



Obedience to a Calling

Just as our Lord gave himself in total surrender to his Father on the Cross, so will a person drawn to the life of the Oratory respond to the grace offered there so freely and generously.

Ave verum corpus natum
Ex Maria virgine,
Vere passum, immolatum
In cruce pro homine.
Cuius latus perforatum
Unda fluxit et sanguine;
Esto nobis praegustatum,
Mortis in examine.
O clemens, O pie,
O dulcis Jesu,
Fili Mariae.

An Oratorian is not his own man, he is God's, and his greatest delight will be to serve his brethren. He will have liberty in abundance, but he will place it at the disposal of those with whom he is called to live in fellowship. He will be glad when the talents and good qualities of his brethren are recognised and he will flee jealousy like the plague.

To be a good steward is to be willing to share, not to cling to what one has been given. Labour of the mind requires regular reading and sustained study and the cultivation of a scholarly and tolerant churchmanship. The greatest discipline of all is the love that makes for peace. Love includes the willingness to talk with and listen to one's brethren, showing honour for all. Great will be the joy of those who love in Christ. To surrender oneself totally to him is the final obedience.

Most brethren will have personal responsibilities by virtue of their particular ministries. If they seek or are invited to undertake additional work or engagements, they are expected to discuss this with their local Chapter and in humility to accept their advice.

New members of the Oratory may be unsure in what circumstances permission should be sought; it is better to err on the side of caution and to ask when in doubt so as to develop a frame of mind which naturally submits self-will to the scrutiny, wisdom and counsel of the brethren.

Labour of the Mind is a characteristic of Oratory life. Those involved in academic life may have a natural love of reading and study but this will not apply to all brethren. Some will find little time in busy lives for any serious study; others will think that they keep up on their reading but it will be restricted in scope or shallow in depth. It is important to consider how best a brother can maintain the Oratory spirit of labour of the mind. Courses, classes, sabbatical or study leave, tapes and Oratory reading weeks can be useful aids to serious study. Care should also be given to breadth of reading, both fiction and non-fiction, religious and secular. Reading is essential for preaching and teaching as well as for our own prayer lives because it enables us to explore the world of God, to reflect upon it theologically and to

bring the whole of life under the protection of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

THE RULE

The Rule is simple and straightforward, and basically, it involves the daily Eucharist (wherever possible, and one must make every effort to explore possibilities), the Divine Office (to be recited with care and reverence) and interior prayer (meditation, mental prayer, contemplation). The good works of an Oratorian will be all the more fruitful if they are the overflow of prayer. The Oratory is, and always has been, as its name implies, a Society of Prayer. It is prayer that gives strength to every Christian life. An Oratorian is called supremely to be a man of prayer, by his life and example encouraging others to find deep spiritual life and union with God in Christ. It is hard work but gloriously worthwhile. To keep a rule of life is to seek God. In St Paul's words: - "If then you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ wlic is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory". (Colossians 3, 1-4).

The beauty of the lives of men like Edward King (Bishop of Lincoln 1885-1910) and Michael Ramsey (Archbishop of Canterbury 1961-1974, our Visitor in OGS.) challenge us in our day to follow Christ in deep spirituality and devotion. Christian perfection consists in following Christ in his complete surrender to the Father's will, so we must resolutely face the work of overcoming ourselves, however painful and difficult that may be. For an Oratorian the Cross is his crown and glory.

From time to time, certain members will for various reasons be unable to keep the Rule in its entirety, and the agreement of the College Chapter should be sought in such circumstances.

Whilst the Rule provides the framework for our life, we are saved through grace and not by works, so the Rule must be seen as a means to an end which is our unity with God and not as an end in itself.

THE MEANING OF CELIBACY

An Oratorian is called by God to make a pure oblation of himself to God: to be chaste and pure in all his human relationships. Sexuality is not something to be afraid of; rather, it is something to rejoice in, provided that certain elementary rules are observed. All human beings are to be treated with respect and due decorum, discreetly and reverently. Frigidity is something to shun; it helps no one. Warmth of human friendship gladdens the heart and enables a man or woman to persevere as Christ's disciple. A little encouragement goes a long way.

