



ORDER OF MALTA  
AUSTRALIA

# Becoming Holy: The Landscape of Formation

**“Members are obliged to work on and  
deepen their own spiritual life continuously.”**

(Regulations and Commentary V)

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## H.E. Rev Monsignor Jean Laffitte

Titular Bishop of Entrevaux; Prelate of the Order of Malta

The title of this Handbook sums up the whole purpose of authentic Christian formation: to become saints, in spirit and truthfully.

A misconception should be cleared up from the start: holiness does not identify with a virtuous life, in the strict sense of the word; while a holy life obviously includes a virtuous life, holiness designates above all the work of God, in a heart animated by the righteous and honest intention to become one with God. Holiness means a friendship with God. Like every friendship, it presupposes a double movement: firstly, a divine initiative which gives man the help of God's Grace; then a response from man, who makes himself available for the action of this Grace conferred by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Order of Malta, as a religious order, intends to lead its Members, on the one hand through a familiarity with Christ, on the other hand through the commitment of its Members – Knights, Dames, Chaplains, Volunteers –, to serve Christ in the person of the Sick and the Poor. This is the truest meaning of the binomial *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum*.

The family of the Order of St John of Jerusalem offers various instruments to help its Members to develop their path towards holiness; among these instruments, publications play an important role. They come either from the main see in Rome, or from the various Associations at a national level; or even, at a local level, from smaller Delegations. The National Australian Association now offers us this Handbook, "Becoming Holy: The Landscape of Formation" A simple glance to the table of contents shows us the Association's deep desire to nurture the faith of its Members, thanks to different contributions.

All Members of the Order will benefit greatly from reading and meditating on these texts: and it should be noted that time devoted to deepening one's faith is never wasted; on the contrary, it is the best possible investment for the works of our spiritual family to become truly fruitful.

The aid offered to Our Lords, the Sick and the Poor, is not a mere humanitarian service, however excellent it may be: it is the expression of the charity of Christ. May our Patron St John the Baptist and our Founder the Blessed Gerard join with Our Lady of Philermos in blessing each of the many readers of this excellent Handbook.

*Rome, February 11th, 2021, Memorial Day of our Lady of Lourdes*

## Most Rev Mark Coleridge

Archbishop of Brisbane; Conventual Chaplain Ad Honorem and Principal Chaplain;  
Australian Association of the Order of Malta

When I began in the seminary in 1969 there was a sense that in the eight years of priestly studies we would learn all that we had to learn and be formed in every way we needed to be formed and that after ordination we would spend the rest of our lives unpacking the learning and formation offered in the seminary.

In the many years since then it has become increasingly clear that learning and formation are in fact a lifelong task for the ordained. As I look back across the years since my ordination in 1974, I can see that much of my real learning and formation happened after ordination. It is like learning to drive a car: you learn enough to pass the licence test but then you really learn to drive once you have your licence.

As I move through this later phase of my priestly life, I see that the task is never-ending. The more I have learnt, the more I have to learn; and I fully expect to lie on my death-bed feeling still a beginner and saying as much when I stand finally before God face to face.

What is true of the ordained is no less true of those who have pledged themselves to membership of the Order of Malta. You have responded to a call and have undergone some initial formation. But that is only the launching-pad for a life of learning and formation. This is because the journey of conversion, which is the goal of all Christian learning and formation, is endless; it is a journey into the infinite abyss of the God who is love.

My thanks to all those who helped to complete this Handbook. It has involved a great deal of work by people deeply committed to the vision and mission of the Order. My hope and prayer is that what is found in these pages will not be a dead word but will be a living word that produces rich fruit in the lives of all the members of the Order to the glory of God who is the potter by whose hand we are formed (cf Jer 18:5-6).

## The Hon James Douglas, Knight of Honour and Devotion

President, Australian Association of the Order of Malta

When we become members of the Order we take on the obligation to work on and deepen our own spiritual lives continuously.

The Order, with the guidance of our chaplains so generously provided in this handbook, helps to provide a framework through which to fulfil this goal. Our spiritual activities – prayers, retreats, days of reflection, pilgrimages, regular masses and other liturgies, including now communal rosaries over the internet during these days of the pandemic, provide a vital part of this structure. So does our own Journal of Spirituality.

Consoeur Lady Murray's meditation on the Order's prayer shows how it suits us as a guide to lifelong formation. Cardinal Pell's reminder of the uses of silence and solitude in our prayer life, the injunction from Psalm 46 "to be still and know that I am God", is a timely aide to our individual prayer and meditation.

Our works for the poor and sick, in defence of the faith and our participation in the sacramental life of the Church offer further opportunities to make effective the practical expression of our spiritual lives. Dr David Pascoe and Fr Danny Meagher show us how to integrate our works with our prayer lives while the Order's Prelate, Bishop Jean Laffitte, reveals how Christian charity's spiritual dimension renders our humanitarian actions for Our Lords the Sick and the Poor a coherent whole, as we recognize in them the person of Christ.

We can take advantage of the opportunity to deepen our knowledge of the faith, of scripture and tradition, through reading the extensive literature available. Here the Rev Fr Gerald O'Collins SJ provides a helpful guide. Our other chaplains and other members of the Order, including those who have taken the promise of obedience, can help us too. Fr James McCarthy's and Fr Anthony Robbie's articles in particular address our prayer and sacramental lives. Those in the Defence of the Faith panel also help keep us informed about current controversial topics affecting the Church.

Consoeur Dr Jennifer Dunlop's instruction in praying the Divine Office, Confrère Professor David Kissane's introduction to the work of the Subpriory and Confrère Rev Deacon Adam Walk's paper on the use of spiritual direction illustrate the resources we have within our own ranks to assist us on the path.

Confrère Daniel Kwok and those assisting him have helped develop three handbooks in the last couple of years, one for the year of preparation, another for chaplains and now this one for lifelong formation. They provide wonderful guides to the call to holiness through membership of the Order and through the sources for the lifelong spiritual formation to which we are all invited.

I commend this guide to lifelong formation to all members. It will provide some structure to our attempts to lead good lives by "normalising holiness" to use Archbishop Fisher's words.

# Prof David Kissane, Knight of Magistral Grace in Obedience

Regent of The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

Upon investiture as Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, we commit to the charisms of our Order, charitable works of service to the poor and the sick, *Obsequium Pauperum*, together with nurturing and witnessing the Catholic faith, *Tuitio Fidei*, all for the glory of God. Each day we pray for the grace to be able to carry out this resolve. In so doing, we embark on a journey of steadfast spiritual formation to better equip us carry out the works of the Order.

