

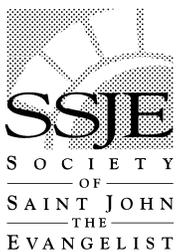
The Rule of Life

of the

SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN

THE EVANGELIST

The North American Congregation



The SSJE Rule of Life ♦ www.SSJE.org

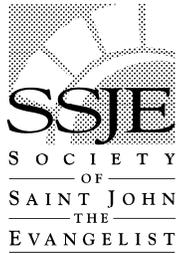
A Contemporary Monastic Rule of Life

A Rule, from the Latin *regula*, suggests not so much a code of legislation but a means of regulating and regularizing. A monastic rule sustains identity by mandating the rhythms of worship, spiritual discipline, prayer and rest, work and ministry. It sets the patterns by which authority is distributed and where accountability is expected. It delineates the bounds of the community and describes the processes of initiation. And it connects the ideals of the particular community or order with the gospel and the Christian mystery.

Our Rule is a contemporary one, created by the Society of Saint John the Evangelist over a period of eight years and formally adopted in September 1996. It replaces the original Rule, written by our founder in the 19th century. While it draws on the teaching of Richard Benson and other early members, the new rule addresses a whole host of issues that we knew to be vital for the health and faithfulness of a community making the transition into the third millennium. It is an authentic expression of our life for today, both who we are and who we hope to be.

Our sole motive in creating a new Rule of life was to strengthen our own community and our awareness of the particular vocation that God has given us; in other words, we produced it specifically for ourselves. Friends urged us to publish it for those who know us and who are seeking a deeper understanding of a way of life to which they feel attuned. And we offer it for those who do not know us yet, but who, in this time of widespread spiritual hunger when the monastic way is exerting a considerable pull on people's imagination and interest, seek a window into the life of a contemporary religious community.

The response to its publication has been overwhelmingly positive. Roman Catholic and Anglican religious communities on both sides of the Atlantic have welcomed it, in some instances using it to enhance the teaching of their own Rules. And large numbers of men and women of a variety of faith communities in their daily meditations have drawn strength and renewal from its teachings. The SSJE Rule of Life is available in book form from COWLEY PUBLICATIONS: www.cowley.org



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Chapter ONE

The Call of the Society

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, the eternal Word by whom all things were created, to become flesh and live among us. In all the signs that he did and the teaching that he gave, he made known to us the grace and truth of the eternal Father. When his hour came the Son consummated his obedience to the Father, and expressed his love for us to the uttermost, by offering himself on the cross. He was lifted up from the earth in his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead in order to draw all people to himself.

We whom God calls into this Society have been drawn into union with Christ by the power of his cross and resurrection; we have been reborn in him by water and the Spirit. God chooses us from varied places and backgrounds to become a company of friends, spending our whole life abiding in him and giving ourselves up to the attraction of his glory. Our community was called into being by God so that we may be entirely consecrated to him and through our common experience of the glory of the Father and the Son begin to attain even now the unity that God desires for all humankind. “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Our mission is inseparable from our call to live in union with God in prayer, worship and mutual love. Christ breathes his Spirit into us to be the one source of our own conversion and of our witness and mission to others; “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” We are sent to be servants of God’s children and ministers of the reconciliation which the Lamb of God has accomplished. Our own unity is given to be a sign that will draw others to have faith in him. Christ has entrusted to us the same word that the Father gave to him, so that those who hear it from our lips and perceive it in our lives may receive the light and through believing have life in his name.

By giving us the grace and courage to make lifelong vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience in an enduring fellowship, God makes us a sign of his eternal faithfulness. A community of men who pledge to stay together until death is a powerful sign to the world of the grace that enables those who love Christ to abide until he comes.

The divine Wind that blows where it chooses has not restricted our Society to a few ministries. Varied gifts within our brotherhood bear witness to the living power of Christ and extend his salvation. Though our gifts differ we share one call to be consecrated in truth, through the power of God’s word and the grace renewed by feeding on Christ and drinking his life-blood in the Eucharist. As a sign of our identity God gives us all an affinity with the witness of the beloved disciple embodied in the Gospel of John. We bear the name of St. John the Evangelist to show the Church what is the source of our inspiration and our joy.



Chapter TWO

Our Dedication to the Disciple whom Jesus Loved

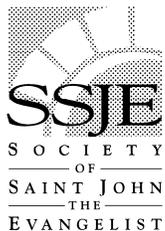
We hear God's living word in all the Scriptures but the testimony of the disciple whom Jesus loved has special power for those whom God calls into this Society. It gives us joy to know that Jesus drew this man John to himself in order to enjoy the blessings of close friendship. We believe that through our religious vocation Jesus is drawing us also into the deepest intimacy with himself. We find a profound significance for our own lives in what the fourth gospel tells us of the beloved disciple's friendship with Jesus and his call to be a witness to the mystery of the incarnation.

This is the man whom Jesus wanted to have closest to his heart at the last supper. The image of the trusted friend lying close to the breast of Jesus is an icon of the relationship we enjoy with the Son of God through prayer. It is by being close to him that we are reunited with the Father, for Jesus is "God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart." And contemplating the closeness of the disciple to Jesus at the supper can deepen our awareness that the communion we have with Christ in the Eucharist is no mere abstract idea but a real and growing bond of personal love.

The beloved disciple did not hide from the suffering of Christ at Golgotha but took his stand there with Mary. By being steadfast together at the cross, enduring all that others found unbearable, they remained in Jesus' love. If we abide in that perfect love shown on the cross we will receive the grace to face together all that we are tempted to run from in fear. Christ's gift of enduring love will be the heart of our life as a community, as it was in the new family which he called into being from the cross when he gave Mary and John to one another as mother and son.

Only love can understand what God gives and reveals through Jesus. The beloved disciple understood that the pouring out of water and blood from Jesus' side signified the giving of the Spirit. Love will open our eyes to the Spirit's power in the sacraments, in prayer, in action and service. He went into the empty tomb, and believed at once in the mystery of the resurrection. Love will make us men of faith who know God's power to bring life out of death. The beloved disciple recognized the Lord in the stranger by the shore. Love will expand our ability to know him in all persons, in all things and in all places.

The beloved disciple lived on, faithful to Christ's call to "remain until I come." The years spent exploring the depths of the revelation in which he had taken part bore fruit in the great gospel which bears the name of John. We have taken this name to show that we too are Christ's friends and witnesses. Through us also many come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and through believing have life in his name.



Chapter THREE

Our Founders and the Grace of Tradition

Just as we believe that our Society had its origin in the response to God's creative call of our founders Richard Meux Benson, Charles Chapman Grafton and Simeon Wilberforce O'Neill, so we believe that it is sustained through our own obedience to the voice of God continually calling us on. God speaks to us in many ways to maintain and renew the vocation of the Society. God speaks to us through the Scriptures and the Christian tradition, through men and women of the Spirit of different ages and cultures, through our own experience and through contemporary voices that engage us with the challenges of our own time. Among the many voices that mediate God's call to us, the witness of our founders and predecessors in the Society has a special importance. God calls us to remember them and to value their testimony. Reflection on our community's own tradition, and a dialogue between our contemporary experience and that of our predecessors, helps us to sustain our identity as we strive to rise up to the demands of the present. As we explore the spiritual legacy of our forbears we remember that they are not dead figures from the past. Risen in Christ, they belong to the great cloud of witnesses who spur us on by their prayers to change and mature in response to the Holy Spirit who makes all things new.

Faithfulness to tradition does not mean mere perpetuation or copying of ways from the past but a creative recovery of the past as a source of inspiration and guidance in our faithfulness to God's future, the coming reign of God. As we meditate on the grace of tradition each of us will hear the call to become, in Father Benson's words, "a man - not simply of the day, but a man of the moment, a man precisely up to the mark of the times. This makes the religious - so far from being the traditional imitator of bygone days - most especially a man of the present moment and its life."

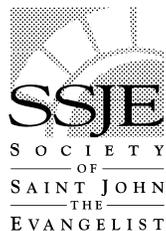
Our Society was the first religious community of men to be firmly established in the Anglican Church since the Reformation and embraced from the beginning both the contemplative and active dimensions of the religious vocation. As we struggle with God's call to us today to be active in ministry, prophecy, teaching and service, and to have a deep life of prayer and worship, we shall find encouragement in remembering the example of our forbears in their dedication to the mystical and apostolic aspects of our calling.

There are many aspects to the witness of those who formed our Society's tradition. Their lives inspire us to be indifferent to celebrity and success and to trust the power of hidden prayer. They stir us to be prophetic critics of Christendom and its compromises and to be dedicated to the renewal of the Church. They summon us to have a world-wide vision of mission, to be adaptable to a wide variety of settings, to be available in ministry to all classes of people. They teach us to integrate the catholic and evangelical traditions and dedicate ourselves to the ministry of reconciliation and unity.

Inevitably, the Society's past is also marred by many failures. God will have much to teach us through them, as long as we humbly keep in mind our own biases and shortcomings.

Chapter FOUR

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The Witness of Life in Community

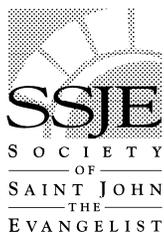
God has called us into being as a community and our life as a community, though fraught with struggles and failures, is a powerful act of revelation, testimony and service.

In community we bear witness to the social nature of human life as willed by our Creator. Human beings bear the image of the triune God and are not meant to be separate and isolated. All of us are called by God to belong to communities of personal cooperation and interdependence which strive to nurture and use the gifts of each and to see that our basic needs are met. Jesus called his disciples to be the light of the world, a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid; through the vitality of our life as a community we are meant to help people remember their own calling to form community. In an era of fragmentation and the breakdown of family and community, our Society, though small, can be a beacon drawing people to live in communion.

One of the ways in which we promote community is by being the nucleus for a wider fellowship. This is formed through the relationships we establish in our varied ministries, especially the hospitality of our houses; through the Fellowship of Saint John, whose members keep a rule of life in harmony with ours; by the participation of our personal friends and families and by our neighbors regularly joining us in worship. Our proclamation of the good news is also an invitation to be in communion with us. “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us.” This wider family is a true expression of community sustained by many energies of mutual service. We not only serve our brothers and sisters by acting as a spiritual center and home and ministering to them; they support us in innumerable ways in prayer, through their gifts and voluntary labors, by teaching and inspiring us and by working together with us in Christ. Some who find themselves relegated by neglect and prejudice to the margins of society will find a special grace in participating in this wider fellowship around our community.

Our human vocation to live in communion and mutuality is rooted in our creation in God’s image and likeness. The very being of God is community; the Father, Son and Spirit are One in reciprocal self-giving and love. The mystery of God as Trinity is one that only those living in personal communion can understand by experience. Through our common life we can begin to grasp that there is a transcendent unity that allows mutual affirmation of our distinctness as persons. Through prayer we can see that this flows from the triune life of God. If we are true to our calling as a community, our Society will be a revelation of God.

Our life as a community should also be a sign to the Church to rise up to its true calling as a communion of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ and the company of Christ’s friends. We are not called to be a separate elite, but to exemplify the life of the Body of Christ in which every member has a particular gift of the Spirit for ministry and shares an equal dignity. Fr. Benson taught that “there are special gifts of God indeed to the Society, but only as it is a society within the Church. The small body is to realize and intensify the gifts, to realize the energies, belonging to the whole Church.” Our witness and ministry is not merely to separate individuals; it is for strengthening the common life in the Body of Christ.



Chapter FIVE

The Challenges of Life in Community

Every Christian is called to live in community as a member of the Church. Christ in his wisdom draws each disciple into that particular expression of community which will be the best means of his or her conversion. Our way of life in this religious community is one of many expressions of the common life in the Body of Christ. We can be confident that Christ has called us into our Society because he knows that the challenges and the gifts it offers are the very ones we need for the working out of our salvation.

The first challenge of community life is to accept whole-heartedly the authority of Christ to call whom he will. Our community is not formed by the natural attraction of like-minded people. We are given to one another by Christ and he calls us to accept one another as we are. By abiding in him we can unite in a mutual love that goes deeper than personal attraction. Mutual acceptance and love call us to value our differences of background, temperament, gifts, personality and style. Only when we recognize them as sources of vitality are we able to let go of competitiveness and jealousy. As we actively seek to grow, and discern which men are being called into our Society, we must ardently seek for signs that God desires to increase our diversity in culture and race.

We are also called to accept with compassion and humility the particular fragility, complexity and incompleteness of each brother. Our diversity and our brokenness mean that tensions and friction are inevitably woven into the fabric of everyday life. They are not to be regarded as signs of failure. Christ uses them for our conversion as we grow in mutual forbearance and learn to let go of the pride that drives us to control and reform our brothers on our own terms.

The Society's dedication to the fourth gospel draws us to see reflected in it certain values which we especially take to heart as we live in community. In John's gospel the community of disciples is portrayed as a circle of Christ's friends, abiding in him in obedience and love, and depending on the Advocate who leads them together into the truth. In this portrait we recognize an implicit critique of the tendency for communities to harden into institutions, and for officialdom to replace the spontaneity of mutual service. Our faithfulness to our calling will be seen in the ways in which we fearlessly subject our life to hard questions in the light of the gospel, resist inertia and rigidity, minister to one another generously as equals, and stay open to the fresh inspiration of the Spirit.

