

Class #2 chapter 3 notes

There are a lot of reasons one may enter a monastery but only one that will keep one there, enabling him or her to persevere unto death. It is only the love our Lord Jesus that will enable us to face all the challenges, enable us to walk through thick and thin and arrive at our desired goal which is eternal communion with living God and life with all the saints.

St Benedict beautifully describes this and Roberts begins this chapter with this quote from the Rule:

“What, dear brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life. Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way with the Gospel for our guide.

Don't know if any of you are interested in sharing when you first heard the Lord's call but this would be worth hearing if you are willing to share it? I think my own calling really began while praying before a statue of our Lady while I was in a capuchin seminary. It was just a sense of her presence and the wonder of what prayer allows one to experience. A real deepening of this sense came as I read through the Story of a Soul by St Therese of Lisieux. The call of each of us is always a little different.

On p. 48 we are given a clear sense of what this calling involves so let us read the first paragraph on this page. The monastic way of life “fosters a radical reorganization of the human heart.” The call to it implies a dissatisfaction with what we thought to have been important in our lives. And I think this dissatisfaction can linger all through our lives even as monks until God's love takes over the whole of our being, takes over our way of thinking, feeling and existing. Again those words of St Augustine come to mind where he writes of how restless are our human hearts until they rest in God.

On the same page Roberts indicates the specific monastic ingredients of this call, the celibate chastity and evangelical poverty; obedience and stability according to the RB; the basic observance of our monastery expressed in the Customary of the Abbey of Gethsemani; the inner attitude which is the soul,

spirit, and real fulfillment of the exterior commitments. A little further on Roberts brings home how this observance takes place in a specific monastery which never exists in a perfect form but how a fervent community is to be living it. This is something important to realize for as he goes on to say:

“In all monasteries there are deficiencies and imperfections. When we come face to face with these weaknesses, our promise of fidelity does not ask us to reform the monastery or criticize the faults that are so obvious. Rather it requires that we ourselves be faithful and contribute our efforts to the fervor and observance of the house.”

What I have come to see again and again over the years that if I want or desire to find fault with my community, it does not take long find defects or the faults of others but this is to be the very opportunity to take a closer look at one's own heart and how I may be projecting on to others what I am being called to face about myself.

On p. 52 Roberts gets into who imposes the observances on us. Let's read the first paragraph.. No one imposes observances but we freely embrace them in our response to Jesus who is daily calling us into communion with Himself. This again is the basic theme of this whole book, our relationship to Christ as he daily invites us to come follow Him.

The function of the observances is clearly stated on p. 53 so let's read the second paragraph. They are to ground us in God's own Trinitarian life so that we become living sign of God's own life in the world we live in.

We are led into silence and solitude for a very profound purpose so let's read paragraphs 2 and 3 on p. 54. Stepping out of the society in which we may have lived for many years so that “psychologically, solitude and silence make us sensitive to the voice of the Lover who speaks not in the strong wind or earthquake, but in a ‘tiny whispering sound.’” (1 Kings 19:12)

We are being called to follow Christ into his own interior life, into his own spiritual experience. Read paragraph 2 on p. 55. By our way of life, we enter into a whole new experience of the world in which we live and this should not surprise us.

Our struggle is one of the war of the heart as stated on p. 56 where we learn a whole new language of the heart. Read a section in paragraph 1 on this page and then how we are called to share in Christ's Passover on p. 57. We go through a death in order to experience a "superabundance of life."

Roberts then gets into the value of the Enclosure so let's read the second last paragraph on page 58.

Next, Roberts spends some pages on our prayer life, beginning with some comment on *Lectio Divina*, a topic I will spend some time on this Sunday in view of our Lenten reading. Let's read the 3rd paragraph on p. 62. It's all about developing attentive hearts, hearts ready to hear the Word of God not only spoken in the Liturgy and Divine Office but throughout the day.

He touches on our Eucharistic life and tells of our privilege and responsibility in this regard. Let's read the 2nd paragraph on p. 64. This has become a big topic here in America because of the huge Eucharistic Congress to take place this coming July 17th-21st in Indianapolis, IN. It is to be a gathering of people from all over the world.

Roberts then moves into considering the Divine Office or "what St Benedict calls the 'Work of God' is the special focus of the monastery. This is because the Office publicly expresses the monastery's deepest identity as a community of praise, giving its life to God alone in the name of the entire Church and world." Roberts then gets into saying that all are not obliged in the same way and in some sense downplays the individual's responsibility of being at all the Hours. Needless to say, individuals have good reason of one kind or other to miss some of the Offices, but I don't think we should forget St Benedict's words about there being nothing to be preferred to the Work of God in terms of our priorities.

On p. 69 we have a quote from the Vat. II document ***Sacrosanctum Concilium*** that wonderfully expresses the preciousness of attendance at the Divine Office and its meaning for our lives so let us read it. A little further on there is mention of the "many minor irritations of prayer in common, especially sung prayer" that we should not be surprised of having to face.

Next, we get into what Roberts calls “Gospel Austerity.” The 2nd paragraph on p. 70 gives a good overview of this experience so let us read it. We are reminded of what the Abbot has to face and the gift of discernment in living this reality. The p. 71 there is an effort to interpret the meaning of *metanoia* which is an important description of what real monks experienced. Let us read the paragraph.

On p. 73 we have what Roberts, from his reading of the pre-benedictine monastic tradition calls “three elements [that] are abundantly clear in the area of hardships and austerities” so let’s read about these.

He then gets into the **Common Life** that is nicely described in the 3rd paragraph so let us read it with the quote from Acts 2:44-45. Our life in common is at once a great support and a great challenge. Living together enables us to see all the human flaws we have but also offers a constant support in knowing others are struggling as much as we are in being true to what God is asking of us, of realizing our full potential to participate in God’s own life.

Finally, we take a look at **Monastic Work** so let’s read the 2nd paragraph on p. 81. There is our manual work but also the Work of God. Work is an essential part of our human dignity. This is brought out especially well in the 3rd paragraph on p. 83. We think of work in terms of physical labor but it really embraces the whole of our lives. Roberts ties this in with learning the role of humility in our lives , a virtue so central to the whole of St Benedict’s thinking. Let’s read the beautiful paragraph on p. 86.