We are blessed in the Australian Association to have this guide to such spiritual formation, which has been compiled so enthusiastically by Confrère Daniel Kwok. It offers much to inspire members in their pursuit of this quest, making overt that this formation not only begins through our preparation for investiture, but also continues unabatedly through our daily prayer and works. Our formation is lifelong! Immersion in the life of the Order draws us into prayer together for the greater sanctification of God.

One further opportunity to enrich our involvement is presented after five years of service as a Knight or Dame in the Order through the vocation of a Promise of Obedience to God's will. This is facilitated through the communal membership of our Subpriory of the Immaculate Conception. This Knight or Dame embarks again on a further Year of Preparation, in which we seek to ever deepen our spiritual commitment to Christ through prayer and the works of the Order. The Subpriory can be a spiritual home that further nurtures this pursuit of grace and holiness.

For some, a further deepening of faith and spirituality may occur through the vocation of the Professed of our Order. These Professed Knights, who take vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, are central to our identity as a religious Order. Their vocation may arise at any age; for some it may be found after some years of nurturing their faith and sustaining their formation through the Order.

Becoming a Knight or Dame of the Hospitaller Order of St John thus commences this lifelong path of continued and never-ending spiritual development. I commend this formation guide as a roadmap that will help you on this journey, this quest for holiness, through the Order of St John.

“Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy.” *Lev 19:2*

“He himself made human beings in the beginning, and then left them free to make their own decisions. If you choose, you will keep the commandments and so be faithful to his will. He has set fire and water before you; put out your hand to whichever you prefer. A human being has life and death before him; whichever he prefers will be given him.” *Sir 15:14-17*

“You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” *Mt 5:48*

“Jesus said to him, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself.’” *Mt 22:37-39*

“For this is the will of God: your sanctification.” *1 Thess 4:3*

“They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.”  
*St Pope Paul VI, Lumen Gentium Ch V, 1964*

“Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness.....  
A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness.”  
*Pope Francis, Gaudete et Exsultate Ch I, 2018*



## Introduction

Daniel Kwok, Knight of Magistral Grace in Obedience; National Coordinator for Formation, Australian Association; Councillor, The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

The call to be saints is especially clear for members of the Order of Malta that has as its purpose ‘the promotion of the glory of God through the sanctification of its members’. (Constitutional Charter Art 2, Para 1).

In a talk to the American Association in 2016, the Prelate of the Order, H.E. Rev Monsignor Jean Laffitte said:

*“..... the Order of Malta is the exact opposite of an NGO, a Nongovernment Organization, because of this priority of God’s Glory and personal sanctification. Every member is called to holiness. All their work, all our works are inspired by this love which binds them to Christ the Lord. The activities do not in the first place give some moral or spiritual merit. On the contrary, it is the spiritual bond with the Lord and with the church which inspires and makes really fruitful our activities.”*

Fulfilling our commitment as members is not accomplished merely by a high activity score in charitable works. They are necessary but must be inseparable from other elements in the response to Our Lord’s call to us to be holy, to be saints.

Understandably, it is easy to see sainthood as beyond reach. ‘What? Me a saint?’ many would say. Yet St Paul tells us: ‘...this is the will of God: your sanctification.’ (1 Th 4:3). Our God will provide the grace for our sanctification when we say “Yes” as Mary did, and continue to ponder as Mary did.

The Order’s Regulations oblige members “to work on and deepen their own spiritual life continuously” (Regulations and Commentary V); and the principal functions of Associations towards members are to help their sanctification by providing ways for “initial and permanent formation” (Regulations and Commentary VII).

In Australia and New Zealand, our Regional Hospitallers build and maintain a vibrant spiritual activity calendar comprising Masses, retreats, reflection and recollection days, communal prayer, and access to spiritual writing and media. Our chaplains, to whom we are incredibly grateful, are vital to our liturgical life and spiritual development.

As collateral support, this handbook was created to provide general guidance for formation. It is deliberate that prescriptions are not included as “everyone does not proceed by the same path” (*Lumen Gentium*, Ch 5). The articles are contributed by both our chaplains and members. Whether one is fresh in seeking formation or has a long history in doing so, there is something to be gained reading the various articles. Each comes from a formidable knowledge and experiential base. Each, while helpful on its own, connects with all the other articles, like a landscape being appreciated for its parts as well as for its sum.

Fr Danny Meagher, Emeritus Rector of the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, provides the kindling article recommending a “rule of life” that forms the scheme for the handbook. Archbishop Anthony Fisher tells us that holiness is not an abnormality; and that helps hopefully to dispel timidity in seeking sainthood.

Fr James McCarthy writes about prayer in its various forms – oral, meditative, contemplative, and points us to the Order’s patrons. Fr Anthony Robbie refreshes us with the meaning of true participation at Mass and of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Fr Kevin Lenehan elucidates the necessary features of retreats and points to the benefits of recollection and reflection. Dr Jennifer Dunlop shares from her 40-year familiarity with The Divine Office.

Finding material for studying, reflecting, meditating, and contemplating is a fundamental part of formation.

Fr Gerald O'Collins, Emeritus Principal Chaplain of The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception recommends sources for spiritual development. He does not offer a long bibliography. Instead, he points to the primary sources – Sacred Scriptures, Tradition, and a few classic sources. Fr Danny Meagher further suggests papal documents that are relevant to our charism and part of the social teaching of the Church.

Since 2002, the Order has published The Journal of Spirituality series. Many of the articles are specific to the spirituality of the Order. An index of the content of the entire series is in the appendix.

With members having differing formation requirements, there is significant sense in seeking the guidance of a spiritual director. Deacon Adam Walk gives us an introduction to spiritual direction and how to benefit from it. Fr Kevin Lenehan introduces the requirements for retreats and those for recollection and reflection. I suspect there will be poignancy felt when you read Cardinal George Pell's reflections on silence and solitude in a world rampant with noise and movement. Lady Murray adds a guide for meditating on the Prayer of the Order.

There are of course externals in formation. Putting into practice our dual charism of *Tuitio Fidei* and *Obsequium Pauperum* aligns us with the words of the apostle James: "faith without works is dead" (*Jm 2:26*). Prelate of the Order, Bishop Jean Laffitte, Fr David Pascoe, Fr Danny Meagher elaborate on that.