Because community life provides so completely for all our basic needs we must rise to the challenge of making sure that our sense of personal responsibility stays strong. Community life is arduous, and not an escape from the toil of earning a living. It is essential that work is distributed in such a way that each brother shares in its demands to the full extent of his ability. We are called to maintain an ethos that stimulates each of us to learn new skills by which he can serve the brotherhood and develop his ministry to others.



Chapter SIX

The Spirit of Poverty

The poverty we embrace through our vow has its source, supreme example and eternal home in the being of God, who is a Trinity of Persons. In the Godhead there is no possessiveness, no holding back of self. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One in mutual self-giving and receiving. Faith sees the cross of suffering and self-giving love planted in the very being of the God revealed to us in Jesus. When God made room for the existence of space and time and shaped a world filled with glory, this act of creation was one of pure self-emptying. But God broke all the limits of generosity in the incarnation of the Son for our sake, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.” By the vow of poverty we bind ourselves to have the same mind . . . that was in Christ Jesus.”

The poverty that comes from God is not a barren emptiness. Christ “became poor that by his poverty [we] might become rich.” It is only because we are being “filled with all the fullness of God” that we can pledge together in this shared vow to give ourselves away in a common life of worship, hospitality, evangelism and service. “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

By this vow we renounce personal ownership. We are to be of one heart and soul, holding all things in common. By sharing everything we will be in harmony with the very being of God whose Triune life is boundless sharing. We will have a foretaste of the life of the communion of saints. We will recognize that the concern with individualistic fulfillment and private security that prevails in our culture is a trap from which we are being set free. More and more we will come to know that we were all baptized into Christ to be set free from self-centeredness. Our fulfillment comes together as members of one Body, and the Spirit will summon us again and again to surrender individual desires for the sake of our brotherhood and our mission.

If our religious poverty is to be authentic we must stay soberly aware of the essential difference between the deprivation of those whose poverty is forced upon them, and the way of life we choose by vow. We continue to be privileged by our education, our access to power and our material security. Nevertheless, the Spirit has many ways of making us poor and we are in no doubt that they will be costly to accept. In particular we can be sure that the Society’s life will be marked by fragility and many frustrating limitations. The resources to meet the demands made on us will seem inadequate, and our numbers too few. Our energies will seem insufficient for the claims made on them, and the task of balancing our life and husbanding our strengths too difficult. Even some of our ideals and dreams will need to be surrendered; the way God actually calls us to live may seem less appealing or less heroic than other forms of the religious life. God will give us our poverty. Every day we will be called to grow in reliance on grace alone and to surrender those inner and outer riches that hold us back from risking all for Christ, who risked and gave all for us.



Chapter SEVEN

Poverty and Stewardship in Practice

As we come to enter more completely into the offering of the Eucharist we learn more and more to offer thanks at all times and in all places. This gift of overflowing gratitude to God, who supplies all our needs, enables us to let go of dependence on possessions and all that is superfluous. In the sacrifice of thanksgiving lies the secret of simplicity of life to which we bind ourselves in the vow of poverty.

This simplicity of life finds expression in the way we enjoy and value the goodness of ordinary things and the beauty of creation. As we cherish the essential gifts of life, we grow in freedom from the compulsion to accumulate things, and cease to long for wealth. The movement towards simplicity puts us at odds with our culture, which defines human beings primarily as consumers, and gives prestige to those who have the power to indulge themselves in luxury and waste. As a community and as individuals we shall have to struggle continually to resist the pressure to conform. Our vow of poverty inevitably commits us to conscientious participation in the movement to establish just stewardship of the environment and earth's resources.

Our personal responsibility in this vow means taking care to gather around ourselves only what is appropriate and necessary. We must always seek the permission of the Superior to keep any gifts offered to us. We shall readily share among ourselves the things we have for our use, and give away whatever we cease to need. Whenever we have reason to buy anything for our own use we are to be watchful for temptations to be irresponsible. Our collective responsibility involves us all in the careful stewardship of our resources, especially in the policies which govern the use of our endowment and properties. Those who have responsibility for using funds allocated by the community need to guard against the temptation to misuse this power by spending thoughtlessly or failing to involve others in significant decisions.

The security we enjoy as a community makes us strangers to the precariousness and destitution that are the lot of the poor. Therefore we come to the poor in need of their witness to what it means to be powerless and to put one's trust entirely in God. As a community we must continually watch for signs that God is calling us to live and work with those who endure the hardships of material poverty. Even when our work among God's poor is limited in scope we should be their allies in every way. Our vow binds us to ruthless self-examination as to our real solidarity with the poor. In our education, preaching and political lives we are committed to advocacy for the poor, and the struggle to restore to them their just share of power and the bounty of God.

Engaging with Poverty

The vow of poverty is a commitment of faithfulness to the gospel itself, which summons us to a new vision and way of life that reverses the values of the world. The beatitudes of Jesus call us to trust the promise of divine fulfillment hidden in things that the world counts as barren and negative. By our vow we reaffirm our baptismal renunciations and pledge ourselves to seek out the mystery of divine grace present in places and experiences that seem insignificant, dark or empty.

By our vow of poverty we recognize that in our own spiritual lives there will be seasons in the shadow, experiences of dryness, waiting, obscurity and the seeming absence of God. In the light of the gospel we know that these are necessary, and that some of them yield more blessings than times when we are filled with devotion and confidence. “Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.” Our whole spirituality should bear the mark of our vow, showing that God is freeing us from dependence on feelings of success and happiness.

Poverty involves radical truthfulness about our own persons and the community itself, grounded in the knowledge of our fallibility and brokenness. Popularity and acclaim are dangerous, as they can lure us away from the sober awareness of our spiritual poverty that compels us to confess that “this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” The knowledge and acceptance of our fragility preserves us from complacency and illusion, continually throwing us back on the mercy and compassion of God.

In the great prayer of Jesus in the fourth gospel he says of his disciples, “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” The vow of poverty is one of the chief ways in which we affirm our separation in Christ from everything in the world that opposes God’s way of self-sending love. It sets us in opposition to the way of coercion, violence and militarism. It commits us to reject in Christ’s name every manifestation of exploitation, prejudice and oppression. It calls us to dissociate ourselves from structures of privilege and wealth. By this vow we confess the rule of the cross: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.” Through the vow of poverty we pledge ourselves to look for the signs of God’s activity and glory, especially in the lives of those who are strangers to success and power as the world defines them.

One of the signs that our poverty is authentic will be the readiness of others to confide in us their own experiences of suffering, grief and loss. If we are evading the mystery of poverty in our own lives, we will shut ourselves off from the pain and weakness in the lives of our brothers and sisters. If we are living our vow, they will find in our company a holy place of acceptance and understanding where they can wait for God to bring strength out of weakness and resurrection from death.

The Vow of Celibacy

Through our vow of celibacy we offer ourselves as members of a community to be completely available to Christ. We commit ourselves to remaining single forever, instead of united to another in marriage or partnership. We pledge to forgo the expression of love through sex, which God has blessed as the means for human partners to become one.

It is our desire to make a vow of celibacy that is the deepest possible expression of trust in Christ who has chosen us to follow this path. Christ is the creative Wisdom through whom the Father created all things; he is the light who lightens all who come into the world. Our sexuality, our power to love, our creative energy for relationship and union are of his making. They reflect the mystery of the triune life and mirror God's passionate love for all creation. In our vow we offer these gifts that belong to the heart of our humanity to Christ, trusting that he will bless, shape and use them. Our faith in Christ as creator also expresses itself by revering our manhood itself as sacred. If we foster a climate of celibacy in which this faith and reverence flourish, each brother, whatever his sexual orientation, can come to accept fully the particular way the mystery of sexuality has been woven into the texture of his humanity.

Our vow is also a response to Jesus' own way of life. His own freedom from ties of family and home, in order to be completely available in the Spirit for the proclamation of the good news, attracted others to choose the same path. They trusted in his promise that their choice, though full of painful losses and risks, would bring the reward of an abundance of new relationships among those who were awakening to the joy of the Kingdom: "a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children . . . and in the age to come eternal life." When we make our vow we affirm our own confidence in this promise.

We make our vow also trusting in the healing power of Christ, the redeemer of human brokenness. Our capacity for intimacy, our sexual desires, our readiness to be faithful, are all damaged by the confusions and wounds of our fallen human condition. For us celibacy is a path of healing and redemption, as the vocation of marriage and partnership is for others. As we make our vow we acknowledge humbly our need for grace to give us that unity and integrity of heart which we can never attain by our own power. We set out on the celibate way as a path of salvation that gives us the hope of attaining maturity as loving, disciplined and free men.

Our vow flows also from the experience of Christ ascended and glorified dwelling in our own hearts. Though we have surrendered the fulfillment we may have found in marriage or partnership, the mystery of union and mutual love is truly given to us. In the emptiness and absence that celibacy opens up in our hearts, Christ waits to make known to us the infinite strength and tenderness of his love. The exploration of our sexual solitude through prayer will reveal the depth of Christ's desire to be the one joy of our hearts. We can find the joy of celibacy only by entering into the mystery of our union with him and returning his love.

Celibate Life

Each of us will pass through different phases in our lives of celibate chastity. At times we will be glad of our inner solitude, which fosters prayer, and the diversity of relationships we enjoy in community and with friends; at other times we will feel loneliness. While others are enjoying the consolations of community life, some brothers may be missing the solace of partnership, the joys of sex and the satisfaction of having a home of their own. There will be seasons of contentment in our singleness; there may be days of testing and confusion if we fall in love, or become strongly attracted to another. Struggles will come at different stages as we break through to new levels of integration; the challenges faced by young religious will not be the same as those that come with the onset of middle age. Old age may bring its own trials of doubt. Only if we share these different experiences in candor and trust can we offer one another genuine support.

At times many of us will miss having fathered children. We shall need to open the poignancy of this loss to Christ in prayer. He will show us that in union with him our lives have been far from barren. As we nurture others in Christ, and bring them to maturity, we shall discover that fatherhood has found expression in our lives. In prayer, meditation, our thought, our work and our friendships, we are called to fulfill our deep human urge to be creators with God of new life, and to bear fruit that lasts.

The disciplines that let chastity take root in our lives are not mere curbs. Their purpose is to help us live with vitality and spirit. When we meditate we should truly pray with our bodies, and dwell on the glory with which the indwelling Spirit endows them. We are to reverence our bodies and do justice to their need for regular exercise and adequate sleep. Physical sloth and stress from overwork are equally liable to make sexual tension worse. Lethargy makes us more susceptible to the escapism of fantasy.

The disciplines that foster celibacy include those which prevent our spirits from becoming solemn and heavy. We can all contribute to the sanity and balance of our life together by allowing playfulness and humor to keep us in touch with our humanity and to release tension.

Jesus taught chastity of the heart, not merely of outward behavior. The conversion of our imaginations continues all our lives as we seek to make his integrity our own. We shall need to examine our hearts often to test the degree of our emotional honesty in our relations with others, and our faithfulness in honoring our personal boundaries. Whenever we are in perplexity or temptation it is essential to open our hearts to our spiritual directors or confessors; secrecy makes us more likely to deceive ourselves.

It is through friendship that we will be of most support to one another. Celibacy could be unbearably lonely unless we uphold one another with affection. Our friendship with one another does not draw us away from the centrality of the love of Christ in the heart, for that is the very thing we all have in common.

The Witness of Celibacy

Our lives of committed celibacy can act as a powerful sign of the reality of God's grace. As we grow in our understanding of the meaning of our vow we are called to become more aware of our role as witnesses. The celibate life is a risky one. If it is lived as a cowardly way of avoiding intimacy and commitment, it can wither the soul. But if as celibates we embrace our sexuality as a divine gift, and draw upon it as a source of energy and creativity, we can bring hope and encouragement to many who meet us.

Our singleness of life awakens the need to discover within our own selves the mystery of the male and female dimensions of the divine image. If we are courageous in this exploration, and cooperate with the converting power of the Spirit, we can bear a significant witness to both men and women. Women will find encouragement if they encounter in us not only the security that comes with deep respect, but also empathy of soul. Men will find encouragement if they encounter in us confident forms of masculine identity that do not depend for their vigor on force or competition.

Our fidelity to this vow can be an encouragement to those who are united in the sacrament of Marriage; like them we depend on divine grace to help us remain steadfastly together until death through all the changes and trials of life. Some partners of the same sex who have made a covenant of faithfulness in Christ may find inspiration in our loyalty and perseverance.

We are also witnesses to those who for many reasons live single lives. Much of the confusion and pain in fallen humanity's struggle with sexuality stems from the illusions that sexual activity is essential to wholeness, and that other forms of intimacy are inferior to the sexual bond. We can help people by the example of our lives to honor the depth and fullness to be found in the intimacy of friendship. We can bring inspiration and support to the struggles of those who seek to find meaning and purpose in their singleness. In our ministries, especially of hospitality, our celibacy gives us a special freedom to provide a setting in which single people of all ages and walks of life find respect, welcome and affirmation.



Chapter TWELVE

The Spirit of Obedience

The Gospel of John will teach us to experience obedience as a growing freedom to love all that God desires and wills. Jesus bears witness to this freedom, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise . . . my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” On our own we are powerless to act in selfless freedom in response to God’s desire. Obedience is only possible because Christ dwells in us and we dwell in him through Baptism. His obedience is active within us, drawing us into his union with the Father. By the vow of obedience we join together to make this loving consent to God’s will the corporate offering of a community. We learn together to listen intently to God, and we support each other in the struggle against all that resists God within and around us.

