you.

It is no wondrous skill
this art of meditation...
but is, instead, the
license of your imagination.
This is where
you will learn
the art of listening...
of being present.
In the stillness or
the wanderings
of your mental play
you will learn to hear the voice
of God...and be ready
to hear his will for you.

Enter into the Scriptures
and become a player
in the drama that unfolds...
listen to each figure
share their stories with you.
Speak to them,
ask them questions
and learn about their God.

Sit in awe at the stillness,
before the roaring flame
of God...rejoicing
that such a thing is
possible, in this strange
unpredictable universe.

Marriage and Partnership

You could be among those
blessed
to have a companion on
your journey,
one with whom
in the spirit of love,
you have chosen to spend
your life...in partnership.

There is no place
in your life...
where you will be as
challenged,
as in this relationship
of mutual love and sacrifice.

Twice blessed will you be
should your companion
be walking toward the Lord
with you...
some are not so blessed.
You will, at times,
need to make some choices
to put things in perspective.
This is nothing more
than a blessing to
your mutual life together.
For without the joys
of community, and
the presence of God

your relationship will be
tenuous at best.

But in the context of
your union
you, my brother,
will learn...how
to love your Creator,
by loving your partner...
it is all a preparation
for the Love that surpasses
all others.

Single Life

Equally blessed are you
in the eyes of our God
if you live contentedly
in singleness.
Although the challenges
may be great,
there is a greater freedom
in your journey
to go where God wills
at the times he appoints.

Though a life
in committed partnership
is blessing for those so called,
others who are not
so inclined
need not fear
to ask...

“am I meant to be
alone with God?”

There is no law that says
God desires us
more in partnership
or commitment
than alone.

For
as God is not removed
from the joys of
a first date, or
a romantic evening
on the beach,

so he is not far
from the comfort
of an evening at home
alone by the fire,
or the excitement
of people-watching
at the local cafe.

What he desires
is that we walk with him
in any event.
And if the moment comes
when our souls catch fire
at the sight of another...
and we can't decide
whether or not we are
called to the life of
companion and partner,
let us remember that God
has no agenda in this regard
other than our happiness
and our fulfillment.

Work and Sanctity

You may well be
tempted, in your secular work,
not to reveal your vocation.
After all, a brother in the bank
or the law firm may seem
an interesting anomaly.
But your presence there is
needed
as a gentle reminder
that all is not
as it may seem.
Your presence says
"there is so much more
than this" and yet
you need never say a word
about the mystery of
your "other" vocation.

There are so many ways
of serving your fellows
in the spirit of Christ
and your work, remember,
may be as sanctifying
as your worship and your prayer.

Your Lord was a carpenter,
and worked, as you do,
with the same intent...
to build the kingdom
by making labor holy
and to God's glory.

When you enter into that place
where you will spend
the better part
of each new day...
live out these rules
to make the day holy:

Embrace challenging
projects and tasks, and
create a sense of excitement
and a subtle unspoken joy
at human accomplishment.
When you need to present
troublesome colleagues or
co-workers with a reprimand
or a harsh reality, always say
"I am at your service."
It tells them that your motive
is to help and heal,
not to criticize or harm.

Never say you don't have time.
Always tell people when
your time will be available.
Pray a lot.
Be deliberate.
Don't be afraid to smile.
Don't speak when you're
stressed.
Be ethical in business dealings,
despite what you're told.
Remember peoples' birthdays,
anniversaries, and
important occasions.
It makes people feel special.

Congratulate people
on doing their jobs well.
Never tell people what to do.
Ask instead.
Show up to work on time.
Leave on time.

Staying late doesn't make you
a better employee, only
a bitter one.

Emphasize the importance
of your other life.

Listen,
Problem-solve,
never take credit for it.

Always take a lunch.

These things may
serve to bring
the gifts of compassion
into a place where it may
be lacking.
And on those days
when you don't feel well...
and it's all you can do
to go to the place,
remember someone
in your morning prayers
who through misfortune
cannot work as you do.
Work for them that day...
offer it as an oblation to God
in their name,
that they too
may be sanctified.

The Church

Oh, that a Body so broken
can continue to fulfill
such good works in the world.
Like the Christ, wounded
and beaten, it rises
from death to life
bringing new hope.

This is the church,
the Body of Christ
a microcosm of
the whole Creation...
and you, my dearest brother
are a microcosm
of the church.
In your heart, which is

the church,
are a myriad of experiences
and feelings and voices...
imprinted upon your life
by everyday you've lived.
Within your heart, you will
struggle to do right things
to make wise choices,
and to overcome your
deficiencies.
The church struggles daily
to do the same.
There are many voices,
many conflicting ideas,
dissent, apprehension
and above all...
the pains of growth.

Be forgiving.

As the universe groans
under the weight of its need
for redemption, for salvation
for fulfillment of God's
purpose...
so will the church cry out
adding its voice to the
experience.
So will you cry out
becoming one
with the Body of Christ.

Be patient.

Never contribute to
controversy or schism...
never sever your ties
to those who may try...
you are still One Body.

This gift is alive...
organic, like the universe...
like yourself.
Help it to heal...
pray with it...
nurture it and, above all,

Be faithful.

To Be a Shepherd

How easy it is
to gaze upon
a plaster saint...
and endeavor to
model your life
upon a caricature.
Please do not doom
yourself to failure.
You are not a carbon copy
of sanctity, but a living
feeling human being
asked only to struggle
with your own vitality.

As we are told...
“he never asked us
to be successful
only faithful...”
faithful to his Word
alive to his Promise.

When you accept
the blessed responsibility
of being present to another
remember that listening

is not a passive experience...
and is nonjudgmental.

You are called to be
a mother and
a midwife, allowing others
to give birth to
their truth that waits inside.
Help people to find
their options in life
and be a whole person
when they may be incapable.
Be a companion, not a judge
a fixer or a critic.
A brother is
what the name implies.

Love without bounds
and serve without reward.
Continue always
to surround yourself
with those who seek
the truth...and
may God be pleased
to deliver you
from those who have found it.

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Reflections on The Skillfulness of Shepherds

The Vowed Life



And so you've chosen to live a life in vows.
What does this mean...in a world
where no one promises
and no one any longer demands?

There is from the outset, in our relationship with God, and in community, a necessary emphasis on personal responsibility. We need always remember that the choice to enter fully into religious life, by the profession of vows (in this case Poverty, Chastity and Obedience ¹), is a stark contrast to the world in which we live. In the apostolic religious life, we are called to live a life of integrity which requires us to be the directors of our own actions, insofar as God gives us the freedom to do so. There is perhaps nothing so challenging.

We have made a choice to embrace a difficult form of life that will challenge our humanity by challenging a fundamental viewpoint of ourselves. Namely, that we must be disciplined into effective action by relinquishing the outside world and its distractions and entering into a place "set aside" for such work (see below). The reality is far from what Jesus had in mind when he said: "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me".² This denying of the self is an interior process of letting go of those flaws in our character that interfere with effective relationships with others. It is also reflected in a willingness to let go of our gifts, remaining free to go where God leads us and to be used as he needs us.

¹ The Evangelical Counsels which became associated with various apostolic orders beginning with Saint Francis and his followers. Although interpreted in a more contemporary light for modern apostolic communities, they are a part of the tradition of religious life and the backbone of its perspective.

² Mark 8:34

It is learning to tell the difference between wants and needs, knowing that God alone will provide for our sustenance. It is essentially to bear the weight of community, learning sacrifice and abandoning any sense of self-reliance. Our cross is the same as that of Jesus — the burden of the world and all its sins and attachments, as much to social systems and inherent prejudice as to worldly goods.

You have chosen, in fact,
to offer your life to God
and to be mindful —
ever mindful — of
his presence in your daily activity.

Once we acknowledge the context in which we are to live our lives by virtue of the vows and the Rule, we seek an identity and purpose for that context to make sense or to become manifest. We attempt to develop a pro-active approach to ministry and the spiritual life. Essentially, we are people of prayer. In our case, the prayer more consistently takes the form of active service. This is the primary action of prayer in the apostolic life.

Although many Gregorians adapt a variety of prayer traditions to our unique perspective, the primary manifestation of our prayer life is servanthood. We, by virtue of the Rule, are called to be God's witnesses, inspiring prayer in the world as a response to our ministry of presence. The necessary emphasis on witness and presence in the world is summed up in our rule which states: "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,"³ and to show God's active response to that prayer in our servant ministry.

"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."⁴ All of our actions in the world are called to bear witness to the Glory of God, as the inscription on the BSG cross states "*Soli Deo Gloria* ." "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 [and] who serves God in everything."⁵

No longer is it necessary to believe
that you must stay

³ *BSG Rule: Of the life of a brother*

⁴ William Law; *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*

⁵ *Ibid.*

within the cloister,
on the holy mountain,
to be near God
or aspire to be holy.

The realization of this form of religious life is contingent upon our ability to effectively function as a part of the world around us, hence the relinquishment of the cloister. As the monastic, Thomas Merton, put it in his *Contemplation in a World of Action*, a religious brother or sister “should be a sign of freedom, a sign of truth, a witness to that inner liberty of the sons of God.”

Our interpretation of this in our own times is the call to action in the world, where it is necessary to be present as a witness to God’s glory. A particular emphasis might be sensed here that is present in our founding ethos, articulated by one of the senior members of our community in his evaluation of the religious life and its potential for the modern church. He writes: “The religious are not off in some misty forefront of advance against the powers of darkness; they are walking along side their fellow Christians, helping to bear the burdens on the way to God.”⁶

You’ve made a promise
to seek and serve Christ
as in your Baptism.
To seek and serve
as an equal among equals,
a brother among brothers
in the world,
consecrated and, yet,
not set apart.

Our vocation calls us to holiness of life. Holiness means to be “set apart or aside” for God. Yet, we are called to be consecrated but not set apart *from*. Called to be set apart and yet not set apart *from*. We need to understand the distinction, for we are called to be set apart *for* the service of God and yet we are not called to be set apart *from* the communion we share with others in the Christian family. One side reflects our relationship in its context with God, the other in our relationships with other people. We are holy only as we continue to exist and manifest that holiness in a community framework. That holiness means nothing outside of the context of those with whom we share it, express it, celebrate it and transmit it. The presence of a brother or a sister, the presence of holiness, points to sanctity in a community — it is prophetic witness, it is a call to conversion of life, it is the mystical Body of Christ.

You have taken vows —
made promises in a place
where promises still mean something...
in that heavenly space inside yourself

⁶ Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG; *State of the Religious Life*

where God dwells,
and only you and he together
know whether or not you are
willing to keep them.

We have chosen to undertake a life in vows, a mode of being “in the world” that is embodied in our Rule. This has profound implications for the rest of our lives. The Rule is not a secondary fact of our lives that can be laid aside or put on hold during trying times in our lives. It is not something to be manipulated around the facts and circumstances of our day to day. It is, instead, the very means by which our lives will be structured from the day we profess the Rule until, if we choose a life profession, such time as our earthly life is over.

These vows are not made to the community. The community, in this context, simply receives and supports them in a common witness. The fulfillment of these vows, or the inability to fulfill them, however, has far greater implications in our relationship with God directly. Our individual life in vows certainly affects the community and its strength, (“The strength of the brotherhood is dependent on the prayer life of each brother.”⁷) but we need always remember that the vows are made to God through and with the community. It is by virtue of the Rule that our bonds as brothers and sisters mean anything at all. Ultimately, the living out of this “life in context” is a relationship established with God and actualized in the community of faith we share with one another.

You have chosen
not a better life, but
a different one,
a life bound to God
by binding yourself
to a community of faith
under the same vows,
the same promises.

We must always avoid the temptation to place ourselves above and beyond our fellow Christians. There is truly nothing in our Rule and its requirements that is above and beyond anything required of a Christian person. One of our brothers states: “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.”⁸ We must always

⁷*BSG Rule: Of private devotion*

⁸ Br. Ciaran Anthony BSG; from a sermon entitled *Mary, Martha, & One Thing More, The Servant #155*, Fall 1994

approach our vocation and the call to service with the utmost humility, in the clear recognition of our profound reliance on Christ and the uncompromising love of God.

The vows are tools for reminding us daily of our dependence upon God. The structure provided by the Rule and the nurture of the community sustain us in fellowship with one another and provide a new thread of continuity centered around God. This is a revolutionary departure from the world around us and the Rule must and does provide a frame of reference that not only dictates our new life in Christ but also insures that this new life can be supported.

You have, in essence,
offered...
to be poor in spirit —
as humble
as the Christ was,
to be chaste in your motives
as you deal with others,
and to obey the will of God
reflected in community -
in its function,
and its structure.

What are these vows that we profess? The three words that represent them have become as heavy as stone with centuries of interpretation, re-interpretation, argument and schism. The community, as well, has borne the weight of these vows in its struggle to make them relevant to the Christian seeking to live and love in God's service in our own times.

These wise counsels have come to signify our minds, our bodies and our selves. Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Each of them, as interpreted by the community, has come to mean a radical change in perspective, in the way we see the world, ourselves and our fellow-travelers. Hence, they have also come to mean a new way of relating to each of these. These vows arise from a well-nourished and strengthened sense of self-respect, an appreciation of the dignity of others and a full commitment to the service of others by the relinquishment of self-will. "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."⁹

These vows may not
change your life

⁹ Ibid.

any more than any other Christian's.
They may, however,
change your perspective.

One might experience, when attempting to live into the vows, a desire to seek and embrace wisdom. A life of holiness will draw us into the experiences of all who have gone before us on the road to God's service. Once we start on this path towards wisdom, having made the decision to live life according to the will of God and his service, we will find slowly that we no longer desire to live for ourselves alone. The path to wisdom is the path of selfless service to others and the joys of community. We come to put away childish things such as self-absorption, the strivings for wish-fulfillment and the foolish narcissism of competitive action. We come to rest fully in the comfort of a community that strives for the same goals as we do.

Our Founder 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."¹⁰

The light that shines
through you
as you look upon the world,
secure in the embrace
of the Body of Christ,
illuminates the faces
and the places you encounter;
revealing the glory
of all of his Creation;
making a different world, and
mystifying each experience.

To accept and profess vows, as opposed to simply trying to live a virtuous life without the structure of a Rule, brings more focused opportunities for self-awareness and draws us into a dynamic engagement with God. There, we can find the assistance we need to live a life suddenly different from what the world expects, and we find life more abundantly. Once we have accepted this new life, the light of Christ can come to dwell in us more fully and we will find ourselves no longer alone but walking a path with innumerable saints present and past who dwell in that light.

¹⁰ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Wisdom From On High, The Servant #159*, October/December 1995.

We have become friends of God. We have been called to a task, to bear witness to his glory in the world, not in isolation from it. A life in vows is the vehicle by which we carry out this task. It will seem at times to be a burden far greater than we may carry, but the community is there so that we do not have to do it alone. We are reminded that: “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.” ¹¹

This is your vocation...
to sanctify each human experience
by participation in it...
to bring your wholeness
to the mundane,
to bring an awareness
of the light of Christ
into the reality of your existence,
thereby touching
the lives of others
and healing the broken.
Build your bridges
and go forth!

The rewards of living this life may be few or many. As the journey unfolds, we will discover more about ourselves than we thought we knew. But if we choose to live the path outlined before us, with our companions along the way to love and nourish us we will find a different world or more importantly, “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.” ¹²

Therefore, my friends, we go forth into the world in faith, knowing that we have a community of saints walking beside us. We must give glory to God in all we do, understanding and living the vows so that we may be transformed and hence transform the world.

¹¹ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *You Are My Friends, The Servant #153*, Easter 1994

¹² Br. Donovan Aidan BSG; address entitled “*A Full Earth*” delivered as part of a Creation Spirituality Workshop, Annual Convocation, 1992

The Vowed Life — Reflection Questions

Focus:

The vowed life bears witness to powerful realities in the world around us. It is a vehicle which carries the Gospel message of love, reconciliation and service to others, both within and outside of the church. It is also, in the twentieth century, still an effective and powerful statement of the presence and possibility of holiness in the world.

Personal Development:

- 1 — What does the vowed life in action state
 - a. about your understanding of the individual?
 - b. about your understanding of community?
- 2 — In our community, members are given wide latitude in personal interpretation of the vowed life and individual praxis (**Greek.** practice; a pattern of activity or behavior such as the exercise of a profession, occupation or skill), What does our diversity say to others about the Gregorian way of life?
- 3 — What does the prospect of a life in vows reveal about human nature? About your own character?
- 4 — What do the vows reveal that will help contribute to your participation in this community? In the world around you?
- 5 — What do you believe, in light of these reflections, are the personal obstacles that you may need to overcome to embrace the vowed life?
- 6 — What are the personal assets of character that you bring to the vowed life? What are your strengths?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Poverty



The Rule itself
overflows with poverty,
the poverty of spirit
that the Lord requires.
Within the vow
there rests the kernel
that blossoms into the truth,
the truth of Christian giving.

To make the vow of Poverty is to accept and live a life of gratitude for the gifts of God. This is a fundamental perspective that most people might overlook. When we live lives consumed by want, consumed by the struggle to achieve more, gain more for ourselves, we are stating that what God provides is not sufficient, or worse yet — that we know what we need more than God does.

Poverty is the acceptance of the word “enough.” We gain poverty by stepping far enough outside the “do more/be more” activity of the world and rest in the sufficiency of God and our own adequacy “as we are,” loved and desired by God.

More than a law,
its spirit
speaks of generosity
and of perspective —
nothing that you have
is truly yours...therefore
give back to God
what already belongs to him.

The Customary of BSG clarifies the Rule on Poverty as the acceptance of the tithe as “the minimum standard of Christian giving.” It is the vow of proper stewardship, self-appraisal and self-giving. If one stops at the tithe, however, one has missed Poverty’s other implications for Christian.

The right use of God’s gifts includes all of the talents and treasures that are ours to develop in this vocation to apostolic religious life. Poverty embraces these aspects of our lives as well. Hence, the Rule does not explicitly stop at the tithe in the way it is worded, but states that we must dedicate “the major portion of the fruit of our labor to the church and to the brotherhood.” As such, the vow of Poverty explicitly includes our active ministry, our presence and the fruitful rewards of our prayer — all offered to the glory of God.

What a myriad of ways there are
to seek poverty
in a world that too many call
the “real” world.
What is true in any event
to a Christian
is illusory for some,
are you surprised that it should be
as such....the other way around?
You’ve probably already
come this far
having had such a realization.
The world does not offer much
to those with sights set
on goals as lofty as yours...
to seek the Lord
and will to be found!

What are the practical effects of this understanding of Poverty? Firstly, it provides for a necessary “taking stock” of those gifts of talent and ministry that are ours. We must have the tools to develop and sustain these gifts; and the community becomes an excellent support in this regard. “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.”¹³

In his discussion of the section of the Rule entitled “Of the life of the brotherhood” just noted, one brother concludes: “It is from here that I draw my understanding of the role of the brotherhood in the continuing education and formation of its members. It is how we make incarnate to one another our pro-active nurture, intelligence and presence, which are the antidotes to the negligence, ignorance and pride which, as implied in the Rule, will poison and kill our Brotherhood and, ultimately, our witness to the Gospel.”¹⁴

¹³ *BSG Rule: Of the life of the brotherhood*

¹⁴ Br. Francis Andrew BSG; on continuing education - “*What Do We Need?*,” *The Servant #161*

So how do you approach
this poverty...
when your struggle is
the common struggle...
to survive in a world
that relies on the material
to provide security?
How do you decide
what your needs are,
when you live your life
somewhere on the edge
between the cloister
and the railroad flat?

Although the first step in this understanding of Poverty is the cultivation and use of one's gifts in ministry, the next step in this shift of perspective is perhaps more difficult. Poverty, in this regard, suggests not just the proper understanding and use of these gifts but, necessarily, the development of a lifestyle that does not interfere with the right use of them.¹⁵

On the level of the tithe, one cannot accept this minimum standard of giving if one is already living beyond one's means. In this same regard, no one can cultivate the proper use of God's gifts in service to the church or the brotherhood if one does not rightly use one's time; one's social inclinations and agendas; or one's drive for success and achievement. Hence, Poverty implies an appropriate prioritization of our lives. Far from presenting a standardized interpretation of Poverty, each individual's lifestyle will necessarily require an independent appraisal and a unique, situational interpretation of the requirement of Poverty. Such freedom is likely to prove challenging to the apostolic religious and requires more forethought, diligence and care than might be anticipated. This is a fundamental part of the discipline of our Rule. The whole of religious vocation depends upon the ability to evaluate life's activities in terms of their contribution to the ongoing witness to Christ and the kingdom of God. The results of such a journey provide a powerful witness.

