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## THE CARTHUSIAN WAY OF LIFE

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In the House of God are many dwelling-places. The Charterhouse includes fathers, converse brothers and donates. All have left the world and sought the solitude of the desert in order to consecrate their whole life to the Lord. All follow Jesus Christ as the first exemplar of the Carthusian way of life. All are monks who share a common vocation experienced in different ways. This diversity enables the family to fulfill its role in the Church with greater perfection.

*“We cannot here pass over in silence a Mystery that merits our deepest consideration; the fact that this same Lord and Savior of mankind deigned to live as the first exemplar of our Carthusian life, when He retired alone to the desert and gave Himself to prayer and the interior life; treating His body hard with fasting, with vigils, and other penances; and conquering the devil and his temptations with spiritual arms.”*

(Statutes 2:10)

All three states of Carthusian life are equally called to a common contemplative ideal. “The complexity of the personal journey, psychological fragility, the difficulty of living faithfully over time, invite us to make sure that we neglect no means to offer to all who ask to enter the desert of Chartreuse a formation that includes all the dimensions of the person.... Directing them along the path of interior freedom and docility to the Holy Spirit....” (Pope John Paul II, 9th Centenary Message to the Carthusian Family, May 14, 2001)

The physical structures of the Charterhouse reflect this diversity and encourage the respective Carthusian vocations. The hermitages of the fathers exist in one wing and the cells and work areas of the brothers in another. A common cloister unites these two living arrangements and gives access to a third shared area containing the Church, chapels, refectory, Chapter House and other areas essential for community life.

A candidate moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit chooses his path according to temperament, natural inclinations, endowments and needs. The father spends most of the day secluded in his hermitage, in prayer, study, and preparation for the priesthood (all are eventually ordained). The brother maintains his human and spiritual equilibrium through five or more hours of work daily, in addition to hours in his cell spent in prayer, spiritual reading, study and other exercises of monastic life.



Both vocations are authentically Carthusian. The brother allows the father (or cloister monk) to remain in his hermitage and carry out his calling in reclusion (except when called to leave his hermitage by the Rule). The cloister monk's continuous solitude grounds the brother to his own calling of silence and solitude in the more exterior activities of his life. Candidates to both come from similar backgrounds. Both have an identical goal of the contemplative life. Both are essential for the community to function. Together, these two vocations strengthen each other; if either were lacking, the Carthusian life would not be possible.

## **THE FATHERS**

The father or cloister monk spends the greater part of his day in a hermitage, a separate four-room dwelling (normally of two stories) with an enclosed garden. The lower floor includes the garden, a workshop and a wood storage area. Here the monk cuts wood for his stove, and undertakes manual work according to





his talents and interests. The upper floor entrance is an anteroom (called the *Ave Maria*). Here the monk offers a Hail Mary when returning from the outside before entering the second room (called a *cubiculum*), where he spends the greater part of his day. This principal room includes an oratory, a study table with bookshelf, a dining table at a large window overlooking the surrounding mountains, a bed with rustic mattress, a woodstove, closets and a bathroom. Here the monk prays, studies, reads and engages in manual work.

All activities nurture a deeply contemplative life. At the oratory the monk recites both the Canonical Office and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin at fixed times throughout the day.

These practices establish his mind and heart in God, and direct his whole being to attention, love and union with Him. He offers prayers throughout the day in a simple sincere way that ever strengthens the fundamental direction of his life. His studies are a lifelong task that steadily builds the foundation necessary for the contemplative life. “For they are mistaken,” the Statutes read, “who think that they can easily attain to interior union with God, while previously having neglected the

study of the word of God, or later abandoned it altogether.” (Statutes 5:2)



The priesthood itself is envisaged in its monastic and contemplative dimension. The Carthusian priest has absolutely no outside ministry. He exercises his priestly service strictly for the community and vocational retreatants. His vocation becomes a means of greater conformity to Jesus, the High Priest, Who unites the monk in a special and sacramental way to His life of prayer and sacrifice.

