

Letter from the Dominicans of Avrillé

No. 16, May 2014

The Monastic Life



Dear Family, Friends, and Benefactors,

In several preceding newsletters we spoke about religious life. Yet, as there are many kinds of religious, we wish to briefly explain a common form of religious life which is the monastic life. We will follow Dom Guéranger in his book *Notions on the Religious and Monastic Life* (Solesmes, 1950).

Contemplative monastic life can be characterized by five aspects: separation from the world, prayer, work, mortification, and family life.

Firstly, a life of separation: monastic life consists, in the first place, in a separation from the world. This is shown by the cloister, the inner courtyard and garden formed by the monastery buildings protecting the religious from contact with the world, and by the habit which clearly shows that the religious is one consecrated to God and thus separated from worldly things.

Our Lord calls the monk or the nun to follow Him, and this *sequela Christi* (frequent expression of primitive authors meaning “the following of Christ”) entails a physical separation from the world. Our Lord Himself foresaw this separation and announced the reward: “He who leaves house, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children for the sake of My Name, will receive a hundredfold and shall possess eternal life.” (Mt. 19:29)

Contemplative life supposes silence, calm, a whole climate which ordinarily demands a physical separation from the world. Yet, this separation does not imply renouncing affection for one’s family. Dom Guéranger writes: “This affection, on the contrary, being purified by divine charity, will only become more lively, tender, and faithful. What is said here of parents is also applied to friends whom they [the religious] left in the world.”

Secondly, a life of prayer: after having left everything, the first duty for the monk and nun is to be entirely given to God by prayer. Prayer is the second characteristic of monastic life, and especially liturgical prayer for choir Brothers and Sisters. Saint Benedict calls it the *Opus Dei*, God’s work, which must be preferred to all things.



Compline during Passiontide.

The liturgy is a hidden manna that fortifies the soul and, at the same time, gives understanding of the things of God because the liturgy is the prayer of the Church who is the Spouse of Christ.

In certain Orders, where there are lay, or converse, religious who give themselves more to material tasks, these religious have often a method of prayer a little different and more adapted to their duties. For example, among the contemplative Dominican nuns, the converse Sister will pray the rosary more, which helps her to give herself to God by uniting her heart and soul to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary in the mysteries of their life.

Thirdly, a life of work: after prayer, work is the second duty of the monk. Ever since Saint Benedict, the monastic life is characterized by these two words: *ora et labora* ("Pray and work" which is one of the mottos of the Benedictine Order).



Our Brother Cook bakes the bread in the brick oven.

The work done by religious (as the entire life of the contemplative) is consecrated to God as a sacrifice, which is begun in prayer and continued in the spirit of prayer, with the silence that leads to union with God.

Work is also an excellent discipline, teaching us to dominate our passions. It is a penance, having become difficult after original sin. Best of all, work is at the same time meritorious since the Son of God sanctified it by His own sweat during His hidden life at Nazareth.

Monks and nuns consecrate a certain part of their work to the study of the mystery of God by reading Sacred Scripture and spiritual authors. This study allows them to offer their mind to God. Being done in an atmosphere of prayer, it also helps them to turn their hearts towards God, because the truth presented by the intelligence enflames our love for Him Who is Truth Itself.

Manual work, however, is very useful to keep one in humility and, if offered with purity of intention, it is very sanctifying. Thus it has a place in every monastic life.

Fourthly, a life of mortification: this is another characteristic of monastic life, for prayer and penance are the two wings that bring us to God. There are certain traditional monastic observances that mortify the body, which are necessary to restrain the flesh and to free the spirit; for example, fasting and abstinence, silence, and the early rise. Not only are these mortifications helpful for the soul, but they are even sweet for those who love God, because they strengthen charity, help free the spirit from the flesh wounded by sin, and maintain the soul in humility. They also have the great advantage of uniting us to Jesus crucified and thus allowing us to contribute to the salvation of souls.