Later in membership life, there are options to undertake discrete programs to prepare for the promise of obedience or the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. David Kissane, Regent of The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception details its history and purpose. He invites members to consider furthering their formation by taking the promise of obedience. There is basic information for members drawn to becoming professed knights.

Collectively, the articles in this handbook offer a fair idea of what formation entails.

"A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness" (*Pope Francis Gaudete et Exsultate 19*). Formation is disciplined, intentional and gradual. It is a lifelong "path of holiness" taking us to Our Lord and all the saints in heaven. Taking this path would help a member fulfil the purpose of being in what is a religious order.

# Hearing the call

## We are all called to Holiness

Rev Fr Danny Meagher; Emeritus Rector of the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Homebush, NSW;  
Magistral Chaplain of the Order of Malta

### **God calls us to holiness**

The revelation unique to Christianity is that God not only wants to give Himself to us, but does give Himself to us, and those who are willing to accept God's life are indeed raised now into a life of union with God. At the Last Supper, Jesus said that those who loved Him would keep His commandments, and that He and the Father would love them, and make their homes in them. For God to be living in us, and we in God... this is holiness.

If we were in the least spiritually alive, this would fill us with delight and a burning desire to follow. The point is that members of the Order of Malta are so very blessed: baptised Catholic, member of an ancient Order of the Church, recipients of the extraordinarily rich traditions of the Order. The Way to God lived by Jesus now lies open to those of us who want to follow. Thanks be to God.

Holiness does not lie off in the stratosphere somewhere. It does not lie in the future, nor in the past. Holiness starts with the least human being and it starts where we are now. God loves us as we are; God loves the whole of us; we journey towards God knowing and loving ourselves better; we journey to God finding God within us and also finding God in all those around us and in all the events, good and bad, of our lives.

There is only one Way to God, and that is in Jesus. Yet, the different saints, with their different personalities, light up different aspects of the Way which can be helpful. May I refer to the way, the little way, adopted by St Thérèse of Lisieux? This is the way I recommend to seminarians.

First, humility. This is to know and lovingly accept the truth about ourselves – our weaknesses, failures, strengths and gifts. For most this is a painful process of purification, so to keep going we need a confident trust that God is indeed all love and compassion, always ready to heal and forgive.

This is Thérèse's second element: a childlike trust in the goodness of God our Father. Note that it is not sufficient simply to "believe" that God is merciful. We need to actually accept God's mercy and let the past, the guilt, the blame all go.

Finally, St Thérèse speaks of the practice of love: love of God and neighbour. To abide in love, is to abide in God. This might all sound lovely, but it is ascetical in the extreme if we give ourselves to it day in day out, generously and with utter determination.

In the end we become people who truly know ourselves and come to love ourselves: so arise peace and joy in our hearts. One is comfortable in one's own skin and confident to be exactly who we are in public: so arises authenticity. Having plumbed our own hearts, we know the human heart and can love others truly: so arise compassion and the ability to be present. Like the saints, we radiate the Holy Spirit, so becoming enormously attractive and fruitful.

This is what God wants for each member of the Order. Here is a little more on how to proceed.

### **Prayer – Spending time with God**

To pray is to be with God, often with an attitude of praise, thanks or love. St Teresa of Avila calls prayer an

intimate sharing as between friends. The Curé of Ars described prayer as God looking at us, and we at God. There are lots of ways we can be with our friends, so there are lots of ways to be with God, lots of ways to pray. The way we use at any one time depends on the circumstances, our own temperaments, and how accustomed we are to praying. The best advice is to pray in the way that works for you.

Jesus prayed in different ways. He prayed alone, it seems for long hours, in the desert and up on mountains. He seems to have preferred praying at night or in the early morning. However, he also prayed in the presence of his disciples and they asked him to teach them how to pray. He used his own words and recommended against mindless babble. He asked for things and, mostly, the Father granted his requests, in the case of the miracles. However, suffering his Agony in the Garden, Jesus' request was not answered. He prayed emotionally, calling God "Daddy" and, from the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!"

So, when we relate to God, there are many ways of doing so, many forms of prayer. There are vocal prayers, the Rosary for instance or the Our Father. Engaging in Mass with others is prayer. Reading the scriptures, or other spiritual reading (*Lectio Divina*), slowly allowing the words to touch our hearts leading us to reach out to God – this is prayer, and very effective prayer.

People can sometimes worry about their prayer, thinking they are praying badly or not enough. Sometimes people worry about how advanced they are in prayer. This is not for us to worry about. Simply, as St Thérèse would recommend, turn to God our Father, pray as we can, and leave everything to Him.

It is true, though, that over time a person's prayer will normally change. Often the way we pray becomes simpler, fewer words, less thinking and more loving, as St Teresa of Avila said. As we pray with scriptures, for instance, one word or phrase might hit us, and we can stay with the thought or emotion for quite some time. This is a normal process and, as we quieten down, God can share a great deal with us. It is for God then to take the lead and for us to simply receive.

The important thing is that we do pray. We cannot have a relationship with God if we do not spend time with Him. I tell the seminarians that we have to give God the best time of the day – a time when our emotions tend to be more tranquil and our mind quieter. The place is important – somewhere we can feel drawn to God. Preparation is also important, so that mentally and physically, we know we are turning to God. If we do our little part faithfully, God will lead us to the fullness of life.

### **Formation is lifelong**

I often apologise to seminarians that formation at the seminary is so testing. I explain that a priest has no "tools of trade" other than himself. That is, a carpenter has a saw, a lawyer his legal knowledge, but a priest has only himself to offer. So, our "selves", if we are to be true shepherds after Christ, must be transformed and made translucent with the Holy Spirit. Since we do not begin as saints, this transformation is truly testing.

The same goes for members of the Order and indeed any Christian. If we are to be drawn into union with God, the whole of our being is to be transformed. Formation is a holistic, life-long, graced journey following the steps of Christ. In speaking about the formation of priests, St John Paul II spoke of four elements: human, spiritual, pastoral and academic. All genuine Christian formation will, likewise, affect all dimensions of a person. The formation, if it

is leading to God, will be healing, enlightening, challenging, painful and ultimately deeply liberating. Initially, progress tends to be slow and the changes hard-won and noticeable. As we come closer to God, the progress will be faster and the changes less noticeable. However, if we remain open, the progress will continue all lifelong, for the goodness of God is infinite and it is into God's goodness that we are growing.