Without love, without friendship, life is not worth living. Love and friendship take us to the very heart of God. Jesus said to his first disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love I have called you friends.... This I command you, to love one another."

Men and women who love God can also love one another. Great friends in Christ's Gospel are radiant witnesses of God's love. St Francis of Assisi and St Clare; St John of the Cross and

St Teresa of Avila; St Francis de Sales and St Jane de Chantal - all these loved one another with a pure heart fervently. By their manner of life and good example they lifted up many others to God. We are all called to lift each other up. Special friendships used to be frowned on, but now they are recognised to be necessary for the living of Christian life. They must never be exclusive or possessive. Provided that they are wisely handled and rightly regulated, they can glorify God. Consecrate your love, your friendship to God and place it on the paten with the Sacred Host at the Eucharist, to be offered as a sweet oblation to God.

An Oratorian is a man of God, called by God to share his creative energy in deep spirituality for the sake of all God's people.

The elementary rules to be observed by Oratorians regarding celibacy will combine with God's grace to enrich our friendship with God, each other and the people we serve. Elementary rules include the avoidance of sexually compromising situations and never taking advantage of someone in a professional situation where they may be particularly vulnerable. Physical contact may be appropriate but may also be misunderstood and give 'wrong signals'.

Actions or speech which can be construed to be flirtatious or to harbour sexual innuendo is not in the spirit of celibacy.

Celibacy requires great personal integrity regarding a self-knowledge of sexual orientation and a recognition of when a relationship is straining human emotions. In such situations, the support and counsel of the Prior or another senior brother should not be seen as a weakness but as a courageous act of perseverance.

THE HOUR OF PRAYER

The most important thing in prayer is perseverance. Perseverance through darkness, dryness, boredom and a sense of helplessness will bring us to heaven. All that matters is the firm intention to seek God and to wait upon his will. Abbot Chapman says: "When we have no comfort in God, but want it more than anything else, then we are probably more united to him than at any other moment. So we must aim at being in the desert and not at any consciousness of God's grace and presence." Formal meditation - picturing, pondering, applying, resolving - strenuous cerebral activity - if you can do it and it helps you to find God: that's fine.

But if you can't do it, don't worry. Be content to make simple acts of faith, hope and love interspersed by silence. Allow God gently to lead you. Lead you he will, if you wait quietly upon him, into pure contemplation. St John of the Cross in the *Living Flame of Love* says: "If a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it still more. The soul then has to walk with loving advertence to God, without making specific acts, and exerting no effort on its own part. It must keep a simple, pure and loving awareness. The soul must be attached to nothing, whether of sense or spirit, which would introduce noise into the deep silence. There the voice of God speaks to the heart in this secret place, in utmost peace and tranquillity."

Wait quietly upon God. Stay silent in one place, away from all commotion, allow God to take you over, and he will. St Teresa of Avila's *Way of Perfection* shows that sanctity does not consist in doing extraordinary things but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. To be

alone with God is initially difficult. Persevere long enough and the day will come when you will tell yourself: Prayer is the best thing in life.

Some brethren will wish to divide their prayer time into two or perhaps even three sessions; other people prefer the hour in one block. Most people find that prayer in the early morning is best - it consecrates the first part of the day to God and gives it a priority; busy lives can all too easily result in prayer time being curtailed.

THE KEEPING OF ACCOUNTS

It has to be said quite frankly that this detailed practice and discipline has been abandoned in most religious communities, Anglican and Roman. In the world in which we live there simply is not the time for it. Nevertheless, it is a valuable practice and we seem on the whole to manage it.

The general practice nowadays is for a religious to declare at the beginning of each year how much money he has received during the past year, how much money he has spent and how much money he has in hand for the coming year. In our community it is important that the payment of dues should be calculated aright and delivered punctually, since delay may cause trouble and inconvenience to those responsible for the administration of the Oratory.