Much like the community,
could you be called
to abandon the illusion
of "ownership"
so prevalent in a
consumerist society?

May it be that you are called
not to value "opinions"

¹⁵ See Luke 11:42 (or Matt 23:23)

for the sake of having them...
not to allow the evening news
to determine how you see the world
on any given day?

A community member reflects: “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.”¹⁶

For you to find your poverty,
your bliss,
is only a matter
of choosing Love
rather than envy...
of choosing Love
rather than disillusion...
of choosing Love
instead of settling for
love.

If a community does not nurture the gifts of its individual members and provide the tools and the guidance needed for their right use, then Christian witness may ultimately become ineffective. Without a community’s constant self-appraisal and the continued formation of all of its members and their ministries, the value of Poverty can become a fruitless exercise in isolation and country club ethics; self-absorbed, self-congratulatory and a parody of the truly spiritual value proposed by our Lord Jesus.

Likewise, if any member of the community does not exercise appropriate stewardship of the gifts entrusted by the Spirit, the common witness of the brotherhood is weakened, its internal structure is compromised and it cannot be strengthened to sustain its members scattered throughout the world. Thus, “Keeping in mind that all talents are gifts of the Holy Spirit, the work of the brother must be to the greater glory of God...We must therefore give the best that we can offer.”¹⁷ In responding to this challenge posed by the Rule, our brother notes: “‘We must therefore give the best that we can offer.’ That powerful sentence sums up the spirit of our Rule. Our offering is, in reality, not just our ‘work’ but ourselves; to be at its best, this offering must be strong,

¹⁶ Br. Ciaran Anthony BSG; *Mary, Martha & One Thing More*

¹⁷ *BSG Rule: Of work as an apostolate*

fresh and alive. This takes effort, discipline, responding to outside challenges, and cooperation not just with God but with God's people." ¹⁸

Jesus the Christ will
gladly help
as you struggle with
the buyers and the sellers,
with those who peddle dreams
disguised as needs.

As you meditate upon his words
and his example,
as you enter fully into
your relationship with him
and others,
you will discover that
the source, your sustenance,
is as close as saying "No"
to prepackaged happiness —
and saying "Yes" to taking
each new experience on its
own merit...
or taking each new thing
and evaluating it
in terms of this:
How much
will it add to your relationship
with him?

It is only through the exercise of one's relationship with Christ that anyone can enjoy the fruits of Poverty as a way of life. It is not an exercise of the will, nor is it a disciplining of the desire for attachments and the joys of this world. Poverty is nothing more than the offering of the first fruits to God. It is a living exercise in gratitude for the blessings of life.

Without the benefit of Christ's strength and presence, true Poverty of Spirit as reflected in our vow of Poverty cannot be accomplished. As we kneel before our Superior in making the vow of Poverty, or as we watch in joy as one among us who is newly called to his service kneels in that place to do the same, we are reminded by the words: "I make the vow of Poverty...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." ¹⁹

¹⁸ Br. Francis Andrew BSG; on continuing education, - "*What Do We Need?*"

¹⁹ *The Rites of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory*, pp. 10.

Poverty — Reflection Questions

“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.” (BSG Rule, Of the vows)

Focus:

Poverty, as interpreted by the community, embraces the giving of time, talent and treasure as the standard by which we live. We also embrace a new understanding of life which focuses on establishing a level prioritization different than what one may be used to.

Personal Development:

1 — What is your understanding of “appropriate prioritization” as reflected in our interpretation of Poverty?

2 — What are three ways that you might concretely and pro-actively integrate that understanding into your practice of the vow of Poverty, independently of the title?

3 — Do you believe that the spiritual life requires sacrifice?

a. If yes, what would your sacrifice be? Why?

b. If no, why not?

also

What do you believe it may be *necessary* for you to sacrifice in order to live the vow fruitfully?

4 — The Gregorian theme of servanthood is reinforced by the vow of Poverty. Describe how you believe these two ideals work together, or not, in the life of the community? In your life as a member of the Gregorian family?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



Chastity

How well Our Lord knew
how we would struggle...
coming to terms with our most
primal self, the only need
we truly have — to
experience Love.

Live in hope and freedom
With one another!
You are called to this
And to this alone.

What God asks
is to have a right perspective...



What better way to praise God than to enjoy his Creation and all things in it, not the way we would like things to be in our dissatisfaction, but as they are in their inherent worth. There is a profound spiritual value in the understanding that God's Creation is good, and to embrace the integrity of each creature that God has breathed life into. To do so is to love with the ardor of God. This is the essence of Chastity.

We are asked to decide
to live with all in love,
respecting each other's
integrity, each other's
personhood. To seek
for dignity and not
to objectify.

To live in Chastity
is to commend yourself
body, mind and spirit
To the care of your Creator.
As God is now the ward
of all that you possess,

treat these gifts with dignity
and integrity.

Our Rule says, "Chastity is the decision to live with all in love, with respect for each persons 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." ²⁰ This vow, in contrast with more traditional interpretations of Chastity involving continent celibacy, is treated in great detail by Br. Tobias Haller's "State of the Religious Life." However, the interpretation of Chastity embraced by our Rule addresses the question of our motives and our actions, striking directly at the heart of our most profound fears.

Those fears are quite apparent in our relationships those with whom we share moments of social intimacy and/or personal vulnerability. But they are equally apparent in our view of our own self-worth. The vow calls us to right relationship with ourselves and others; right use and respect for our bodies and those of the persons with whom we may experience sexual intimacy; and right treatment of the instincts for addressing our social, personal or emotional needs for appreciation and validation.

Be open to the call,
the possibility,
that you are called
to a singleness of purpose...
of relationship...
with the God who loves you.
For as some are called
to a covenant relationship
with another person,
others are drawn
to be covenanted
to God alone.
This is the celibate life...
What a gift to be so chosen.
What a joy to receive.

We should, starting with the vows necessary emphasis on integrity, turn inward to ourselves as the starting place. Until we gain an acceptance and appreciation of our own individual integrity, living our lives "each in the state to which we are called," any attempt at Chastity is fruitless and any appreciation for the "being" of those around us is impossible. We have an innate capacity as thinking, rationalizing creatures to objectify not just ourselves and others, but our needs for fulfillment as well. We experience, and hence justify, most of our needs as simply instinctual and therefore natural. As a result we have a strong tendency, which is clearly nurtured by

²⁰ *BSG Rule: Of vows*

our society, to view ourselves as entitled to have those needs fulfilled. We cannot help but view our fellows as viable means toward the necessary ends of “need-fulfillment”.

The call to Chastity is the call to the relinquishment of the sense of entitlement in this regard. It is the call to view ourselves and others as *persons*, loved by God and called to holiness of life. Remember that neither the vows, nor the Rule, nor the community itself make us holy. Our sanctity comes from Christ alone. The vows are the means of living out that sanctity and the Rule is the guide by which we measure our successes and our shortcomings. Our relationship with Christ is the guide by which we judge Chastity, for he alone calls us into a relationship of love with him, asking nothing in return, needing nothing from us.

Therefore, starting with an inward glance, are we above all true to ourselves as regards our being and our personal integrity? Do we treat ourselves in thought and word and deed as we would expect to be treated as part of God's good Creation?

Also difficult, however,
is the decision
not to attempt
to possess the ones you love
or to nurture their dependence
upon you.
This is the root
of oppression,
to diminish another's humanity
by disabling rather
than empowering.

This is where
true chastity begins...
to dare to love
bearing witness to
the whole self,
and the completeness
each person
in the light of
the Living God.

Most of the abuses of Chastity start with a denigration of the self and work outward into the world from there. Self-hatred, self-pity, arrogance and an infidelity to our own interior values can cause us to treat others as objects and de-value their worth because we have objectified ourselves and lost a fundamental point of contact with our fellow-travelers. It is here that community, again, provides the initial lessons in living out the vow, and nurtures a sense of the worth of each individual member, so that the vow may be honored in the world.

There are those who are called to celibacy as an expression of Chastity. Truly blessed are those who feel called to that kind of offering. For a religious in the world, as well as for any Christian, Chastity is the call to learn the language of intimate love, and that may not require a touch of the hand as much as a deep desire for the wholeness of all people and their completion in the light of God.

Sexuality is a gift
and may be shared
between two people
when the intensity of their love
extends beyond a
simple expression...
 into one more complex.
You must decide
whether that love
warrants such expression.

Whether called to celibacy,
or fidelity to a partner,
it will require a sacrifice of will
and a dedication of purpose.
Be open to the call
And respond according to God's whispering.

The depth of love required by Chastity starts with our own personal relationship with Christ. As we learn in our journey to embrace the love of Christ and its intimacy, the resulting relationship has far reaching implications. No longer is it justifiable to avoid intimacy, to deny our own vulnerability or to encourage others to look to us personally as the source of their strength or fulfillment. Our responsibility is to point toward Christ as the well of living water, the spring from which all may find sustenance and succor. ²¹

We may find that being open and vulnerable in confessing our relationship with Christ is a difficult proposition. "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." ²²
Our relationship with Jesus is about empowerment. Our relationships with others should reflect his desire for them, empowering them and pointing them towards wholeness.

²¹ See John 4:9-14

²² Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG; *A Gift to Share, The Servant #148*, Epiphany/ Lent 1993.

Stir up no storms in your heart
As you contemplate relationship...
And whether you are called
in one direction or another,
listen only to God
and remember the key,
to respect the dignity
of the human person.
This includes you too!

Chastity is not so much a grace as it is God's intention for us. Our relationships with spouse or partner are called to sanctity to the same extent that we, as individuals, are. If we bring shame, guilt or fear into our unions, our partnerships will be ruled by these things. If, however, we bring joy, celebration and passion, how much more so are we living each experience within God's intention? We are to be neither slaves to our bodies, nor captive to body shame. We are part of God's good Creation, as are sex, passion and tenderness. We must not be afraid to allow that these things are good, and are as varied as Creation itself. But neither must we hesitate to acknowledge that the love of this life is but a shadow of the Love in the world to come. Only when we come to rest in God will we find completion.

You are dedicating yourself
body, as well as mind and
spirit...to
a nurturing Creator.
So that you might become
more fully human...
neither diminished
nor exalted, but
free and joyful
and ready to abandon yourself
into his embrace.

It is from the sharing of our relationship to Christ with others that Chastity proceeds and is lived. It provides the necessary reference point whereby it may be a living vow. If we abandon ourselves into the love of God, taking our places as his children, yet fully living in our humanity, we will draw others into relationship with God as well. There is no coercion here, but a natural attraction to the Source of love. As one rests in the comfort of God's love, the most beautiful thing one has to offer, in thanksgiving, is oneself. Let us offer body, mind and spirit; without shame, free from fear, with respect for our bodies as the temple of the Spirit,²³ yet let us never fear to love as God has called us.

²³ See 1 Cor 3:16

Chastity — Reflection Questions

“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.” (BSG Rule, Of the vows)

Focus:

The vow of Chastity was further clarified by an act of Council in 1989 as *“entailing either continent celibacy or permanent fidelity”*.

Personal Development:

1 — If you are married or partnered, in what way will the vow of Chastity affect your relationship with your significant other? In what way will your relationship with your partner, or your perspective of that relationship, change?

2 — If you are single, in what ways will your living out of the vow of Chastity change the way you perceive or approach potentially intimate relationships? What about the celibate life?

3 — What relationship do you see between Chastity as stated in the vow and celibacy?

4 — Chastity, as defined in this community, affects our perception of the very concept of relationship. Given this understanding, how can you integrate this vow in your interaction with and understanding of the following:

- a. yourself?
- b. your community?
- c. your friends and family?

5 — In the same way, how does the vow of Chastity and its resultant shift in perception affect your relationship with God?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Obedience



The whole of your life
from this point on
will be viewed from the perspective
of the servant
living in the sight of his master.
What frightening images come to mind
when you think upon the word
“obedience,” as countless generations
of tradition fall...
weighted and heavy
upon your shoulders,
upon your sense of independence?

It is important for us to realize in community that we are not held together by the truths and certainties that we possess, but rather we are bound by what we lack in ourselves and in our finite natures. We are bound together by our common struggle to find meaning and to seek Christ, not because we have found either of them. This is an essential realization if we are to develop an understanding of humility in our lives. We must never claim to have the truth. The nature of religious persecutions, division and disenfranchisement for thousands of years have been the result of one truth claim pitted against another, the followers of each inflicting pain and humiliation, even death, upon one another

If we make truth claims about our way of life, if we *have* the truth, we imply that others must not have it. Therefore, we must, with the conviction of duty to that Supreme Truth, seek to impose it upon others. Nothing would be

more devastating to our way of life. Instead, we make no truth claims about our way of life, but we bear witness to Obedience as a particular means of seeking the Truth.

It is in community that we find ourselves willing to accept and act upon the grace that God provides. We have the visible example, not of those who make truth claims, but of those who have embraced Obedience to the Gospel way as a journey to be taken, with full knowledge that to travel that journey alone is impossible. We have chosen to make our lives an example of service by means of the Rule and of vows. We lead different lives as religious, pointing to a new way of life, making ourselves an acceptable offering before God, a living sacrifice.²⁴

The truth is
that your life is not your own
nor was it ever...really.
You have made the vow
to follow this realization
to whatever ends it leads.
As you, daily, are
confronted with your peers...
with those at work or
in the home...
be mindful that
“anything” does not go
as it may have before.
Let it be as though
you ask a silent permission or
“by your leave”
before any undertaking...
keeping in conscious contact
with your Reality.

One important witness that we provide by living in the world as vowed religious is the witness to Obedience as a way of life. Let's ask ourselves how willing most people we encounter in the church would be comfortable with the idea of being obedient to a community (whether the brotherhood, the church), or a Rule of life. Most people would cringe. We live in a world that has come to over-value personal autonomy. To tell an individual in our society that they need to be answerable to anybody but themselves may be perceived as a social crime. As one of our community has noted: “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.”²⁵ We Christians live inside a wonderfully

²⁴ See Romans 12:1-21

²⁵ Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG; *Signs of the Spirit*, a Pentecost sermon

time tested optimism. Obedience promises us a way of hearing and responding to the Gospel call.

We have decided to practice a contextual means of seeking the Gospel way of life and allowing it to unfold in our lives — and we must never assume that we have been ultimately successful. Look at your life, your journey until now, and you will notice how much more you share with a person when standing with them at the beginning of that journey than with those with whom you may stand at the conclusion of it. Our life experiences point strongly to the bonds we have formed with those who acknowledge their own sense of wonder, awe, even inadequacy in the face of those challenges that we ourselves face. We are bound to those with whom we share the same fears, the same anticipations and the same struggles. Yet, even when we look back at all of the shared joys and common struggles, we may find ourselves alone at the journey's end wondering what will become of us. What truly holds our communal bonds in place is the future, as yet unfulfilled, for which the past and the present but lay the groundwork and prepare us.

Your direction, your compass,
is the holy Gospel.
Let it be your nourishment as well.
Let your will be guided by
the wholesome example
of our Lord Jesus,
that you may know
the will of God, and
not let your ego be bruised
by the relinquishment of "self".

Let us look for a moment at the socio-political phenomenon of "political correctness." The terms and language of this movement often over-emphasize not what brings a person into community, but rather what sets them apart. Our culture has yet to learn the difference between being divisive or being diverse. We name ourselves by our oppressors or those things that victimize us, even if, in some instances, they are our own inherent disorders. Every person claims to name and live by their own personal truths, implying that theirs is the only truth sufficient for themselves and their identification with the world, hence their journey seems to have ended.

What happened to the search for an objective universal truth? What about the journey to God's truth? Where is the bond that links a community if one's personal truth serves only to isolate one from the communal journey? The witness of our lives depends upon our ability to facilitate community by sharing our full humanity with others and allowing them to discover their place within the community. Obedience is one of the ways that we accomplish this. We show forth the fact that there are things in this world that are more important than our sense of independence. That, indeed, if we are to survive, we must find ourselves answerable to something beyond our limited scope of vision and our own desires.

And pray, always pray
to remain teachable,
to place the needs
of the whole, the community
above your wants.
Learn to tell the difference.
Be mindful and respectful
of those who have gone before you
and give them, and all others
the same deference
that you would offer Jesus
for he is with them.

Obedience is an uncommon departure from the cultural norms of today. It is the statement that the community, not autonomy, is the greater value. It does not mean adapting the community to suit one's individual needs and desires, but rather adapting our needs and desires to fulfill the necessities of the community. Obedience summons the individual to accommodate the community's need as the priority, while affirming the community's responsibility to nurture the individual in a common witness.

A danger in the church today is that it finds itself seeking to compromise its traditions, doctrines and disciplines in an attempt to be acceptable to all people. We change language and liturgy to be inclusive, which in and of itself is not at all bad, but it has at times been taken to such extremes as to find itself unable to express what it holds to be true. We have people in the church who deny the Resurrection, the Incarnation and deny doctrine as inferior to dialogue, thus reducing the faith to an intellectual enterprise or a set of rational, positive self-affirmations all to make the church more acceptable to all people at all times. Has it never occurred to her that we are a vehicle for changing the lives of people who suffer and are in pain, not the other way around?

In such Christianity, there are no consequences because salvation has become meaningless. No one need fear the power of sin, because sin either does not apply (as in the case of those who have been wounded by misuse of the term), or is just an innocuous "turning away from God" rather than a deliberate, albeit misguided, choice to take wrong and hurtful action against God, others and ourselves and then justify the behavior. The church has allowed people to perceive themselves as exempt from responsibility for sin because they have been oppressed or victimized by the church or society. It has accommodated people's sense of disenfranchisement by relieving them of the need to accept personal responsibility to overcome resentment and oppression. These secular, cultural forces present the danger of having reduced the Christian faith to irrelevant dictums to make people comfortable with the faith journey. The Christian faith was never meant to be comfortable. It was meant to be dangerous.²⁶

²⁶ See Ephesians 6

The Christian journey calls us away from all of our perceived needs for security and places us into a Gospel way of life directly opposed to the way of the world. A brother notes: "As a brother, I rejoice at the fact that I have been able to witness to God's love for me to others. Life in the brotherhood is a serious and dangerous business. One may be called where one does not want to go. The unknown is often risky. However, it also calls me to live in freedom and to be a good steward of God's gifts." ²⁷

To obey means to accept, in prophetic witness, the decisions of the church and the brotherhood even if they impact us directly in ways we do not like. There are few, if any, circumstances where disobedience is appropriate. Likewise, to obey the Gospel calls us to a way of life with which our inner most being is at odds. It asks us to embrace our talents and our gifts, ourselves as part of God's good creations. But it also demands of us astute observations of our own limitations and shortcomings and a desire to live within the rules of community in spite of those limitations. When we speak about "naming our own truth" we must acknowledge that we are precious in the sight of God, but we should also be willing to direct our objectivity to our own fallenness, our difficulty in achieving successful spiritual development without the grace of God. Our "truth" is nothing more than our own utter dependence upon God. It should have little or nothing to do with our independent successes or individual value assumptions. Our desire needs to be conformity to the will of God as manifest in the directives of the Gospel and as revealed by the Spirit.

If you have the grave misfortune
of being one of those
who wields authority, and who
suffers the obedience of others,
appreciate the sacrifice of will
that you may demand of them,
and pray to be made worthy
of such a mighty weight.
Exercise authority
with prudence and temperance
...never demand respect.
Earn it instead.