### **Formation needs a “rule of life”**

Formation does need concrete structure. Some adopt a “rule of life”. A rule of life ought to suit our life situation, be life-giving and lead to growth. Various elements of a rule of life may include:

- **Prayer:** we need to open ourselves to God in prayer if we are to develop a close relationship with God;
- **Regular examen and Reconciliation:** we need to give thought to where we experience God in our lives and where God might be leading us and, at times, the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be helpful; so our lives take some direction from the cues given to us by God;
- **Participation at Mass:** listening to the Word of God and receiving the Lord sacramentally;
- **Charitable work:** our Order is called to serve our Lords the poor; by meeting Christ under the various guises of the poor, and making friends with the poor, our own horizons are broadened and our hearts expanded;
- **Education:** our Order is founded for the defence of the Faith, so we need to be well-informed and abreast of current controversies;
- **Spiritual Direction:** a chaplain may be able to help us recognise the direction God is leading us and help us to grow in prayer;
- **Retreats:** as Christ got away to be alone with his Father, so must we, to reconnect and be recharged.

Following a rule of life, or something like it, allows us some structure to our daily lives that suits us and will lead, day by day, year by year, us closer to God.

In the next pages are a number of articles which expand on different elements of a good rule of life and other resources are also provided.

## Normalising Holiness

Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP; Archbishop of Sydney;  
Conventual Chaplain Ad Honorem of the Order of Malta

*The following, used with his permission, is an extract from Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP's address honouring papal honours recipients on 22 October 2020 in Sydney.*

As if the Catholic Church didn't have enough saints – and it is estimated that it has recognized about 10,000 so far – it celebrates all the others as a job lot and we assume that we are talking billions. All Saints is the festival of all who have gone to God, whether fêted or not.

Is this just spiritually greedy? We already have an average of 29 saints to celebrate each day, which can make praying the Mass and Divine Office rather complicated. And if the saints are not only those who have demonstrated heroic virtue and been transparent to divine grace, they are also held up to us by the Church as worthy of imitation. “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” as St Paul said.

“Imitate them?” you might laugh. Imitate the Incredibles who sang happy songs as they were torn apart by lions, or who lived atop a pole or in a cave dressed in animal skins or nothing at all, or who were hyper-pious and inclined to trances, visions and levitations, or who lived for years on nothing more than the Blessed Eucharist or bled with the marks of Christ's Passion? Don't get me wrong: I think those saints were mostly real and the tall tales told of them often underestimate rather than overestimate the miraculous dimension of their lives. But they were certainly eccentrics, if glorious eccentrics, these acknowledged saints, and not really the sorts of people you'd want your daughter to marry!

If the way some of the saints lived here on earth doesn't appeal much to us, our image of how they live in heaven might be equally unappetizing. Sitting on clouds, staring at God, playing harps and singing hymns is not going to attract moderns who treasure individuality, variety and entertainment so highly!

Then there's the problem that saints are expected to live exemplary lives. But many of us are like the young Augustine who prayed “Lord, make me chaste, but not just yet”. We hope we'll be holy by the time we're old and die, but in the meantime, we're inclined to live a middling good and banally bad life. We're weak and there are many distractions, and who wants penance in a consumer culture? Who's up for virginity, missions and martyrdom in a postmodern world where nothing's worth living for, let alone dying for? Who wants plenary indulgences when indulgence of a rather different sort is the order of day?

But the Feast of All Saints stands in contrast to these thoughts, instead insisting that a saint is not only someone who does whacky or truly extraordinary things. All Saints is about normalising holiness. The call to holiness, as the Second Vatican Council insisted, is universal (*Lumen Gentium* Ch. 5; cf. *Mt* 5:48). And that means there are all sorts of people who have dedicated their lives to the imitation of Christ and service of Church and society. When I say that All Saints marks the end of the church on earth, I don't just mean its chronological ending but also its ontological purpose. The Church is for getting people to heaven. Even those who get into the last pews it counts a success. And there are many. Indeed, the Council said there are as many ways of being called and gifted for Christian service as there are Christians (*Lumen Gentium* 32).





# Responding

## Daily Scriptural Prayer

Rev Fr James McCarthy; Parish Priest, St Aloysius Cronulla, NSW;  
Magistral Chaplain of the Order of Malta

In the Catholic Faith and in our commitment as members of the Order of Malta, daily prayer and spiritual exercises are an indispensable part of our relationship with God and with the Order itself. The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes St John of Damascus (d.749) saying that prayer is “*the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God*” and St. Thérèse of Lisieux (d.1897) said of prayer that it is “*a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy*”. (CCC 2590) St Augustine (d.430) beautifully described the longing for the heart of God in each person when he said, “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*”

Prayer is the communication of and with God. Unlike a therapeutic motivational talk, prayer is the response to the need of every human being to experience the care and intimacy of God.

In any loving relationship, communication needs to occur on a daily basis. A series of daily routines and various modes of prayer help to develop and strengthen one’s personal relationship and intimacy with God. Those who have previously served in the military are well acquainted with repetitive daily routines, and the implementation and observance of daily prayer routines and exercises should also be a characteristic of the Members of the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order.

Jesus often went to quiet places to pray, and as Christians we are also called to find a quiet place for daily prayer in the midst of the noise of our world. Finding a quiet place that is free from distractions, even for just a few minutes at a time, can provide an opportunity to listen and communicate with God.

As Catholics, we listen attentively to the Word of God and allow God to speak to us through the Scriptures. St Jerome (d.347) famously said that “*Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,*” while St Isidore (d.560) said “*When we pray, we talk to God; when we read Scripture, God talks to us.*” As Catholics, there are many methods to listen to the Word of God, and the path towards sanctity involves drawing from the treasures of our faith both old and new (Cf. Mt 13:52). As Members of the Order of Malta, we are committed to talking to God and for providing space for God to speak to us.

Many saints throughout history have personally experienced and encouraged others to slowly read and reflect on the Scriptures, allowing the Word of God to sink into their thoughts; and dwelling on specific words or phrases that are particularly moving. The method of prayer promoted by St Benedict (d.547), known as *Lectio Divina*, is an ancient form of prayer that allows the fruit of a contemplative Scriptural reflection to be continued throughout the working day.