There is no need to fear that these monastic penances be harmful to bodily health. On the contrary, the longevity of the Carthusians is well known precisely because their Order is very likely the most penitential. Moreover, these

acts of mortification contribute largely to maintaining spiritual joy in the soul and in the community.

Fifthly, a life of family: this is the last characteristic that we will point out here. The Holy Ghost wanted monastic life to develop in the form of communities certainly because there is, in community life, an excellent means of sanctification by the practice of fraternal charity and by the example of fellow religious.

Saint Thomas Aquinas says that charity is a supernatural friendship founded upon sharing of the same life. Christian charity is founded on the participation of the same Catholic life, the same Catholic spirit, the same sacraments, and the same doctrine.

What unites young men, or young women, who are different by their education, their families, their temperament, their nationality? It is nothing other than the same love of Our Lord, the same love of their Founder. The friendship between Brothers or Sisters in religion is much more supernatural because it is not founded upon flesh and blood, unless it be upon the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ. The charity in the midst of a religious community is much stronger than in a natural community, because one shares more completely the same life, and a life that is most supernatural. Now, if this supernatural aspect can sometimes be the occasion of certain difficulties and therefore a certain penance, it is also and often the source of great joys, allowing us to see the truth of this hymn: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est* (where there is charity and love, there God is found). Where this charity reigns, God's presence is perceived and one is in the antechamber of Heaven.

Community Chronicle

January 16-17: Father Mary Dominic represents the community at Rafflay during the SSPX priests' recollection for the region presided by Father Jacques Laguérie.

January 19: "Each day brings us more proof of the necessity to clarify to the maximum the under-lying questions [of doctrine] before going further ahead for a canonical solution, which however does not displease us. Yet this situation concerns an order of nature, and to invert things would place us without failure in an unlivable solution" (*Letter to friends and benefactors of the SSPX* of October 23, 2008). This principle being dangerously put back into question, Father Prior reads at all the Masses an "Appeal to the faithful" cosigned by about forty priests members or friends of the SSPX, in order to state that we intend to continue without changing "the survival operation" of Archbishop Lefebvre. Is it a declaration of a split? On the contrary! It is a public testimony of our firm and unshakable attachment to the principles that always guided Archbishop Lefebvre in the fight for the Faith.

January 26: Father Prior and Father Mary Dominic are in Alsace for a recollection given to our tertiaries.

February 6: Visit of Father Thomas Aquinas, O.S.B., Prior of Santa Cruz Monastery in Brazil.

February 19: Father Francis Mary and Brother Andrew Joseph are at Lourdes for the sixtieth priestly anniversary of Father Marziac.

February 20: Father Louis Mary continues the series of apologetic conferences. During this semester he will speak about the enigma of Judaism and the Old Testament prophecies announcing Our Lord.

March 3-5: Exams for our young scholastic

Fathers.

April 13-20: Holy Week with the traditional ceremonies that make us participate more profoundly each year in the great mystery of our Redemption.

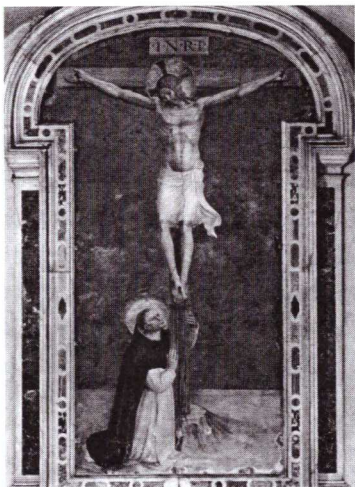


The work-site

The construction of the future dormitory for our Saint Thomas Aquinas school is well advanced as you can see in the pictures. The roof is finished and the work on the inside will soon begin.

We do not have, however, enough money to complete the project and we risk having to interrupt the work-site. Hence we come once again to you, dear Friends and Benefactors, in order to ask your generosity so that we can finish before this coming summer. Be assured of our daily prayers and know that God will reward you a hundredfold!





FOR MORE INFORMATION

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You may send donations to the address above, OR:

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