



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Br. Symeon On His Call

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Monastic life is a counter-culture life. It goes contrary to the generally accepted norms of our society. I have to be honest and say that I am still working on my reasons for becoming a monk. I'm still moving along with my life. I suspect that the answers I'll have five years from now - for why I remain a monk - will be different from the reasons I have now. Yet, a factor that remains a constant is a desire to seek God.

There was no voice from God, no voice from the outside, audible to the ears telling me to be a monk; yet there was a voice that came from within, a call or inclination, a yearning. Saint Symeon wrote: ". . . it's Christ ... who illumines souls who seek him." He wants us to be the persons we are meant to be.

I was in college during the late 60's and the prevailing climate of those years has had a great influence on the person I am becoming. For me, my college years were a time for: moving around, seeing where I've been, looking outward, looking inward, taking it all in, and taking stock of what I had gathered. It was a time of extremes: long hair, hard hats, Hippies, Yippies and flower children, ROTC recruitment, Vietnam in the living room, endless nights studying chemistry, listening with friends to the draft lottery while crowded around a dorm radio, sit-ins, Kent State, Jefferson Airplane, Mama Cass Eliot, and the '68 convention in Chicago. Yet, in the midst of all of this there was, among my peers, a genuine openness, a wonderful freedom to be oneself.

My last year at college was a year of growing inner turmoil. Many friendships were won and lost, ties with home were ever changing, "fun time" on campus was running out as graduation loomed nearer and nearer. There were anxieties over entering the job market; a whole new phase in life was about to begin. I wished it did not have to be so. I wished my college life could just go on.

I had various part-time jobs during my first year out of college. Eventually I found a more permanent job with a rather conservative insurance company. It seemed strange at first but I liked the work and I liked the pay even better. Then came my first new car, my stereo system and my own apartment. There were new friends, Gatsby's Pub and many office parties. Yet I couldn't settle into the usual pattern; I couldn't settle down.

After three and a half years I quit my job and took off on a cross-country camping trip through Canada and into the Canadian Rockies. For two months I was virtually by myself with plenty of time to unwind and to think. Once I stepped out of the New York scene and felt the freedom of the highways and of wide-open



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spaces, I sensed I was lacking something in the way I had been living. I was yearning for some sort of wholeness.

I came home broke so went back to my old job and stayed on for another year and a half. I was happy to be back with my friends again, and to have an income, but after a few weeks I felt that I was back in the same old rut. It was at about this time that an advertisement in a magazine caught my eye. It was a vocations ad for Saint Louis Priory (now Abbey) and it described a life of community, work and prayer. This ad appealed to me because somehow it rekindled my yearning for wholeness. I answered the ad and began a correspondence with Father Luke which lasted for a year and a half, until he wrote and said that it was about time to come out and meet the community. Once again I quit my job, and flew to Saint Louis. After several visits I asked if I could stay.

My yearning grew and changed and kept growing, yet it wasn't until a year after my first vows that I knew that I had found what I was looking for on that cross-country camping trip. I learned to live not in the past, or to be anxious about the future, but to live in the present moment. I've found that community life helped me to tie up the diverse aspects of my life into a wholeness that I had been looking for.

One reason why I joined this community and why I have decided to stay is that all that I do during the day is done in the context of faith in the Risen Lord. I've gained a real happiness in loving others, even as life continues to batter me about. This happiness is rooted in the gift of faith in the Lord Jesus who very gradually has become a real part of my life as he makes himself known and felt in those hidden yearnings and stirrings within. I am not in this alone; I have the love and support of my brethren, as they have mine, as together we try to seek the Lord in our day-to-day lives as Christians in a modern world.