Each monk participates in God’s creativity through manual work—summer gardening, wood splitting to fuel his winter stove or other solitary occupations. Prayerful labor encourages a monk to discover and accept a small part of the

Cross of Christ just as Christ accepted His cross for all humanity. Man imitates God his Creator through work, “because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God....The spirituality of work should show the maturity called for by the tensions and restlessness of mind and heart.” (Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, “On Human Work,” #25)

Work can bring the body and mind into balance as it reposes the spirit that otherwise might be too easily fatigued from the rather intense life of prayer. It “honors the Creator’s gifts and the talents received from Him...it is a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the spirit of Christ.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Three, #2427)

Solitude and enclosure are essential elements lived not for their own sake, but as a privileged means of attaining intimacy with God. By restricting contact with others and subduing the ability to move about at will, the mind and entire direction of the hermit’s life is stabilized on the “one thing necessary.”

All other austerities must be viewed in the same spirit. For example, the father wears a hair shirt. The fasts and abstinences follow the example of Christ in the desert. By restraining the desires of the body, the mind is liberated to embrace and become inflamed with the life of God within.

No radios, television or newspapers are provided within the monastery. The Prior determines and communicates whatever outside news he considers vital to the community. Letter writing and visits are infrequent and normally restricted to the immediate family.

These practices are properly understood in the context of obedience as effective methods for drawing the monk to the very heart of God. “For, as all who wish to live according to a rule must observe obedience with great zeal, we, in the measure that the way of life we have embraced is more exacting and more austere, must obey it the more ardently and carefully; lest if—which God avert!—obedience is lacking, such great labors may well go unrewarded.” (Statutes 10:11)



## The Father's Schedule

The typical weekday schedule of the cloister monk is as follows:

11:30 PM	Rise. Matins of our Lady.
12:15 AM	In Church. Canonical Matins and Lauds. Angelus.
2:15 or 3:15 AM	In cell. Lauds of our Lady. Retire to bed.
6:30 AM	Rise. Prime of our Lady and Canonical Prime; mental prayer.
7:45 AM	Angelus. In Church: Community Mass, followed by private Masses.
9:00 or 9:30 AM	In cell. Free time. Mental prayer. Terce of our Lady and Canonical Terce; spiritual reading, study and some manual work.
11:45 AM	Angelus. Sext of our Lady and Canonical Sext; dinner (always meatless; on Friday normally bread and water only). Free time.
2:00 PM	None of our Lady and Canonical None. Study or spiritual reading, manual work.
4:00 PM	Vespers of our Lady.
5:00 PM	In Church. Canonical Vespers. On return to cell: free time. From Easter to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: a small meal. From the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to Easter: a collation of bread and a drink. On Fridays throughout the year: bread and water only.
7:00 PM	Angelus. Examination of conscience. Compline.
8:15 PM	Retire to bed.

Such a day passes with extraordinary rapidity.

## THE CONVERSE BROTHERS

The converse brother, like the cloister monk, is called to find God in the silence of both his solitary cell and in his workshop. His living space includes a *cubiculum*, identical to that of the fathers, and a second, smaller room called an *ambulatory*.

In his *cubiculum* the brother recites the Canonical Office and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, and engages in prayer, spiritual reading and study. The brothers in formation follow a course of study that lays a strong foundation for prayer. All activities foster a contemplative prayer in which they find God and remain united with Him both in their cell and during work.

A morning work period follows time in the cell and assistance at Mass. Likewise, afternoon work time is preceded by further spiritual exercises in the cell. For, "In union with Jesus, a workman's son, they glorify the Father and associate the entire man in the work of redemption." (Statutes 15:1) The brothers normally work alone. But whether alone or with another, their silence safeguards and nourishes the

solitude of mind and spirit necessary to remain attentive to God and His guidance.