The vow has many facets. It is a pledge to unite in a common response to God by embracing and fulfilling the Rule of the Society. It is a promise to work together to discern God’s will as a body and act in concert to God’s glory. The vow binds us to cooperate with the Superior in carrying out our mission. It is a pledge to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking within the heart and to respond to God’s invitations to self-surrender.

Resurrection into the freedom and constancy of Christ’s obedience can be attained only through death and burial in union with him. Our share in humanity’s sinfulness means that we are still hindered by fear of what God desires and resistance to what God ordains. As a community bound together in obedience we support one another through the inevitable pain of dying to our old selves, and encourage one another to trust in the goodness of God’s will for us. The community is a school of reconciliation, conversion and healing for sinners, in which we can grow in our capacity to give ourselves to God.

Obedience is also a path of detachment. We have our own ideas of how best to serve God, our dreams of serving in particular ways. God’s actual call will often be to follow in other ways; as our vocation unfolds we will find that obedience requires us to lay aside again and again the plans we had made for ourselves. Monastic obedience gives us constant practice in letting go of attachment to our individual preferences and learning to trust in the wisdom of the community. It trains us to be resilient and prompt in responding to the Lord in the here and now.

The vow of obedience is fraught with risks. In the name of obedience human beings have gladly abdicated responsibility and taken refuge in passivity and conformity. Unless our obedience is in the Spirit we could be tempted to use the life of the community as a shelter from claiming and using our own responsibility and power as sons of God. The vow of obedience requires us to be constantly attentive to the voice of the Spirit within our hearts, endowing us with our own unique authority and gifts. We are called to be obedient to our true selves as they are being formed in Christ. Only where there is a growing respect for our true selves can there be authentic participation in the community’s common endeavor to discern and carry out God’s will.



Chapter THIRTEEN

Obedience in Practice

By the vow of obedience, each brother gives his complete allegiance to the community by accepting the Rule of Life as his own. The Rule is the expression of our distinctive way of discipleship. It embodies the values, disciplines and patterns of response that experience has shown to sustain our identity. In the vow we promise to cherish the Rule as a gift, being attentive as we read it together and taking it to heart through meditation.

The vow is a pledge to put our whole heart into the community's continuous quest to learn the will of God for us and to do it. God has called us to be active co-creators in Christ, not passive recipients of external instructions. Obedience calls us to pray, to search our hearts and minds together, to consult and discuss with one another, to bring passion and commitment to our cooperation as brothers and ministers in the New Covenant. Our hope is to reach a common mind in our discernment and decisions as often as we can. When a brother disagrees with a decision that commends itself to most of us, the vow of obedience gives integrity to his subsequent support of the outcome.

Grace makes it possible for our obedience to one another to transcend mere acquiescence and to express instead the power of brotherly love and unity. In our cooperation with the Superior we should arrive through discussion at a full understanding of the response or task that is being proposed and pledge ourselves to full accountability. If difficulties occur in following through on any project we should promptly consult with him so that the goal can be realistically reset. We should observe the same standard of cooperation and accountability in our response to any brother who has been given authority in any sphere. In particular we are to give our full cooperation to the brother in charge of the house we live in.

We express our obedience also in the way we are receptive to the Superior's teaching and pastoral ministry, and the openness we have to one another's contributions to the common life.

The practice of obedience to our own interior wisdom as it is being inspired by the Spirit requires us to search our own desires and motives in prayer. In any case where our conscience seems to be in conflict with something required of us in community, we should open our hearts to the Superior about it promptly. The vow encourages us to listen to our own hearts so that we can take responsibility for setting our own goals in the unfolding of our development as men of God. It requires us to be attentive to our own needs and gifts. It spurs us to be imaginative and hopeful about ourselves as active contributors to our common life.

If we remain alert we will see the signs that reveal whether we are indeed being converted. Where obedience is still immature there will be passivity, complaining, resentment, reluctance to be held accountable, rigidity and lack of candor. Where obedience is emerging from a growing freedom we will recognize the fruits of the Spirit in frankness, initiative, generosity and flexibility. We need to pray for these fruits not merely for our own good but so that our community can be a sign in the Church of what it means to be a living branch of the true vine.



Chapter FOURTEEN

The Office of Superior

The professed brothers elect one of their number who they believe has the necessary gifts of the Spirit to lead the Society. The community, faithful to our tradition and vocation that calls for strong leadership, entrusts authority to him which he exercises in these ways as the servant of all.

The Superior is empowered to distribute leadership and share administration throughout the community by choosing the officers and allocating specific areas of responsibility to the brothers. All the brothers are accountable to him in the exercise of their responsibilities. He coordinates the ministries of the community and no new work can be accepted without his permission. The Superior is also the chief pastor of the brethren and has the ultimate responsibility in Christ for the well-being of all. Although the Superior never acts as confessor within the community, and must honor the boundaries of each brother's inner life, if he is to serve and cherish the brothers he needs to know what is important in their lives. By fulfilling his share of the responsibility for staying genuinely in touch, each brother helps make sure that the Superior's ministry to him is timely and effective.

He is responsible for guiding the community as it makes plans and decisions. He presides over meetings of the Chapter in which important decisions are made by vote, and makes sure that less formal decisions are made with appropriate discussion and consultation. The Superior has the freedom to make various decisions about community policy on his own authority. The limits of this freedom are defined by the Statutes and maintained by the collective wisdom of the community. Once a year the community shall hold a discussion in which the Superior's ministry of leadership is reviewed.

The Superior serves the community as chief interpreter of the Rule. He is expected to enrich the community through his own spiritual teaching and by inviting men and women of the Spirit to give us guidance and inspiration. The Superior also receives a mandate to lead the community as a prophet who looks to the future and fosters our collective vision. This orientation towards God's future finds a particular expression in the way the Superior cultivates gifts of leadership within the community and equips potential successors. The Superior may not serve more than three consecutive terms of three years, to make sure that the gift of leadership is renewed.

The office of Superior needs outside resources of support. In addition to a spiritual director, the Superior shall have regular recourse to a consultant of his choice who is qualified to help him monitor his ministry.

The benefits of endowing our leader with strong authority are great, but so are the demands. We need to be aware of both the negative and positive psychological forces that are inevitably brought into play wherever authority is strong. The Superior can be overwhelmed by the number of expectations placed upon him. He will not be equally gifted in meeting them all and will fall short through his own weakness. Only prayer and genuine love can sustain him in his office. The brothers shall frequently call upon God to give our leader the graces needed for his ministry day by day, and to show them how to support and cherish him.



Chapter FIFTEEN

Outward Signs of Our Common Life

From the day of our clothing to the day of our burial, the habit acts as a powerful sign of our common life and identity that we should cherish. It manifests not only our membership in this Society but our solidarity with men and women following the monastic way the world over. It expresses a precious continuity linking us through the centuries to the beginning of the monastic movement in the Church of Christ.

This clothing, dense with meaning, is a source of joy. We have put on Christ in Baptism and the habit can remind us of our present union with him. The triple-cord round our waists is an ancient sign of readiness that can summon us to be prepared to meet Christ whenever he should come. The knots tied in the cord at profession are signs to the hand and eye of the vows we have made to abide faithfully until he comes.

Each house of the Society shall have its own guidelines about when the habit will be worn at home. Sometimes when we are away on mission wearing our habits may be a valuable witness to our calling, but whenever the habit is likely to be a barrier in our dealings with others we should wear ordinary clothing. The habit loses its spiritual value if it is used for ostentation or to imply a false distinction between ourselves and other Christians.

The cross of the Society is an emblem of our common life to be worn with ordinary clothing whenever we choose. It enables us to bear close to our heart a sign of the lifting up of Christ from the earth that he might draw all people to himself.

When we make our life profession, we are given as a further sign of our entire dedication to Christ a ring to be worn thereafter at all times. This ring is a sign of our espousal as lovers of God. It shows our solidarity with those who have made vows to meet the demands of love and faithfulness in marriage and dedicated partnership.

It is a joyful thing to have our lives enriched by these and other symbols, but their power will fade if we fail to renew our appreciation of their depths. The occasions when a brother is given the habit and cross, or puts on the ring, are opportunities when we can all re-experience the richness of these symbols, and from time to time we should meditate on them in our prayer. Our hallowing of these outward signs involves taking care of them, particularly making sure that our habits are clean and in good repair.



Chapter SIXTEEN

Worship

Human beings were created to bless and adore their Creator and in the offering of worship to experience their highest joy and their deepest communion with one another.

In our fallenness we continually turn in upon ourselves to seek fulfillment without self-offering. We squander on lesser things the love that is due to the one source of all being. But the Father never ceases from seeking true worshipers to worship him in spirit and truth. God sent the Son into the world to heal and raise us up so that, empowered by the Spirit, we could surrender our whole selves in adoration and be reunited in the love of God. God draws us into our Society so that our calling to be true worshipers can reach fulfillment in the offering of the continual sacrifice of praise. In this life of worship together we are transformed in body, soul and spirit.

We offer our worship in the Spirit as a community of the Church on behalf of the entire world. Our life is ordered so that we can sustain the full expression of the Church's worship in the constant offering of the Daily Office and the Eucharist. We bear witness to the riches of the liturgy and its power to permeate life with the remembrance of God. Our liturgical life is in itself a vital ministry. We lift up the Church and world in prayer, and strengthen those whom we encourage to take full part in our worship. We also influence the renewal of the Church's worship by our example, and the value we place on beauty in music, dignity in ceremony and depth in the word.

If we become the true worshipers whom the Father seeks, no part of our life is untouched by our worship. It makes our experience of time itself sacred. The offices express the inmost meaning of the times of each day from dawn to nightfall. The weeks are sanctified, beginning with the commemoration of the resurrection on the first day. The liturgical cycle of the year redeems the passage of time by making the months and seasons the means of appropriating again the creating and healing acts of God, reaching its climax in our renewed experience of the life-giving cross and resurrection in Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost.

Our worship will bind us in community with one another and with those for whom we intercede in the liturgy. It unites us with our brothers who have gone before us and to the entire communion of saints. In worship we are not bound to our own time and place; the commemoration of the saints links us with all the ages and every place where God has been glorified. It reveals to us the great cloud of witnesses in the heavens, encouraging us on our straight course to God.

Worship sanctifies work, continually interrupting it so that we can offer it to God in thanksgiving. Worship, like play, is free from the need to produce tangible gains, but it is work. It takes skill to craft and carry out the "work of God," as monastic tradition calls it. Worship makes costly demands on our time and energies. It calls us from the inertia of self-centeredness. When we come to worship in dryness and fatigue, we learn to make the offering of sheer faith and allow ourselves to be borne along by the devotion of our brothers.

The Eucharist

Our worship of God finds its fullest expression in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is the offering through which we return thanks for all that God has given us in creation, and in our redemption through the pouring out of Christ's life-blood on the cross. In this sacrifice of bread and wine all that we do and are is joined by the Holy Spirit to the eternal offering of Christ on behalf of the world. It is the meal which intensifies our union with Christ, draws us together as a community, and nourishes us with the grace needed for our transformation and our mission. It is the mystery through which we are caught up into the communion of saints on earth and in heaven, the mystical Body of Christ. It is the gift through which we experience a foretaste of the life to come.

The celebration of the Eucharist on the first day of the week is our central act of worship as members of the people of God. Our seeking to abide in Christ, and to feed on him constantly as our daily bread, moves us to celebrate the Eucharist also on other days of the week. Although it is not our custom to offer the Eucharist on our day of rest, and there may be another day in the week at which participation is voluntary, the community will normally celebrate the Eucharist together day by day. Reservation of the sacramental gifts enables the community not only to communicate the sick, but also to have a sign of Christ's abiding presence in our midst.

John the Evangelist alludes to a profound dimension of the mystery of the Eucharist in the account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. The Eucharist is a means for Christ to serve us and to give us the love whereby we can serve and love one another. Our celebrations of the Eucharist are occasions of spiritual hospitality, mutual service and witness. Eucharistic hospitality is an important ministry to all those to whom we open our worship. We should be sensitive to their needs and order the liturgy in a welcoming way that enables them to participate with us. Through our celebrations we bear witness to our faith in the presence of the risen Christ in the living word of Scripture and preaching, in the assembled body, and in the sacramental Body and Blood of Communion. Our eucharistic worship is a primary expression of our mission because it has the power to draw people into a living encounter with Christ, the living bread and true healer.

The frequent offering of the Eucharist is a privilege but it also brings challenges. We need to work together to keep on revitalizing our eucharistic worship so that it does not become a repetitive routine. Creative variations in our liturgies are important. Frequent communion is a challenge to us also as individuals. It is not possible for us to participate in the liturgy with intense devotion and awareness every time. Often we must accept being borne along by the corporate devotion of the assembly, remembering that the power of the sacrament is not dependent on our mental clarity or warmth of feeling. However each one of us will need to discover for himself ways of constantly renewing through meditation his self-offering and receptivity, so that we can come to Communion often "with that tender love which is due to Him with whom we are so mysteriously united," as Father Benson urged us.