*Lectio Divina* involves a prayerful reading of a Scriptural passage, sometimes repeated several times, so that certain words or phrases become a focus for reflection for the rest of the day. The Scripture readings from daily Mass are a good place to start when deciding which passage to consider for a reflection. The readings of commentaries about the Scripture passage also help to deepen the reflection. It has often been said that *Lectio Divina* is a little like ‘slow spiritual food’ or like cows chewing the cud throughout the day. After a period of reflection has occurred in the morning, the fruit of the reflection is then returned to at various other moments in the day, for example when in the car, while exercising, shopping, working, or even showering.

The **Rosary** is a similar meditative reflection to *Lectio Divina*, however it involves mantras of specific prayers as

opposed to mantras of specific words or phrases. In both *Lectio Divina* and the Rosary, the focus of the prayer is adoration and intimacy with the divine, and not specifically intercessory prayer. In adoration, the focus is not on self or even on the needs of others, but on God and His action of salvation. God's action is what is central in the Scriptures, and pondering on the things of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, assists in the journey to sanctity.

The Rosary in its current form is hundreds of years old, while the repetition of prayer as a format for meditation of the mysteries of the incarnation, is well over 1500 years old. The Rosary is the repetition of various Scriptural-based prayers, which then gives a specific time and structure for a brief meditation on a mystery of the life of Christ. The Rosary is undertaken by focusing on one of the four types of mysteries – Joyful, Sorrowful, Luminous and Glorious, often depending upon the day of the week.

Pope Saint John Paul II in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002) encouraged the Ignatian method of imaginative prayer, which involves using the imagination to meditate and become present to a specific mystery. ***Imaginative Contemplative Prayer of St Ignatius*** (d.1556) is a useful mode of prayer when praying the Rosary, although this method of prayer is also appropriate when undertaking *Lectio Divina* or other Scriptural reflection. Whatever type of mystery is being meditated upon, the action of God, in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, is the object of the form of prayer.

When concluding a period of personal prayer, it is important to give thanks and praise to God for the opportunity to be in conversation with the divine, and it is also worthwhile to make a resolution or a recommitment to the promises and vows that you have previously made, either in the Order or in your specific state of life. Many saints have found it useful to write some thoughts and resolutions from prayer in a ***journal***, and this is still recommended today.

It is important as Catholics to not ignore the importance of ***The Blessed Virgin Mary*** when undertaking any form of prayer. Mary is with us in our Christian meditation as our companion, as she is the one who was an eyewitness to many of the mysteries of salvation, a companion to Christ in others and even the object of God's action in a few. Mary's importance is due of course to her relationship with Christ, and the Order of Malta would not be faithful to our traditions if Mary was not included in our reflections and our daily thoughts. We as Catholics are not to shy away from the incredible dignity and nobility that God bestowed upon Mary by making her firstly the Mother of Jesus, and by extension the Mother of God, and at the cross the Mother of all Christians and finally the Queen of Heaven.

As Members of the Order of Malta, it can also be worthwhile to consider the presence of ***St John the Baptist*** when reflecting on different passages of the Scriptures, when contemplating *Lectio Divina*, praying the Rosary, or undertaking Scriptural reflection. Although the Scriptures do not mention the presence of St John the Baptist in many contexts, the tradition of the Church, especially through sacred art, has often depicted the Christ Child with St John the Baptist. It may be worthwhile to consider if St John the Baptist visited the Holy Family at Bethlehem, whether he was present at the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple or at the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, or how St John might have reacted to the experience of baptising Jesus in the Jordan River. It may also be helpful to consider the life of St John the Baptist and how his example of preparing and pointing others towards Jesus can be an inspiration for the active life of Members of the Order of Malta today.

St Zechariah, the father of St John the Baptist, was one of the Jewish High Priests, and the upbringing of St John

the Baptist would have been closer to a life of privilege than a life of poverty. St John would have been well-educated in and around the Jewish Temple and more than likely he would have been personally known to most of the significant Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Despite the styling of the adult St John the Baptist as a man who wore “camel’s hair” and ate “locusts and wild honey” (cf. Mt 3:4), he had the ability and courage to speak intelligently and eloquently with King Herod, to the point that King Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist (cf. Mk 6:20). John knew how to speak and to proclaim the coming of the Messiah to different audiences, and his life, example and preaching are a special focus for the Order. St John the Baptist studied the Word of God, he prepared the way for Christ using the skills, abilities and connections that he had, and he helped prepare many people in many contexts to humbly and faithfully enter into the Eternal Jerusalem through his preaching, the action of the baptism of repentance, and his pointing towards Jesus Christ.

Prayerfully reading the *Liturgy of the Hours*, and reading the *writings and biographies of Saints*, especially the Saints of the Order, also help to bring personal growth in the spiritual life and are encouraged as part of a weekly routine of prayer. Every Member of the Order should develop a personal daily prayer routine or exercises which should include some Scriptural reflection, either through *Lectio Divina*, the Rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours or other prayerful reading of the Scriptures.

# Participation at Mass

Rev Fr Anthony Robbie; Parish Priest of St Anne's and St Patrick's Bondi, NSW;  
Conventual Chaplain Ad Honorem of the Order of Malta

We have come to think of the Mass rightly as the “Source and Summit of the Christian life” and at its apex is the encounter with Christ in Holy communion. We could spend our whole lives in contemplation of this, the greatest of the Sacraments. Like Confession, it is intended to be received frequently and indeed, confession is in its essence a preparation for this Sacrament. A soul purified by the Sacrament of Penance comes into the closest union with the Lord that it can ever achieve in this world. If we could only receive it once, it would be worth spending our whole life in preparation for that moment.

When a soul begins to grow in love of God it seeks ever greater proximity to Him. Any person in love will seek out the company of the beloved and when the Beloved is our Heavenly Lord, the search is very easy. He is wonderfully available to us in many ways. The Vatican Council speaks of five ways that He is present to us<sup>2</sup>, but preeminently of course, in the Blessed Eucharist, so prodigious in its effects and nature that it is uniquely known as the Blessed Sacrament. If our experience of this great Sacrament were confined simply to adoration that would itself be a wonderful privilege worth waiting a lifetime for, but in fact as we know, the Lord has made Himself available to us even to the point of being united by a physical and spiritual reception which places us in the closest of all possible unions with Him. While this can occur in various contexts the preeminent one will always be the liturgical setting of the Holy Mass.

