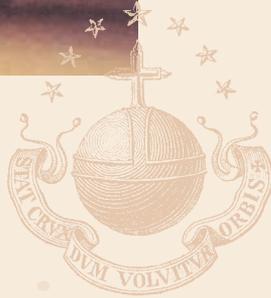
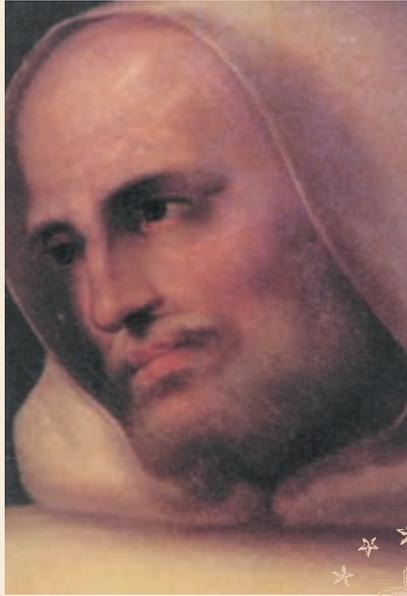


THE CARTHUSIAN LIFE



O Bonitas

Charterhouse of the Transfiguration

April 20, 2003

RESURRECTIO DOMINI

FOREWORD

We are so grateful that you, the Carthusians, have been “Called to the Desert” in Vermont’s splendorous Green Mountains! Your prayerful presence in our beloved state achieves a beautiful blend of solitudes in which to live your very special vocation for the salvation of souls. Vermont is blessed by your very presence, for surely your spirit of peace and prayerful devotion radiates throughout the Green Mountains themselves, encouraging us to visit their deserts, encouraging us to seek closer, more intimate ties with ourselves and our Creator. We are enriched by your very special vocation which some see as sacrifice, but which you welcome as intimacy with Christ.



We are also most grateful for the special prayers you offer for the people of Vermont, the Faithful and for those we hope to call back to the Faith. And we pray to Mary, Mother of God, Mother and Patron of the Carthusians, that she continue to

grace and nurture you in your blessed solitude. How pleased Christ her Son must be with His Carthusian servants, His most loyal witnesses, who seek only the salvation of souls. Surely He hears your intercessions on behalf of the faithful.

My Carthusian Brothers, you are glorious in your simplicity, and radiant in your quiet devotion to Christ and the salvation of His people. We are grateful that your tradition of spiritual poverty remains unbroken after nine centuries! May you continue to serve the Church and the world until the end of time.

+ *Kenneth A. Angell*

Most Reverend Kenneth A. Angell
Eighth Bishop of Burlington

Half a century has passed since the Carthusian Order started its foundation in the United States. The Charterhouse of the Transfiguration sprang from the Church's desire that our form of solitary life take its modest place within American culture. Thanks to a generous benefactor, the community settled in a beautiful, austere and perfectly isolated region which, to this day, offers a solitude unique in our Order.

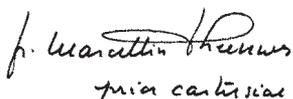
This brochure attempts to explain what a Carthusian monk seeks when he withdraws to a desert so stripped and far from human society. For, in fact, what is a charterhouse? It is not only the buildings in a forest setting filled with silence. Nor is it a social and economic life that desires self-sufficiency and poverty. It is not even primarily a monastic observance which has weathered many centuries.

No, a charterhouse is foremost a small community of solitary men united by the same ideal: to seek God in the depth of the heart. The Statutes of the Carthusian Order call it "the more ardently seeking, the more quickly finding, the more perfectly possessing God Himself in the depths of our souls." (1:4) And again: "To the praise of the glory of God, Christ, the Father's Word, has through the Holy Spirit, from the beginning chosen certain men, whom He willed to lead into solitude and unite to Himself in intimate love." (1:1)

There you have the whole Carthusian vocation! All its aspects exist only for this quest for the one thing necessary in the hearts of men. The monks attentively seek it alone in their cells, and together as brothers form a small church united around the daily Eucharist.

Does a life so withdrawn have meaning in our present world, so preoccupied with material success? Yes, certainly! For the solitary enters himself in search of an essential quality of the human soul that every human being carries. The silence of a charterhouse creates the space where the Word can freely sprout into truth and life. All have the capacity to know it—even those who reject it. We have all experienced a longing for this silence. But the noise and agitation of our society quickly mask it. Because of their silence, the Carthusians maintain a symbolic aura well beyond their merits, expressing the universal language of human destiny.

Would that the reader perusing the pages of this brochure be led to awareness of his own need for silence!



Fr. Marcellin Theeuwes
fr. marcellin theeuwes

Fr. Marcellin Theeuwes, Prior of la Grande Chartreuse
Superior General of the Carthusian Order

CALL TO THE DESERT

In 1084, St. Bruno led a small band of followers into the wilderness of the French Alps to embrace the call of Jesus Christ that “whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:33) St. Bruno lovingly assured them that in the “School of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” their sacrifice would blossom with beauty, delight and the spiritual benefit of many as they learned “a divine philosophy that alone shows the way to true happiness.” (St. Bruno’s letter to Raoul le Verd) In a tradition unbroken for over 900 years, Carthusians live as sons and daughters of St. Bruno, inspired by the Desert Fathers of early Christianity who thronged to the desert to lead solitary lives in poverty of spirit.