The Daily Office

Each eucharistic meal empowers us to approach God afresh in worship, united with Christ; Father Benson teaches us that “Just as in Holy Communion we receive His substance into our bodies, so in the saying of our offices we bring forth the power of that substance, so that it may rise up to God.” The Daily Office is a sustained act of union with Christ by which we participate in his unceasing offering of love to the Father. In reciting the psalms, singing canticles and hymns, proclaiming the divine word in Scripture or lifting our voices in prayer, we are to enter more and more into the mind, heart and will of Christ, and be borne up by the Spirit in him to the Father. Our praying of the psalter, which is the heart of the Daily Office, takes us ever deeper into the mystery of the Incarnation; the psalms give voice to the whole range of human experience which Christ has embraced and redeemed as the Savior of the world. Although nothing essential is lacking when the office is said, we continue the tradition of our Society by singing whenever there are sufficient voices. As we sing and chant deep levels of our being are involved; our hearts are lifted up in greater exultation. And music enhances our worship with riches inherited from many ages.

This fellowship in praise at the heart of the Church continually deepens our integration as a community, making us one in Christ. Our desire to experience this deepening communion will find expression in the care we give to the disciplines of choral prayer. Among these disciplines are practice and preparation; the custom of taking our place in good time; stillness of posture; attentiveness to the readings; sensitivity and responsiveness to one another so that we can sing and recite together.

The office will also nourish the inner life of each brother. It is the means by which our hearts are constantly impregnated with the riches of the word of God in Scripture so that they bear fruit in our prayer and life. When a brother’s heart is full of heaviness, praying the office can sustain him. But for the office to be truly a means of our transfiguration we must cooperate by continually renewing our inner attentiveness, laying aside again and again the preoccupations and daydreams that confuse and tie us down. This effort to keep our hearts open to Christ will be needed all our lives; it is a hidden dying to self day by day.

The Daily Office offered by the Society shall be drawn from the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church or of its equivalent in the Anglican Church of Canada: Morning Prayer, the Order of Service for Noonday, Evening Prayer and Compline. Each house will establish a pattern in the recitation of the offices and the celebration of the Eucharist that best suits the local setting.

Each brother shall take part in every office unless he is permitted to be absent for reasons of infirmity or is prevented by some necessary work. We shall recite Morning and Evening Prayer by ourselves if we are unable to join the community in choir and when we are away from the house. In this way the community remains united in the common offering of praise even when we are separated.



Chapter NINETEEN

The Word of God in Preaching

Preaching is central to our full experience of the living presence and power of Christ in our worship. Although we do offer the Eucharist at certain times when silent reflection on the readings is judged to be sufficient, a homily will usually be preached at our regular community celebrations of the Eucharist. In preaching, Christ, who will be present to us in communion, comes first to those who are listening in “the word of God . . . living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,” and as the one who speaks words that are spirit and life.” The preached word is thus part of our experience of the daily bread of God’s nourishment.

Certain brothers will be given by God a special gift of the Spirit for preaching, but the same Spirit distributes among the brothers the ability to share their experience of God and express their faith in the gospel through homilies offered at the Eucharist. Some brothers may participate in the preaching life only as listeners, but the formation that everyone coming into the community receives should enable most of us to preach. This exchange of the living word among us is a powerful expression of the communion of the Holy Spirit. In preaching we share with one another the fruits of our prayer, experience and study, and build up the common life. We learn to value one another’s uniqueness as we come to appreciate our varied styles and distinctive approaches. We experience the mysterious action of the Spirit, who sometimes touches our hearts with particular power when the words of the preacher are not in themselves especially eloquent or strong.

We shall need to renew our attentiveness to the preached word often. Openness will only be sustained if we ask for it, humbly confessing to God our tendency to be distracted. Courtesy and mutual respect encourage us to show through our posture and responsive attitude that we are listening to the preacher and not turning away from his offering. We need to let go of prejudices that deter us from being alert and ready for the gift that a brother might bring to us in his homily. In our prayer we are called to savor and meditate on the new gifts that have come to us through listening to one another’s preaching so that they can be truly absorbed.

We will grow in our abilities as ministers of the word if we give and receive thoughtful responses to one another’s preaching. Expressions of appreciation and thoughtful and sensitive criticism belong to that “speaking the truth in love” which builds up the body and makes our gifts more fruitful. At regular gatherings of the community time will be set aside for corporate reflection on our preaching.

Although we preach to one another as members of a community we must include the guests who worship with us; they are important members of our liturgical assembly. The word we preach is meant to address their claims and needs as well as our own, and the presence of different people from many walks of life is an incentive to keep before us wide spiritual horizons and challenging questions. People are hungry for good news that life is full of meaning in union with God. As we take turns to preach in the liturgy we remember our primary calling to be witnesses and messengers of that good news.

Holy Scripture

The life we live is permeated by Holy Scripture; it has a central place in our worship, our preaching, our meditation and reading, and our study. Through the scriptures the living voice of God is continually active to convert, nourish and transform us. The more we open ourselves to their riches, the more we have to share with others. And the more we open the scriptures to others, the more we discover in them for our own lives.

In the Daily Office and the eucharistic liturgy of the word, Scripture is continually absorbed into our beings as we pray the psalter and canticles and listen to the readings and preaching. In our worship the Spirit sometimes touches us immediately through a word, an image or a story; there and then we experience the Lord speaking to us. But we shall often go unaware of the ways in which the images and words of Scripture are seeping into the deepest level of our hearts. These hearts of ours are not empty vessels but inner worlds alive with images, memories, experiences and desires. It is the Spirit dwelling within us who brings the revelation of Scripture into a vital encounter with our inmost selves, and brings to birth new meaning and life. Gradually we become aware of the deep resources of truth that this inner process of revelation has formed in us, and are able to draw upon them for our own needs and for the building up of others in ministry. The effect of the scriptures upon us in the liturgy is largely subliminal, but this fact does not justify inattentiveness. We should take care to read the scriptures with a clarity and energy that does justice to our love for them, and to listen as attentively as we can.

In our personal lives of prayer we shall feed on the scriptures and trust in expectant faith that God will be present in them for us. If the Spirit draws us to ways of meditation and prayer that do not directly engage with the scriptures, then we would be wise to keep ourselves open to them by means of reading and study. Often the scriptures will become most vivid and alive to us as we prepare to expound them in preaching and teaching. However, we need to guard against the temptation to let our call to preach become the chief motive for investigating the scriptures. We should learn to listen to the needs of our own hearts and search the scriptures for our own healing and revival.

The disciplines of critical biblical study and the spiritual appropriation of Holy Scripture in the heart are commonly treated as incompatible or kept separate. Our community bears a valuable witness in the Church when we demonstrate that intellectual honesty and contemplative openness belong together in our life with Scripture.

If we are truly called by God into this Society we can be sure that the Gospel of John will be an unfailing source of life and light for us. If we become intimately familiar with it by prayer and study, its riches will prove to be limitless. In times of difficulty, when we are tempted to turn away, we should trust that this gospel will be our rock and mainstay. Entering into it again we shall find ourselves praying the words of Simon Peter to Christ, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

The Mystery of Prayer

A ceaseless interchange of mutual love unites the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our prayer is not merely communication with God, it is coming to know God by participation in this divine life. In prayer we experience what it is to be made “participants in the divine nature”; we are caught up in the communion of the divine persons as they flow to one another in self-giving love and reciprocal joy. If we hold before us in wonder the mystery of the triune life of God our prayer will realize its full potential. The conception of prayer as homage paid to a distant God will fall away. We shall find ourselves full of awe and gratitude that the life of divine love is open and accessible to us, for God dwells in us. “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” If we begin to accept God’s generosity in drawing us into the divine life, and grasp the dignity bestowed on us by the divine indwelling, prayer will spring up in adoration and thanksgiving.

We shall find ourselves adoring the Holy Spirit who is poured out into our hearts and gives us the love with which we can love in return. Our hearts will be filled with thankfulness that the Spirit stirs in the depths of our being and unites all that we are, even what is broken and not yet formed, with the risen Lord. We shall worship Christ himself with adoring love, full of gratitude that he abides in us, and that in him we enjoy the fullness of the Father’s acceptance and love. Our contemplation of his undiminished humanity will continually encourage us to offer ourselves, our souls and bodies in all their humanity, to God through him. Through Christ we shall adore the Father in whom we live and move and have our being, the life-giving mystery of love, who is beyond all words and above all thoughts.

There are many conflicts on the way into the experience of divine love. Sinfulness originates in a deep wound to our humanity that hinders us all from accepting love. As the Spirit exposes it to Christ’s healing touch in prayer, we shall often have to struggle with our reluctance to be loved so deeply by God. Christ himself will strive with us, as the angel strove with Jacob, to disable our self-reliant pride and make us depend on grace. Our love must be purified and tested by many times of darkness, loss and waiting. The nearer we draw to God, the more we will sense our vulnerability to the “cosmic powers of this present darkness” that seek to isolate us from God and one another. So there are sufferings to be expected in our prayer but through them we come to the peace Christ promised. “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”



Chapter TWENTY-TWO

Prayer and Life

God the Holy Spirit longs to inspire in us prayer that includes and embraces the whole of our life. It is a great privilege to be called to the religious life, which offers us every opportunity and encouragement to welcome the Spirit's transforming grace so that prayer may enter more and more into all that we are and all that we do.

Resisting the tendency to restrict prayer to set times, we are to aim at eucharistic living that is responsive at all times and in all places to the divine presence. We should seek the gifts which help us to pray without ceasing. The Spirit offers us the gift of attentiveness by which we discern signs of God's presence and action in creation, in other people and in the fabric of ordinary existence. We are called to spiritual freedom by which we surrender fretfulness and anxiety in order to be available to God in the present moment. There is the gift of spontaneity, which gives rise to frequent brief prayers throughout the day in which we look to Christ and express our faith, hope and love. There is the gift of prompt repentance, which encourages us to turn to God and ask for forgiveness the instant we become aware of a fall. Through these and other like gifts, prayer comes to permeate our life and transfigure our mundane routines.

The life of prayer calls for the courage to bring into our communion with Christ the fullness of our humanity and the concrete realities of our daily existence, which he redeemed by his incarnation. We are called to offer all our work to God and ask for the graces we need to do it in Christ's name. In our prayer we are to test whether God is confirming our intentions and desires or not. We are able to pray about one another, our relationships and common endeavors. We are to bring him our sufferings and poverty, our passion and sexuality, our fears and resistances, our desires and our dreams, our losses and grief. We must spread before him our cares about the world and its peoples, our friends and families, our enemies and those from whom we are estranged. Our successes and failures, our gifts and shortcomings, are equally the stuff of our prayer. We are to offer the night to God as well as the day, our unconscious selves as well as our conscious minds, acknowledging the secret and unceasing workings of the Spirit in the depths of our hearts.

This deep intention at the heart of our life to find God in all things means learning to trust that divine companionship continues undiminished even when we feel only boredom and frustration. We can learn to stay still in our experience of numbness and resistance, and trust that Christ is just as truly alive in our hearts in these times as in those in which we enjoy the sense of his presence.

The more we discover through prayer how completely the divine presence permeates our life, the greater will be the integrity of our ministry as we teach others to pray. Men and women come to us not merely to learn to pray, but to learn to pray their lives. The prayer that has spread its roots into our whole life bears fruit a hundredfold as we use the resource of our own experience in guiding and initiating others.



Chapter TWENTY-THREE

Meditative Prayer

In our meditative prayer each of us seeks intimate communion with God. Quietness and freedom from interruption are needed for us to enter deeply into this prayer. Accordingly, each house of the Society shall have one hour of strict silence set aside each day so that all the brothers can spend this time in meditative prayer completely undisturbed. Occasional necessity may compel a few of us to have their hour of prayer at another time of day, but the community hour is sacrosanct. Although we usually pray alone we are especially close in this hour, bearing one another up. In times of struggle the sense of unity in prayer will be a great support. When we are away on vacation or mission we shall aim at spending half an hour in prayer each day.

“There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit.” We shall not all have the same ways of prayer, but we will be united in seeking to open our hearts to “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God.” The focus of our meditation may be on the Word of God in Scripture or holy writings. We may use our imaginations to enter into the deep meaning of a scriptural story. Or in slow, reflective reading we may wait for the Spirit to alert us to the words or image that are to be the means of God’s particular revelation to us on this day: “The Spirit of truth . . . will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Then meditation opens our minds and hearts, and our response to God’s gift and disclosure is kindled by the Spirit within us. God may touch us through icons, images and symbols, impregnating our hearts with grace and furthering our transformation “from one degree of glory to another.” Sometimes God’s word is waiting to be heard in our own current experience. The call may be to sift through it in company with Christ to see how he is at work in our lives and where he is leading.

Our prayer may distill our heart’s desire in single words or hallowed phrases lovingly repeated, while we lay aside discursive thoughts in order to be unified in Christ. Or we may simply wait on God expectantly until our affections are kindled, and our hearts find a few words to give voice to our worship. When God wills, we may be drawn to contemplation. In the radical simplicity of contemplative prayer we surrender ourselves to the mystery beyond words of Christ’s abiding in us, and our abiding in him close to the Father’s heart.

Meditative prayer is the receptive and responsive prayer of our whole selves. Our bodies are at prayer in the postures and breathing that enable us to be centered. The solitude of the cell gives us the freedom to be spontaneous in expressing prayer through gestures, movements, tears and singing.