## Frequency

Mass is the means by which the Lord continues to be born into the world and to come to His people. It is the highest prayer of which the human race is capable and the more we grow in love of God, the more we likewise grow in love of the Mass. To take our spiritual life seriously means to take advantage of the opportunity that our Faith provides to grow in intimacy with God by the increasingly frequent recourse to those Sacraments which are meant to nourish and sustain the soul – namely Confession and the Blessed Eucharist. In this case, it means coming to Mass with greater frequency and above all, with greater devotion and recollection. As Catholics we are immensely lucky to have this treasure available to us on a daily basis and for those us of, in fact most of us, who live in great cities, it is available in many different places and at various times during the day. Frequent attendance at Mass and frequent reception of Holy Communion is one of the greatest joys which the sincere Christian comes to appreciate. Our Lord said that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have not life in you”<sup>3</sup> and this truth becomes ever more clear to a soul increasingly in love with God. Life itself is offered to us, in the purest and most direct way it ever can be in this world. Many Christians as they grow in devotion wish to consecrate their day to God in the best of all ways and so they make provision in their routine for the practice of daily Mass. The Order does not require this for its members, but it encourages it, especially for those who are in the class of Obedience. Naturally, it is a requirement for those who are Professed. This should never be seen as an obligation, but as the wise counsel of a mother who wishes the best for her children. To love God is to draw close to Him and that is the purpose of the Order of St John of Jerusalem as it is of every religious Order. The sanctification of her members precedes every apostolic work and gives it its motivation.

## How to profit most from the Mass

Much depends of course on the manner of our attendance and frequency does not equate to intimacy on its own. The Church uses the word “assist” at Mass where we commonly say “attend.” This gives some idea of the intent that we should all have an active participation at the ritual celebration of Holy Mass, and not be passive spectators. Of course avoiding passivity does not mean to fall into the opposite danger of a shallow activism, which confuses activity (performing a function) with assisting at the Mass. True participation is interior and spiritual. It consists in uniting ourselves with the sacrificial offering of Christ on the Cross, which is renewed in the action of the Mass by the priest acting in the person of Christ. We get more out of the Mass and achieve a closer union with God when we come to Mass recollected and reflective. When we hear the prayers and readings with attentiveness and devotion we spiritually join ourselves to the whole action of the celebration. We should try to leave behind whatever is worldly

and distracting so that our hearts can make the most of this brief moment of encounter with Christ which is intended to take us out of the normal routine of our life. This does not mean we leave behind our worries and needs. On the contrary, we bring them to the Mass and offer them to God united with the Sacrifice of Calvary in union with the One Who understands all worries and can supply all needs.

When we unite our prayers with those of the Mass they achieve a greater clarity and focus and also a greater efficacy. Praying at home is not the same thing as praying in church at Mass. People sometimes say that they can pray perfectly well at home or in the great outdoors and so don't need the confining walls of a church. Of course they can pray in those other places and we hope they do, but what they cannot replicate at home is the action of Christ Himself in the Mass which draws us to the foot of Calvary and then lifts us up to heaven.

While the Mass in itself will always convey infinite graces in one sense, its effects on us will differ according to our own dispositions. A more advanced soul, closer to God and freer from sin will obviously receive more grace than a tepid soul. God forbid a soul in mortal sin would receive no grace, and in fact commit the additional sin of sacrilege in receiving Holy Communion unworthily. There is no doubt that we as human beings are subject to many distractions and our knowledge and experience is mediated by the senses. Consequently the externals of the Mass will affect us in so far as they assist or hinder the clarity of Jesus' action. Nevertheless, we should always be seeking ever more to spiritualise our experience of the Mass so that it is the interior supernatural reality of the celebration that means most to us.

The externals we usually have no control over and really they don't matter so much as the sacramental action. Whether we are in a great basilica or a small country church, whether a world class choir or a lone organist accompanies us, it is the same Mass and the same Lord. The Latin rite, common to most Catholics or the various Eastern rites all express the same sacramental reality and communicate to us the same grace and truth. This is what really matters, and we must never lose sight of it. Nevertheless, whatever is profane or unworthy of God should be avoided in the transmission of holy things as an obstacle to fruitful participation in the sacred action of the Mass. Coming a bit early and staying a little while afterwards is helpful in preparing the mind for the great encounter and giving opportunity for reflection. The very word "eucharist" means "thanksgiving" and we should make the whole of the Mass our prayerful act of thanks to God for all His many gifts.

### **The privilege of Holy Communion**

At the moment of Holy Communion we receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and nothing less than that. It is an astounding thing and even the most advanced theological reflection cannot come close to capturing the immensity of the privilege this entails for us. To receive just once would be enough for a lifetime, but we can receive many times, even daily if we wish. Even if that is not possible, we have many other opportunities to honour Him in this Sacrament and to draw profit from it. In recent years a great growth in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has arisen all over the Church, spurred overwhelmingly by the youth. It is one of those "signs of the times"<sup>4</sup> of which the Vatican council spoke and a refreshing reminder of God's ability to continually renew the treasure of the supernatural life. This very adoration is a prolongation of the action of the Mass. In the quiet contemplation of the Sacred Host, whether publicly exposed for the worship of the community or quietly reserved in the tabernacle, we come close to the experience of St John the Beloved at the Last Supper leaning upon the Lord's breast. The Presence is enough for us. These are the times when we forge our ever-stronger quiet bond with the Lord. Our affection for Him and His love for us grow in silence and in peace. In St John Newman's great phrase: "Heart speaks to Heart."

1. Lumen Gentium no.11  
2. Sacrosanctum Concilium, 7  
3. John 6:53  
4. Gaudium et Spes 4

# Confession

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In the muffled stillness of the confessional a great miracle is taking place. It is not a miracle visible to the eyes of the world, although the world can certainly see its consequences. A soul is working its way back to life. The Divine Breath of Easter morning is reentering the cold tomb of a human soul and taking up residence again. As with all the Sacraments, if only we understood this in greater depth, how we would treasure the moments of miraculous peace that the merciful God has made available to us in such lavish generosity.

The soul is working its way back to God, although it is not the penitent nor God alone who performs this, but a wonderful cooperation between the two. God invites, the soul responds and then in a gentle and progressive alliance the two work together to restore life. God cannot batter an unwilling soul back to loving Him and neither can a soul restore the life of grace on its own. Instead, the open door of heaven is an invitation pressing upon the conscience of the sinner with greater or lesser insistence depending upon how close or far the soul has already wandered from God, for there is no doubt that the voice of God becomes harder to hear the further one wanders and the longer one stays away from Him.