The Carthusian monastery, known as a Charterhouse, has always perceived itself as a desert where God draws His people “to speak to their hearts.” (Hosea 2:16) God guided Moses and the people of Israel to the wilderness of Sinai to speak intimately with them, teach them and form them into His children. This solitary landscape nurtured God’s covenant relationship of love and fidelity that sought to purify the Israelites of their sins and test their hearts. This biblical desert evokes the physical solitude of a monastery ideally situated in a mountain valley, far removed from contact with the exterior world.

The Carthusian enters an austere silence and solitude stripped of comforts and consolations found in the city. This heart of the desert is a territory of testing and purification. There God leads the faithful on a journey of self-emptying that surpasses the illusionary happiness of worldly success and possession. In his message on the Order’s ninth centenary, Pope John Paul II called this a radical break with the world “which is not contempt for the world, but an orientation given to one’s life for the constant seeking of the only good: ‘You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced.’ (Jeremiah 20:7)” This holy seduction opens up to an ever-deepening relationship with God.

The Order follows its own Statutes, rather than any monastic Rule. The Charterhouse is “a holy ground, a place where, as a man to a friend, the Lord and

His servants often speak together; there is the faithful soul frequently united with the Word of God...there is earth joined to heaven, the Divine to the human.” (Statutes 4:1) As in the biblical desert experience, “The journey is long, and the way dry and barren, that must be traveled to attain the fount of water, the land of promise.” (Statutes 4:1) In the shared struggles that each experiences in solitude, the Carthusians always have found solace and strength in the maternal love and guidance of their principal patron, Mary, the Mother of God.

SERVING THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

Although called to a solitary life, the Carthusian does not live for himself alone. He embraces austerity for the love and glory of God in accordance with His will, and for the intensely desired well-being of the world he has forsaken. Pope John Paul II affirms, “The Carthusians present the world to God daily.” (9th Centenary Message to the Carthusian Family, May 14th, 2001)

All who choose this solitary life participate in Christ’s prayer and sacrifice for the salvation of all souls and serve the Church as faithful witnesses. “In embracing a hidden life we do not abandon the great family of

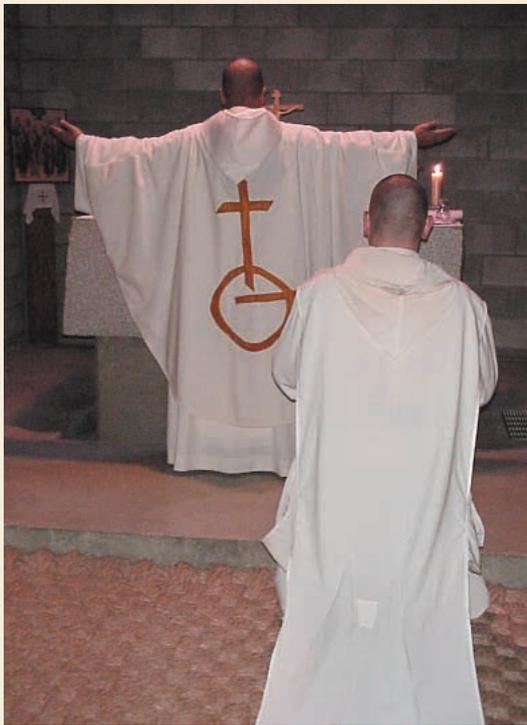


our fellow men. Apart from all, to all we are united, so that it is in the name of all that we stand before the living God.” (Statutes 34:2) Moreover, the Carthusian Order embraces penance so as to share in the saving work of Christ Who redeemed humanity from the bondage of sin through constant prayer to the Father and offering Himself to Him in sacrifice.

Pope Paul VI maintained that “dwellers in solitude” are not strangers to the

body of the Church and the world. “The contemplative life pertains to the fullness of the Church’s presence....Those who live such a life move the people of God by their example and also contribute to its development by their hidden mysterious fruitfulness.” (Pope Paul VI, Letter to the Carthusian Family, April 18, 1971)

Pope John Paul II also affirms that Carthusians do not follow their distinct vocation at the margins of the Church. “Rather it places you in its very heart. Your presence is a constant call to prayer. I too entrust to you my apostolic ministry as



Pastor of the universal Church. With your life give witness to your love for God. The world is watching you and, perhaps unknowingly, expects a great deal from your contemplative life.” (Pope John Paul II, Message to the Carthusians, October 5, 1984)

The Statutes reaffirm the Holy Father’s message. “Making Him the exclusive center of our lives through our profession, we testify to a world excessively absorbed by earthly things that there is no God but Him. Our life shows that something of the joys of heaven is present already here below; it prefigures our risen state and anticipates in a way the final renewal of the world.” (Statutes 34:3)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church regards the consecrated life as a special sign of the mystery of redemption at work within the Church. It is like a Sacrament—an instrument of God’s Will. “To follow and imitate Christ more nearly and to manifest more clearly His self-emptying is to be more deeply present to one’s contemporaries, in the heart of Christ. For those who are on this ‘narrower’ path encourage their brethren by their example, and bear striking witness that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes.”

(Part One, #932)