The Mystery of Intercession

Father Benson taught us to look always to the glory of the ascended Christ and find the meaning of all we do in union with him. We shall enter into the mystery of intercessory prayer only if we realize our oneness with Christ the great High Priest, who lives forever to make intercession for all the world. Christ makes this prayer to the merciful Father through the prayers of all the faithful who are baptized into his body. His voice does not appeal to God separately from theirs; “They are . . . so many mouths to Himself; and as they pray . . . His voice fills their utterance with the authority and claim belonging to Himself.” The Father hears the voice of his beloved Son in our prayers and accepts them as Christ’s.

It is the Spirit of Christ who stirs our prayer and weaves the movements of our hearts into his great offering. Because the Spirit moves so deeply within us we cannot always be conscious of the full meaning and substance of our prayer. Often our intercessions will feel weak and incoherent. Yet the Spirit is helping us “in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Through faith we see Christ not only in his majesty in heaven, but in his lowly presence in every creature. He suffers with and in everyone in need. Our intercession does not call down the divine presence to come to the place where we have seen a need, for the Christ who fills all things is already in that place. It is his Spirit who calls us to join him there by offering our love in intercessory prayer and action, to be used by God for healing and transformation.

It is a wonderful thing that God makes us his fellow-workers and uses our love, acting in intercession, to further the reconciliation of all things in Christ. We offer thanks with joy whenever prayer results in the transformation for which we had hoped. However, we must often suffer the pain of seeing no visible result to our prayer. But we should let no frustration wear down the trust that sustains our waiting on God. Every offering of love will bear fruit. “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

According to an ancient monastic saying “A monk is separated from all in order to be united to all.” The pioneers of monasticism believed that the monk was called to the margin of society in order to hear within himself the deepest cries of humanity, and to discover a profound unity with all living beings in their struggle to attain “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” In our intercessory prayer this solidarity will find its deepest expression. We shall also experience through faith our communion with all the saints in glory who pray unceasingly with us and for us.

The Practice of Intercession

From the beginning the Church has entrusted to the monastic communities a special responsibility for intercession. Our hearts must always be open to those who ask for our prayers and depend on us to share their burdens. We will rejoice with them when the gift we have sought together from the Lord is given them. And we will stay joined to them in their struggle if God's response seems to deny their request or calls them to wait.

Our prayers for one another, those we serve, the Church and the whole world, the living and the dead, are gathered up in our worship, particularly at the prayers of the people at the Eucharist. We should gladly use the opportunities provided in the liturgy of the Eucharist and in the Daily Office to offer our intercessions aloud as the Spirit moves us.

Once every quarter the community devotes a day to the offering of prayer and fasting. On these days it is our custom to pray together in the presence of the eucharistic elements. Through our fasting and these special times of prayer, we open ourselves so that the Spirit can draw us into the prayer of adoration, and move us to offer intercession for all the people of God.

We shall intercede also in our personal prayers day by day, appealing to God to pour out his saving grace on particular people and situations. In intercession we shall discover the power to love those we find difficult. Father Benson taught that "in praying for others we learn really and truly to love them. As we approach God on their behalf we carry the thought of them into the very being of eternal Love, and as we go into the being of him who is eternal Love, so we learn to love whatever we take with us there." God will also inspire each one of us to make certain causes our special concern. We may also be moved to draw the needs of the world into our contemplative prayer, holding them silently in the radiance of God's mercy within our hearts.

Intercession is not an intermittent activity, restricted to those times in which we are deliberately praying for the world and for people. The entire life of each member of Christ's body is intercessory. Christ takes up our actions and everyday experiences into the eternal offering of his whole self to the Father. If we abide in Christ he will show us that he accepts our labors, our struggles, our afflictions and the ordinary actions of our daily lives as sacrificial, and uses them to bless and uphold the world.

The Cell and Solitude

The Father of all whom we seek to love is a hidden God. Therefore we take to heart the words of Jesus, “Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” The cell is the place of this secret encounter and reward. From time to time we may choose to pray in chapel, where the icons and sacramental presence of Christ in the tabernacle draw us to contemplation. Or we may pray in a quiet place out of doors. But the cell is the primary place of prayer where we are to stand before God. The cell therefore must be ordered as a space for prayer and treated as sacred. God has promised to be there for us: “Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.” As we enter our cells we renew our commitment to meet God there by praying these same words.

We will experience our cell as a place of divine presence and companionship not only in our prayer but in our studying, resting and sleeping there. There is solace in being alone with God, but the privacy of our cells is not meant to shut us off from one another. We gladly welcome one another into our cells for quiet conversations.

Maintaining a balance in our life between solitude and engagement with others is not easy. We are subject to many pressures that deter us from experiencing solitude: the claims of work, the fear of loneliness, and the reluctance to face ourselves as we are in the company of Jesus before God. Without solitude we would forfeit an essential means of inner restoration and encounter with God in the depths of our own souls. Therefore we must find times to be alone. We need to love our cells and take opportunities to stay quietly there in reflection, and in restorative activities such as reading and listening to music. We will need to be disciplined in our use of the radio and recordings so that we use them as means of enrichment rather than of empty distraction. Whenever staying in the cell becomes repugnant to us, or it begins to lose its attraction as a place of solitude, we must remember that we are called to life through death: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” In persevering in our cells we shall discover for ourselves the wisdom of the ancient saying, “The cell will teach you all things.”

Our close proximity to one another in our houses means that further solitude may need to be sought elsewhere. We should value opportunities to be alone out of doors and in places where we can be replenished in spirit by ourselves.

Our cells are meant to be congenial and personal places so we are free to have around us plants, pictures and other things that beautify them in simple ways. If we clutter the cells with a profusion of objects or make them chaotic and untidy, our rooms will be a hindrance instead of a help to centered, prayerful living. Therefore at least once a year the Superior or Senior Brother shall require each brother to renew the order and simplicity of his cell.



Chapter TWENTY-SEVEN

Silence

The gift of silence we seek to cherish is chiefly the silence of adoring love for the mystery of God which words cannot express. In silence we pass through the bounds of language to lose ourselves in wonder. In this silence we learn to revere ourselves also; since Christ dwells in us we too are mysteries that cannot be fathomed, before which we must be silent until the day we come to know as we are known. In silence we honor the mystery present in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, strangers and enemies. Only God knows them as they truly are, and in silence we learn to let go of the curiosity, presumption and condemnation that pretend to penetrate the mystery of their hearts. True silence is an expression of love, unlike the taciturnity that arises from fear and avoidance of relationship.

Silence takes root through our cultivation of solitary prayer in which we are free to take delight in our aloneness with God undisturbed. The Spirit helps us through our struggle with distraction to return to that inmost place of mutual love where God is simply present to us and we to God. If we are faithful here in our movement into silence, we will bring the same spirit into our liturgical worship and cherish the silences observed before and during the Eucharist and Offices. Without this constant opening of the heart in silence alone and together we are unable to feel the touch or hear the word of God. Silence is a constant source of restoration. Yet its healing power does not come cheaply. It depends on our willingness to face all that is within us, light and dark, and to heed all the inner voices that make themselves heard in silence.

Our ministries demand silence for their integrity, in particular our speaking to others and our listening to them in Christ's name. Without silence words become empty. Without silence our hearts would find the burdens, the secrets and the pain of those we seek to help intolerable and overwhelming. And our ethos of silence is itself a healing gift to those who come to us seeking newness of life.

Each of the disciplines that protect silence in our common life calls for respect. The Greater Silence makes the night and early morning a healing time for recollection. Silent meals and those accompanied by music and reading accustom our guests and us to enjoying fellowship without needing to converse. Appointed days of retreat and quiet invite us to deepen our awareness and prayer. Our cells welcome us into the silence of God's company, and we spurn that welcome if we rely unthinkingly on radio, music and conversation. We cultivate a thoughtful respect of one another's need to stay focused by avoiding unnecessary interruptions.

Our own strength is not sufficient for weaving silence into the fabric of daily life. For the hours of the day to be permeated by mindfulness of the divine life we must be engaged in constant struggle, depending on God's grace. Powerful forces are bent on separating us from God, our own souls, and one another through the din of noise and the whirl of preoccupation. Technology has intensified our risk of becoming saturated with stimuli. We who are called to maintain a lively interest in our own culture, so that we can bear witness to Christ within it, can never rest from the effort of discernment and resistance or we shall fall captive to scatteredness and stress.

The Rhythm of Feast and Fast

Jesus chose to work the first of his signs and reveal his glory at the wedding feast at Cana, and he was the chief guest at many meals held to celebrate the new life he was bringing through the gospel. His joy will abound in us when we celebrate by feasting on the holy days that commemorate the great acts of creation and redemption, and the glories of the saints. He will continue to reveal his glory among us on the joyful occasions when we have festal meals to mark professions, clothings, anniversaries, holidays and special turning points in our life. These feasts are another expression of our eucharistic life, and anticipate the heavenly banquet which the risen Lord is preparing for those who love him. The careful preparations that make our festivities so pleasing are sacred tasks. Our ministry of hospitality finds one of its richest expressions as we welcome guests to join us in these festal liturgies and meals of celebration.

Just as we feast to celebrate the abundance of the risen life, so we also fast because the end is not yet and the bridegroom is still to come. Our feasts will be holy and joyful if we are equally prepared to enter from time to time into Jesus' desert fast. When we fast we should be following him, moved by the Spirit, to offer to God the experience of emptiness and want. This offering is made in faith simply to God's glory, yet from time to time it will open us to the Holy Spirit's work of revelation. In our fasting the Spirit may disclose our need to grieve for sin, ours and the world's. There may be some temptation we will experience more sharply when fasting, and the Spirit can encourage us to struggle with it more directly. Or Christ may want us to sense our connectedness with his countless brothers and sisters who suffer hunger, and embrace their cause in prayer. Above all, the hunger of our fast can open our hearts so that we discover again our hunger and thirst for the living God and have our desire rekindled by the Spirit.

During Lent there will be a common discipline of abstinence with simpler meals and no meat. We will fast by abstaining from food until evening on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the four quarterly days of corporate retreat. We will join our brothers in a fast of preparation on the day before they make their vows. On fast days the Superior will give dispensation to those who require some food for reasons of infirmity, medical condition or unavoidable duties. Those dispensed can participate in other ways through prayer, silence and recollection. We may also fast on our personal retreat days.

Both our feasts and fasts have a part to play in achieving a wise balance in our daily eating and drinking. In our feasting we learn to savor and appreciate what we eat and drink, in thankfulness to the Creator who gives them. Fasting can help us to become more attentive to what our bodies really need so that we can moderate our appetites and be liberated from greed.



Chapter TWENTY-NINE

Retreat

Times of retreat are essential elements in the rhythm of our life. They enable us to celebrate the primacy of the love of God above all else. Whenever we enter retreat we seek to be more available to God so that we may enter more fully into the divine life. The community shall have one week of retreat together every year under the direction of a retreat leader. The experience of shared silence and prayer deepens our solidarity in the Spirit and unites us in a common response to the living word. In addition each professed brother shall have a week of individual retreat every year. The arrangements about the time and place of this retreat will be made in consultation with the Superior. In each quarter of the year there will be a day of corporate retreat, fasting and intercession. Each brother will have an individual day of retreat every month in which there is no time of community retreat.

Brothers who feel confident of God's call to go forward in the Society will use their retreat before clothing or making their vows to deepen their self-offering to God. If a brother needs further confirmation of his call, the focus of the retreat will be on the discernment of God's will.

Retreat is an opportunity to experience the intimacy we have with God through our union with Christ. Our availability to God will normally be expressed by setting aside three periods for prayer each day, and leaving all distracting tasks. We seek an inner silence for communion with God and therefore refrain from conversation. Exercise and gentle recreative activities in solitude will help us be open to the Spirit.

Retreats will often be times in which we hear Jesus inviting us to be at rest with him: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." But we must expect retreats to expose us to spiritual trial. We may be tempted to tire ourselves or waste the time in busy work and preparation. We may find ourselves staying on the surface to avoid an authentic meeting with the living God. And the emptiness of retreat time may compel us to face the painful signs of our need for healing that it was easier to overlook during our usual routines. So our retreat times will be opportunities to strive against everything that would discourage us from radical dependence on the love of God.

Those of us who guide the retreats of others should be creative in their own use of retreat and guard against mere routine. Our own experience must be real and vital if we are to draw on it when we guide those who are seeking God.



Chapter THIRTY

Guidance and Reconciliation

In our own prayer Christ will come to us as a servant seeking to wash our feet, but he also seeks to attend to our needs through the ministry of others and the Church's sacraments of nurture, forgiveness and healing. We fall and fall again so we should be glad of the opportunities that the sacramental rite of Reconciliation provides to encounter Christ again in the places of our brokenness and poverty, and allow him to bind up our wounds and set us on our feet. If we ever feel reluctant to use this means of grace, we must remember how Peter was tempted to refuse the touch of Christ and how the Lord had to warn him of its necessity. The Superior ensures that each brother has regular access to a confessor outside the community. We are to make our confessions at least every quarter.

We cannot keep pace with the risen Christ who goes before us if we are encumbered by guilt. If we stay estranged in our hearts, we jeopardize the communion we have with our brothers and our fellow members of the Body of Christ. Regular sacramental confession enables us to shed the burdens of remembered sin, and move forward encouraged by the Spirit. We enter the fellowship of the community again with fresh gratitude for the reality of forgiveness. Father Benson has taught us to live as penitents, "to rise thus to live in the full light of the presence of Jesus, to rise to have nothing hidden, to live in openness of heart to Him, and in an openness of heart to one another also, which the world does not know of, to tear away the veil which hides our hearts, to have our inmost life standing out in the presence of God."

