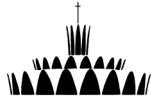


Our Growth in Holiness as Individuals and as a Community

As we begin the last part of the season of Lent, let us renew our aspirations for Benedictine holiness, try our best to live in accordance with those aspirations, and pray that the Lord, through the grace of Lent, of Holy Week, and of the Paschal Triduum, will bring us closer to realizing those aspirations, as a community and as individuals, than we have been before.

We aspire first to true and habitual union with God, and we beg for the gift of an experience of that union, in some way continuous, and from time to time more intense and vivid. May we become one with the Lord Jesus, our mind and will and heart one with his, sons of the Father, temples of the Holy Spirit, with Blessed Mary as our Mother and as Our Lady. May each of us earnestly seek that form of prayer in which we most experience this union, and which most nourishes this union for us, whether it is the Divine Office, the Holy Eucharist, lectio or meditatio. We all must keep trying to find the way to enter into the inner life, and to grow always in that life; this is an urgent need of our community, and our greatest need.

Then we aspire, secondly, to true and habitual love of our brothers in the monastery, and of all the people whom we serve. And first, of our brothers. Let us be available to our brother, ready to interrupt our activities and our plans when he needs us. Let us put his needs, his good, ahead of our own. Indeed, let us make his will our will, unless his will is for something not right, or not in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions and the customs of the monastery -- but then we return to what he truly needs, what is truly for his good, and put that first. Thus, true love of another always involves obedience, profound obedience, to that other. Let us bear one another's burdens. Let us be ready to give practical, concrete help to our brother; let us be prepared to put ourselves out in order to do so. Let us not murmur. Let us not complain. Let us not defame people behind their backs. Let us be reconciled to one another. Let us ask ourselves: is there some brother, some brothers, with whom we are not fully reconciled, fully at peace? If so, what can we do, by the grace of God, to bring about reconciliation



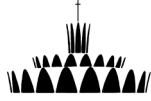
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before the Paschal Triduum begins?

Then, love for the people whom we serve. This means all that love for our brother means, except for these two differences: it is not the same kind and degree of love as the love for our brother, for we are not perpetually bound to the person we serve, as we are to our monastic brother, by the fact that both of us have made perpetual vows to serve God in this same monastery. And, in most of the cases of love for the person whom we serve, the love involves performing the specific ministries for that person, which are ours in virtue of our common apostolic works of School and Parish. Thus, in the School, for example: let us learn our subject as well as possible, for we are to convey it to a young person who is the image of God, in whom Christ dwells. Let us prepare our classes as carefully as possible, let us teach as well as possible, let us grade papers and exams as well as possible, let us discipline and correct our boys as well as possible, and not be weak in doing so because we are tired, or because we want to be liked, or whatever - - and so on, and all for the love of God, and for love of the young person who is precious in the sight of God. And then, in the Parish, for example: let us minister the sacraments in as holy a manner as possible: let us prepare the liturgy, let us prepare our homilies, let us pray long beforehand, as best we can. Let us be available to our people pastorally as selflessly as we can: let us be prepared to be interrupted by them, called for by them, demanded by them, let us make ourselves their servants. Let us be with our people especially when they are sick, and when they are bereaved.

In this love for those whom we serve, let us remember especially the poor: those who are poor because they are sick or weak, those who are poor because they are not blessed with special intelligence or talents or personal gifts, those who are poor because they are emotionally or psychologically troubled, those who are poor because they are from broken families, those who are poor, perhaps we must say in our society, because they are women, those who are poor because they are lonely, those who are economically poor or socially poor -- not blessed in these two areas as are many whom we serve -- and there are such poor among us, and such poor who come to us, in the School, in the Parish, in the Abbey Family.



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And let us insist on reminding our people of their responsibilities to the poor, not least to the economically poor, urge them to be in touch with the poor, not to allow themselves to become isolated from the poor, urge them to listen to the poor, to learn from the poor.

Let us aspire, finally, that our monastery should grow, not only in merit, but in numbers as well. Let us believe profoundly in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us believe profoundly in the Benedictine vocation, in the immense blessing and joy of the Benedictine vocation, which is the gift the Lord has given to us, let us believe profoundly in our vocation as monks of Saint Louis Abbey, of this particular monastery, which is called by the Lord to provide a unique witness and service to the Church and City of Saint Louis, a witness and service which, if we do not provide, no one else will provide. Let us welcome those who wish to come and see our life, let us welcome those who wish to try their vocation with us, let us encourage and help them, and hope deeply that they will be given the blessing of a Benedictine vocation as we have been given it. Let us be prepared to widen the space of our tent to receive them -- and there is scope for us to widen the space of our tent, and still be faithful to who it is the Lord calls us to be, indeed, to be more faithful to this.

Lord Jesus, as we come now to the holiest and most glorious days of the year, know these aspirations of ours, know these deepest yearnings of our heart, and Lord, as you know and as you will, fulfill them.