We vow Obedience to Jesus Christ, to the Episcopal Church and to the brotherhood. The prophetic witness of Obedience in the world is not an unquestioning, self-abasing obedience to the authority of the church, nor is it a narrow sighted conformity to the minutia of theological detail. Obedience is not intended to diminish our capacity for reasonable engagement of questions of conscience or belief. It is instead a witness to role of the community in the ongoing search for and appropriation of the Gospel way of life and its center in God. It is the deliberate dismantling of self-will and conformity to the will

²⁷ Br. Charles Edward BSG; *A Deacon's Role, The Servant #148*

of God. In these contextual circumstances it is to be lived in participation with, in and by community and, in the case of religious life, is structured by a Rule. Our participation in the way of Obedience is necessarily journey centered and not destination oriented. Our goal is outside of the realm of the empirically verifiable truth claim and rests in eternity which we may never know substantively in this lifetime.

Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are our way of seeking God, centered not around autonomy but around participation in and with community. We must never be satisfied that living the vows is the success of our journey — but rather that they are pointers to an objective truth that lies beyond them. They are markers on the journey to God, and we must bear witness in our lives that to seek God and God's Truth are not only necessary, but that these goals alone are worthy of pursuit.

When we "liturgize" our lives, we come to acknowledge the presence in our lives not of Truth, but a desire to seek the Truth, in a manner opposed to the world which has been very successful at finding only truths that are insufficient to fulfill us. We consecrate our lives and our actions to the pursuit of Truth, taking every opportunity to state by holy living that we cannot succeed apart from God's guidance. This is our witness as religious.

Obedience — Reflection Questions

“A brother makes the vow of obedience to Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, the provisions of the Rule of the brotherhood, and to the Superior General and other pastoral officials as appropriate.” (BSG Rule, Of the vows)

Focus:

Obedience is the decision to lay aside self-will and to accept submission to an authority other than one’s own. It is sometimes necessary, therefore, to place a relatively unconditional trust in an authority that may sometimes interfere with personal priorities or even, potentially, personal conviction.

Personal Development:

1 — Describe the impact of the vow of Obedience upon your understanding of each of the following:

- a. your sense of autonomy
- b. your personal ambitions
- c. your personal truth claims
- d. the church’s truth claims

2 — In light of this understanding, are there times when disobedience would be appropriate?

a. If yes, when is it appropriate? Why? Qualify these statements by discussing the impact of disobedience on:

1. the vowed religious
2. the community

b. If no, why is disobedience inappropriate?

3 — Briefly describe your understanding of Obedience as it relates to the four-fold authority that we are called to obey. Namely:

- a. Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior
- b. the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church
- c. The Rule of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory
- d. the Superior and other pastoral officials of the community

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



The Baptismal Covenant

Are you any different
from any other Christian?
Do not be tempted
to believe
that the religious life
is more than...
or better.
It is not a deeper
Christian commitment
than for one who
wholeheartedly
lives out the Baptismal Covenant.



Our life in apostolic witness is a full affirmation of our commitment to Baptism. In the community of the baptized that is the church, we are called not to better or more profound commitment to what is asked of us in Baptism, but instead to a visible and more deliberate witness to what the Baptismal Covenant requires of us.

You have chosen a
different life...
to live out that same
Baptism...
in a family of choice
under a common Rule,
a different expression.

Let us start with Baptism and what that means. In spite of the best of intentions to be inclusive in the church, we must understand that there is no such thing as an unbaptized Christian. To be a Christian is, by virtue of Baptism, to be admitted as a full member of the Body of Christ, being washed with water and anointed with oil in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The understanding of the sacraments as professed by the church is that the sacrament is not only a sign of, but effects the grace that it represents. Baptism is the very means by which, in the Christian understanding and in accordance with Scripture, we are cleansed from sin and given the Holy Spirit of God to dwell within us.

Without the essential element of Baptism one is not fully a member of the Body of Christ that is the church. ²⁸ Baptism is the means by which our membership is effected and sealed. To give the impression that this is not the case is dangerous to the individual as well as to the church itself.

In Baptism we have become the children of God through adoption. Ours is not to join the intellectual debate regarding what it means to be a child by adoption. It is for us a statement that, although all of us are God's children, there is a special intimacy between God and those God has called into relationship with him through Baptism. ²⁹ Each Christian is, therefore related to all other Christians in the way sibling is to sibling, all of us living in that unique relationship to our Creator that is characterized by Jesus in calling God "Abba" or Father. God has chosen to relate to us as a parent, and we are uniquely God's children. This is what it means to be a Christian.

You have bound yourself
to a discipline
and to a certain kind
of sacrifice. But ask yourself,
"What does the Lord require?"
Has he asked a sacrifice?
Explain to yourself
what it is...for
others will surely ask.

It is important to note that it is our particular set of rules, values, dogmatic assumptions or activities that define us as Christians, hence setting us apart from members of other faiths. It is Baptism alone which sets us apart. All of the rest of the formulae that dictate Christian life and worship are means by which we seek to discover what the implications of that Baptism are for us. They are the means by which we appropriate and live out the unique relationship to God which we have been offered in Christ Jesus.

As such, our Rule of Life is the instrument by which we, individually and in community, seek to live out what it means to be Christian. It is the means by which we, as individuals, seek to discover the implications of our unique relationship with God as defined by our Baptism; and it is the community's formula, by which it seeks to express the significance of that relationship with God in our lives together as Christian family.

As a religious in the world,
without such things as
goods in common, or
without the cloister
and regular hours
of prayer in the choir...

²⁸ See Galatians 3:23-4:7

²⁹ See Ephesians 1:1-14

without abandoning the world
what has been your sacrifice?

Throughout the Rule there is an emphasis on sacrifice that is characteristic of the Christian faith. When we are called fully into lives as Christian people, we are asked to make room for the bounty of God bestowed upon us, the most primary of which is the presence of the Holy Spirit. There begins an interior process of the emptying of self, a making room for that presence. As God emptied himself for us, taking on our human nature in the form of a slave “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,”³⁰ we are asked to empty ourselves for God that he might dwell fully in us and we in him.³¹ We are asked, in some sense, to make sacrifices of those things that may seem important to us. Proper stewardship of time, talent and treasure is the very means by which we make these sacrifices.

You may be inclined
to say...

“my acts of charity...
my hours of devoted work
for the church and for
humanity
...these are my sacrifices.”
But do you not gain satisfaction
from the work you do...
is there not a sense of
accomplishment
for helping your fellows?

The whole of the Rule is dedicated to naming those ways in which we sacrifice our self-centered needs, our clinging to possessions, our desire for esteem and high regard. More than just a litany of obligations and requirements, it is a reflection of those ideals which we are called to embody as children of God and ambassadors of Christ. “A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer.”³² and further along, “.....service to our fellow man.”³³ There are many things in the Rule which point to our development of values consistent with the Gospel message of love, unity, service and reconciliation.

Herein lies the question
of your commitment
to the spiritual life,
what sacrifices are you

³⁰ Phillipians 2:8

³¹ John 6:56

³² *BSG Rule Of the life of a brother*

³³ *BSG Rule: Of work as an apostolate*

willing to make
as a religious in the world?
Herein lies the answer.
The life you've chosen
in the world...
may be a bigger challenge
than the safety of
the cloister.

We must take care not to fossilize the Rule by interpreting every passage to represent specific or concrete ways of living our lives in apostolic witness. The Rule is not about praxis as much as it is about perceptions. Our Rule calls us to seek understanding, it does not provide us with it. It does not give us the answers on how to serve, or ways in which to witness. Nor does it detail how our vows are to be reflected in our individual lives. We are called to make those choices within the framework established by the Rule. Therefore, our ways of life may be many and varied.

Yet, we are called to live our lives in the world — and as such, praxis must not be overlooked. The gifts bestowed upon us by God are meant to be shown forth in concrete ministries to our communities, our families and our neighborhoods. Our understanding of Christian witness is that we live in relationship with God only as well as we manifest his love in our relationships with others. We show forth this life in service to all, taking every opportunity to demonstrate the love of God, even in our limited capacity to do so. 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.”³⁴

You are called to live
in the world for Christ
and not for yourself.
The Rule says as much...
“To God alone the Glory”!
How profound a challenge
to keep your motives in check,
and to maintain the right
perspective...
in all things.

Let us look at the promises we are asked to make in Baptism and how that covenant is reflected in our community documents. We are asked to “renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness... renounce the evil powers of this world.... renounce all sinful desires that draw us from the love of God.” We are asked these 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? Do you believe in God;

³⁴ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Second Sight*, The Servant #151, October/December 1993

Father, Son and Holy Spirit?”³⁵ The Rule itself asks us to make the vow of Obedience to Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior. Implicit in this vow is the trust that the statements made in the Baptismal examination are true. We cannot profess 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 gentle master, believing in his grace to aid us in our journey. We profess the Christian faith in baptism and we reaffirm it in our Rule of Life.

As your Baptism unfolds
with each new step you take,
living fully in the Spirit
....and She in you,
you will enter more deeply
into that interior place
where between you
and your Creator,
you can make the choice
of what your personal sacrifices
must be, for you to be whole...
to find your completion
in him.

“The Brotherhood shall, through the consecration of life offered through its Rule, aid in the development of the spiritual life of each of its members.”³⁶ We have essentially accepted the responsibility of allowing the Baptismal Covenant to become fully integrated into our lives and our understanding of ministry and community. “Will you continue in the apostle’s 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?”³⁷

These are neither ideological statements, nor abstract ideals. The Baptismal Covenant is a plan of action, a way of living. They are concrete realities. Our community documents are centered in these realities. We continue: “Members of the brotherhood shall express and exercise in the world their particular consecration in their apostolic activity, witnessing through daily life to the love of God in Christ Jesus. The Brotherhood, through its common bond, shall encourage the growth and unity of all its members, as an example to all with whom they come in contact. Following the direction of the Holy

³⁵ *Book of Common Prayer*, Holy Baptism. pp. 304-5

³⁶ The Constitution of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Article II: Of purpose

³⁷ BCP, Holy Baptism. pp. 304-5

Spirit, the brotherhood shall serve God in the work and worship of the church.”³⁸ The Rule requires weekly, if not daily, participation in the Eucharist; daily prayer; examination of conscience and witness to the love of God. Even Chastity, as defined by the Rule, is the equivalent of “respect[ing] the dignity of every human being” spoken of in the Baptismal Covenant.

In our ministry and witness to the church and to the world, we are asked to show forth the calling of Baptism and to raise up the unique vocation of apostolic religious life. There are essential similarities in each and there are fundamental differences. Baptism is the beginning of the journey; profession of vows is a commitment to a specific route to that journey’s end.

³⁸ The Constitution; Article II: Of purpose

The Baptismal Covenant — Reflection Questions

Focus:

Read the Examination of Candidates and the *Baptismal Covenant* in the BCP pp. 302-305

Personal Development:

- 1 — What difference does it make in your life to know that you are baptized?
- 2 — Where is your understanding of Baptism reflected in the Rule of BSG? Where is it not? Where does the Rule add to that understanding?
- 3 — In what ways does the Rule of BSG act distinctively from the Baptismal Covenant in calling you to holiness of life?
- 4 — What do you see your individual witness communicating to others about the vocation of Baptism and the unique possibility of the vowed life?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



In the World and Not of It



You will hear this phrase
as long as you live
a life consecrated
to the service of God...
and yet, you will not know
quite how to define it,
that feeling of
being a citizen
of another country.

To be in the world and not of it is a statement of citizenship. We are called, as Christians, to a defiant non-attachment to the world and its ideals. We are called to live in prophetic witness, which requires us to stand firm, motivated by nothing but the kingdom of God. This is akin to sedition in this world. And yet, as apostolic Christians, we are called to live very much in the world around us — dealing with the common struggles the same as any other person. This is unusual for a society that generally believes that religious are set apart, as detached from the strivings of the world as possible, so much so as to even live apart from our "ordinary" Christian brothers and sisters.

The prophetic witness attested to and lived out in Gregorian witness, however, asks something quite different from this common perception. If our Lord saw fit to live in the world, surrounded so by the ordinary folk of life, how much more are we, his followers, asked to do so? Jesus lived an extraordinary life, and yet lived very much in the world, worshipping, working, and enjoying fellowship with his fellow citizens, everything including suffering right along with the least of them.

It is far more than
non-attachment to
the things of this world.
More importantly, it
is the non-attachment
to its objectives.
While some around you
strive to fill their coffers
with admiration and
esteem...
when they chase
security and safety,
as they yearn for power and
control...you, dearest friend,
must quietly seek for God.

We read stories in the Scriptures of the daily experiences of Jesus with his friends and followers. His participation in the celebrations and circumstances of life; the wedding feast at Cana, his journeys to Jerusalem as a child, his table fellowship, praying in the synagogue, even his struggles in the Garden before his crucifixion, point to his experiences in the world and demonstrate God's appropriation of our full human experience. We are called to be as fully participatory in this human existence as he was.

We must remember, however, that we are indeed set apart in a certain context. This discussion of our lives in Christian witness emphasizes what makes us continuous with the Christian tradition, and emphasizes our role in and among the community of the baptized. Yet it is also meant to demonstrate what it is that motivates, guides and sustains us in our ministry and, indeed, sets us apart in our vocation. We are, as described earlier, holy people – in the sense that we are consecrated to God. “Our Rule of Life 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.”³⁹ Our call to holiness of life is received by each of us individually, and is blessed and upheld by the church during our profession of vows to a life of dedicated servanthood. We are commissioned and set apart to serve God and his church. We are also called to appropriate the invitation to citizenship in the kingdom of God and manifest an ongoing witness to its presence in the world and its eschatological coming at the end of time. Our brother continues: “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.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Br. James BSG; from a sermon on the occasion of his installation as honorary Canon, Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, San Pedro Sulas, Honduras

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Do not disdain the world
as some would have you...
it is, after all, full of the beauty
of God's own Creation.
But always live as though
you are a guest here...
of some unseen host.
Be careful not to wreck the house
or leave messes behind you,
replace the things you use
and always ask permission
to speak candidly
to your fellow house-mates.

If we, therefore, are citizens of another kingdom, we are to live our lives in such a manner that the integrity of that understanding is not lost. This means quite more than what one may expect, more than simply a non-participation in the systems, ideologies and programs of worldly concern. Prophetic witness is substantially more than the decision to disdain governments and institutions. It is to live with the conviction that all will be as God intends it to be — in his time, in his way. It is the decision to identify with the struggles of every person, inviting the presence of God's compassion, manifesting the presence of God's love and concern, without being presumptuous enough to name God's truth or to speak with the authority of God. Our Founder once wrote: "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." ⁴¹

Never presume
to tell others how
to run their lives.
Feel free to name truths
as you see them,
with great kindness
and generosity.
Make your observations
by the light of God's truth,
but never try to
rearrange their furniture,
or judge their decor.

Prophetic witness is the relinquishment of all claims to power and authority or even understanding, and is instead to live within absolute dependence upon the fullness of God's intention as it has been revealed in Jesus (See Ephesians 1:8b–11). We do not have the right, nor if we approach the world with humility, do we have sole license to that understanding. "What is Truth?" ⁴²

⁴¹ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Preach, Teach, Heal; The Servant #160*

Pilate asked our Lord. Did Jesus name the truth for us? No, rather he remained silent. He remained silent and refused to name the Truth for us authoritatively, knowing that the Father would reveal the truth in his own time.

What difference would it have made had the Christ, in a moment of opportunity, spoken for us the complete and authoritative will of God for all of humanity. He could have named truth in terms available to our simple understanding. How much of our searching and struggles for understanding would have been unnecessary? But Jesus instead remained silent, so that the rest of history remained open for us to pray, to seek and to attempt understanding with all of our hearts. And he remained silent to provide an example that no one may possess the full authority to speak for Truth. God remained silent that we might have a voice to pray for wisdom.

Let us ponder these words for a moment: "Living a Rule, while an act of discipline, is a freeing experience. You can sort out your values and test your assumptions against something truer and more permanent than yourself." ⁴³ Prophetic witness is to remain in God's silence and in his invitation, giving others voice to pray and to seek God's Truth, by providing an example of the life-giving vocation of God's people. It is to say with our very lives that all will be well. It is to state without reservation that God's kingdom is waiting for us to find our fulfillment there, in him who is the source of all things, and it is to state that the systems of this world are insufficient to provide such comfort and succor. To live as a religious is to live your life in such a manner that "every living moment may be an exemplification of the motto of the brotherhood: Soli Deo Gloria — to God alone the glory". ⁴⁴

Live your life as such
until its end...
and then, quietly
put your affairs in order,
leave a gift for your hosts
and depart...holding onto
gratitude and love
for their great kindness...
having put up with you
for so long.

Ours is an Incarnational faith. Therefore, let us live our lives with gentleness, kindness and generosity, for we are ambassadors, vessels of the Spirit, called in partnership with God and our Christian family to enter a new way of life in this world as a foreshadowing of the life in the next.

⁴² John 18:38

⁴³ Br. Gordon John BSG; *A High Calling, The Servant #162*, Summer 1996

⁴⁴ *BSG Rule: Of the life of a brother*

In the World and Not of It — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“If we, therefore, are citizens of another kingdom, we are to live our lives in such a manner that the integrity of that understanding is not lost. This means quite more than what one may expect, more than simply a non-participation in the systems, ideologies and programs of worldly concern. Prophetic witness is substantially more than the decision to disdain governments and institutions. It is to live with the conviction that all will be as God intends it to be — in his time, in his way.” (From The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

The common perception of community is that it has defined parameters based on such factors as geography, socio-economic factors or political agendas. Our understanding of “community” in the community is tempered by the prophetic witness mentioned above. We have, in action, stated that the common perception of “institutional” community is inadequate to our experience. Our community and its witness continue to be strong even though we are not bound by geography or worldly ideologies. We are bound only by the Rule and bonds of affection. Our understanding and practice of community in the world extends even to the kingdom of heaven to include those who have gone ahead of us.

Personal Development:

1 — In what way does the contemporary nature of this community confirm or contradict your previous notions of religious life? Similarly, in what way does the dispersed nature of Gregorian life challenge your assumptions of community?

2 — In what ways do you see the idea of *prophetic witness* informing your particular understanding of community?

3 — How do you choose to live “in the world and not of it”? In what ways will your actions express that understanding?

4 — How does the above interact with your understanding of the community motto “Soli Deo Gloria”?

Goals: Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Quietness

The grace of your vocation
is to be rooted in the Gospel,
therefore, never
offer an opinion, unless
it is solicited...and
only then, orient it
towards the words and deeds
of our Savior Christ.
It is not enough
to be well versed in Scripture
but to be well versed
and well adapted
to the objectives of God
and the establishment of
his kingdom.



To keep silence, in thought, word and deed is a manifestation of humility in the presence of God and his existence within his Creation. Our presence, as testimony to God's love, should always be subdued, in deference to his goodness and mercy towards us. We accept quietness, not merely as a reflection of our humility, but in acknowledgment of the fact that we really know very little at all. It is an expression of our awe at the Presence of he who is far greater than ourselves, and a deference in the face of the Love that surpasses our capacity to reason.

"Silence in thought" is the attempt to live within the quiet of our inner mind and to subdue our hearts in the presence of God. When we embrace our interior life, we make the decision to quiet our thoughts and be ready to abandon ourselves into the silence wherein God's presence is made available to us. This is the fruit of our prayer life, if we make the sincere attempt to enter "our inner room" ⁴⁵ and as the Psalm says "speak to [our] heart in silence

⁴⁵ Matt. 6:6

upon our beds".⁴⁶ Inner quietness, inner silence leaves us more available to sense the interior movement of the Spirit as she guides us into God's presence.

"Silence in word," as stated earlier, is a reflection of our humility. It is the acceptance of our own limited knowledge and the understanding that, more than our words, our presence to those around us can be life giving and nurturing. We must be ever aware that, as much as we may desire to do so, we cannot change the way people feel about themselves, the world around them, or their interior processes. We can be available only to invite them more deeply into the process of self-discovery, and to the awareness of God's presence to them.

Idle gossip and
senseless chatter
are in violation of the ideals
of poverty and
chastity.
Implicit in those vows
is the relinquishment
of a need
for too many words
or to be heard
as though the opinions really matter
from your limited perspective.