People sometimes imagine that all that is necessary for the restoration of a soul to God is confession, but that is only one act in a series. The Sacrament we know by the name of Penance, commonly called confession, is also known in many areas as Reconciliation, and this is indeed a noble description of the process by which a soul step by step returns to the love and knowledge of God. In fact, there are five steps involved in the process, all of which are necessary for the successful administration of the sacrament – contrition, confession, absolution, penance and purpose of amendment.

## 1. Contrition

The sinner must actually be sorry for their sins. It may seem like an obvious point to make and some will say that no one would confess them without being sorry, but in fact, we have an enormous capacity for self-deception and never more so than when we start to deal with the embarrassing details of our own failings and our culpability for them. We may be truly sorry or we may just be embarrassed by our failures and keen to receive sympathy for our predicament. The contrite soul really is sorry that the sinful act took place and is prepared to admit that he or she was the author of it. Traditionally two forms of contrition have been identified – perfect and imperfect. Perfect contrition is that sorrow for sin which proceeds purely and selflessly from a soul distraught at the offence it has given to God. It may understand the harm it has caused itself, but out of a devout and tender love for its heavenly Lord, it expresses sorrow purely for the offence it has given to God. This is a very difficult level of disinterestedness to acquire and really only a quite advanced soul will have the motivation and the love of God to reach it. Nevertheless, in the absence of the confessional, this pure sorrow would be enough to restore a soul to the love of God.

Fortunately a lesser standard is acceptable in the tribunal of the confessional. We describe as imperfect contrition that degree of sorrow which will have a mingled degree of the selfless and the selfish. On the one hand, shame at the offence to God, and on the other shame for one's own predicament. Sin is a shameful thing. It exposes human weakness and is always expressed in degrading acts. These are even more damaging when they are expressed in public and damage our standing before the eyes of other people. For our part, they reveal to us how weak we really are and how shallow are the motives of our heart. This is all very humiliating, but there is more that drags the soul down and discourages it. Our sins bring punishment upon us, both in this world and the next and so part of the motivation which we describe as imperfect contrition is a healthy fear for

the punishment that is inexorably coming our way. Is such a repentance then sincere? Yes, without question, even if it is not as altruistic as the higher degree which involves regret only for the one we have wounded. This lesser degree is acceptable to draw upon us the grace of the Sacrament and so even if our motives are a bit mixed, as long as they are sincere, we are well on our way.

## **2. Confession**

This is the main act we perform, accusing ourselves of our faults in number and kind and making sure we don't hold back anything out of shame or indifference. It's only absolutely necessary to confess mortal sins, but venial sins should certainly also be confessed in the hope of eradicating their habitual faults from our souls.

## **3. Absolution**

The hand of the priest is raised over us, but it is actually the hand of Christ Himself that bestows pardon. This is the element the world cannot give. No therapist, no counsellor can bestow it. No degree of public confession, no matter how revealing before the eyes of the public can bestow the consolation which accompanies those precious words "I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". This is the only one of the five elements provided by God explicitly, but it is the most important, obviously.

## **4. Penance**

The proof of our sincerity is shown in the desire to make up for the harm we have caused. An instinct for penance reveals a growing sense of the harm that sin does and guards us against our confessions becoming routine or presumptuous. The penance imposed by the priest is always a symbolic one, since we can never in this life make up for the harm our sins cause to an infinitely perfect and good God, much less even to other people, but they are an expression of our desire to take personal responsibility for our actions and to redress the imbalance our sins have caused. They have caused real harm, and justice requires real responses.

## **5. Purpose of Amendment**

The truly sorry soul is not just regretful over past faults but wishes not to commit them ever again. This doesn't mean that he or she never will commit them again, nor even that with a weary self-knowledge they suspect that a habitual sin will in fact recur in the future. It means simply that I wish that I were other than I am, better than I am and that I wish to move towards a different future where this sin which I truly regret, has no further hold upon me. It may be a slow progress, it may involve falls and recoveries, but I want to change. The rest is an unknown future and depends on the Providence of God.

## **Regular Confession**

Obviously mortal sins must be confessed as quickly as possible after they are committed. To remain in the state of mortal sin, cut off from God and the life of grace is a dreadful state which hardens around the soul and causes the voice of God to be heard ever more faintly. Sins then multiply in the soul and repentance becomes harder and harder. Even if one's sins are only venial, though, it is still a very valuable thing to come to confession regularly and to cast them before God and ask His help.



We understand that the Sacrament takes away the guilt of sin in the eyes of God, but it does more than this. It imparts the necessary grace for the rebuilding of virtue in the soul. When we confess a particular sin, God grants us the grace of the corresponding virtue, so that the penitent who confesses anger receives the gift of patience, the sinner who confesses to lust receives the gift of purity and so on. This is enormously valuable in rebuilding the virtues in the soul and makes all the difference in the living of a Christian life in the midst of a world full of distractions and temptations.

Regular confession gets us in the habit of being alert to our sins and thereby being ready to work on them, and one by one eradicate them. It's a life-long process of course, but the struggle is evidence of growth – and also of love. A good examination of conscience alerts us to what sins we may be in the habit of committing and makes our time in the confessional fruitful. Preparation is always key to a fruitful and sincere confession.

A final consideration must of course be how frequently should we come to the Sacrament? To be perfectly blunt, one should not leave it too long between confessions, or we become unaccustomed to the habits of examination and the experience of sorrow for sin. On a practical level, we simply can't remember what our sins are if we only confess twice a year or so. Such confessions are always perfunctory and reluctant and have the savour of "box-ticking." A good frequency is once a month or so. More often if we are so inclined, but less often and we simply won't remember what our sins are.

This beautiful Sacrament shows us the tender and merciful love of God for each one of us in a most remarkable and touching way. A personal human touch, a personal reassurance is extended to every child of God in this wonderful encounter which brings encouragement, instruction and healing to a troubled soul. Like the Blessed Eucharist it is meant to be resorted to frequently to nourish life in a challenging world. The wiser we are the more we will love it and seek it out. We will never be more grateful for the ministry of a priest than when, laden with troubles and sin, we hear the words and find the hand raised in absolution over us, imparting a consolation that comes from heaven itself.