Each College will have a practical method of responding to the Note on Stewardship. Oratorians should live in modest simplicity and unusual expenditure (e.g. a new car) should be discussed with the College Chapter.

THE CHAPTER OF FAULTS

In most communities, Anglican and Roman, chapters of faults were abolished many years ago. It is now taken for granted that when a man (or woman) wishes to join a religious order he will wish to keep the community rule as well as possible, acting as a mature and responsible adult. If he finds difficulty in keeping the rule, he seeks advice and help either at a community meeting or privately from his Superior. Humiliations are no longer imposed on novices by novice guardians. There are sufficient humiliations in a post-Christian Society for all of us without adding to them. Instead, encouragement is given.

In our community chapters of faults may still serve a useful purpose, provided that they do not go on for too long. The recitation of endless details and minor peccadilloes only serves to bore and irritate those who have to listen to them. The important thing is clearly to indicate the main areas of failure with a certain economy of verbal expression and to be willing to take advice. The same may be said of lists of sins in the confessional. State clearly the main sins: the rest are like the tributary of a river. Be open and honest, but do not go on at great length.

RELAXATION OF THE RULE

Great wisdom and discretion are essential for a novice guardian who has to deal with those under his care. Our manual makes provision for the relaxation of the rule at certain times,

e.g. holiday periods and when travelling. If prayer, the divine office and the daily Eucharist are the strength and stay of an Oratorian, and his supreme joy is to keep his rule as perfectly as possible, not to earn merit but out of sheer love of Christ, for the sake of his friendship, there need be no anxiety about the keeping of the rule or its occasional relaxation. In sickness it is not possible to do much more than to commend oneself to God and to remember one's brethren.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LETTER WRITING

Letter writing has become a lost art, but as a means of communication between brethren it is all important and may do a great deal to promote mutual sympathy and encouragement. This is a most valuable adjunct of Oratory life and it can be augmented by the use of the telephone or fax.

WHEN DOES AN INQUIRER RECEIVE THE MANUAL?

The answer seems to be after he has taken the trouble to have a full discussion with the Prior or his deputy and has attended one or more Chapter meetings.

WHEN DOES THE INQUIRER BECOME A POSTULANT?

This must depend on the decision of the Prior after consultation (whenever possible) with the Superior and Novice Guardian. The Prior will wish to consult the brethren in chapter before reaching a decision.

A form of admission may be used, and the date of the beginning of the postulancy should be recorded in the College minutes.

WHEN DO THE BROTHERS BEGIN TO PRAY FOR THE POSTULANT?

As soon as the postulant has given a clear indication that he wishes to test his vocation to the life of the Oratory, with the approval of the brethren and those in authority.

THE JUNIOR GUARDIAN

The Junior Guardian holds in his frail hands under God the future of the Community. Therefore he must put all his trust in God as he seeks to discern God's will for those committed to his care.

He must be strong and courageous in his dealings with each one, as well as patient, remembering always that an Oratorian is a person called by God.

Godly admonitions and gentle exhortations will be necessary from time to time, in tune with the regular instructions given to men in his care individually and corporately.

But above all the Junior Guardian must be a man of God's loving kindness, warming and cheering the souls that seek God. Through the intimacy of his friendship with God in prayer he can humbly help them to seek God more and more until in eternity they see the glory of his face.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?
In thy presence is the fullness of joy.*

The Junior Guardian shall care for the formation of a brother through the postulancy, probation and in the early years of his professed life. He shall arrange to meet him regularly and invite him to stay, so that they can know each other in a fraternal way. He should guide him in both the spirit and discipline of Oratory life. He should be ready to listen and encourage, and be open in his assessment of the junior brother to the brother himself and the College Chapter.

The Junior Guardian has both a duty to a brother(s) in his care and to the Oratory and he must carefully balance these two responsibilities when discerning God's will and advising the College Chapter. The College Chapter should determine the length of time a brother needs the guidance of a Junior Guardian.

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