Words have a way of filling space and time and often create a barrier between people. Presence, however, the reassurance of God's grace and its availability to all, invites communion and communication. We must be prepared, when we speak, to point individuals toward the Gospel promises and to knowledge of God's salvation and the redemption offered in Christ. This is done far more through action and example than through words. When the Scriptures say "faith without works is dead",⁴⁷ they are proclaiming that it is truly through good works and the example provided by them that God's grace is made known. We need to use an economy of words that speaks less of what we "know" and reveals more of our common striving for the knowledge of God, showing us to be not above, but right alongside our fellow Christians in holy pilgrimage. Let us remember the words of our Founder: "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."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Psalm 4:4

⁴⁷ James 2:26

⁴⁸ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Preach, Teach Heal*.

"Silence in deed" is to accept that we should never seek by way of action to give the impression of our piety. Self-conscious piety and self-righteousness are the enemies of faith. Like the Pharisees in Scripture, we must avoid acting in such a manner that others are "compelled" to note our piety.⁴⁹ To walk in quietness and humility is to avoid the spiritual dangers of calling undue attention to ourselves and our actions. Remember that, as religious, our duty is to call attention to God — not to ourselves. Our active lives should be compelled by Grace alone, and any recognition of this on our parts will ultimately lead to quiet action among our fellows, seeking not our glory but God's. In this manner we truly live, as we are called, not for ourselves but for him who died and rose again for us.

⁴⁹ See Luke 11:43

Quietness — Reflection Questions

Focus:

The word “silence” can mean several things. It can at once signify a lack of communication, or it can signify the very space within which communication is made possible. “Quietness,” on the other hand, is a form of “*passive action*.” It is very effective at creating a space suitable for communication and is, in itself, an invitation to the act of holy listening. In this case, the person practicing quietness receives the invitation, as do those who observe him.

Personal Development:

1 — Reflect on the nature of opinion (individual and/or collective). How does it contribute to a sense of identity in a community or an individual? How does it interfere with community?

2 — How is your sense of “opinion” or personal conviction challenged by the vow of Poverty? the vow of Chastity? the vow of Obedience?

3 — How does the dynamic tension between humility and personal conviction operate in your life?

4 — In what ways do you think you could improve in the area of communication? In what way do you see yourself being an effective communicator?

5 — How might you better practice the virtue of quietness named in the Rule?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Patience



My dear brother...
there is no longer any rush
to achieve goodness
by thought, or word, or deed
before the passage of time
comes to its predetermined end.
You are loved, as all of
his children are. And so,
above all be patient with yourself.
Be gentle with yourself,
and thank God for his kindness.

Patience with ourselves and our Christian companions is essential. We are finite in our compassion, limited in our ability to appropriate holy living. We must be patient with our spiritual development and patient with reaping the fruits of our prayer. After the profession of vows in religious life, many feel as though there should be some immediate change in our personalities, changes in our perceptions and outlooks. Here, it must be remembered that profession is not the goal post but the starting line. It is the place where we begin our journey towards holiness and allow the Gospel life to unfold its way before us.

There are three areas of consideration when we are dealing with patience. The first is patience with ourselves, the second concerns patience with others, and the third relates to patience with time and its movement toward the future, even into God's kingdom.

Even from our birth
we will tend to fall down
and be given the grace to stand again,
and your life will be
a living out

of this same pattern
of growth in holiness.
You will stand and fall
and stand and fall
and may someday learn
to walk.
Most days you will be carried
and occasionally,
by virtue of your prayer,
will sometimes carry others.

The starting point for patience with oneself is the realization of our finite nature. This begins, as all things do, with humility. The struggle with acceptance of our shortcomings is usually the symptom of an inflated self-image. When we proceed from an inner perception of our own self-importance we will naturally be impatient with ourselves for falling short of the mark. We set high expectations for ourselves and the result is a dissatisfaction with our perceived flaws when those expectations are not met. This is part of our sin, the sin of presumption.

We are called to repentance. How are we to act as ministers of reconciliation if we are unaware of our shortcomings or unwilling to change them. Repentance is not an intellectual endeavor. It is not enough to be intellectually aware of our sin; we need to experience true contrition when confronted with our defects. As our brother writes, “the repentance described in the Gospel does employ the intellect and engage the emotions, but it culminates in a sometimes neglected faculty: the will. Gospel repentance means ‘coming to yourself’ so suddenly, so radically that you are not simply intellectually aware of your guilt, or emotionally sorry for your actions, but turned around and strengthened to act.”⁵⁰

Be patient with others
and realize, when
some may offend,
by behaviors other than
your own,
that you only know
a piece of their picture...
their story.
If you know your own mind
then you may, perhaps,
teach it. But if you recognize,
as you must, that you
know only very little...
listen and learn
from one more humble
than yourself...

⁵⁰ Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG; a Lenten reflection entitled *Three R's: Repentance, Reconciliation and Renewal*.

the person who has no facade
the person who is more honest
in the eyes of the Creator...
is perhaps the one
who bothers you the most.

We, like all of God's creatures, have immense personal value because of our unlimited potential. However, we are all still works in progress. We allow God's divine will for us to unfold in the ever new, ever creative potentiality of our being. We must be careful to not to second guess God about what our achievements should be, nor should we over-value or under-value ourselves in terms of our self-worth. We are not the arbiters of our own inherent worth in the scheme of creation or in the place of God's kingdom. We must know ourselves as we are and trust that God will determine our worth.

When we deal with others, we must understand that we know very little. Since we cannot even presume to know our own nature and what lies inside of us, how can we presume to know enough of others to pass judgment upon them. To be impatient is, by its very nature, to pass judgment. Patience with others requires an understanding of their finitude, their acceptability to God their Creator. Impatience with them is to state that they should be other than they are, or in a different state than they are; it is to presume to judge them by standards that we ourselves have set rather than to accept them as they are in Christ. Impatience is the refusal to see the presence of the Spirit of God within them. However, we must remember that “our work as ambassadors of Christ, as ministers of reconciliation, consists of more than feeling sorry. For feelings of compassion, unless they are followed by acts of compassion, are worth nothing. If we are to be true to the one whose gracious action, in giving himself to death upon the cross, saved us from the powers of sin, then we too must act.”⁵¹

Another's defects are only
the mirror of your own
reflected more honestly
without your “self”
to hide behind.
As you go through life
trying to be
a good brother...
keep in mind that others
will struggle as well
to make a good impression
upon you.
Endeavor, always, to
be honest.

We must be content neither to diminish our value by self-deprecation, nor to assume an overly zealous self-confidence. Both are contrary to our true

⁵¹ Ibid.

nature. We are only called to exhibit patience with ourselves as an example to those who struggle with their own sense of balance and priority. We are called to see Christ in all persons, being patient when their shortcomings – or our own short-sightedness – might obscure the light that shines from within them. We are called to wait upon the will of God, trusting that in all things the world will be healed, and that we along with our brothers and sisters will find the glory of God proclaimed throughout all Creation.

Wait upon the will of God!
And, remember, you already have
what you've prayed for...
and you do not really lack
anything you yearn for,
but God...who is good...
has already bestowed it upon you,
you just don't see it yet.

Patience — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“O tarry and await the Lord’s pleasure; be strong and he shall comfort your heart; wait patiently for the Lord” (The Psalmist, Psalm 27:18)

“There are three areas of consideration when we are dealing with patience. The first is patience with ourselves, the second...with others, and the third...with time and its movement toward the future...” (From The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — What does the above Psalm passage say to you about God’s role in the development of patience?

2 — What most challenges your ability to be patient? How can the Rule help?

3 — In what ways does a community act as a “school” of patience? What are the ways in which community challenges you *personally* in the area of patience?

4 — Someone once described time as “Things I Must Earn” or, alternatively, “This Is My Education.” Describe briefly how these statements may or may not apply to your needs regarding patience.

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



Humility

Never over-value
the esteem and praise of others,
this can only lead to danger.
The fruition of humility
is that your own esteem
comes by virtue of being
pleasing to God.
Despite Hollywood's
romantic notions,
being a religious
is not a glamorous life.
It is, in fact,
peculiar.
Take no pride in your position,
but be content to be loved
by God alone.



The truth is that anyone who speaks of humility, giving any impression whatsoever that they have it, has already admitted in fact that they do not know it at all. This is the trap that ensnares us all. In all reality, the only person who ever lived who knows humility in its fullness is our Lord Jesus. He suffered obediently unto death and, though completely innocent, gave up his life without a word in his own defense. What a miraculous example of humility.

We, as religious, face a particularly dangerous road as we seek humility. We seek to live it out in a common witness to God, knowing that he alone is our power and our strength. But the moment we think we have it, humility vanishes and we are left with our own arrogance. The moment we perceive ourselves as spiritual, counting our graces as if to say "look how far I've come," humility becomes elusive and we are in dangerous territory. We may be tempted to see ourselves in some romanticized light, holy men and women seeking to serve God in visible witness to the world, but we can never afford to glamorize our entrance into this ministry. That is why we are called servants. It is humbling to recognize that we are called to be the last in this life, the least of all his creatures — the selfless, and sometimes, suffering servants of God. We are called to be obedient to our Lord, thus reinforcing our posture of servanthood by witnessing to humility as a desirable estate. Yet, as we are also called his friends, we are reminded that even in our present circumstance, he is there to share our nature with us. For he, as well, was meek and humble.

Be ready and mindful
of the magisterial authority

that others will invest you with.
They will give away to you
power, and project
all of their past and
present experiences of faith upon you.
Don't judge the person
but be reluctant to accept
the full weight of that authority.

We must be mindful that humility is a grace. For all of our striving and all of our earnest desire for it, we must remember that it is a gift. Humility is nothing we can achieve on our own. The most we can do is to become ready for it. This process of becoming entirely ready is based upon our willingness and desire to look within ourselves and see where we fall short of the mark. It is to recognize our deepest flaws and to embrace our utter dependence upon God for the grace to live a good and holy life.

In contemporary culture there is a growing phenomenon called twelve step recovery. Begun with the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, there have developed several different communal fellowships based on the model of AA and its twelve steps of recovery from alcoholism and addiction. Perhaps nowhere in contemporary society, alas even in the church itself, is there such a movement towards dependency upon God to supply one with grace enough to live a spiritual life. For the alcoholic in recovery, this spiritual development is of the utmost importance for continued abstinence from addictive and self-destructive behaviors. One of the twelve steps employed in this program of recovery, the "Sixth Step," states that "We became entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character." It is promptly followed by, in Step Seven, "Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings."

The emphasis on the recognition of the faulted human nature followed by the humble attempt to ask God to guide us to renewed life in him speaks of a profound spiritual movement in the fellowship that has embraced this way of life. Humility in this group of men and women is recognized as the only true way to achieve spiritual growth. It is perceived as the means by which fellowship is created and is seen to be solely an active grace of God in the lives of his people that each individual must be willing to ask for. We as religious would do well to appropriate this understanding.

All of your companions'
preconceptions and ideas,
issues and experiences
with the church,
will be placed upon your shoulders.
Accept this with great reluctance
and with great humility.

As a result of the authority people will naturally impose upon us as a result of our vocation, we will be expected to have answers, often times to their

deepest and most heartfelt questions. Our ministry is not to answer those questions for people, but to point them in the direction where they may find the answers themselves. Ours is to point them towards the Gospel and to the interior life of prayer. We must never be afraid to admit when we have no answer, remembering that our life does not point to a deeper knowledge of the will of God, but to a commitment to ask the questions upon the answers of which our lives depend. It takes great humility to admit that one does not have an answer.

In your vocation and ministries,
do not seek positions of authority
or of great and
public visibility...
unless you are called.
Remember Gregory,
who shuddered to leave the cloister
for the highest seat in Rome.
You do not represent the church
as an institution...
but the Christ
as a friend and companion
accessible to all.

Our Superior General, the highest position of personal authority in our community, is seen in this way: “The Superior General shall guide the brotherhood with love and affection, with patience, quietude, humility and justice, and being mindful of the motto of the Patron of the brotherhood, Saint Gregory the Great, be a “Servant of the Servants of God.” [He] shall lead the brothers under the guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”⁵² Even those among us called to authority are reminded that Christ alone is the head of our community and our only Lord. For this reason, all of our superiors are still referred to as “brother”.

Not all of us are called to positions of authority. Not all of us are called to the ordained ministry. To be a religious is to be called to a different kind of life that may or may not ask of us the sacrifice of accepting the responsibility to undertake publicly visible ministry. We must be careful in our position not to attempt to represent the church and its ordained ministry unless that is where we are called. Religious are neither pseudo-clergy nor sacramental ministers, except in the sense that we are the sacramental presence of God as friend and companion, brother or sister. Humility is the recognition that one may not be called to be any greater than this, for this alone is beyond our imagining — to be, as Gregory said, “friends of God”.

When we gaze into the faces of our companions, our friends, neighbors and fellow seekers, we need to perceive the face of Christ there. How can one not be humble when confronted with the face of the living God? How can one presume to challenge the mystery of each individual human life, infused with

⁵² *The Constitution of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory*; Article VII: Of the Superior General

the grace of God, by not bowing down in respect of the power reflected there? Our brother notes: “Enjoy God’s grace; share God’s blessings; look for God in everyone, and even when you don’t readily see him there, know that he is, and treat everyone accordingly.”⁵³

Make the words,
 “I do not know”
a regular part of
your vocabulary...
and never be afraid
to show deference.
It is not coy, or an indication
of low self-esteem to do so,
but let your heart
always ponder God
and when he speaks through others
recognize him and answer.
Always strive
to value silence
for that is where,
in your darkest hours,
you will find him.

As apostolic religious we must be ever aware of our need for humility and our complete inability to achieve it on our own. There will always be temptation to have answers available to those who surround us. Of course, given the romantic illusions that many people have about the religious life and all that it entails, we will be invested with a certain authority by those who surround us in parish ministry, our neighborhoods, friends and the lives of those we encounter. To a certain extent our formation in religious life will prepare us with the basic necessities of this ministry. We will be taught history, liturgy, theology and develop pastoral care skills. We must remember, however, that our spiritual lives are not what we demonstrate to the world, but instead that our religious lives are an outpouring of the grace bestowed upon us in our relationship with God. That relationship is lived in private within each of us. Our life in church is not our interior life. Our corporate worship is the manifestation of the nourishment we are given in our individual prayer, and our individual prayer life is upheld and fed by our corporate life. Both of these worship experiences prepare us for our ministry.

As Christians we are called to lives of dedicated service to others. We are called in various ways, each according to the talents God has given us. Humility is the earnest attempt to live within the gifts that God has graciously given, neither expecting more nor contributing less than what we have received. It is the acceptance of our place in life, without excessive zeal for prestige, thus undermining the integrity of servanthood as a place to be desired in itself.

⁵³ Br. Donovan Aidan BSG; *A Full Earth*.

Remember that you are,
in spite of your new vocation,
still sinful, still afraid.
To find humility...recognize
your powerlessness
in the face of that sin,
and rejoice for the grace of God...
 that he has called you
to his house and
to his service.

To desire humility is a liberating endeavor. When we acknowledge our sin, we as Christians are left with nothing else but the forgiveness offered us in Christ Jesus. We meet this forgiveness in our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need our brothers and sisters, we need them to remind us of our need for humility, daily reminding us by their prayers and presence that we have been offered the grace of salvation in Jesus our Lord. Our need for the support of community is expressed wonderfully by our Founder: “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.”⁵⁴

Humility, therefore, is the acceptance of that salvation offered in Christ, with the clear recognition that it is unwarranted, offered freely as a gift in spite of our worth; independent of our value and inspired only by God’s love for us, his children. To accept it without reservation and with gratitude is to remain in humility, recognizing our hunger and need.

Humility, in essence,
is the recognition
of what and who
we really are...
followed by
a sincere attempt
to become what God
intends for us to be.

The church is called the beloved of God. We too, as members of the body, are called into relationship with him who calls to us. We are beloved of Christ, asked only to step fully inside his love and to reside there with him, first in time — then in eternity. As religious, we seek to undertake the journey towards the love of God, by becoming what God has intended us to be. This is the journey towards wholeness.

⁵⁴ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; a sermon entitled *Peter’s Denial*, delivered at a gathering in Western Louisiana.

As a famous holy man
once said...
try to avoid at all costs
seeing yourself
inside your head,
as on a TV screen,
in the beatific vision...
gazing upon God in prayer.

In the community of the baptized we may trust that God, in divine compassion, has called us to himself. Let us, above all, greet this news and one another with humility, reverence and joy. Let us seek to serve one another as we await the day when we shall all meet in the kingdom of Glory. Let us live, desiring nothing more than to do God's will, giving ourselves in thanksgiving and prayer for the gift of each opportunity to love with the compassion of Christ, praying for one another in times of sorrow and gladness, and keeping our gaze upon the beauty of Christ reflected in our community and its members.

Humility — Reflection Questions

Focus:

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Prayer 58. For Guidance, BCP, Prayers and Thanksgivings)

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

Personal Development:

1 — Briefly describe your understanding of the difference between humility and humiliation. To what extent might either be operative in your life?

2 — List the following items in order of priority according to your personal perspective, the first item being the highest and last item being the lowest priority:

- yourself,
- God,
- your significant other (or a good friend),
- the community,
- your parish,
- ministry to “strangers”.

- a. What was the reasoning behind the order of your list?
- b. Where are you in relation to God in the list? Why?
- c. Where is the “stranger” in relation to the community? Why?
- d. Did you experience any difference between where you ought to focus priority and where your living shows that you focus it?

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

4 — Read the above passage from *Micah 6:8*

- a. Does this passage challenge or reinforce your list above?
 - Why?
 - How?

5 — What about your initial list do you believe reflects the community motto “servant of the servants of God” ?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Charity

Charity is the act of giving the all of ourselves, to the glory of God and the benefit of others' growth. Remember that your sense of need will indeed diminish as your prayer grows. As God sustains you with the myriad of blessings such as a home and food, and clothing... do not ever be afraid to share your good fortune.



Charity as an aspect of giving: Charity (Lat. *caritas*) is an outpouring of love that comes from God. In practice it can proceed from Poverty and the proper understanding and practice of stewardship. When we recognize that everything we possess is only ours by virtue of good fortune and the permission of others, we will be less likely to live into the illusion of "ownership" and self-perpetuating greed. We, as members of God's kingdom, only *use* the things of this world, hopefully in a manner that gives us strength and support in our active ministry.

Practicing non-attachment and the prioritization of our lives, we are lead to the realization of how little we actually need, despite what we have convinced ourselves for so many years of our lives. True to the promises of Christ, we are more than adequately provided with our basic necessities. Therefore, it is all the more essential that we be willing to evaluate our needs further in light of those who truly lack the very necessities of. How can we, in good conscience, fail to provide for those who lack food and shelter? How can the church not pour every effort into the correction of this disparity, especially in our society, a culture of excess such as the world has never seen?

In the true spirit
of Christian life, open up

your heart and home
to those who may need.
The ministry of hospitality
is not limited to
the Benedictine
or the Franciscan,
but is essential,
 to all Christians
and all holy people.
Set apart, each day,
a portion of your benefit
in preparation for those in need.
When Christ knocks on your door
tomorrow or thereafter
feed him, clothe him
give him what is rightly his.
Like the Jews, waiting
for Elijah,
set an extra place at table
if you are so inclined...
in memory of those who lack
the very blessings that you have.

Our lives in Christian witness are meant to be vehicles to carry the message of God's love to all of his children. There is no more concrete way to do this than to be the very vessels through which God fulfills his promises by providing such necessities as are had by even the birds of the air, or the lilies of the field.

⁵⁵

Aside from the Vow of Poverty, and the virtue of Charity as stated in the Rule, we are reminded 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 ability in the apostolate and ministry to which he is called." ⁵⁶ This is the example of self-giving that we are called to offer. We are reminded that what we have comes from God and that it is to be given away. In fact, implicit in this statement is the very knowledge that giving is the only reason for which we have received anything at all.

Be a good steward
of the gifts of God's Creation.
Give of your time
and talents...in your ministry
in your home and
in your community.
Bless your friends with kindness,
and when just one lacks

⁵⁵ Matt. 6:28

⁵⁶ *BSG Rule: Of the work of the brotherhood*

the presence of family...
make him your own,
for as long as he needs
and it is a comfort to him.