Each brother in vows, after consulting with the Superior, will find a spiritual director with whom to meet regularly. Christ is not only the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but "the Way, and the Truth and the Life." In spiritual direction we make progress on the way which is Christ, learning how we go astray and discovering the paths of prayer and mercy. Our spiritual directors help us enter into the truth which is Christ, uncovering our illusions and guiding us to explore the freedom for which Christ has set us free. They challenge us to seek liberation from all that is narrow and superficial so that we can find the abundance of life which is Christ. Anyone who tries self-sufficiency in the spiritual life soon falls prey to illusion. From the earliest days God has given members of our Society the calling and gifts for the ministry of spiritual direction. It is especially important for those of us who are called to be spiritual directors to receive direction ourselves.

Christ will also make himself known as the good shepherd through the teaching and counsel of our retreat leaders. In times of retreat we should open our hearts, expecting to hear his voice speaking through the one we have invited to guide us.

Mission and Service

Christ sends us with the same passionate trust and love with which the Father sent him into the world. Our mission is to bring men, women and children into closer union with God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit that he breathes into us. Christ is already present in the life of everyone as the light of the world. It is our joy to serve all those to whom we are sent by helping them to embrace that presence in faith. Our mission is being fulfilled as our prayer, worship and daily life in community draw people into life in Christ. It is also expressed through ministries that demonstrate the wide range of the Spirit's gifts. These ministries spring from our baptismal vocation; only a few of them are the specific responsibility of the ordained. The Society's identity is not defined by any particular ministries, since the Spirit is free to change them. Nevertheless our tradition, experience, and discernment of the signs of our own times encourage us to be alert for Christ's invitation to serve in the following ways:

We are ready to respond to the needs of those who desire to learn how to pray, to understand the things of the Spirit, and to press forward on the way of conversion. Some brothers therefore make themselves available, as the Spirit enables them, for ministries of spiritual formation, initiation and guidance with individuals and groups in the Church, and with seekers outside it. We will be alert to the claims of those who seek solid nourishment for the heart and mind, and be open to God's call to preach, to teach, and to provide written resources through books and publications.

God may prolong our tradition of service to those who are exercising, or being prepared for, ordained ministry in the Church by calling us to support them with our hospitality, to act as guides and confessors, and to offer such training as we may be qualified to give. Equally, we are ready to support and equip lay men and women for their ministries.

God can call us to further the work of healing and reconciliation by reaching out to the sick, offering the sacraments of healing and forgiveness, befriending the alienated and perplexed, serving those in prison and seeking the company of the marginalized.

We are to be prepared for God to call us to be active witnesses for peace and social justice, bearing witness to Christ's presence on the side of people who are deprived and oppressed. We expect our calling to continue to bring special resources to bear on the needs and claims of children and their families who are impoverished and at risk.

God may call a few of us to special ventures in mission in other places and countries, or to hold office in the Church. In rare cases where a brother would be separated from community life for long periods we would look for clear signs that this was indeed a call coming from God. In our understanding and discernment of ministry we must be careful to recognize how broad is the range of talents that God uses in ministry, and be prepared for ministries which draw on artistic gifts, and engage our concerns for the environment, and the renewal of society.



Chapter THIRTY-TWO

The Spirit of Mission and Service

All our ministries are expressions of our community life; they are carried out in the name of the whole Society, supported by its prayers and the labors of those who carry on the other regular work of our daily life. All of us share in the graces that flow from them. While strictly respecting the confidentiality that covers many aspects of our work, we should share the rest of our experiences in ministry with one another so that we can appreciate them and give praise to God together. Wherever possible we shall go out on mission in twos and threes rather than singly so that we can express our companionship in ministry.

Certain brothers bear their part in our mission chiefly by sustaining the life of the community with their work, witness and prayer at home. It is important to express our awareness of their vital role within the body. This sense of our interdependence and equality will be especially important for the infirm and elderly.

Christ has promised that if we abide in him, and consent to his skillful pruning, we shall bear fruit that abides. If the results of our labors are to last, we need to root our endeavors in Christ and draw on our intimacy with him. This involves prayer for ourselves and for those whose lives we have the opportunity to touch. Knowing that grace is powerful in weakness, we hand over to Christ any anxiety about our own adequacy. We are to trust our own experience of God and draw directly from it so that our witness can be authentic. We also need to let go of any grasping for immediate results; much of what the grace of God achieves through us will be entirely hidden from our eyes. We also expect to experience failures. Some of these contain lessons that can help us become more skillful in the future. Other failures are means by which we enter further into the mystery of discipleship; we are not greater than the master, and many went on their way without accepting his words or deeds.

If we give freely of ourselves, we should expect abundant gifts in return, according to Christ's promise. We should enter into our ministries expecting to receive as much or more than we can give. Christ will make himself known to us in wonderful ways in those we serve, especially in those who suffer and are poor in spirit. Ministry itself will draw out from us gifts, insights and strengths that we never knew we had. We will be continually taught, humbled, surprised and stretched. Ministry is itself a vital means of our conversion by Christ and its disciplines are central to our asceticism. We must also expect power to go out of us in ministry and to experience fatigue that may sometimes be severe. Seasons of rest and relief are important for individual brothers and the whole community.



Chapter THIRTY-THREE

Ministry in Practice

Discerning which opportunities for ministry we should respond to brings into play the wisdom of the whole community, the responsibility of particular brothers and the skillful supervision of the Superior. In deciding which ventures to pursue or invitations to accept we take into account the resources of the community, the availability of particular brothers and their needs, the mission priorities of the Society, as well as the needs of those whose claims upon us are under consideration. We must remember that we are called to exercise demanding ministries within the community for one another and amongst our employees and those who work alongside us. The prudence that informs this practice of discernment, however, is not meant to hold us back from responding generously and spontaneously to unforeseen and urgent claims that the Spirit makes upon us.

The coordination of our tasks, responsibilities and ministries means that we must often turn down requests and opportunities. Without faithfulness to our limitations we can jeopardize our community life and its balance. It will often be painful when we are unable to respond to the needs that touch our hearts. It is important to share this frustration in prayer. Christ can help us to accept our limitations as expressions of our poverty, and the constraints he imposes as ways in which he is shaping and molding our lives. In a community such as ours it is unrealistic to expect that the balance between meeting our own needs and those of others can be kept always in perfect equilibrium. Instead we must be resilient enough to embrace the emergencies and stresses that belong to apostolic life.

Our reliance on the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit in our ministry does not replace the need for training, preparation and supervision. We may only engage in ministries for which we have received training and whose disciplines we have embraced. It is especially important in those ministries involving confidential work with individuals that we observe those boundaries and guidelines binding on ministers of the Church. A brother must never be left feeling isolated in his ministry. The leaders of the community must make sure that resources of consultation and supervision are available to him.

We make it known to groups and individuals who call upon our ministries that the Society needs donations to support our work. Normally we help them in the exercise of their stewardship by suggesting amounts in proportion to our outlay of time and effort. God's generosity in supplying all our needs gives us the freedom to make our ministries available to certain groups and individuals who lack the resources to make these normal donations.



Chapter THIRTY-FOUR

Hospitality

The source of hospitality is the heart of God, who yearns to unite every creature within one embrace. Only in the fullness of time will God gather all things in Christ, yet God's boundless welcome is something we already enjoy here and now in the Eucharist. Our life together as a community gives us a foretaste of the communion of saints. So we have the power to be a sacrament of God's hospitality, a house of God, offering his nurture and protection to all who come under our roof.

It is not enough merely to offer accommodation to visitors. Our faith must recognize the one who comes to us in the person of the guest, the stranger and the pilgrim. It is the Lord, who has identified himself with each of his sisters and brothers. If we are to give them bread and not stones, and truly meet Christ in them face to face, we must realize the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us for the ministry of hospitality, and remember how deeply people are yearning for the things of God. We have silence for our guests, which protects the mystery of their hearts and brings healing. We have our ongoing stream of worship, which they can enter. We have the fellowship of our altar and our table. We offer security, where guests are safe from intrusion and free to pray. Our houses have simple beauty. We offer courtesy, acceptance and intercession. And the Spirit has given us gifts of guidance, teaching and encouragement by which we can help retreatants grow in Christ.

We must also remain true to the limits of our hospitality. The claims of our life together and our other ministries mean we cannot take in everyone who wants to come or meet a guest's every need. We cannot offer the closeness that some are seeking and can seldom be available as pastoral counselors. Normally our guests can stay only for short periods. If we let our life as a brotherhood be overwhelmed by the claims of guests, we could endanger the resources by which we can serve them. We can be confident of the rightness of boundaries that contain and foster our own life together. Every house shall have a private area to which guests are not normally invited and there shall be interludes during the year when guests are not received. The brothers who are given primary responsibility for our ministry of hospitality know its cost more than any and they need our support. Not every guest will be easy to welcome. If we experience difficulties in our relationship with any guests we should pray specially to find Christ in them and consult one another about the most appropriate resolution.

Just as we enrich our guests' lives, so they enrich ours. We welcome men and women of every race and culture, rejoicing in the breadth and diversity of human experience that they bring to us. Their lives enlarge our vision of God's world. The stories of their sufferings and achievements and their experience of God stir and challenge us. If we are attentive, each guest will be a word and gift of God to us.



Chapter THIRTY-FIVE

Employees

Among our many partners in ministry, the men and women who earn their living by working for the Society have a special place. We could not fulfill the mission to which God calls us without the contribution of their many skills to complement our own. Our concern and gratitude for them should find frequent expression in our prayers.

Our belief in the dignity of work and the honor due to all forms of labor and creativity should be revealed by the respect we show to each of our employees. The way we exercise authority as employers must reveal our belief in the equality of all as persons and citizens. We know that for many of our employees the work they undertake for us is the chief expression of their ministry within the Body of Christ. Their dedication often leads them to give more than duty requires. It is important that we regularly show our appreciation and gratitude in a variety of ways.

To help in maintaining the highest standards of integrity, fairness and clarity, we shall use a manual of guidelines setting out all the procedures to be observed in our professional relationships with our employees. It is an important feature of community discipline to be faithful to these rules. The brother responsible for human resources guides those who supervise individual employees. Our commitment to the well-being of our employees includes a concern for their professional development and continuing education as well as fair compensation and time off.

The nature of our community life and ministries leads us to require our employees to be especially respectful of our privacy, and to maintain confidentiality about ourselves and our guests. We, for our part, must demonstrate our commitment to this ethos of confidentiality and refrain from any kind of inappropriate intrusion into the personal lives of our employees.



Chapter THIRTY-SIX

New Members

New members bring with them the promise of new life for our brotherhood. They contribute new gifts for our common good and our mission, both personal talents and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This promise of newness of life and hope for the future should be a source of joy. We shall often pray to the Father for the gift of new members, trusting that our prayer will be answered: “Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”

It is an important responsibility for the novice guardian and Superior to lead the community in a collective process of discernment to discover whether an applicant is genuinely drawn to our way of life and has certain basic, necessary qualities. Through observation, prayer and conversation we seek to find that the candidate has a love for the gospel, a desire for prayer, an attraction to ministry and signs of personal adaptability. We also draw on the results of professional testing to provide evidence that his mental and physical health are adequate for the demands of our life.

Postulancy is a preliminary test of a man’s calling. Normally it lasts for six months but the Superior may lengthen or shorten the time as he sees fit. The postulant takes part in the life and duties of the novices so that we can discover whether he has the resilience and maturity to set out on the path of formation. The postulancy culminates in a directed retreat. If the postulant then shows a strong desire to go forward, the Superior will decide whether to admit him to the novitiate, first consulting the novice guardian.

Integration into a brotherhood like ours is a slow process. Brothers are to be welcoming and supportive to those who are with us for a trial period. At first the bonds we establish with new members will be light, allowing them to feel unconstrained in their freedom to leave. Deeper mutual commitment comes later. It is important that the professed brothers express their considered reactions to the new member’s early days of adjustment when they meet to conduct evaluations.

Our sober recognition that only a few of those who come to test their vocation will go forward to life profession ought not to discourage us as we initiate new men into our way of life. We trust that God always uses a man’s time in our Society for good. Every call is entirely in God’s hands.



Chapter THIRTY-SEVEN

The Novitiate

The novitiate is a time of progressive initiation into the life of the community. Novices are putting their vocation to the test of experience. At first they participate in our active ministries only in limited ways, so that they can devote themselves with a single mind to conversion of life. Their training is in the hands of the novice guardian; the Superior will help him and appoint at least two other experienced brothers to assist with the work of formation and discernment.

We are to help the novices to let go of their previous life and work, and to come to a changed understanding of their relationship with family and friends that makes room for their new and primary loyalty to the Society. We expect them to grow into our full life of worship and prayer and offer them training in spiritual disciplines. Recognizing that our novices will not have had equal exposure to the resources of Christian knowledge and wisdom, we will guide them in corporate and individual study that will help each brother explore the scriptures, Christian doctrine, history and spirituality. We help them to grasp the meaning of this Rule and to explore our particular tradition and the teaching of our founders. The novices begin to make the Gospel of John their own, and to understand the role of the monastic way in the life and mission of the Church, past and present. We give our novices work in which they have opportunity to practice obedience and cooperation, learn humility, and discover within themselves a readiness to act with generosity.