The work itself reinforces a life of active contemplation and obedience that encourages prayer and greater union with God. The tasks can be anything that meets the material needs of the house: cooking, baking,



carpentry, gardening, landscaping, secretarial work, bookkeeping, laundry work, repairing machinery, electrical work, book binding, cutting wood in the surrounding forest for winter burning. The labor provides balance and variety to an intense life of prayer. When offered in obedience to God the Father through the person of his superior, it anchors the brother more firmly in the life of Jesus, who always did the Will of the Father.

Like our Lord Himself, the brother uses his natural talents and supernatural gifts in full liberty of spirit to accomplish the tasks assigned him, sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do. “It is through man’s labor that not only ‘the fruits of our activity’ but also ‘human dignity, brotherhood and freedom’ must increase on earth.” (Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, “On Human Work” #27) This “ancient monastic tradition assures us that such work contributes greatly to the practice of those virtues from which flows perfect love.” (Statutes 15:2)

Fasts and abstinences are the other austerities that, in part, form the life of the brothers. These practices allow a brother to imitate Christ in His fast in the desert. Such mortification of the flesh frees him from the tendencies of his lower nature and enables him to follow the Lord more readily and cheerfully.

For the brothers, the distinctive intensity of their solitude and enclosure offers a pathway to spiritual and psychological equilibrium and yet differs from that of the fathers. This seclusion also tends to that purity of heart, which alone promises a vision of God. Like the cloistered monks, the brothers receive their outside world news only through the Prior and restrict their infrequent visitors and letter writing to family members.

These and other austerities are properly understood only if seen as effective means for drawing the monk to God and allowing God to become the very center of his life. With that goal, the brothers struggle with great zeal to observe obedience, knowing that if obedience is lacking, any labors however great may well go unrewarded.

Concerning the brothers, St. Bruno wrote with joyful heart, “Of you, dearest lay brothers... ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,’ because I see the riches of His mercy towards you... Indeed, what you love, what you know, is shown by what you do. It is clear that you are wisely harvesting Sacred Scripture’s sweetest and most life-giving fruit since you observe with great care and zeal true obedience. For true obedience, which is the carrying out of God’s commands, (is) the key to the whole spiritual life, and the guarantee of its authenticity...” (Statutes 11:9)

### **The Converse Brother’s Schedule**

The typical weekday schedule of the brother is as follows:

- 12:00 (midnight)** Rise.
- 12:15 AM** In Church. Canonical Matins, return to cell by 2:00 AM, prayer, Angelus and retire to bed.
- 6:00 AM** Rise. Prime of our Lady and Canonical Prime, meditation, spiritual reading, possibly study. Optional assistance at the brothers’ Mass. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament if desired.
- 7:45 AM** Angelus. In Church: Community Mass. Return to cell for Terce of our Lady and Canonical Terce. Free time.
- 9:30 AM** Work begins.
- 11:45 AM** Angelus. Return to cell, Sext of our Lady and Canonical Sext; dinner, (always meatless; on Friday normally bread and water only); None of our Lady and Canonical None. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament if desired.
- 1:30 PM** Work resumed.
- 4:00 PM** End of work and return to cell. Wash up and free time.
- 5:00 PM** In Church, Canonical Vespers.
- 5:30 PM** In cell. Prayer, spiritual reading and study. Supper, except on Fridays and during Advent and Lent, when a simple collation of bread and a drink are taken. On Fridays throughout the year: bread and water only.
- 7:00 PM** Angelus. Examination of conscience. Compline said before going to bed.
- 8:00 PM** Retire to bed.

The brother’s life is especially well-balanced, partaking as it does in the solitude of the cell and in work.