Charity as an aspect of understanding: Charity may also be defined as right relationship with others. In this sense, Charity is a matter of perspective that directly pertains to our responsibilities in relationship with those in our lives. It is a result of another virtue discussed earlier, Patience. We must perceive this relationship between Patience and Charity and its implications before Charity may become a living spiritual practice, rather than simply a condescending form of accommodation, or mere toleration towards others.

To be charitable towards another human being is to give them permission to be who they are, without expecting them to abide by our rules or value judgments. It is to allow individuals or communities to be imperfect, to be incomplete, and it is to join them in the struggle to find wholeness. It is also to be willing to provide from one's God given resources the strength, companionship and emotional presence of oneself to the person who is in need of these things.

True Charity is to grant these gifts of presence, patience and understanding so that the individual may be empowered rather than disabled. One of our sisters explains: "As healers and helpers... ministering in Jesus name, 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."⁵⁷ Often times we may be tempted to provide for others from emotional wells that we do not possess, in an attempt to actually find fulfillment ourselves, by virtue of simply pleasing people. These circumstances do not represent Charity, but are selfishly motivated acts that ultimately oppress those around us, robbing them of the will or desire to find strength independent of our Charity.

Charity is to bring individuals to the same wholeness that we have discovered in Christ Jesus, and to wait patiently and with compassion as they discover that the gift has been offered to them as well. We must be careful not to impose artificial conditions upon those around us, giving the impression that they are conditions of judgment. God calls each of us freely, and we are not arbiters of God's grace. We are simply called to be available to our fellows, giving of ourselves, conveying God's love and understanding.

Do not take hostages
by your kindness.
Expect no appreciation

⁵⁷ Sr. Susanna Bede, CSSG; *Parents and Healers* - a homily on healing.

or anything in return.
And yet, to expand the kingdom
ask your beneficiaries
to promise if they can
that one day, when they are able...
and they meet someone in need,
to do the same, and
to remember you in prayer.

Charity as an aspect of service: The Rule makes clear that the single largest act of Charity required of us as apostolic religious is the ministry of service that we provide the church. The nourishment that we are provided to carry out this task comes from the Holy Eucharist. It is at the table of fellowship that we are fed and strengthened to be of service, and it is only natural that we should serve the church as the instrument by which we hear God's call to that table and to that mystery. We need to remember that "service flows from community as naturally as a dance flows from music."⁵⁸ It is only through the grace of Jesus Christ that we can be a community at all. He alone is the force that moves us. Our brother continues: "The Spirit reveals Jesus to us as one who welcomes and ministers to us, and one whom we can serve in serving others. We know, too, that Jesus is both the substance and the teller of the story. But the Spirit also reveals Jesus to us through a sign like no other: broken bread and a cup of wine."⁵⁹

We are called "servants of the servants of God," to remind us that we are not just the least, but the least of the least, inspiring in us the humility to give away what we have received so freely. God has provided for our nourishment to accomplish the task he has set before us. Charity is to live in active gratitude for this holy food, and as with the Rule, we are not only shown the way but provided with the means and structure to do what has been set before us. The religious witness under vows is a way of life that perpetuates itself by placing its center in Christ, who is both the beginning, the way, and the end of the journey.

We are called in active service to show forth God's glory in such a way that others will be inspired to service as well. When we provide an example of the liberation available to all people by selfless service to others, we must be on guard to not take undo credit, or to seek recognition for our actions. We do not have the strength to do these things ourselves, in fact they are contrary to our wounded human nature. Being mindful of this, give yourself completely to charitable works, and bear the burden with Christ so that others may learn from your example. Never be afraid when you pray for others, to ask them to pray for you. Encourage and empower others to join you in the task of service to the church. Charity is about sharing the burdens of the church and allowing members of the body to assume their rightful place beside you and to feel useful in their own right.

⁵⁸ Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG: *Signs of the Spirit*

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Charity — Reflection Questions

Focus:

Charity can proceed from any one of the three vows. In each case, the vow acts as the impetus for Charity. Charitable acts such as giving, understanding or service are the results of the motivations provided by the vows. However, in each of these cases, the perspectives are different. Charity can also proceed directly from a spontaneous outpouring of the love that we receive from God, without motivation, without reason and without reward.

Charity is about sharing the burdens of the church and allowing members of the body to assume their rightful place beside you and to feel useful in their own right. (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — What are the negative feelings and connotations elicited in our society by the word “charity”? What are the positive?

2 — Who is deserving of our charity? Why? Is anyone undeserving? What criteria should we use in making a determination?

3 — In your opinion, is there a difference between giving from a place of Poverty and giving from a place of Charity? Are they the same? What are the similarities and the differences in the motivations for each?

4 — At what point can acts of charity contribute to “enablement*” (see below) of an individual rather than empowerment? How do we know the difference?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

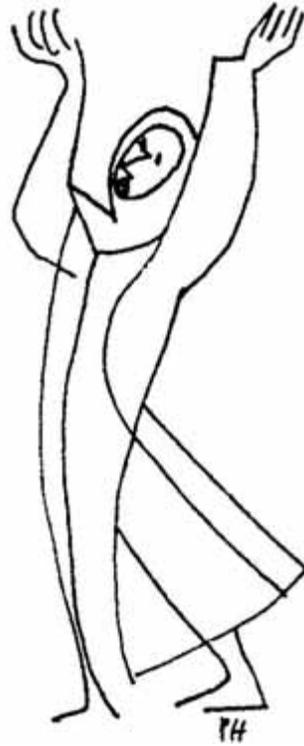
the community

*The concept of “enablement” in the current vernacular is used to suggest an inappropriate form of caretaking an individual. It is generally understood to be a means of perpetuating a person’s self-destructive behavior by participating in unhealthy “rescue” from the consequences of those behaviors.



Courage

You, my brother,
will be asked to be courageous
in ways you never realized.
You will need
daily to confront
the complexity of
a world in flux...
and to do your utmost
to embrace a certain
simplicity
for the sake of God.



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 (*Richard Thomas Biernacki*).

How much Courage does it take to also remember that we are to live our lives as strangers in a strange land? How much Courage does it take to live with simplicity in such a complicated world, to attempt to live among one's enemies and love them in spite of division and hatred? 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."⁶⁰ This is a large task, and daily we are reminded of our frailties and our dependence upon God's strength — even when we cannot sense it. This takes Courage.

Courage, for a religious in vows, means to rest within cloud of darkness, and to live with the understanding that God is present beyond the veil of our

⁶⁰ Br. Thomas Joseph BSG; *Trials and Tribulations, The Servant #154* Summer 1995

limited comprehension. It is to trust in the silence that speaks of the presence of God, seeking to conform ourselves to a will that is often times difficult to discern in our limited nature, and knowing that our very lives depend upon that will for our sustenance.

It is not an easy task
to be in the world
and not of it....
to see more than
an easy answer
to a complex question...
and, yet, simplify your
responses
as Christ would have you do.

It takes Courage to suffer through the challenges of life in this world. God knows this, for he shared our human nature with us, suffering along side the least of his servants. We trust because faith has shown us that God knows our pain and suffering. Sometimes this revelation can be overwhelming. Often times, we can struggle to accept our own human failings, especially with the expectations that might be placed upon us by our friends, companions and those among whom we minister. One member of community summed it up in this way: "When you find your fears, your frailties, your incapacibilities and your failings overwhelming you, join yourself to Jesus in all your humanity, and reach out to God and one another in prayer." ⁶¹

We must, with Courage, acknowledge that we too are in need of God's grace and healing. Our deepest fears are sometimes reflected in our inability to reach out ourselves, for ourselves. To acknowledge that we are weak, frail and suffering along with our fellow Christians is essential for building bridges of communication. We are not above these things certainly; however, we may unnecessarily feel above the need to reach out for our own wellness.

Ours is a Creation
still groaning with
the pangs of birth,
of growth...of
becoming.
The world is full
of pain and anxiety
and fear...and
your companions in it
suffer so.
To suffer through it daily
and not turn to run
to the enclosure of the cloister
will require great strength.

⁶¹ Br. Ciaran Anthony BSG; *Beginning Again, The Servant #164* Eastertide 1997

Pray always for the strength
of him who called for you.

One of our members, in a time of great suffering 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." ⁶² This is the courage that the Rule speaks of — to acknowledge our own needs, even to risk the limitations of our fellows in helping to fulfill them. This is where our reliance upon God must be truly embraced and appreciated.

Fear is the opposite of faith. It is essentially mistrust in the goodness and charity of God and his desire for the wellness of his children. We must, however, show forth in our lives that to trust in God does not mean to sit idly by as he takes care of our needs. Faith in God, in fact, demands of us that we take pro-active steps in the care of ourselves and others, taking the necessary action to have our primary needs for security, sustenance and emotional well-being fulfilled, and then leaving the results of those actions up to God.

Our deepest fears as human beings can be summed up as follows: firstly, we are afraid for our security and safety. This reflects our instinctual drives for shelter, food, economic security and our physical well-being. Secondly, we are afraid of not gaining the esteem and affection of those around us. This fear dictates our relationships with others, whether we are respected, loved and nurtured by family and friends, held in high regard by colleagues, whether our needs for emotional fulfillment and nurture are met. Finally, we are afraid of not having power or control over our lives. This is ultimate fear as regards our being, the "why are we here?" questions, the existential craving for self-determination, our need to feel in control of our life and its direction. All of our deepest fears are wrapped up in these three areas.

Our is a world
full of symbols and signals
and messages and noise
all crying out
consume, consume,
achieve, do, become,
louder and more frantic
until the moment came...
when, as all of us had done,
you learned not to
pay attention or
not to hear.
So overcome are the senses that
you can lose the single skill
so necessary to your ministry...

⁶² Br. Bernard Fessenden BSG (d. 1993); *The Woman at the Well, The Servant # 151*

the ability to listen...
to be present.

We are called “human beings,” not “human doings.” From the perspective of the religious, we are more likely to be understood as “human becomings.” We are being prepared for more important things than the world would have us imagine. All the noise our society creates, all the cries to action are geared toward telling us what our needs are, telling us of our own inadequacy. World-centered solutions, however, are antithetical to the God-centered life.

Courage is to listen, not the to strivings and struggles of the mind, but instead to awaken ourselves to the blissful silence of the mysterious presence of God within us. It is to trust in that silence, to place ourselves fully into the emptiness of our own being. Courage is to trust that, in spite of our fears of being left empty, God will fill us with every good thing, not just to satisfy our hunger, but to prepare us for the joys to which we are called. We are fed with living bread so that we may guide others to the table to have their fill as well.

The burden of courage is yours,
and the world will rely
upon you,
to be available...
to listen to their pain...
allowing them to invite you in...
and not to run away.
It is no small task...
as your brothers know well...
and they will hold you up,
along with God,
as you struggle with the weight
of so profound a duty.

The community of companions on your faith journey is there for the purpose of strengthening you as you approach your ministry in the world. As we learn to listen to each other, we learn the skills necessary to listen to others. As we involve ourselves in this community and its dynamics, we learn what it means to live within any community and to place God at the center of our common life. Faith is an existential leap into the boundless generosity of God. It is our identification with the Divine and the acceptance that we are not self-defined but rather "God-defined" people. It is the essential understanding that we are called to be what God would have us be, with all of our innate limitations, and to live within the knowledge that all of the resources necessary to achieve our purpose have been provided.

In a wonderful discussion on fear and faith, one of our Companion Sisters wrote: " Fear is a result of the fragility of human life. Sometimes we can feel as if we are in control of life when things are familiar. This is a false security.... We are not in control. Jesus calls his apostles to take nothing for their journey and admonishes them to let go of control and anchor themselves in God.

Their acceptance or rejection by others is unimportant. A spiritual life, a faith-filled life, is simply a life in which all that we want, all that we have, and all that we do is anchored in a sense of God's holy, loving presence. God's presence makes all we do holy. And his presence casts out all fear." ⁶³

Yet nothing weighs so much
as a life devoid of
gratitude and joy.
There is no pain so great
as holding a sparkling treasure,
so beautiful as yours,
and keeping it inside
afraid to share it
with those who need its light.
No loneliness is so profound.

Courage is the decision to live with faith rather than fear as the motivating force in our lives. As Christian men and women, we choose to live free from the hustle and bustle, free from the rush and readiness that is the hallmark of self-will and, instead, to live within the blessed rest that is the loving and eternal presence of God.

Walk forward
dear and gentle warrior...
wearing Christ as a garment
confront your fears
and then help others to the light.

We, as apostolic religious, are asked to take ourselves into the world, sharing the courage we have gained with others, so that they, too, might find the strength to confront the fear that keeps them from freely embracing the love of God. We are called to be standard bearers, gentle soulful warriors, strengthened by God to walk courageously toward his light. As we travel the journey to Love we are asked to call others to pilgrimage with us, with the skillfulness of shepherds, calling all peoples from their sheer and lonely cliff sides to join us in our journey on the long road home to the Lord's pastures.

⁶³ Sr. Clare, CSSG; *The World of Fear, The World of Faith, The Servant #165* Summer 1997

Courage — Reflection Questions

Focus:

A common slogan in Twelve Step recovery programs is that “*fear is the opposite of faith.*” This statement could probably be best illustrated in the story of Peter trying to walk on water toward Jesus (Matt 14:28-32).

Personal Development:

- 1 — Do you agree or disagree with the “fear/faith” polarity described above? Why or why not?
- 2 — In what areas are your fears most prevalent in your approach to religious life?
- 3 — How does one go about gaining courage in the face of fear?
- 4 — Is there a distinction between “everyday” courage and the Courage spoken of in the Rule? How might you go about getting the kind of courage the Rule speaks of?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Prayer

Be still...
for a moment.
Listen for him,
attentive and ready
for what I AM says
in the silence.
This is your vocation
to live in relationship
with your Creator.



All of the virtues just discussed, including the ability to live into the fullness of the vowed life, are firmly rooted in prayer. And although much has been written about prayer, its forms, its fruits and its challenges, it still needs to be reiterated that without prayer our religious lives are useless. Trying to live a life of active service is impossible were it not that the outward lives we carry forth in dedicated service are the extension of the benefits we receive in prayer.

Prayer could be defined simply as our relationship with the living God. Over and above that it becomes a matter of personal choice as to the ways in which prayer becomes manifest in our lives. However, due to our human limitations in having effective relationships even with other people, this definition can lead to discouragement and difficulties when we cannot live up to our expectations about what it means to have right relationship with God. As in life, the ways we relate to others often becomes the defining point of our being. So too, in the interior life of prayer, vocational religious attempt to live into their identification with God. Our relationship with God, in prayer, becomes that which defines us.

Remember, however,
that your relationship
with him...will only be
as honest as your relationship
with your fellows, and

the same holds true
the other way around.
If you listen to your brothers
and sisters in this world
and respond to them
with honesty, you will
understand the complexity
of your relationship
with the Father...and
the many ways he speaks.
If you are honest with God
about yourself and
all of the struggles, pains
joys and celebrations
of your spirit...
then you can be real
and true with those about you.

Too often, we think that prayer requires words; petitions, intercessions and thanksgivings. Let us for a moment, however, approach prayer from a different perspective. Let us say that prayer is defined by nothing less than our intention. No matter what action we are about to take, it is our intention that it be prayer that makes it so. For it is in giving our consent, opening ourselves up with intention to the loving presence of the Holy Spirit, that we accept the invitation to live into our relationship with God.

As with people, our relationships are not simply determined by the things we say to one another, but in our actions towards and with one another, in our moments of quiet time together, in our rest and in our work with and for one another. These are the many ways in which our relationships with human beings are manifested. Why should it be any different with God, or dare one say — any more limited? Our brother writes: "Why should we hide behind our humanity? Jesus never did. Nor, I hasten to add, did he rely on his divinity. Instead, he prayed; 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." ⁶⁴

There is a mystery in
that inner room
wherein dwells the
Spirit of God,
closer than breathing,
closer than feeling...
and your job, your
true vocation...
is never...never to try
to explain away that mystery

⁶⁴Br. Ciaran Anthony BSG; *Beginning Again, The Servant #164* Eastertide 1997

but to enter into it
as into darkness,
with a friend
holding your hand...
leading the way.

So then, prayer is the intention to relate our present thoughts, words or deeds; our deprivations, pains or elations; our presence in the given moment no matter what our state of activity or rest, as a gift of self to the presence of God. This view of prayer does not depend upon our abilities and is not compromised by our shortcomings. It is to live within one's limitations while at the same time offering one's whole self into relationship with God. This view also allows our prayer lives to be more alive and places us in the position of allowing ourselves to be aware and available to God's presence with us in all of our activities. Work, conversation, service and even the most mundane of daily tasks can be made a reasonable offering of prayer to the God who calls us by name.

In those moments
when you find yourself
anxious and rushed
moving through the world
at twice the pace...
curl your toes beneath you
feel the ground, the floor,
and remember where you are
in the present moment...
you are not merely a thought
in God's Mind...but
an experience...
pause to let him catch up and
enjoy you.

We are people of prayer. Our Rule revolves around the development of our prayer life with the four-fold Office, daily prayer, meditation and devotions, spiritual reading and the worship of the church in the Holy Eucharist. However, prayer is a mysterious faculty, viewed by many as a gift of the Spirit and available only as a grace of God. Some also view it as the only true means of relating not just to God, but to each other. We know only that it is our vocation, and from it comes all of our strength, our hope and our usefulness. Without prayer we can never be sure that our motives for service to others are inspired by God's love or whether they are simply self-serving. If not for prayer we could never begin to assume the place that God has intended for his children, the work of cooperation in God's plan for the redemption of Creation.

When we think upon the state of that Paradise of Adam and Eve, we imagine that the original intent of humankind was to live in constant prayerful relationship with God. Before the Fall of our earthly forebears, we can only

suppose what must have been the state of communion they enjoyed with God. But as people of the Resurrection we must realize that what was lost has been restored in Christ Jesus. We are no longer estranged from our God, but all has been made new again and our relationship with God has been reaffirmed in Jesus. To embrace Christ is to re-awaken to the powerful realization of God's love for us and his desire for relationship with us. As one of our community 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."⁶⁵ To embrace the life of prayer is to approach a new state of mind that recognizes the presence of Christ within a renewed Creation, and to make all of our actions a way of relating to him and cooperating with him in the redemptive work.

When you pray...
do what you will.
Speak, listen, laugh out loud
cry...work, smile at a stranger,
sit in the lotus position,
sing, chant, bow a thousand times..
it makes no
difference but that
your spirit does it with you,
through you...in the moment.
Be present for the Lord your God...
as he is present for you.

We must remember that God calls us into relationship with him because he earnestly desires our companionship. We should not so much attempt to "do" prayer as to allow ourselves to be inspired to it. Our prayer life should be a realistic reflection of our gratitude for the love that God has bestowed upon us, whether or not we believe it to be merited. We should never pause to wonder about our worthiness to receive such blessing. We already know that we are not worthy. We are, however, blessed with the knowledge that God loves us anyway.

It should also be noted that, within our discussion of intention described earlier, to pray is to give ourselves consent to open our spirit to the Spirit of God. God inspires each of us to prayer by issuing a constant invitation. He knocks at the door of our heart every moment of every day, asking only for our response. Prayer is consent, it is giving ourselves permission to respond to that invitation.

⁶⁵Br. Donovan Aidan BSG; *A Full Earth*

Prayer — Reflection Questions

Focus:

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.*

(From the Catechism, BCP)

Personal Development:

1 — Given the understanding of prayer mentioned above, what would you consider a response to God “by deeds...without words” ?

2 — Name five ways in which you could pray to God without words. Describe what makes these “actions” prayer.

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

4 — Write your own prayer, asking God’s blessing for one of your brothers or sisters in religious life, and for success in their ministry. Then write a prayer asking for God’s blessing for you and your success in religious life. Do this before reading on to the following questions:

a. Which prayer was easier to write, the one for you or the one for your brother or sister? Why?

b. Is it difficult to pray for yourself, for your own needs and desires? Why or why not?

5 — Share your experiences of a time when you felt that you could not pray.