Growing into our life under this Rule is not a matter of mere adaptation but of inner change and conversion of life. We expect emotional and spiritual trials to be part of the experience of the novitiate; many stages of genuine transformation are marked by experiences of confusion and loss. The brothers who have a special responsibility for the work of formation help the novices to face these trials with courage and to gain insight into their meaning.

The other professed brothers participate in the formation of novices in many ways. Novices learn the meaning of our vocation from our daily witness to the mercy of God and the graces of the vowed life. Our encouragement enables them to endure the stresses of adjustment and change. Their readiness for commitment is fostered by the faithfulness of our prayerful friendship. And we contribute our insights into their development by means of the regular evaluation sessions.

Our hope is that the novitiate will lead to the discovery of an inner freedom to choose this life gladly, or to take up again the challenge of Christian life outside, if this seems God's will. The novitiate normally lasts two years. Towards the end of the second year the Superior shall consult with those who train the novices, and decide whether to propose to the Chapter the election of the novice to profession in initial vows. The novitiate may be extended, but not beyond a third year. Every novice prepares for profession in a retreat of two weeks.



Chapter THIRTY-EIGHT

Initial Profession

The whole community rejoices when a new brother is ready to make the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. His aim should be towards life commitment, even though at first he is allowed to bind himself by the vows for a period of three years only. This initial period gives time for the community and the brother to make certain that God is calling him to the life of our Society.

Through his discussions with the brother at the end of the period of commitment in initial vows, the Superior may conclude that it is wise to extend it for a further year. Three such extensions are permitted.

The years of initial profession are dedicated to further formation in the religious life. This is a time to begin discerning the gifts a brother may have for ministry, and providing opportunities for developing these gifts through training and practice. His studies should not be directed to these ministries alone, but should aim at a further consolidation of his knowledge of scripture and the classics of Christian theology and wisdom. During these years the brother develops a firmer grasp of his identity as a religious and seeks to intensify his self-offering to God in daily life and work.

The newly professed brother takes his place in Chapter and begins to take a full part in the community's decision making. He becomes eligible for new responsibilities and tasks.

An important goal of these initial years in vows is the development of personal responsibility for one's own growth in the religious life and a strong sense of accountability. To promote this development, each brother in initial vows will meet regularly to discuss his own progress with an experienced brother, or group of brothers, appointed by the Superior to provide him with support and advice. In addition, every nine months or so, the Superior and one or two of these appointed brothers will gather for a day of assessment with the brother in initial vows. In this assessment he gives a full account of his experience of life under this Rule, discusses goals to aim for in the coming months, and receives counsel.

We pray that when the moment of decision comes, our brother will find that Christ has given him the freedom and courage to choose life-long commitment. The foundation of this courage is a profound gratitude for salvation. "How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things he has done for me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people." Before accepting his application to be admitted to life profession, the Superior must consult with each member of Chapter to gather evidence that we share the conviction that God is calling him. The final decision rests with the Superior. The brother prepares for life profession in a retreat of at least two weeks.

Life Profession

Jesus' offering of his life on the cross was the supreme expression of his love for the Father, made in perfect freedom through the Spirit. "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." This free self-offering is expressed anew in our lives when, abiding in Christ, we find in him the power to surrender ourselves entirely to God, by taking the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience for life. When a brother vows to abide in our community until death, the whole brotherhood rejoices in the gift of freedom that enables him to make this commitment after years of testing.

Father Benson has taught us that the call of God in the religious life is continuous, abiding and progressive. Continuous, because in the communion we enjoy with God in prayer and worship day by day, the voice of the Spirit never ceases to call us into deeper union. Abiding, because the wisdom of God, communicated to us in our prayer and life, is absorbed into our hearts never to perish. Progressive, because God's voice will come to us in the future ever new, calling us to fresh opportunities, and bringing gifts beyond what we know now. As profession brings to an end the period of probation, so it inaugurates a lifetime of developing response. As a community we are responsible for making sure that each brother has the encouragement to grow and change in response to the life-giving Spirit through whom we are born again. Periodically the Superior will invite each brother in life vows to take part in a day of assessment with him. This provides an opportunity for the brother to reflect deeply on the call of God and his response to it. The Superior will invite one or two other brothers to take part in the discussions.

The life profession of a brother inspires us with awe as well as joy; we wonder at the risk of such an irrevocable choice. For a time may come when his steadfastness could be tried to the limits of endurance. Then he may long to take back his promise, and leave us. Setbacks and disappointments will shake his constancy. He may be tempted to use changes that have taken place in the Society, in the Church, or in himself as pretexts for canceling his commitment. Only by depending on God for the grace of perseverance, fixing ourselves by faith in God's unwavering commitment to us, can we risk taking vows which bind us forever. A life profession will be a special opportunity to renew our confidence that grace will not fail us. "If what you have heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father."

The grace to surrender our lives to God through our vows has been given to us in Baptism whereby we die with Christ and are raised with him. It is the same grace that gives strength to martyrs to submit gladly to death as witnesses of the resurrection. From the beginning monks and nuns have been encouraged to understand their own commitment in the light of the freedom and trust that enables martyrs to give up their lives to the glory of God. The witness of the martyrs should be far from our minds as we go forward in the vowed life day by day.

Separation from the Society

Our pilgrimage as religious will be marked by separations, when members leave the community. These partings on the way will test the quality of our brotherly love and our dependence on God alone.

Separations may give rise to many different responses. When it has become clear that a novice or brother in initial vows does not have a vocation to our life we may feel gladness that he is ready to move on to explore God's call to another way; even so, if we have grown to love one another, the separation will wound us. But when a brother leaves because he has ceased to rise up to the demands of God's call, our grief will be more severe. Only truth sets us free, and the Spirit of truth will help all of us to express and face the conflicting emotions we may feel. While some brothers are experiencing anger and disappointment, others may be more conscious of relief. There may be times when we recognize that the departure of a member clears away an obstacle to the onward movement of the community. We can help one another accept the validity of our different feelings and support one another as we work through them.

The same Spirit who frees us through the truth is the Spirit of love, who will give us in due course the generosity to let our brother go with respect and hope, commending him to the love of God. In the Spirit we will be able to trust that God had a holy purpose in calling him to be a member of our brotherhood for a time. As part of our continuous self-examination as a community, we will go on to consider together what there may be for us to learn from his leaving.

It may happen that a brother in life vows comes to feel he is unable to persevere, and expresses a desire to leave the Society. The gravity of this crisis means that the community and he must embark on a process of discernment of a year's duration to discover whether his vocation is dead, or whether the breakdown can be healed. Only after this may the Chapter release him from his membership of the Society. His vows remain binding until he is dispensed from them by the Visitor.

Whenever a man leaves, there is an opportunity for us to recognize the mystery of our vocation and to reaffirm our total dependence on God for the grace of perseverance. Jesus gave a special calling to the beloved disciple to remain until his coming. We can be steadfast only if we grow in reliance day by day on the glory of Christ's faithful abiding in us.

The Maturing of our Minds in Christ

Our pursuit of knowledge is an expression of love for God's world and the riches of revelation. As we bring our gifts of imagination and intellect to maturity we are able to glorify God more and more. Since our gifts and ministries vary, we need to encourage one another to value not only reading and study but many other ways of learning, every method that helps us become more responsive in heart and mind to the whole creation. As our faith matures we come to recognize Christ's hidden presence everywhere: "All things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

We cannot fulfill our mission without a lifelong engagement with the riches of Scripture and the Christian tradition. We need therefore to encourage and train one another to explore this great tradition at first hand. It is important to absorb classics of Christian spirituality and theology, and valuable for each of us to develop a personal interest in certain schools, periods or figures to which we might be specially drawn. We need knowledge of other faiths, and a sound grasp of religious history to which good biographies have given richness and color.

The Spirit calls us to be alert and open to our own time. Some of us will be drawn to contemporary explorations of theology and spirituality and engage in studies that throw light on the changes now taking place in the world. Our aim is to maintain a lively, critical interest in the cultures in which we are situated, and seek to expand our perspectives globally so that we can empathize with other societies and religious traditions.

All our ministries, whether of preaching, teaching or personal encounter in the Spirit, call for a penetrating understanding of the mysteries of the heart and human relationships. For this we need many resources. Psychology and the human sciences are sources of insight, and some of us will find in literature, philosophy, drama, film, music, dance and the visual arts springs of vital truth if we approach them keenly in the Spirit.

We commit ourselves to maintaining ample libraries in each house as well as devoting funds for further education and the enrichment of the imagination. The community is to hold regular events of corporate education so that our learning can be a shared experience. Individual commitment to learning in a disciplined way is equally essential. Study does not have the same attraction for all of us, and even those who enjoy it find that the pressure of other responsibilities distracts them. Unless we grasp the truth that it is both a labor of love and a spiritual discipline, we are likely to neglect study. We should therefore support one another in setting aside time regularly for reading, and encourage one another to take advantage of opportunities for training, enrichment and further education. Our sense of common endeavor will be stimulated when we discuss with one another what we are learning and take a mutual interest in our discoveries. Our goal is to arrive at the maturity that enables us to plan our study so that it can be focused, regular and supported. We shall not always be able to reserve time for study every day, but each week should include it.



Chapter FORTY-TWO

The Graces of Friendship

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”

For us no honor exists that could be greater than Jesus calling us his friends. The more we enter into the fullness of our friendship with him, the more he will move us to be friends for one another, and to cherish friendship itself as a means of grace. The forging of bonds between us that would make us ready to lay down our lives for one another is a powerful witness to the reality of our risen life in Christ. In an alienating world, where so many are frustrated and wounded in their quest for intimacy, we can bear life-giving testimony to the graces of friendship as men who know by experience its demands, its limitations and its rewards.

Among ourselves we must devote time, energy and prayer to the fostering of friendship. There are many different degrees of intensity in celibate friendship, and stages of growth. Our common concerns are to lay aside perfectionism, to respect the variety of bonds we will establish between us, and to ensure that none is left friendless. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”: we shall seek to let go of possessiveness and extend this freedom to one another. We want to have the freedom to continually release our brother for relationship with others, just as in those dances in which the movements constantly weave fresh links between the dancers.

We also have opportunities to make friends outside the community. Friends of different ages, cultures and walks of life will enrich our humanity. We value the gift of friendship with women, as Jesus did; without it we run the risk of spiritual and personal impoverishment. But there are costly constraints to be accepted on both sides in the friendships between religious and others, and discretion needs to be fostered with those outside. In particular it is vital that we protect the confidentiality of one another’s personal lives and the privacy of the Society’s inner life.

The Spirit uses the demands of friendship to further our conversion; struggles are inevitable as well as rewards. Our sexuality, our dread of rejection and disappointment, our need for forgiveness and reconciliation, our difficulties in achieving emotional honesty, are all brought into play. Fear can hold us back. In these struggles we have the constant companionship of Christ to give us courage and joy.

Mutual Support and Encouragement

Each day brings fresh opportunities to fulfill the commandment of Christ, “that you love one another as I have loved you.” We need one another’s support at times of special stress, disappointment and weakness, but we also need it as the daily bread of our life together. Encouragement is expressed not only through serious concern for one another but also through the free play of our God-given sense of humor.

Honest and direct communication help us strengthen one another. We create the setting for mutual disclosure about how we are experiencing our life in regular meetings from which we exclude the discussion of business. In these, and our other sessions for planning and discussion, we are called to engage one another openly. A brother can frustrate that openness if he shuts himself off or does too much talking. On the other hand, insensitivity in the gathering can inhibit a brother from sharing from the heart. We shall need to invite the Spirit constantly to build up our trust and show us how to speak the truth in love.

We can lift one another up through celebration and the practice of courtesy. We value the opportunities which birthdays and anniversaries present for celebrating a brother’s life. And we seek to sustain a climate of courtesy in which each of us receives assurance day by day that he is appreciated. We need to be generous in expressing delight in one another’s achievements.

We express our regard for one another not only in words, but in gestures that give our bodies a part to play in the interchange of affection, as is natural for men who believe whole-heartedly in the incarnation. We are free to cheer one another with open arms of welcome and to show our care and sensitivity through touch.

Like Jesus, we will be especially attentive to those who could easily become isolated or overlooked. Newcomers to our life, the older brothers, those who are in pain from illness, sorrow or spiritual trial, have particular claims on our hearts. The Superior of the community bears burdens for us all that can become intolerable if brothers neglect to express their care for him regularly and explicitly, or fail to cherish him when he is under pressure.

Above all, we are to open our hearts to any brother with whom we are in conflict. Breaches of trust, injuries, and even enmity are bound to happen, since communities of love are special targets of evil forces. These forces will tempt us to defer reconciliation, or even to pretend that the fabric of our common life has not been torn. But the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ spurs us to seek out the one from whom we feel estranged in order to establish communion with him again through a mutual change of heart.

Maintaining our Health and Creativity

Jesus came as our healer that we “may have life, and have it abundantly.” We show our lack of faith in him if we diminish that abundance through neglect, or the fear Jesus portrayed in the parable of the man who buried the talent his master had committed to him.

Health of mind, body and spirit is a priceless gift of the Creator which we are to cherish in wonder and thankfulness: “I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful and I know it well.” So that we can better glorify God in our bodies, each of us shall take responsibility for maintaining his health through regular exercise, hygiene and prompt recourse to medical attention as soon as he becomes aware of any significant symptom. Hypochondria and obsessive self-concern, on the other hand, are distortions of this duty and it is our responsibility to call one another to maturity.

