

What Roberts hopes to cover in this chapter is to “explain the interaction of the promises of profession within the living rhythms of the monastic vocation” and as he goes on to say “their purpose is to help the monk or nun answer affirmatively the invitation of Jesus to follow him exteriorly and interiorly.” In a real way Roberts wants us to take a close look at the whole of our lives and to be clear about how each of their elements combine together as the expression of the total gift of ourselves to God.

Again I feel that we could spend the rest of this class sharing with one another how the different parts of our day overlap and assist us in our desire to be the loving persons we feel we are called to be in our life together. Each moment of any one of our days is to be lived in the loving presence of Christ who gave himself entirely to us as we have been celebrating these last couple weeks since Palm Sunday. Holy Week is the most significant of all weeks of the liturgical year in the Church for it not only recalls what took place two thousand years ago but expresses a mystery that captivates us as Christians. As I have said more than once, as followers of Christ, we not only hold certain beliefs but are doing all we can to live by them every moment of our lives

Once our lives have been touched by the grace of God, nothing should begin to occupy us so much as being true to this experience of God’s closeness. The words of St Augustine that have been repeated more than once in the book by Richard Neuhaus we have been listening to in the refectory come to mind that “our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

Let’s read the 2nd paragraph on p. 244! The only real spirituality is a “lived spirituality.” In a sense I think this paragraph says what Roberts has hoped to convey by the whole of his book on vows. When he says that the “reason we now want to see the living roots of this spiritual tradition in order to drink the clean water which flows more freely there” he is summarizing the whole of our Benedictine and Cistercian way of life. There is a clear water that flows in our monastic way of life and we want to drink of it all day long so that it penetrates the whole of our lives. Only then will we quench our incredible thirst for divine life that will never be fully satisfied until we abide forever in God’s presence.

There have been different ways of quenching this thirst either by methods of ascetism and prayer or by an emphasis on monastic hospitality and contemplative awareness. Let's read the 3rd paragraph on p. 245! Our efforts at conversion or "*conversatio*" are to be reflections Christ's own *conversatio*, raising our lives "to the level of his inner relationship of total docility to the Father and the Holy Spirit." We are being called as monks to enter into God's very own interpersonal life, called to enjoy the intimacy of the Trinity itself. This reminds me of those words of St Paul that: "What **no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor** the human heart conceived, what God **has** prepared for those who love him."

At one point Roberts gets into again quoting from the Desert Fathers so let's read the 2nd paragraph on p. 246 and the quotes he gives. That first quote from an Elder covers all the interior struggle that goes on in the heart of anyone called to our way of life. More and more I am convinced that if we follow the wisdom of this Elder we will be living the gospel of Christ Jesus! We have spent a number of classes together about the vows and what I hope that you will take away from all we have shared, is an awareness of this inner struggle that goes on day after day in the hearts of us all. It is all about letting the Love of Christ take hold of every moment of our days. The Elder warns us about "examining or even listening to the business of others; not taking anything for oneself but instead giving to others; not being proud in one's heart, not critical of others in one's thoughts.." and so on for to do so is to allow the Holy Spirit to fill our lives.

Roberts then gets into the main "spiritual crafts" the monk embraces when committing himself to the life. These are nicely outline in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs on p. 249 so let's read these. Emphasis has been put on different spiritual crafts over the centuries and it is good to be aware of this as we read earlier documents of our Order and what is happening today among religious communities. Each one of us gathered here comes out of a different religious experience, out of a different spiritual formation and as a result of this, each of us will develop the spiritual crafts in a different way if we are going to mature as religious. Whatever helps you, each one of you to be more attentive to the presence and the following of Jesus in your lives is what really matters.

The one thing that is crucial is being attentive to God's Word spoken in the everyday circumstances of your own life. Roberts gets into this in the 2nd paragraph on p. 252 so let's read this. Going "beyond self in increasing transparency of the body to the soul and of the soul to the truth and love of Christ" is called by different names, whether that of "divinization" or "transformation" or "unity of love" or "the loftier summits of teaching and virtues" or "unity of spirit" but the intent and growth are the same.

This inner growth is beautifully expressed in the writing of William of St Thierry as described on p. 253 in the 3rd paragraph and quote from his writings so let's read this. William draws on the 17th chapter of the gospel of John which I think is one of the most moving of all of Scripture.

On p. 255 he gets into Merton's own contribution to inner development of the heart. He speaks of "Merton's essential contribution to monastic spirituality" in the 3rd and 4th paragraphs so let's read these.

This whole process of transformation would have us to see the relation between the body, soul (mind) and the spirit (heart). The 2nd, 3rd and 3th paragraphs on p. 257 touch on the dynamics of these relationships so let's read these paragraphs, beginning with the words "Beyond and underneath human affectivity" of the 2nd paragraph. Here Roberts says that the "inner core of our being is primarily a *receptive capacity* for transcendental life." "It is an openness to be wounded and to give oneself totally both to God and to one's neighbor in a free option of redeeming love.." This is what is to take place in the heart of the monk, something that not only transforms him personally but touches the hearts of all those around him.

He then gets into what he calls the "deepest integrating principle" which is the "heart." Let's read the 3rd paragraph on p. 258. We are told that "St Paul uses both the words, heart and spirit, to indicate this most precious of human realities probably in order to bring out the heart's receptive connaturality with the Spirit of God" Rom 5:5; 8:9-10. It is in our hearts that we most resemble the living God, what goes on there is what draws us either nearer or takes us further away from what will make us most happy and fulfilled for all eternity.

In the next section of this chapter, called **A CHRISTIC MILIEU**, Roberts has us look at our Monastic Observances, our Lectio Divina, and Humility of Heart.

“Fatih looks on these practices as interrelated ways by which a person may collaborate with grace and be disposed to pass from self-love to a perfect, self-sacrificing love for Christ. This is how the monk and the nun “will see God” (Mt 5:8) even in this life, because this is how God’s image is brought to completion in them, since “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). On p. 260, in the 2nd paragraph he brings out how this transformation takes place over a long period of time so let us read this paragraph. So much of our monastic life is a process of learning to be patient with ourselves and with others. We live in a culture that likes to have things like this take place yesterday or at least in short order if not immediately, but this spiritual process demands a lot of patience.

Mary the mother of God is an outstanding example of spiritual growth, of learning to live by faith so let us read the 2nd paragraph on p. 261.

“Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit” so let us pray to her often to help bring about the inner transformation we are seeking.

In the 4th section of this chapter called **OBSERVANCE, PRAYER, HUMILITY** he touches on the value to community life in 3rd paragraph on p. 263 so let’s read this. Community life puts all kinds of different demands on each of us and this is precisely why it is so valuable for the cenobite.

There are a couple beautiful paragraphs on p. 267 that are worth reading so let’s read the 2nd and 3rd on this page. God is working with each one of us in unpredictable ways and this is something we want to ready for and ready to respect in the lives of our brothers or sisters.

Finally Roberts gets into what is called the heart of the Rule of St Benedict, the value of humility in our lives. It is not an easy practice to get our heads around but is at the core of following Jesus who told us to learn of him for he is meek and humble of heart. A good summary of Roberts teaching on this matter is covered by the last paragraph on p. 270 and the 2nd paragraph on p. 271 so let’s read these. Roberts thinks that Benedict’s 4th step of humility sums up best his thinking on this matter where Benedict says “his heart quietly embraces suffering” or more literally, “in his conscience he silently embraces patience.” This all provides enough for our class today, a note to end on.