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



Our Common Life



There is profound love
in our life as a family...
but as you now realize
it requires great strength
to maintain your family ties
when you live scattered,
a Diaspora household.
It only serves
to illustrate, how awesome
is the love of brother
of sister...bound
under a common oath
to love and serve the Lord
when, in spite of
worldly distractions,..
they are there for you
in Spirit and in prayer.

A community of faith can be described as "love in action." In the Gregorian family we are called to community in common witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, bound only by the love of God, the Rule and bonds of affection. Called as we are into this fellowship of the Spirit, we are reminded daily that a community is made up of more than its parts, for we are scattered across the country and are held together by the very Power that we witness to in our daily lives. This "love in action" that is our community is

nourished by daily prayer, the Eucharist and is strengthened by frequent communication and the pastoral care of each member.

There are many ways
to proclaim
in this global village of today,
the nurture of community
without the necessity
of a common house.
A prayerful attention
to your Daily Office,
frequent intercessions,
and painstaking observance
of the Rule...all serve to bring
into your heart each day
the knowledge of what it is
that makes you indispensable
to this family of God.

It is in the context of this community that each member is given the strength and the tools necessary to function fully in their ministry to the worlds they inhabit. Religious community is a gift, and like the many other blessings of this life, it is not one to be taken for granted. As the community comes together in Convocation each year for fellowship and the nourishment of common worship, one can readily recognize the power of God's love as the familial bonds are knit together with prayer and song during the Gathering Service.

There are moments when the power of the Spirit is so powerful as to remind one of the Pentecost story of Scripture. We are reminded that it is only by God's grace that this power has become available to us, and in the short time spent together that power is drawn upon to guide and govern the community in its ongoing discernment and development of service, witness and mission.

When you lift up *your* voice
in prayer to the Lord,
you lift up *our* voice
and become a part of
the chorus, singing
his praises with the angels
and affirming that
you are not, indeed,
ever alone really.

It is during times of fellowship that the body of the community heals, its individual members mend from times of tireless service and allow their spirits to be refreshed and renewed. It is also during these times of gathering that the community makes decisions regarding its function in the world, never being afraid to remain true to its founding charism. We welcome new members to the community, bid farewell to others who have found themselves called to

new horizons and sometimes face difficult decisions regarding divisions in the body of the community as well as the church.

In all of these things, the community seeks to allow its actions to be guided by wisdom, choosing to be directed by the Spirit, and always remaining mindful of what will benefit the community as a whole. Our Founder admonishes us: "Love in action does not sin. Love in action desires to serve whether it commends or criticizes. There is a wisdom of this world that is foolishness with God because it is self-centered and self-righteous. And then there is the Wisdom born of the Spirit which is gentle, temperate and loves the common good." ⁶⁶

Communicate frequently
with this family of faith...
make visits as often
as you are able...
and live each day as though
they are by your side.
They are.

Were it not for these times of renewal our community might cease to exist; but the power of community would still call people to seek it amidst their fellows. We are blessed that this community has been called into being, for not all Christians have been so lucky as to have the fellowship of other Christians. But we need to remember that community is a gift from God, and its actions will show forth that fact in obvious ways if the community is true to its ethos. Our Sister writes: "It is easy to claim for our lives the blessings that we want to be God's gifts to us. In claiming the blessings we often neglect the source. If instead we set our attention to accomplishing spiritual discernment, meaningful prayer, and faithful charity, there will be plenty of room for all the prosperity we will ever need." ⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Wisdom From On High*

⁶⁷ Sr. Clare, CSSG; *All-Natural*

Our Common Life — Reflection Questions

Focus:

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. (Compline, Prayer for Mission, BCP)

Personal Development:

1 — The community emphasizes time and again that every member who enters the community changes it. Where have you seen or experienced this happening?

2 — In what ways can the community nourish and uphold you in your personal witness to the Gospel that will maintain the integrity spoken of in the Rule? (*Of the life of the brotherhood*)

3 — What does the above prayer mean when it says that we depend upon each other's toil? How do you believe that this applies to the community?

4 — It sometimes becomes necessary to release a member from the community for the good of the body. For what reasons do you believe that this becomes necessary? What do you believe is the most appropriate way to do this?

5 — Name some ways in which you can contribute personally to a sense of community during those times of the year when our members are apart from one another in the world.

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

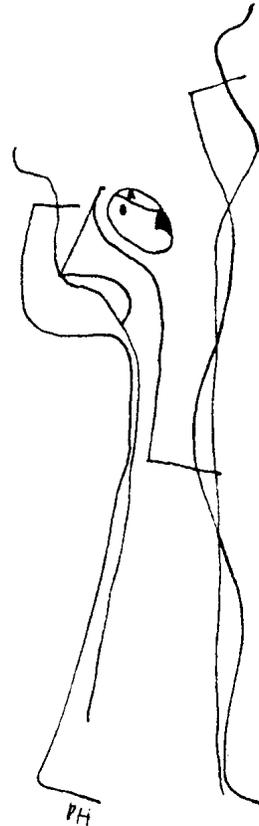
Church/Parish Life

the community



A Visible Witness

You are choosing
to bear a witness
to the glory of Christ
not to the glory of
the brotherhood.
You have done this
by changing your life
to live within the Gospel
its truths...
its joys...
and its eternal rewards.



The issue of our visible witness to the Gospel and the love our God begins with the symbols of the way of life to which we have been called. Human nature is very well adapted to symbols and signs, it is part of our psyche, part of our spiritual nature, that symbols come to embody value statements for us as easily as they do. The cross of the community and the habit are symbols particular to our lives as consecrated religious. Each part of the habit, especially the cincture and its three knots, are imbued with meaning for us and for those who recognize them. There are many other symbols in our lives of visible witness that may or may not accompany these things, such as prayer beads and clerical collars. Let us for a moment look at these symbols to see where they may point us.

Because you made this choice
you are given new clothes
like a newborn child.
You have not earned
the right to wear the habit...
but you have been given
the privilege,
by virtue of your consecration
as a servant of God.

Many among the brothers will tell you that the Brotherhood Cross is truly our habit. It represents our Christian faith, but may not suggest the life of dedicated servanthood that sets us apart in religious witness. The tunic that we wear, along with the cord and scapular, are traditional, meaning-laden symbols of the consecrated and communal character of our vocation. The habit speaks of a dedicated life, the cross places that life in context, and the three knots in our cincture represent the Vows. These things together become a unity of symbols that visibly communicate the nature of our lives in Christian Community.

Let us look for a moment at the brotherhood Rites as we are clothed with the habit during our profession. The tunic, we are told, is given that we might be “clothed in humility and know the joy in obedience that is given to every child of God.” The cincture is given that we may “be bound with the strong Name of God against all evil and impurity,” the scapular that we may “always be kept in the life of dedicated service,” the cross as “a symbol of the saving death of Christ our Lord.” As we receive these things we pray to God that each of us may be “girded about with strength, and upheld to do God’s work in the world,” we pray that “God may direct the work of [our] hands this day and always,” and we pray each of us, day by day, with the following words: “O God, who has given me the grace to wear the cross of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, give me the grace to be worthy of the vocation to which I am called.”⁶⁸

This habit exists
to draw attention to God
and not to you,
although it will do both.
Whether you wear it daily,
or only rarely,
do so with discretion.
Take care of it
for it belongs to him,
and if you cannot be the same
without it as within...
do not wear it, for it becomes
a danger, or at the very least
a costume.

Wearing the habit in public makes a profound statement of self-imposed marginalization from the mainstream of worldly society. This statement does not merely speak to others, it commands their attention. It can also make conflicting statements to people depending on our attitudes and their preconceived notions. It can speak of contempt for the world if we wear it with arrogance disguised as dignity. It can speak of our own pomposity and make clowns of us if we wear it with pride disguised as authority. It can also speak of judgment and cast shame upon others if we wear it with self-righteousness

⁶⁸ *The Rites of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory*; pp 8-11.

disguised as piety. In all of these examples, the habit becomes nothing more than a costume. This is a dangerous pitfall.

One may be inclined wear prayer beads along the side of the habit. Beads can be a useful tool in the life of prayer. But if one is not prone to praying with these tools they should not be worn. Lovely as they are, and pleasing to the eye, they are not accessories. To wear them even when you do not pray them is a masquerade that must quickly be put aside lest one invite spiritual danger.

The scapular is another symbol that speaks directly of our ministry. It is an apron, the hallmark of the servant, and a symbol of our understanding that all work is sanctified to God's glory. We wear the scapular mindful that ours is an active ministry and when we place it over our habit we are reminded that we are about to go to work.

Wear your cross
with dignity and grace
ever mindful of its weight.
There will be days
that it seems too heavy
even to place around your neck.
Take it up as Christ did
and, though you may falter
as did your Lord,
someone will be there
to help you along
and ease the burden for you.

Some see in their habit a wedding garment to be worn to the feast.⁶⁹ Some see in it the baptismal robe, the sign and seal of our covenant with God and the symbol of our new life in him. For all it is a sacramental garment, and if one wears it throughout daily life, one must be prepared to make that life a liturgy. Otherwise, perhaps it is best worn as a liturgical garment only in the church itself. It does not serve the Gospel to dress as part of a theatrical performance.

⁶⁹ Matt 22:12

A Visible Witness — Reflection Questions

Focus:

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...(Jesus to his disciples in the hearing of all the people, Luke 20:46)

Wearing the habit in public makes a profound statement of self-imposed marginalization from the mainstream of worldly society. This statement does not merely speak to others, it commands their attention. It can also make conflicting statements to people depending on our attitudes and their pre-conceived notions. (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — Reflect on how it felt the first time you wore your habit in public after being received into the novitiate. What were some of the feelings you experienced? Did 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?

2 — When do you think you will be inclined to wear your habit or witness shirt? When not? What are your criteria 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/her? Should it?

- 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 — What message do *you* want to convey when you wear it? How can you go about it?

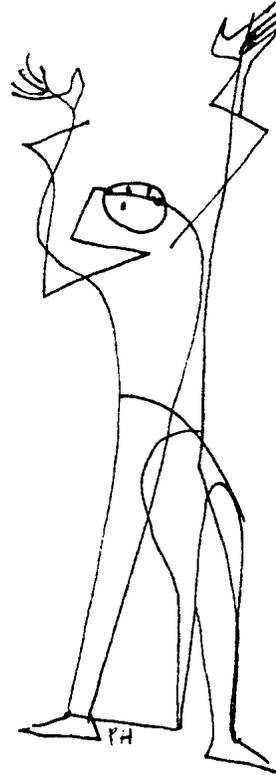
Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Worship

Remember that your life
is a liturgy and not
the other way around.
Your entire existence,
in this capacity,
is an offering
and a thanksgiving
to the Lord.
Do not neglect this
for the sake of
overindulgence
in participation,
but be mindful that
in the House of God
your worship with
the community
makes you a part of the family.
Rather than setting you apart,
or worse yet, above...
it makes you accessible
and lovable, not
laudable.



It is in our participation in the worship of the church that we have a wonderful opportunity to exercise our ministry in and with the Christian community. The religious life and its expression are deeply rooted in the liturgy of the church, and we have mentioned earlier the necessity of making one's life a liturgy of self-offering and sacrifice. Yet, in concrete terms, how do we go about our participation in the corporate life of the Christian faith?

The liturgy of common worship and prayer is an outward expression of our inward understanding and appropriation of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is in the context of this liturgy that we are nourished by holy food and drink in the Eucharist, we sanctify the various parts of the day in the Daily Office, we commend departed loved ones to God, welcome new pilgrims to the Christian faith and accept and impart the healing love of God to one another. Every aspect of our lives, interiorly and exteriorly, is reflected in these celebrations. In the presence of God and one another we affirm and attest to God's presence in our every action and in every moment of our lives — together and apart.

If it must be so,
to preserve your integrity,
choose anonymity

in the midst of the congregation
until you are established
as a simple Christian -
before a shepherd.

As we have acknowledged and understood that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian, our individual lives in religious witness mean nothing apart from this communal celebration. It is essential, therefore, that we embrace our standing as members of the community of the baptized, assuming our place as members of the body of Christ, apart from which our lives are empty of meaning.

A major portion of our lives in common worship entails our hearing and responding to the Word of God. Herein lies our understanding of the importance of community. The living nature of that Word is not manifested apart from its proclamation in the public forum of the Christian community. It is during the reading of the word in the ritual of church worship that its sacramental nature is revealed as the Word of God. The word on the page becomes the transformative, revelatory Word that calls us to communion with one another.

As you listen to the Word
and as you sing, or dance
or pray or praise,
in all your acts of worship...
do not strive to be heard
above the rest...
but let your voice meld
with the countless
generations...in the
beginning, now
and forever...
one voice, one Creation.

In the experiential encounter with the Word of God during worship, we are called to the Gospel way of life. Simultaneously we are given the tools necessary for holy pilgrimage and we are given Bread for the journey. These are the gifts we receive. We also offer up ourselves, body mind and spirit, as an act of thanksgiving to God for the blessings of these gifts. It is also in this context that we celebrate and share those gifts with one another and the community. Worship is a modality of relationships between ourselves, God and each other. Here, we are prepared for Gospel ministry. Here, we are called to conversion of life and given the strength and nurture essential for success in living out the Christian life we are called to in Baptism. This is no easy task.

Be wary of theatrics
and countless genuflections
they only distract

rather than serve...
but let your economy
of movements and oblations
come from the heart,
spontaneous and free...
free from dangerous expressions
of piety.
Give all you do
a meaning, let all things be
significant because you
have thought them through.

When it occurs, our encounter with the Word can be immediate and overpowering. It can inspire us to awe, fill us with fear and trembling and it can transform our lives. Great saints have been moved to transform the face of society by the inspiration of that Word. You are one with that great body of men and women who have been called to action, called to service by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos, the Word of God. As one of our brothers writes: "What Jesus wants for us is to be unhesitating. Exactly as fast and as far as God calls us, that far should we go. God may not call us to martyrdom or any instantaneous change, but what God calls us to, that we should do without hesitation. 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' Once you meet God, and if you want God, you must be prepared to get God. And if you get God, you must be prepared to get what God got. That's the Gospel. Having Jesus, you need nothing else. Having even everything else, you still need Jesus." ⁷⁰

Listen to each word
as from the mouth of God...
take none for granted.
Say each prayer
with careful deliberation
so you realize, firsthand,
what it is that you are asking.

Our worship in community reflects our understanding of the call to service in God's kingdom. There is, amid the joy and celebration and love of this Christian family, a necessary solemnity that reminds us of the great weight of our responsibility. When we come to the table for Eucharist, we are reminded that we come there for renewal and strength, not simply for pardon and solace. ⁷¹

God will surely speak to you
and through you
as the Creation itself
praises...

⁷⁰ Br. Thomas, n/BSG; *Conversion, The Servant #164*

⁷¹ *Book of Common Prayer*; Eucharistic Prayer C, pp. 372

through the blessing
of its Creator.

Given the significance of our public worship, it should not be surprising that, in practical terms, our actions in Christian worship should not set us apart from but rather emphasize our continuity with the community to which we belong. This holds equally true for the brotherhood and the congregations in which we find ourselves participating in public worship. We need to be mindful that this begins with holding true to the rubrics of our Prayer Book and also to the Customary of the community. It means that our every action during worship should have significance and meaning, not merely be signs of theatrical expression or liturgical priest craft. When singing in choir or with the congregation, it means finding the medium between contribution to public worship and listening to oneself above the rest. A member of community must endeavor to avoid self-consciousness during worship, becoming conscious instead of that body of saints in eternity to which he or she belongs.

Christian worship is deliberate, thoughtful and continuous with two thousand years of tradition. The apostolic life is a living out of this worship in the world, seeing in all things a reflection of the sacramental presence of God and responding appropriately. We give thanks for the necessities of life, we praise God as he speaks through the Creation, we offer sacrifice of ourselves in service of others. This is the liturgy of our lives. We are empowered in the community so that we may bear witness to these things in the world. As our Founder writes: "If you thank and love Jesus, and he holds the marching orders, the following will be your mandate for the rest of your life in community: A faith that is unshakable, a fellowship that is enduring, a peace that baffles understanding." ⁷²

⁷² Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *The Religious Life as Observers, The Servant #163*

Worship — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; come let us adore him.” (BCP, Morning Prayer II)

“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (Jesus to the Samaritan woman, John 4:23-24)

Personal Development:

- 1 — What elements do you believe need to be present to make an activity “worship”?
- 2 — How does your understanding of worship fit with the liturgical practice of
 - a. your congregation?
 - b. the brotherhood?
- 3 — What elements of your daily life do you think can become “worshipful” ? How can you incorporate the elements of worship into your daily life in order to make your life a “deliberate” liturgy?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



The Holy Eucharist

It is not everyone
who has the chance
to enter into Eternity
and celebrate with God.
What a joyful thing
to sit at his table
with all the saints
who have ever been
or will be again
and be nourished by
the word...
and fed by
the Word.



Earlier, we emphasized that holiness cannot exist independently of the community in which it is expressed, shared and imparted. We also pointed out the essential continuity between the individual and the Christian community, noting that it is only in community that the sacraments become revelatory events of God's grace and love. Nowhere is this more true than in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Whereas, in the liturgy of The Word of God our souls are made to hunger for the Lord, in the liturgy of The Holy Communion that follows, that hunger is filled by God with God's very Self. As the Word reveals himself in the Gospel, calling us into community and fellowship in and with him, so in the Eucharist that we are visibly transformed into that community of saints in Jesus Christ. Our brother writes: "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." ⁷³

⁷³ Br. Tobias Stanislas BSG; *Heart of the Matter*

What an honor
to be called to
the greatest of all banquets...
as lavish as his Love
and as simple as
the gifts of bread and wine
offered up to God
by a carpenter and
his friends.

There is nowhere, perhaps, a theology quite so complex for an action quite so simple. The *act* of being fed has often times come to be experienced as the *art* of being fed, with elaborate liturgies and grand sweeping gestures. But what is happening in these moments is quite the simplest thing in the world. We are being fed, being provided with food for our bodies and spirits, right from the hand of God. There is no more generous expression of God's love for us to be found in this world, than to experience the comfort of being fed as a family, at a common table, in the presence of the One who cares for us.

When you stand or kneel to receive the Holy Communion, as you anticipate your daily rations, and once you have received them, you may be tempted to be withdrawn and to indulge yourself in the solemnity of the occasion. You would be well served, however, to open your eyes and look around you as your brothers and sisters receive their food as well. Reinforce your bonds of fellowship by witnessing the breadth of God's bounty as he provides not just for your own nourishment, but for that of all his people.

You are called to participation
in this greatest of mysteries,
called by Christ, weekly and
even daily,
to remember him.
It is your thanksgiving and
the center of your life
as a religious...
as a Christian.

How difficult is it really to approach this table on more than just Sundays? We are called by the Rule to weekly participation at the very least, in clear recognition that a daily Eucharist is the preferable option. We are blessed in this endeavor by the knowledge that the Holy Table has been prepared, and our Christian brothers and sisters have been nourished there, every day at almost every hour for the past two thousand years. This glorious sacrament is the Work of the church. The job of the church is to bear witness daily to the fact that God feeds his people, as with manna in the desert. In this our wilderness, God has brought forth living Bread,⁷⁴ his Son, to sustain his people.

⁷⁴ See John 6:30-35

In this action
Christ in his mystical body
offers himself
in the mystery of
a living sacrament,
to God the Father of All.
This same Christ,
is the same offering,
not different,
because of its
eternal nature.
You are a part
of that offering,
in that you offer Jesus
and he offers you
when he offers himself
to God
because he has
identified himself with you
by giving you his Spirit.

In this sacred meal, you my brothers, are called to the Table, to visible communion with one another. This is the wedding feast and you are called as a spouse of Christ, like Israel, to be a faithful lover to the Lord your God. You are the body of Christ, and your participation in these mysteries means to join yourself with Jesus in obedient self-offering to God, to enter into that communion of Love that is the Trinity, and to participate in that exchange. This is the greatest gift of being a Christian person, for God himself has invited you into this sacred place. It is here that you will find that your arms are not too short to reach for him, because he has pulled you to himself in these eternal moments and whispered his love by the fragrance of wine and the taste of finest wheat.