If a brother shows signs of disorder in his relation to food, alcohol or any other substance, this becomes the concern of the whole community. The Superior has the responsibility of helping him to set his feet on the path of sobriety, moderation and health. Likewise the compulsion to over-work and other forms of obsessive behavior are signs that freedom is lacking and healing needed.

Each of us has been given the divine spark of creativity and imagination, and as we grow in our conversion to Christ, so should our gratitude and reverence for these gifts. Fear and inertia quench the spirit. Faith in the Giver of all good gifts will lead us to use the opportunities our life provides for developing our creativity and using our imagination. The community shall provide time and resources for hobbies and skillful pursuits so that every brother may find outlets for creativity beyond what his regular work offers. We shall seek to maintain a climate where music and other arts are valued and where the beauty of creation is loved and enjoyed. We shall endeavor to order our stewardship so that vacations can provide not only the opportunity of visiting our families and friends but also of exposure to the beauties of nature, the stimulus of other cultures and enrichment by the arts. Our creativity will thrive on mutual encouragement.

If our endeavor to develop our creativity were in response to a secular ideal of self-realization it would come to nothing. Our stretching toward fullness of life is an act of faith in Christ who is the living Word through whom all things have their being. He is the true light shining through all creation. It is not in religious activity and thought alone that we see his glory, but in all the world. We are called to realize his life-giving presence within our own selves and bodies and share in his ongoing creation.



Chapter FORTY-FIVE

Rest and Recreation

The hallowing of rest and the keeping of sabbath is an essential element in our covenant with God. The one who can find no happiness except in ceaseless work is afraid to be still and know that the Lord alone is God. If we find ourselves filling leisure time with tasks, we can be sure that we have begun to imagine that our worth consists in what we accomplish. When we regularly cease from our labor and enjoy rest as a holy gift, we can grow in trust that our worth in God's sight lies simply in our very being, clothed with Christ.

In the culture in which we live the pressures to be busy all the time are intense, and it is a true ascetic endeavor to resist them in obedience to God. The Church itself is in constant danger of adapting to a culture of hyperactivity and stress. We have a particular call to resist this conformity and to bear witness before the world to the graciousness and wisdom of the sabbath. Our faithfulness will show itself in our attention to the needs of the body and spirit for sleep and rest. Our life is demanding and we must recognize how much power goes out of us in our ministry. By taking rest we show that we accept our creaturely need for replenishment and restoration as Jesus did.

Our ministries of hospitality, preaching, liturgy and retreat direction mean that Sunday usually makes many demands on our energies. Although the Lord's day itself cannot be our actual day of rest, we should seek through our prayer on Sunday to lift up our hearts in the joy of the resurrection. Because our rest comes on another day of the week, it is all the more important to recall the sacredness of sabbath time.

The ways each of us will enjoy our sabbath day will be many and varied, but each of us will need to distinguish between leisure that is genuinely recreative and the drifting which comes from sloth. Our day of rest gives us the opportunity to refresh and deepen our friendships. It enables us to play and exercise and enjoy the use of our senses. It opens a space for music, art, entertainment and particular pursuits and hobbies. The fruits of our leisure time will prove whether we have hallowed or profaned our sabbath. If we have kept it holy we will resume our daily life reinvigorated and restored to ourselves. If we have wasted our leisure, we may find our day off leaving us with a sense of dullness and a residue of fatigue. We can help one another use our leisure time well by taking care not to give one another needless tasks on our day of rest.

Holy rest has its place in the rhythm of each day as well as the week. Those who reserve a time each day for some leisure that brings composure and refreshment set a good example for all the brothers to follow. The sabbath commandment is also a guide for our well-being in the longer view. We shall endeavor to provide opportunities for special times of renewal from time to time, especially when a brother has had some years of hard work in a particular ministry.

In each house of the Society the brothers shall gather regularly to enjoy conversation in a relaxed atmosphere. All should participate so that the common life may be strengthened.

The Challenges of Sickness

We are co-creators with the Holy Spirit who enables us to consecrate every aspect of life as an offering to God's glory. Even sickness can be transfigured, and become the means by which we experience personally the reality of the Lord's assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." A brother's illness affects the whole community and God will provide gifts of grace for us all.

The fragility of human life makes sickness inevitable. When it befalls us we are to seek restoration and play our full part in the process of healing. This means radical dependence on Christ through our own prayer, the prayer of the community and our friends, and his ministry of healing mediated through the sacramental rite of Laying on of Hands and Anointing. It involves our ready acceptance of medical means of healing. The whole community joins the brother in his rejoicing when he is restored to health.

Sickness may compel us to be dependent on the care of others. This may conflict with our pride and challenge our notion of self-sufficiency. We are called to let go and accept the service of others gracefully. It is an important expression of our vow of obedience to be open and cooperative with those who are looking after us in sickness. Those who care for the sick should cherish this opportunity of service and realize that their caring may be the chief means by which the sufferer experiences the companionship and love of Christ.

Physical and mental illness may bring such suffering that our faith in God is put to the test. Our prayer for healing may not be answered in the way we desire. We may have to come to terms with disability or incurable sickness. Pain and fear may make us feel abandoned by God. The springs of prayer may seem to dry up. All of us should live day by day in growing dependence on Christ crucified so that we are prepared for such times of trial. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. God suffers with us. In times of pain, when we are aware only of darkness, we will need sheer faith to assure us that we are still inseparably united to the God of love.

A brother may be so sick that he cannot play an active part in the liturgy and our ministries. But we should trust that the offering of sickness and weakness contributes powerfully to our total life in Christ. Those who suffer are "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." And those of us who have been strengthened by God in sickness are able to use their experience to "console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God."



The Gifts and Challenges of Old Age

Tradition records that the beloved disciple lived to a great age. We who belong to a community named after him are called to be appreciative of the gifts that come to maturity in old age, and also sensitive to the needs and struggles that accompany it.

We pray that seeds planted in many years of faithful life will bear fruit in old age. Our older brothers will then be able to contribute their experience of what is essential in our life with God, a sense of perspective, wisdom, their appreciation for the community and joy in the younger members. The elders of the community are to be honored as the bearers of our corporate memory who link us with our past. Some of us will even reach our prime in old age, discovering new gifts and continuing in active in ministry informed by long experience.

We grieve to see the old so commonly neglected and discounted in the world around us. The way we honor and cherish one another in advancing years can be a powerful witness against this sinful failure. Our valuing of elderly brothers becomes particularly important when the limitations of old age prevent them from participating very fully in our active ministries. We need to ensure that the spirituality of the community, expressed in our teaching, conversation and actions, affirms the intrinsic worth of every member and emphasizes the contributions that the elders make through their prayer and perseverance. Unless there is this climate of support, an older brother may give way to discouragement, or have difficulty in accepting a role in the community with fewer responsibilities and restricted opportunities.

Our closing years of earthly life may bring new challenges in the spiritual combat. It is humbling to grow more dependent on the care of others. It is hard to cooperate with the Spirit and overcome our natural tendency to deny our decreasing strength and the approach of death. As we grow older we may become more vulnerable to attacks of despair in which our sense of the meaning and value of all that has gone before will seem to drain away. The Holy Spirit may compel us to deal with issues, doubts and wounds that we avoided when we were more vigorous. Those challenges will prepare us further for our final surrender into the arms of God through our death. In all these struggles the grace of Christ will never fail us.

One of the hardest tests comes if the need for professional nursing means that a brother has to be cared for outside the community. This separation will call on the deepest resources of acceptance and trust in the brother who has to move away. All of us must do everything in our power to sustain his sense of connectedness with the community.

Holy Death

The gospel proclaims that Christ has transformed death by his cross and resurrection and that through our Baptism we have already passed through death with him and been incorporated into his risen body. But we grasp this mystery only by faith, accepting the inner struggle between doubt and confidence in Christ's promise of eternal life: "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life." Day by day, as we feed on Christ in the Eucharist, our hope can be rekindled: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."

We are called to remember our mortality day by day with unflinching realism, shaking off the sleep of denial. Paradoxically, only those who remember that they are but dust, and to dust they shall return, are capable of accepting the presence of eternal life in each passing moment and receiving ever fresh the good news of hope. The anticipation of death is essential if we are to live each day to the full as a precious gift, and rise to the urgency of our vocation as stewards who will be called to give account at Christ's coming. Remembering that death can come to us at any time will spur us to be prepared, by continual renewal of our repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of God, to meet Christ without warning. We shall remember to express to one another those things that would make us ready to part without regrets, especially thankfulness and reconciliation.

Week by week we are to accept every experience that requires us to let go as an opportunity for Christ to bring us through death into life. Hardships, renunciations, losses, bereavements, frustrations and risks are all ways in which death is at work in advance preparing us for the self-surrender of bodily death. Through them we practice the final letting go of dying, so that it will be less strange and terrifying to us.

In the community we shall experience the event of death in many forms. A brother's death may be serene; other deaths will share in the agony of Gethsemane or the physical and spiritual pain that has tested many saints. Some of us will die filled with the light of hope; others may enter the darkness of Jesus' dereliction. As brothers we will seek to uphold the one who is dying with compassion and love, supporting him with prayer and the sacramental grace that comes through Holy Communion and the Laying on of Hands and Anointing.

The death of a brother may give rise to many varied feelings among us which we can help one another to accept. We will not be ashamed to grieve, as Christ grieved at the death of Lazarus, or to show ourselves to be shaken. But Christ has prayed that those whom God has given him will be with him where he is and will see his glory. In our mourning and celebration of the liturgy of burial we seek to show our trust that our brother is being brought into the glory of God's presence. In Christ we are still one with our departed brothers and we express this communion through regular prayer for them and by recalling their lives on the anniversaries of their deaths. We believe that they pray for us and that we will be reunited when Christ gathers all creation to himself, so that God may be all in all.



Chapter FORTY-NINE

The Hope of Glory

All praise and thanks be to the Father for the gift of the hope of glory. Through this gift the Holy Spirit opens all that we are and all that we do to the promise of eternal fulfillment beyond death.

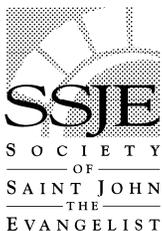
In our prayer, in which we look to the glory of the ascended Christ and realize our union with him, we see only as “in a mirror, dimly”; the Spirit fills us with the hope of seeing him as he is, face to face. As we follow the way of conversion, and surrender to the grace which changes us from one degree of glory to another, our longing to be wholly transformed into his likeness deepens. Our own sufferings, and the pain we see in the world around us, sharpen our yearning for all creation “to be set free from its bondage to decay and . . . obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

In our daily worship, hope stirs our desire to adore God for all eternity in the host of heaven. In the Eucharist we show forth Christ’s death until his coming again, and the gift we receive in Communion intensifies our expectation of that final coming. Inwardly we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” looking forward to that day when he will gather us for the eternal banquet that will unite all God’s people in the joy of the Kingdom.

This gift of hope is woven into the texture of our daily life as a community. Living, working and worshipping together as one body, calling nothing our own, we learn to anticipate the glory of the communion of saints, in which all joys are shared. The gift of hope is present whenever we minister to one another and to those whom God gives us to serve. Christ has promised that we shall bear fruit that lasts if we abide in him. Hope assures us that every act of witness, prayer and service that draws others into the life of divine love builds up the eternal city of God.

In this hope we, the brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, offer our whole life to the glory of God the Holy Trinity, thankful for the mercy that has drawn us into the divine life. Our hope lies not in what we have done for God, but in what God has done for us: “Every action by which his strength has been developed in us has been a deifying action, gathering us up into the participation of the divine nature, which is the blessed purpose of his Incarnation, the fruit of his mediatorial love, the epiphany of his triumphant power.”

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.



The SSJE Rule of Life ♦ www.SSJE.org

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Fr. Richard Meux Benson is the author of all the published works cited.*

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12. John 5:19,30
16. *opus dei*, the term used in the Rule of St. Benedict for the offering of corporate worship
17. From an instruction on Communion, 1874: p.157, *The Religious Vocation*
18. From an instruction on the Divine Office, 1874: p.166, *The Religious Vocation*
19. Hebrews 4:12; John 6:63; Ephesians 4:15
20. John 6:68
21. 2 Peter 1:4; John 14:23; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:10,11
23. I Corinthians 12:4; Ephesians 3:19; John 16:13,14; 2 Corinthians 3:18

24. p.307, *The Final Passover ii, pt2*, London, Longmans 1895; Romans 8:26,27; John 4:13; Evagrius of Pontus, *Chapters on Prayer*, chap.124
25. Instruction on Intercession, 1874: *Instructions on the Religious Life, Third Series*.
26. Matthew 6:6; Ps. 132:14 RSV; John 12:24; Sayings of the Desert Fathers
29. Matthew 11:28
30. From an "Instruction on Confession," 1874: p.146, *The Religious Vocation*; John 14:6
35. John 16:23
38. Psalm 113:10-12
39. John 10:18; 1 John 2:24
41. Colossians 1:16,17
42. John 15:13-15; 2 Corinthians 3:17
43. John 15:12
44. John 10:10; Psalm 139:13
46. 2 Corinthians 12:9; Colossians 1:24; 2 Corinthians 1:4
48. John 5:24; John 6:54
49. 1 Corinthians 13:12; Romans 8:21; Revelation 22:20; from a sermon preached by Fr. Benson on the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany 1865, soon after the founding members began their life in community.