## THE DONATE BROTHERS

Living among the fathers and converse brothers are donate brothers who have likewise sought the solitude of the Charterhouse in order to consecrate their whole life to the Lord. Each brother has an alternative option called donation. Instead of vows, he makes a promise to the House and the Order of obedience, chastity, and living without personal possessions within the monastery, although keeping the ownership of whatever he might otherwise possess. He follows the same stages of probation as the fathers and converse brothers. After this probation period and the vote of the community (including perpetual donates), the Prior may admit the brother either to perpetual donation or to a donation renewed every three years. The donate brother has greater flexibility in his schedule. For example, he is not held to assist at the night office, although encouraged to do so.

## LIFE IN COMMUNITY

The grace of the Holy Spirit unites solitaries into a communion of love, in the likeness of the Church, which remains one, even though spread throughout the world. The Sacred Liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice, is the noblest form of community life, since it establishes the deepest and most intimate communion. When we join in it each day, we have but



one heart and one soul as we present ourselves before God. This unity of the Carthusian family is consummated in Christ, who is Himself present and at prayer.

In solitude, the monk remains, in the depths of his soul and by prayer, always united not only with his brothers in the monastery but also with the whole human race. For, “If we are truly living in union with God, our minds and hearts far from becoming shut in on themselves, open up to embrace the whole universe and the mystery of Christ that saves it.” (Statutes 34:2)

The community meets three times each day in Church to chant the Latin Gregorian of the Mass and the Divine Office according to the Carthusian Rite. The

brothers either join in the chanting or remain in silent prayer. Such gatherings unite the community on the deepest level into a communion in charity. In the middle of the night they rise and together, for several hours, chant in a spirit of vigilant waiting for the return of the Lord, nourished by readings taken from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Although the chant is done in Latin, the readings, the prayers and the other non-chanted parts of the Office are in the vernacular.

Sundays and Solemnities are special expressions of community life and can be called “family days.” On these days all of the canonical hours except Prime and Compline are chanted together in Church. Conventual Mass can be concelebrated and the noon meal is taken together in the refectory while one of the monks reads from the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. After the Office of None, the entire community gathers in the Chapter House to listen to the Martyrology for the upcoming week and a reading from the Gospels or the Statutes, and to discuss any issues concerning the community’s welfare.



Every week the fathers share a fraternal gathering with friendly conversation following their common chapter, and once a week they take an afternoon walk together through the forests. The brothers, whose cenobitic life is more pronounced, meet monthly for conversation after common

chapter, and walk together one afternoon a month. Twice a year, both fathers and brothers enjoy an all-day outing, and on one of these share an outdoor lunch. All community walks are secluded from contact with outsiders.

These gatherings are occasions in which the monks grow in knowledge and understanding of each other, and allow the love, which their cell life nourishes, to flower into fraternal charity. Conversely, this family spirit sustains the monk in his solitude. The solitary life and communal life thus interact in a meaningful way, united in the loving embrace of Mary, the Mother of all Carthusians. For we honor, with a very special affection, the Blessed Virgin Mary who watches over our solitude with maternal care.



The Officers of the House work in the service of the whole community. The Prior's principal service is to mirror to all the love of the heavenly Father thereby uniting all into one family. His dress and appearance show no outward sign of his office. He is normally elected by the community to serve until relieved of his charge by the General Chapter.

The Prior appoints all other Officers. The Vicar, the second in the House, assumes discreet and watchful care over the cloister monks. The Procurator provides such care on behalf of the converse and donate brothers, and is entrusted with the material responsibilities of the monastery. The Novice Masters are responsible for the formation of the young and for assisting vocational retreatants in their discernment. In whatever service they render, the Officers are called to maintain vigilantly the spirit of their vocation through a life given to prayer in solitude.

Pope John Paul II views the contemplative search for God as "inseparable from love of the brethren, love that makes us recognize the face of Christ in the poorest among men...St. John does not stop recalling it: 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.' (1 John 4:7) St. Bruno understood it well, he who never separated the primacy he gave to God, throughout his entire life, from the deep humanity to which he bore witness among his brothers...." (9th Centenary Message to the Carthusian Family, May 14, 2001)