This donation of self
is a way of life
for the Father, for the Son
and it is for you to be present
and offer yourself...
it is your right

it is your privilege.

The Holy Eucharist — Reflection Questions

Focus:

"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." (Br. Tobias Stanislas Haller, BSG; Heart of the Matter)

Personal Development:

1 — In Br. Tobias' quote above, he refers to the food that we "feed to one another." What does "feeding one another" mean for you?

2 — In your opinion, what are some of the ways we feed one another outside the context of the Holy Eucharist? In what ways do you believe the Eucharistic feast enables you to do that?

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

4 — The Rule specifies that we are to attend the Holy Eucharist at least once each week or once each day when possible. Is this something possible for you? If not, why? Is it really impossible? What kind of re-prioritization might it take to make it possible?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



The Daily Office



How the Office will
bind you to this your family...
Oh, what joy in knowing
that as you pray it
others are too...
in an unbroken line
that follows the Sun
across the heavens
and traverses the history
of our tradition.

Of all of the disciplines that the Rule requires, the backbone of our way of life rests in the duty of the Daily Office. It establishes the rhythm of our daily lives by punctuating the day with prayer. The Office, as well, establishes us firmly within the tradition of the church and within our heritage, handed down from the House of Israel. For thousands of years, the hallmark of holy men and women has been those moments where the time of day stands still and their hearts and minds have been called to fulfill the duties of prayer, praise and thanksgiving to God the Father.

In our time together in fellowship, gathering as we do from around the world, our daily routine is structured around the four-fold Office. Here, God's community of faith is called to sing the Office, reminiscent of the Cherubim and Seraphim singing around the throne of God, and for those moments in community we are made to feel that heaven and earth come together at the appointed times. Such is the power of a community that worships together. Each of us, we can be sure, returns to our individual lives carrying the power

of those moments with us to nourish and sustain us, as we return to the praying alone in the world like sheep among wolves.

There is great comfort
in the familiar words,
and each time you say them
you will most likely
hear your brothers' voices too,
echoing responses
and Amens.

The Office, indeed, is a duty required by the Rule. More importantly, however, it is the most substantial portion of the way we relate to God in our lives of prayer. The Office, as opposed to any other type of prayer or devotion, has significance precisely because of its rootedness in the tradition of the Christian faith. These are the prayers authorized by the church for appointed times, and as we pray them we are offering up the voice of the church itself, asking what the church deems appropriate in the ways that it deems appropriate. This expresses our understanding of the unity of the Body. As much as we need uniformity in the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist, we equally need uniformity in the work of the Office, especially as a community within the body of the church.

Don't merely say them
but pray them,
this is their joy and their power.
Let the words fall from your lips
not like stones, but
as drops of water...
refreshing your thirst
and watering the earth.

To pray the Office faithfully, using the prescribed forms, is as much a part of the vow of Obedience as the tithing is a part of our understanding of the vow of Poverty. It is to relinquish self-will in favor of community structure. It is to state in action that the church, as the Body of Christ, understands the relationship between God and his people better than the individuals themselves are capable of understanding. Faithfulness to the Office is to accept submission to the church's petitions over and above our own needs and desires, except during the times appointed for our petitions. We pray for the needs of the church before we pray for our own, placing ourselves appropriately in a place of deference to the entire body.

By virtue of
their appointed times,
let them consecrate each day
to the glory of God,
and energize your spirit
to answer your calling.

The Office sanctifies the day by calling us to mindfulness of God's presence in time, made possible by the Incarnation. God is fully present in our daily lives, and our call to prayer at the times appointed calls us, and the rest of the Creation through us, to recognition of that presence. We are called as sentinels, to pray when the rest of the world cannot or will not. We are called to give voice to every creature under heaven ⁷⁵ in praise of the Creator, and along with those who pray with us to raise up a chorus of song and celebration. We are called to pray for those who have gone before us and for those who will come after us, that the mantle might be carried until the time he comes again in glory to establish his kingdom.

There may be times
when the words seem empty
and the road to prayer dry.
Remember that you
are not alone in this.
So little time
in the day...to fulfill
the hours of prayer...
makes it easy to forget
or to lose the zeal
to perform the "Holy Work".

Remember that the Rule is the structure of our lives and is neither secondary nor subject to our circumstances. The Office may at times seem burdensome and barren, seeming to interfere with our desires for time or personal fulfillment. How selfish is this point of view? The Office is the very means by which we find time to rest and energy to pursue our other agendas. However, we must always be mindful that our "other" agendas are secondary to the purpose of our lives as vowed religious.

But across the miles
let the voices of
your brothers
call you to your duty,
into the presence of
your family.
Respond with certainty
that you are carrying a torch
that illuminates the world
with his light...
and become his willing
messenger.

Somewhere in the world, as you settle down to pray, no matter what the time, someone in the church is offering up the same prayer as you, maybe even another Gregorian. As you open your lips to pray as a child of God, remember

⁷⁵ *Book of Common Prayer*; Eucharistic Prayer D, pp. 373

you are not alone. Call the presence of that unknown soul to sit beside you and sing together the praises of God who made you; of his Son, who has promised that when two or three are gathered together in his name he will be with them;⁷⁶ and of the Spirit who has given you her voice, that you may offer worthy prayers and be called to eternity for some moments each day to take your place as beloved of God.

⁷⁶ Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom, Evening Prayer

The Daily Office — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“The Office, as opposed to any other type of prayer or devotion, has significance precisely because of its rootedness in the tradition of the Christian faith. These are the prayers authorized by the church for appointed times, and as we pray them we are offering up the voice of the church itself, asking what the church deems appropriate in the ways that it deems appropriate. This expresses our understanding of the unity of the Body. As much as we need uniformity in the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist, we equally need uniformity in the work of the Office, especially as a community within the body of the church.” (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

- 1 — What do you find the most challenging about the Daily Office?
- 2 — The Daily Office provides a rhythm to our individual lives and a structure that is particularly important to our community life given that we live apart. What other aspects of your religious life can you develop that might contribute to that rhythm?
- 3 — What is your understanding of the focus of each of the Office? Are there specific themes that you sense that give each a particular purpose or flavor? Are there themes that you prefer to attribute to each?
- 4 — Aside from the Daily Office, what else can we as members of the Gregorian community lay claim to that provides a similar sense of continuity with one another? What about you personally?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



The Scriptures



Somewhere in the pages
of the Book,
among the beginnings
and the begats...
you will find your Lord.
As you study the words
and worlds that brought
you into being...
Christian child, learn
to distinguish the message
from the words...for
God does not speak by Scripture
but through it.

We are a people of the Book. The Bible is our document, it is our history. We, as an apostolic religious community may feel free to claim it as our own, in as much as it is the book of the whole family of God. It is from the Book that we gain our understanding of God's call to his people, place our vocation in perspective, and gain an understanding of our continuity within the Judeo-Christian tradition. We are, in all humility, called forth in the manner of prophets and apostles, and our witness to God in the world should be rooted in those traditions recorded in our Holy Book.

The history of your salvation
from “in the beginning...” until
this moment, as you read
these words
is contained in the Book — disguised,
like the Christ

among your suffering brethren.
As Jesus is the moment
when the Book ends,
so you are the experience
that continues the story...
a moment in time
with him...in
his work toward the kingdom.

Through the Scriptures our faith as Christian people becomes informed and our witness to the glory of God, and his Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, is given structure and focus. As such, our Rule requires us to study the Scriptures,⁷⁷ not merely to inform the intellect, but to inspire the will to action as we continue the history of the salvation of God's people. Above all, in the Bible we encounter the Lord Jesus, as he is revealed in the word written by those who wrote of him in ways so intimately that we are inspired by their example of faith. We embrace the Hebrew Scriptures as the history of God's call to his people, preparing the way for the Incarnation of God's anointed. We recognize that the New Testament's books were written by men (or maybe women) of the early church with a faith so strong that it feels as if they must have known Jesus in the flesh, although scholarship teaches us otherwise. But if faith were possible for such people as themselves, we may be comforted that it may be the same for us. The Scriptures are the doorway to such faith.

Someone once said,
"The Bible is the manger
in which the Christ is lain...
but let us never forget
that there's a whole lot
of straw in that manger."
Be wary of the ways
that the book can be used
as a tool in the hands
of the marauding.
Be responsible with its words
and use its message
to bring peace...
never dissension.

Scripture, like prayer, is a medium by which we come to experience our relationship with God. However, it was once called a "dumb [i.e. mute] and dangerous book" by those who knew how it could be used by those who were uninformed or came to it with a hidden agenda. The Bible is a complicated document, unreasonable at times, strangely silent on some very important issues, and often outspoken on some others that we would rather not hear about. As responsible Christians, we can profess reverence as regards the

⁷⁷ *BSG Rule: Of private devotion*

Book — but that must necessarily include a bit of apprehension and an appropriate amount of reticence.

Try not to get stuck
in that place
which says... "this
can only be one way,"
for what makes the Book alive
is that it speaks to many
in the ways in which God calls...
each to his own level
of understanding.

We should be wary of the idea that the Bible speaks for itself — it does not. Often times it contradicts itself. Often what it says is unclear or inappropriate given our modern sensibilities. But this does not mean that what the Bible says is untrue or irrelevant. Contrarily, it means that we must abide by the Scriptures within the guidelines interpreted by the church, sound reason, experience and tradition. It is upon this foundation that we will come to a responsible biblical faith.

The Scripture is your guidepost.
Read it often...
become friends with those
who have made their home there.
Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca,
Mary, John, Paul...learn your lessons
from these your elders.
Listen to those who knew him,
to those who struggled to find him...
they've come a long way
to tell you their stories...
be grateful and humble
for they've chosen you
to be their confidante.

A diligent study of Scripture will enable us to come to know the people of God, for the fullness of our humanity, good and bad, is related in these tales as old as civilization itself. It is comforting to know that we are called, as Abraham was, to new horizons and dreams — in spite of our human weaknesses. It is reassuring to see the struggles of that thick group called disciples of the Lord, who in spite of good intentions, had as much trouble understanding Jesus and his mission as we do. If we make an earnest attempt to enter into relationship with the people of Scripture, we will discover that they become as familiar and as intimate with us as the brother who sits next to us in choir.

The Scriptures — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“All Scripture is inspired by God (theopneustos — “God-breathed”) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (Paul to Timothy RSV- 2Tim 3:16)

“Through the Scriptures our faith as Christian people becomes informed and our witness to the glory of God, and his Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, is given structure and focus. As such, our Rule requires us to study the Scriptures, not merely to inform the intellect, but to inspire the will to action as we continue the history of the salvation of God's people.” (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — What do you believe is the distinction between your encounter with the Scriptures in public worship versus your encounter in individual study and reading? How about during the Daily Office?

2 — When is Scripture most revelatory for you, or at which point do the words become The Word?

3 — Discuss three ways in which you might physically, spiritually and/or emotionally prepare yourself before Scripture study to allow for the revelatory moment. What is the symbolism behind your choices?

4 — Try the above. Did you experience any noticeable difference in the following areas:

- a. your understanding of the text?
- b. your sense of God's self-communication through Scripture?
- c. your sense of participation in the ongoing life of the gospel?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Meditation



Once or twice a day
sit, quiet down, and
enter into the presence
of the Divine.
It's just a matter
of pondering the Creation
not trying to sort it out.

As vowed religious, it will be taken for granted by those around you that you are familiar with the art of prayer and meditation. Although prayer is seen by most as something accessible to all, a skill that anyone can attain to, meditation is perceived by people to be something best left for the experts. The general consensus among even the most intelligent of people is that meditation is a mystical talent that only the spiritually adept need approach. In fact, the opposite is most nearly true — prayer being the "art of the outstretched hand" and meditation being something that almost every human being does naturally without even realizing that they are doing it. Meditation is not so much a skill as it is our nature, and we are almost immediately drawn to it whenever we put our guard down and have a few moments rest.

Watch a flower or a bird
experience their own reality...
wonder about trees
and what they really think,
make a list of things
you're grateful for,
pretend you're a stone
sitting on a hill,
watch a roaring river
and wonder where its home is...
picture all the people
who've taught you
things invaluable.

Meditation is nothing more or less than our reflections on the things that *are*. In those quiet moments when we slow down, as we look at our lives and our friends, as we sort out difficult feelings we are drawn into the inner chambers of our heart and, without realizing it, most of us are quietly and expectantly hoping for a small voice to tell us who we are — and what the meaning of our lives might be. We hope in these few moments to gain insight into our lives, we are often inspired to gratitude for what we have, and we are almost always stricken with an awareness of the subtle beauty of the world around us. In short, we are listening. This is meditation.

Ponder what
Mary or Martha
would think about
the world today...
marvel at the miracle of birth...
of people or of stars,
go to the beach
and make sand castles
with the Jesus Child,
or watch a sunset
with the Lord, and
let him wrap his arms
about you.

There is, quite frankly, no need to wrap meditation in a heavier cloak than this. To listen actively is a skill that most everyone in today's world has lost, and so it is no small feat that in moments of quiet and solitude we are drawn to it at all. Meditation, unlike active listening, is a passive activity that draws us to silence. We are called as religious to enter into this silence and, perhaps more than most, to be quite aware of what it is that we are actually listening for — the very silence itself. It is in the practice of this listening that we learn what it means to listen to others, and perhaps we even learn to listen beyond a persons words into their very own silence where the truth of God is.

It is no wondrous skill
this art of meditation...
but is, instead, the
license of your imagination.
This is where
you will learn
the art of listening...
of being present.
In the stillness or
the wanderings
of your mental play
you will learn to hear the voice
of God...and be ready
to hear his will for you.

Our Rule requires us to be open to meditation each day: "A brother is required to meditate for fifteen minutes in each day *unless* [emphasis mine] he is to hear or deliver a sermon or homily on that day." ⁷⁸ It is anticipated, of course, that if a brother is to deliver a sermon, the meditative process must necessarily have been involved in the preparation of it. The other implication is that if a brother has heard a sermon he has fulfilled his obligation for meditation that day, emphasizing that the skill utilized for each is the same — listening!

Enter into the Scriptures
and become a player
in the drama that unfolds...
listen to each figure
share their stories with you.
Speak to them,
ask them questions
and learn about their God.

Our culture, unaccustomed to the interior life, has imbued meditation with so much otherworldly meaning that it does not occur to people that it has less to do with lotus positions, mantras or mandalas than it has to do with resting in the present moment regardless of one's surroundings, and finding the time to listen to that moment. Many Christians do not realize that meditation is not peculiar to Eastern traditions such Buddhism or the yogic traditions, but that it has existed in the Christian faith since the early days of the church, which inherited it from Judaism and the Greek philosophers.

Sit in awe at the stillness,
before the roaring flame
of God...rejoicing
that such a thing is
possible, in this strange
unpredictable universe.

The Christian understanding of God is that he speaks through the Creation. He also speaks to us in time, because he has broken through eternity and come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. So it matters not what clothes you wear, or whether you are dazed by clouds of incense. What matters is that you are listening. You may discover answers to questions you didn't know you had. Perhaps that is the point. The questions themselves may be the very answers that we seek, for in the Garden even after the Fall of man, God called out to Adam with the words "Where are you?" ⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *BSG Rule: Of private devotion*

⁷⁹ See Genesis 3:9

Meditation — Reflection Questions

Focus:

"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." (BSG Rule, Of private devotion)

Personal Development:

1 — How do you personally define meditation? How did you come to this understanding? What makes it different from or similar to prayer as you understand it?

2 — Some people find it difficult to sit in silence for periods of time. What are your challenges in "silence"? Have you used "walking" meditation?

3 — The Rule implies a close relationship between meditation and preaching. How does this agree or disagree with your own understanding?

4 — In your experience, how does the practice of meditation affect your ability to listen to the world around you?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



Marriage and Partnership



You could be among those blessed
to have a companion on
your journey,
one with whom
in the spirit of love,
you have chosen to spend
your life...in partnership.

Despite the apparent trend in society towards autonomy, and the resultant trend towards the dissolution of committed long-term relationships, we recognize and affirm the inherent value of partnership between two individuals, and bear witness to it as a desirable state. Christians celebrate the beauty of love represented in a lasting covenant between two persons called to this type of commitment. The Gregorian religious witness can embrace those who are called to lasting covenant because it focuses on the quality rather than the object of love in our understanding of Chastity.

We are not to give the impression that this is the only state in which the vow of Chastity is exercised, nor is it accurate to state that marriage or partnership is the preferred state of every Christian person. However, given the nature of the vow as interpreted by the community, Chastity is lived out in relationships of intimacy, and it is in the state of marriage or partnership that one will find the most challenges and the most significant rewards in the ongoing practice of the vow. Marriage or committed partnership is a ministry.

There is no place
in your life...
where you will be as

challenged,
as in this relationship
of mutual love and sacrifice.

Living out the vowed life is a difficult choice in and of itself. It becomes more challenging as we begin to share our lives more intimately with those around us. To enter into a covenant of relationship with another individual is to invite that person into the sanctity of your Christian life. The vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience then become significant in the life of your partner, for they are the lens through which your relationship with one another will be viewed from your perspective.

Since the Rule is not a secondary fact of your life, but the very structure of it, its implications for your partner are not inconsequential. A brother notes: "Sometimes a Christian is confronted with the hardest choice of all — the choice between obedience to Christ, and obedience to a kindred, husband, wife, significant other."⁸⁰ Although it may sound extreme at the outset, this is not an extraordinary example of the sacrifice that a life in vows demands. The partner of a vowed religious must be aware that, although they are supremely important in the life of their loved one, they must live in balance with the demands placed upon the religious by the Rule of the community.

Twice blessed will you be
should your companion
be walking toward the Lord
with you...
some are not so blessed.
You will, at times,
need to make some choices
to put things in perspective.
This is nothing more
than a blessing to
your mutual life together.
For without the joys
of community, and
the presence of God
your relationship will be
tenuous at best.

If your partner happens not to be Christian, then the outrageous nature of a life in vows will become far more apparent and significant than it might otherwise appear. With the lens of a significant other and the nature of intimacy that arises from that type of relationship, the marginalization of the religious life becomes very focused. When one has a committed partner, the developed experience of intimacy that results can heighten awareness of the responsibilities entailed in the spiritual life. A non-Christian spouse substantially increases the likelihood of interior struggle when conflicts of priority arise, which they naturally will. It is for good reason that Scripture

⁸⁰ Br. Thomas Joseph BSG; *Trials and Tribulations*

warns against being “mismatched with unbelievers” (see citation below). In cases such as these, we must be very clear in communicating the truth of the matter of love as we understand it.

But in the context of
your union
you, my brother,
will learn...how
to love your Creator,
by loving your partner...
it is all a preparation
for the Love that surpasses
all others.

The reality is that through loving and caring for one’s partner we come to experience the love of God even in a very limited sense. We are utterly incapable of existing apart from the love of God, and unless we bring God into our most intimate relationship, the love we find risks being selfish and centered in motives that are not chaste, but self-serving. What is important is that we find and experience love and that, when we do, we honor the vow of Chastity above all.

Marriage and Partnership — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness...what does a believer share with an unbeliever?” (Saint Paul to the church at Corinth, 2Cor 6: 14-15)

“Love in action does not sin. Love in action desires to serve whether it commends or criticizes. There is a wisdom of this world that is foolishness with God because it is self-centered and self-righteous. And then there is the Wisdom borne of the Spirit which is gentle, temperate and loves the common good.” (Br. Richard Thomas, BSG; Wisdom From On High)

Personal Development:

1 — In what way do you think the above quotes apply to the ideal of marriage or partnership? If you are married or partnered, how do they fit with your experience of your covenantal relationship?

2 — In your opinion, do you think that marriage/partnership is a ministry? What are the potential positive and negative sides to this view?

3 — What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of having a partner who shares your religious faith?

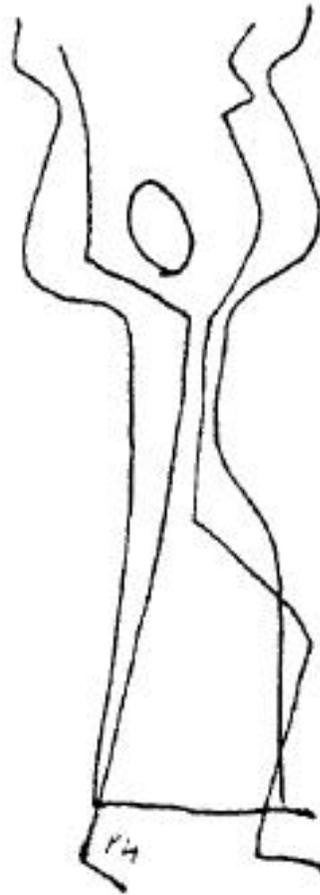
4 — What do you think are the potential challenges of Poverty in a committed relationship? Of Chastity? Of Obedience?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



Single Life



Equally blessed are you
in the eyes of our God
if you live contentedly
in singleness.
Although the challenges
may be great,
there is a greater freedom
in your journey
to go where God wills
at the times he appoints.

There are several issues regarding those of us who are called to the single life that need to be carefully considered. Due to the church's long history of confusion and contempt over the issues of sex, sexuality, marriage and committed partnership, members of the Gregorian family must wisely consider our position on these issues.

One of the most important statements reflected in the community rule regarding this subject is the vow of Chastity. Some in the church continue to treat sexuality only as a black and white moral issue. Gregorian understanding of this issue, in shades of gray more appropriate to Anglican tradition, is that sexuality is a multi-faceted issue of integrity, fidelity, morality and freedom. Our tradition has for many years acknowledged that sexuality is a gift from God. Some of us are not called to the married or partnered life, and of these, some who are not called to the celibate life. What then are the implications of Chastity for these religious? An act of Council in 1989 further clarified Chastity as "entailing continent celibacy or permanent fidelity." So, if a member of community is neither called to the celibate life nor has, at present, a partner to whom he has promised "permanent fidelity," in what ways might he fulfill the vow?

Though a life
in committed partnership
is blessing for those so called,
others who are not
so inclined
need not fear
to ask...

“am I meant to be
alone with God?”

In many ways, the life of the single religious is enviable and in other ways it is not. So many of us who have felt called to the joys of partnership can relate to the angst and pain of not having found it. Sometimes this struggle can precipitate a sense of profound loneliness and frustration. Some of us have wondered if perhaps we were called to celibacy yet have felt confused because it didn't feel appropriate, and we have even suffered a sense of guilt for desiring something as “worldly” as going on a date, perhaps sensing that it was incompatible with our state in life.

This is, perhaps, where the concept of fidelity becomes integral to our lives as healthy members of the vowed life. Surely we are called to be integrated in the fulfillment of our human nature and the common desire for companionship. We are certainly called to be true to ourselves as regards the manner in which this desire takes shape in our lives.

There is no law that says
God desires us
more in partnership
or commitment
than alone.

There is an over-abundance of opinion both in the church and in the secular world that everyone is meant to be involved in a committed relationship. How often do we here the expressions “there's someone for everyone” or “you just haven't found the right person yet”? Unfortunately, these statements negate the value that many people have experienced from being alone. There are simply many people who have experienced and enjoy the freedom associated with the single life. God smiles on these people for, like the prophets, they have greater freedom to go where God calls them.

We, as religious must bear witness to the fact that there are many states of being in the world, and none is preferable in God's eyes. Whether in committed relationship or singleness, God calls each of us to bring holiness into that state and to be his companion.

For ...
as God is not removed
from the joys of
a first date, or
a romantic evening
on the beach,
so he is not far
from the comfort
of an evening at home
alone by the fire,
or the excitement
of people-watching
at the local cafe.

It is here that fidelity to our own interior values and desires comes to the test. For it is in these very situations, in which we confront others as potentially intimate partners, that we must learn and practice what Chastity is. Do we respect ourselves and others? Are we willing to let ourselves become vulnerable emotionally, spiritually or physically — allowing that these things are good and, when properly understood, healthy? Do we seek to possess or control the affections and desires of others for companionship to satisfy our own selfish motives?

Our emotional and physical drives for companionship must be motivated by our vows and follow on the commitment to be “restrained from all excess in order to be free to love others....” There is a correlation in this phrasing of the Rule which suggests that Chastity creates a space of freedom. Indeed, the entirety of the Rule of our community implies freedom.

What he desires
is that we walk with him
in any event.
And if the moment comes
when our souls catch fire
at the sight of another...
and we can't decide
whether or not we are
called to the life of
companion and partner,
let us remember that God
has no agenda in this regard
other than our happiness
and our fulfillment.

Gregorians are called to live in relationship with God. Whether partnered or married or single this does not change. Our Lord desires a full and total commitment from us, but this does not mean that he doesn't want to share us with others. As he is the source of all love, devoted companionship is blessed with his presence. However, there are those that find themselves embraced by

a life of singularity, provided with the means and the desire to devote their time to God alone. Such is the wonderful diversity of God's family. We have so much to learn from one another, so many wonderful perspectives. As we live the vow of Chastity in community, let us show one another what it means to be free to love as God has provided for us. Above all, let us encourage one another to be comfortable and secure in love of God, each in the state to which they are called.

Single Life — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried....I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do” (Paul to the church at Corinth, 1 Cor 7:7-8)

“Surely we are called to be integrated in the fulfillment of our human nature and the common desire for companionship. We are certainly called to be true to ourselves as regards the manner in which this desire takes shape in our lives.” (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — What are the implications of the Focus statements for the lives of single men and women? Which of them do you agree with? Why? Which do you disagree with? Are the two statements mutually exclusive?

2 — If you are single, what do you believe you can *reasonably* assume the implications of Chastity are for you?

3 — If you are married or partnered, what is the witness provided to you by the single person?

4 — Are single men and women impacted by Poverty and Obedience differently than a married or partnered member of the community might be? In what ways?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



Work and Sanctity

You may well be
tempted, in your secular work,
not to reveal your vocation.
After all, a brother in the bank
or the law firm may seem
an interesting anomaly.
But your presence there is needed
as a gentle reminder
that all is not
as it may seem.
Your presence says
“there is so much more
than this” and yet
you need never say a word
about the mystery of
your “other” vocation.



The Rule of the community defines labor in this way: “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...work is an oblation to God, as is service to our fellow man.”⁸¹ It is, therefore, explicitly stated that it is not our vocation as brothers that constitutes our partnership with God, but the very contribution of our labor, secular or otherwise. We may, as may our peers, be tempted to believe that work in and for the church is preferable for a religious. The Rule quickly dissuades us from such thinking. Our vocation is to live the Rule and our ministry includes our work, for we are called to dedicate all labor to God.

There are so many ways
of serving your fellows
in the spirit of Christ
and your work, remember,
may be as sanctifying
as your worship and your prayer.

⁸¹ *BSG Rule: Of work as an apostolate*

Your Lord was a carpenter,
and worked, as you do,
with the same intent...
to build the kingdom
by making labor holy
and to God's glory.

As with the Benedictines of old, our lives as apostolic religious are a balance of work, study and prayer. Our Rule calls for a healthy balance of these things, but it does not dictate a daily schedule. This is one of the biggest challenges in our vocational life. We must learn to effectively balance these aspects of our lives in vows.

When you enter into that place
where you will spend
the better part
of each new day...
live out these rules
to make the day holy:

We are called to bring the spirit of renewal and refreshment into our work environments as much as into our interpersonal relationships, our neighborhoods or our churches. One of the biggest gifts we can bring into this environment is to help others to feel purposeful. This is dictated by humility and the clear recognition that we have, or at least should have, detached ourselves from the notion that our successes are built upon achievements in work. That is a folly that belongs to the rest of the world, but our success comes from God alone.

Embrace challenging
projects and tasks, and
create a sense of excitement
and a subtle unspoken joy
at human accomplishment.
When you need to present
troublesome colleagues or
co-workers with a reprimand
or a harsh reality, always say
"I am at your service."
It tells them that your motive
is to help and heal,
not to criticize or harm.

We are called to point out the awe and wonder of tasks accomplished by human hands, of the joy of camaraderie and teamwork and to marvel at the sheer ingenuity of the human mind. These are some of the many perspectives that a religious can bring into the work environment. Yet, even in the most trying of times, with the most trying of colleagues, when confronted with the flaws and defects of others, we are called to service — to demonstrate an

ethical standard of behavior that neither bemoans nor relishes the shortcomings of others, but seeks to correct them gently and compassionately. We are to foster community in the workplace as much as in the church.

Never say you don't have time.
Always tell people when
your time will be available.
Pray a lot.
Be deliberate.
Don't be afraid to smile.
Don't speak when you're stressed.
Be ethical in business dealings,
despite what you're told.
Remember peoples' birthdays,
anniversaries, and
important occasions.
It makes people feel special.

In the workplace, the balance that you learn in a life of work, study and prayer becomes essential. We are challenged to manage time and resources in an appeal to stewardship and our vow of Poverty. Often to our own dismay, we gain continued experience of our vow of Obedience when it comes to being beholden to our supervisors; and challenges to the vow of Chastity are no different in the workplace than anywhere else in our lives.

Congratulate people
on doing their jobs well.
Never tell people what to do.
Ask instead.
Show up to work on time.
Leave on time.
Staying late doesn't make you
a better employee, only
a bitter one.
Emphasize the importance
of your other life.
Listen,
problem-solve,
never take credit for it.

Always take a lunch.

Remember, above all, that your work life is not to be seen simply as a means to enable your ministry in financial terms. Nor, should you work directly for the church, should that be seen as the exclusive means of ministry fulfillment. Work is but a part of your active ministry in the church of God as a religious under vows. For the religious who works for the church, there may be the added danger of having a lack of balance, represented by the elimination of

the secular in one's life, in favor of surrounding oneself with the trappings of "Church-ianity." Remember that our ministry is to those who have not yet found Christ as much as to those who have.

These things may
serve to bring
the gifts of compassion
into a place where it may
be lacking.
And on those days
when you don't feel well...
and it's all you can do
to go to the place,
remember someone
in your morning prayers
who through misfortune
cannot work as you do.
Work for them that day...
offer it as an oblation to God
in their name,
that they too
may be sanctified.

Our labor in the church, at work or in the world is meant to be an offering of self to God and a creative partnership with him in plans as yet unrevealed. We must take every opportunity to reflect the goodness and truth of his Gospel in the world around us. That world is desperately in need of the message of salvation and the redemption offered us in Christ. The more well rounded our lives become, the more opportunities we will find to bring the glory of God into the systems that the world has made.

Our work in the world is an essential part of our witness. We touch the lives of others and build bridges between the sacred and the profane. One day the time will come when our bodies will no longer support a life of labor, and if we haven't over-identified our ministry with our lives at work, then we will be able to let go with peace the burdens of the workplace, and still take comfort that our usefulness is not at an end. Retirement can be a ministry too.

Work and Sanctity — Reflection Questions

Focus:

The Rule of the community defines labor in this way: *“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...work is an oblation to God, as is service to our fellow man.”* (BSG Rule, *Of work as an apostolate*)

Personal Development:

1 — Name three ways in which you can demonstrate holiness of life in the work place. Is it essential to these that you be obvious about your religious vocation?

2 — What, in your opinion, is the interrelation between “secular” work and the co-creative “partnership” described in our Rule (noted above)?

3 — Though the Rule seems to draw a subtle distinction between “work” and “service to our fellow man,” does our labor differ in substance from our ministry? Is it the same? What is the distinction that the Rule points to?

4 — How do you perceive your work as an oblation? Where is this oblation apparent? Where is it not?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth

Church/Parish Life

the community



The Church



Oh, that a Body so broken
can continue to fulfill
such good works in the world.
Like the Christ, wounded
and beaten, it rises
from death to life
bringing new hope.

The living church, as the community of the baptized, is a precious gift — but we must never fail to realize that it is an institution of human construction, however inspired of God it might be. If we approach the church with the same compassion that we exhibit for those in our care then perhaps we can begin to keep things in perspective. The church, as a human institution, is flawed although it is nonetheless a sacrament of the presence of God.

This is the church,
the Body of Christ
a microcosm of
the whole Creation...
and you, my dearest brother
are a microcosm
of the church.
In your heart, which is
the church,
are a myriad of experiences
and feelings and voices...
imprinted upon your life
by everyday you've lived.
Within your heart, you will

struggle to do right things
to make wise choices,
and to overcome your deficiencies.
The church struggles daily
to do the same.
There are many voices,
many conflicting ideas,
dissent, apprehension
and above all...
the pains of growth.

Be forgiving.

We are past the day where men and women believed that the church was a mirror image of the government of heaven, and we are, as Anglicans, well distanced from the notion of the infallible authority of the church. However, we must not let these notions keep us from honoring the church with the respect that is due her. For in spite of schism and scandal, in spite of mutual mistrust between the church and the world, even with the infiltration of politics and secular social agendas, the church is still the only institution that has ceaselessly served the world in kindness and generosity for two thousand years. It has, with all of its failings, proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, bringing hope to a world in flux. It has, in short, remained faithful to the commission of our Lord.

As the universe groans
under the weight of its need
for redemption, for salvation
for fulfillment of God's purpose...
so will the church cry out
adding its voice to the experience.
So will you cry out
becoming one
with the Body of Christ.

Be patient.

Once you have been baptized, you are one with the church. She is in you and you are in her. The Spirit that guides you both is the same Spirit, equally at home in both of you. The church's struggles in the world will mirror your own and you will both be impacted by the world around you, perhaps rejected and scorned, certainly viewed with some suspicion by a world that desperately needs the Gospel we offer. "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." ⁸²

Never contribute to
controversy or schism...
never sever your ties
to those who may try...
you are still One Body.

Because of this struggle you may be tempted to turn away again and again. After all, it is not easy to be a part of a body that can sometimes deliberately set itself apart from the world around it. Remember that John's Gospel reminds us that we are not called to be set apart from the world, but to be the church in the world: "in the world and not of it." There will be many opportunities and, often, apparently sufficient reason to feel like turning away from the church. The body can sometimes be its own worst enemy.

This gift is alive...
organic, like the universe...
like yourself.
Help it to heal...
pray with it...
nurture it and, above all,

Be faithful.

We have seen scandal rock the church in our time, but this has always been the case. A brother notes the following: "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." ⁸³ This attitude expressed by our brother is certainly representative of the prophetic stance we are called to hold in the church. As brothers, we can be the dangerous conscience of the church, aware of the abuses in the church, yet pointing to a better way revealed in the life of prayer and devotion. But we are never to seek out reasons to deride the church or contribute to scandal. We are to be faithful partners in the ongoing witness to Jesus Christ and the glory of God.

⁸² Br. Thomas, n/BSG; *Conversion*

⁸³ Br. James BSG; *Scandalous!, The Servant #157*

The Church — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“Once you have been baptized, you are one with the church. She is in you and you are in her. The Spirit that guides you both is the same Spirit, equally at home in both of you.” (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

“for if a person does not know how to manage their own household, how can they care for God's church?” (Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim 3:5)

Personal Development:

- 1 — What parallels do you notice between the church and the individual, as both are dwellings of the Holy Spirit?
- 2 — In what ways can you draw yourself into the parallel you explored in Question 1?
- 3 — Can you identify with the church's struggle for identity in today's world?
 - a. If yes, how? In what ways do you identify?
 - b. If no, what are the fundamental differences that stand in the way?
- 4 — What can your life as a vowed religious offer to the church by way of example and witness to the following areas:
 - a. Healing from schism
 - b. Continuity of history
 - c. Spiritual renewal

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



To Be a Shepherd

How easy it is
to gaze upon
a plaster saint...
and endeavor to
model your life
upon a caricature.
Please do not doom
yourself to failure.
You are not a carbon copy
of sanctity, but a living
feeling human being
asked only to struggle
with your own vitality.



As a Christian in the world, you are called to represent the Christ. This is no small task, when we do so with the clear recognition of our humanity and our full participation in human life. As religious, living in the “secular world,” we are not called to place ourselves above others in this world, but called to be a worker among workers, a friend, companion and a marker on the road to the life of holiness that every person is called to. My dearest friends, we are blessed by the presence of God, and commissioned by him to be his servants in the world. No life is more worth living than this.

As we are told...
“he never asked us
to be successful
only faithful...”
faithful to his Word
alive to his Promise.

We will, as time moves on, be faced with the ever present need to face our failings, to hold one another up in prayer and presence and to feed one another with the Bread of Heaven until he comes. Ours is a life of miracles and our faith will be well rewarded. Throughout our lives, friends and companions on this journey will come and go. Make sure that each relationship that you experience is recognized as precious. There is great love between brothers in community, inspired only by the God who has called us into fellowship with one another.

When you accept
the blessed responsibility
of being present to another
remember that listening
is not a passive experience...
and is nonjudgmental.

Some of your companions will be called to new horizons, new ministries. We must accept and embrace that God is calling them to places where we cannot follow. Pray always for their faith to be strengthened and upheld, and praise God for his movement in the lives of his people. When one of us departs for his heavenly reward, we can take comfort in the words of our brother: "Death brings change, and change can be seen as good or bad. Those who are left behind ache for that space to be filled, now become noticeably and painfully empty, until a moment ago overflowing with the lively presence of another. Time will distract us and the ache will subside, but we are creatures on a sacred journey and are reminded that those departed from us are gone but for a season until we will be united with them forever." ⁸⁴ There is no end to the communion that we share with one another.

You are called to be
a mother and
a midwife, allowing others
to give birth to
their truth that waits inside.
Help people to find
their options in life
and be a whole person
when they may be incapable.
Be a companion, not a judge
a fixer or a critic.
A brother is
what the name implies.

The world changes around us as we walk through life, and we are responsible for bearing witness to the permanent and the lasting, not the transient. Our lives as vowed men and women in Christ are centered around the Easter mystery. Yet, as our Founder reminds us: "As Easter people we need to look forward into the changes taking place. It is exactly when change occurs that we see the power of God...It is exactly when the things we think unchangeable change that the power of God becomes most available to us. We live by that Easter faith or not at all. The world is changing around us...thanks be to God!" ⁸⁵ Ours is a form of religious life that challenged the status quo. We are a community centered in renewal and change.

⁸⁴ Br. James BSG; *The Death of a Friend*

⁸⁵ Br. Richard Thomas BSG; *Living in a Time of Change*

Love without bounds
and serve without reward.
Continue always
to surround yourself
with those who seek
the truth...and
may God be pleased
to deliver you
from those who have found it.

We are called like shepherds to tend the faithful of God's people. In this capacity we will play many roles, but only if we accept our place among the fold. The brother is called to witness to the glory of God, inspired to faith by God's faithfulness to his people, and moved to servanthood in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are asked to love, as God would love — and to inspire others to seek that love with all of their hearts. In this life we are blessed to have companions who have been called into a common witness to the miracle of God's presence. We are privileged to call them “brother” because they have invited us into this family of God with love. From the moment you enter this family, it will care for you like no earthly family can, lavishing you with the love of God, without condition. One day, when your service here is done, you will reach heaven's gate — and may you be blessed to hear the words “Well done my faithful servant, come and enter into your joy.”

To be a Shepherd — Reflection Questions

Focus:

“We are called like shepherds to tend the faithful of God's people. In this capacity we will play many roles, but only if we accept our place among the fold. The brother is called to witness to the glory of God, inspired to faith by God's faithfulness to his people, and moved to servanthood in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (The Skillfulness of Shepherds)

Personal Development:

1 — What do you think it means to be a shepherd? How does it relate for you to the “servant” ethos of Gregorian life?

2 — We see Christ's threefold ministry as ‘priest’, ‘prophet’ and ‘king’. We have discussed the ministry of our vowed life in terms of ‘brother,’ ‘servant’ and ‘shepherd’. What other images come to mind for you as you explore analogies of the vowed life? Describe them? Where are their limitations?

3 — In light of your answer to the above, what are the skills you believe you must cultivate to successfully appropriate the analogies you find most indicative of your ministry? What skills do you believe are essential to your success in Gregorian life?

Goals: *Please state your personal ministry development goals in the following areas (see Introduction):*

Spiritual Growth
Church/Parish Life
the community



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