## Praying the Divine Office

Dr Jennifer Dunlop; Dame of Magistral Grace in Obedience;  
Chancellor, The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

The Divine Office, otherwise known as the Liturgy of Hours, is our tutor in prayer, our companion on the journey of prayer, our portal into joining with the Communion of Saints' continual prayer before God, and our daily integration with every other Christian praying this Office. We, the people of God, the royal priesthood, (*Vat II Lumen Gentium n.10*) have this invaluable tool to lift up our hearts and minds in praise of God our Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

The term "office" comes from the Latin "officium", or service, and this is the service we offer to God, as enjoined by Jesus, that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart" (*Lk 18:1*), and "pray constantly" (*1 Thess 5:17*) and Paul's letter to the Ephesians "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication... alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (*Eph 6:18*). The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy at Vatican II n.90 referred to the Office as "a source of piety and nourishment for personal prayer" and wanted it to be shared by all, not just the clergy.

Of ancient times, the Hebrew people prayed three times during the day: at sunrise, in the mid-afternoon, and at sunset. Jesus himself prayed the usual daily prayers of blessing, and then took himself off to pray alone at vital points in his ministry, and at his disciples' request taught them how to pray in giving us the Lord's Prayer (*Mt 6: 9-13*). The Acts of Apostles speaks of the community of the faithful gathered in prayer "with several women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (*Acts 1:14*), united by the word of God, prayer and the Eucharist (*Vat II Const. On Sacred Liturgy n.12*). The Apostles told us to offer prayer to God the Father "through him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (*Heb 13:15*), through Christ (*Col 3:17*) in the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (*Rom 8: 26*).

In the early part of the third century, Hippolytus, a Roman theologian spoke of the Christian's obligation to pray not just at sunrise and sunset, but also, imitating the passion of Christ at 9 am (*Terce*) when Christ was nailed to the tree, at noon when great darkness came on the land (*Sext*), at 3 p.m. when Christ's side was pierced (*None*), at midnight, "at this hour all creation pauses for a brief moment to praise the Lord" and at cockcrow "our eyes looking towards that day in the hope of eternal light at the resurrection of the dead". Even if Christians prayed alone for some of these seven hours of prayer, it was normal to come together to pray the Morning and Evening prayers, which Vatican II calls the "hinges of the day" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*). These centuries old tradition of praying the Liturgy of the Hours came to be considered the preserve of the clergy and those in monastic institutions until Paul VI at Vatican II promoted the restoration of this precious gem of daily prayer to all the people of the Body of Christ.

### Structure of the Divine Office

The basis of the Divine Office is found in Scripture, so that in a four-week cycle almost all of the 150 psalms are recited during the seven "hours": Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Prayer During the Day (Before noon, Midday, Afternoon), Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. Three psalms are omitted because of their imprecatory character (57, 82, 108), but the rest help us to pray whilst identifying with their expressions of thanksgiving, or joyfully blessing God, or crying from the depths of sorrow. Scriptural readings are presented, canticles sung, and we pray in common with our fellow Christians at the beating heart of the Church.

### **Morning and Evening Prayer**

The great “hinges” of the day, Morning and Evening Prayer commence with an introductory verse “O God, come to our aid; O Lord, make haste to help us” followed by the “Glory be...” and then “Alleluia” (except during Lent). A hymn is then sung, followed by the recitation of three psalms. In Morning Prayer there is a morning psalm and Old Testament Cantic and then a second psalm of praise. In Evening Prayer there are two psalms or two sections of a longer psalm, and then a Cantic from the Epistles or Revelation. A short scripture reading proceeds with its short response and then the Gospel cantic is recited, the *Benedictus* in the morning and the *Magnificat* in the Evening. Prayers of intercession are offered, with morning emphasis on consecrating the day and its work to God, and with petitions in the evening, ending with prayers for the dead. The Lord’s Prayer is said so that it is recited three times during the day: Morning and Evening Prayer, and at Mass. A concluding prayer is offered and then the dismissal or blessing concludes the office.

### **Night Prayer**

In the Short Morning and Evening Prayer publications this short “hour” can be found at the end of the volume, and it is a beautiful way to offer final prayers before going to bed. This is especially poignant if said in the dark of the night accompanied by candlelight which is then extinguished as our final antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary is sung. This commences with the plea “O God, come to our aid” and then the “Glory be...” and the “Alleluia” (except in Lent). An introductory verse is followed by silence and time to make an examination of conscience so that the day’s blessings can be recalled, and one’s shortcomings held up for recognition and forgiveness requested. Following this there is a hymn, psalmody, a short reading with the moving response: “Into your hands I commend my spirit”. The Antiphon that follows is a prayer of universal appeal: “Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.” As moving as the main Gospel canticles is the *Nunc Dimittis* that follows: “At last, all powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace, according to your promise” (Lk 2:29 – 32). Alone, or in community, our voice can rise in the Marian Antiphon that closes the hour: the “*Regina Caeli*” in Eastertide, or the “*Salve Regina*” or “*O Sanctissima*” in other seasons.

### **Prayer During the Day**

These are the “little hours” otherwise referred to as *Terce*, *Sext*, and *None*, being short interludes in the working day: Before noon, Midday, Afternoon. The beauty of reciting them is that they draw one’s heart back to God even though one continues with the day’s work, so they are often said alone rather than gathered in a larger community as with Morning and Evening Prayer. These little hours commence with the Introductory verse “O God, come to our aid” then the “Glory be...” and then “Alleluia” (except in Lent). A Hymn is sung, the Psalmody prayed, a short reading with its versicle follows, a prayer is offered and in conclusion the acclamation is made “Let us praise the Lord” with the response “Thanks be to God”.

### **The Office of Readings**

This hour was traditionally a nocturnal practice, but it can be said at any time of the day. It has longer readings than any of the other hours, and fewer psalms. These readings allow deep meditation on sacred scripture, the writings of the Fathers, Doctors of the Church, writers from East and West, and selected spiritual authors. It is a marvellous stimulus for *Lectio Divina* and allows mulling over for the rest of one’s day. One can meditate on the

word of God, and ponder the meanings of seasons and feasts in the Church year. It gives abundant nourishment for devotion and prayer. This hour starts with the invitatory if said just before Morning Prayer, or the verse “O God, come to our aid” and the “Glory be...” and “Alleluia” (except during Lent). A hymn is sung, then three psalms recited, then a versicle for the two readings. The first reading is scriptural and the second comes from the works of the Fathers, or Church writers or is hagiographical. A responsory is said after each reading, and the great “*Te Deum*” is intoned after the second reading’s responsory on Sundays (outside Lent) and during the Octaves of Easter and Christmas. It concludes with a prayer then the acclamation “Let us praise the Lord: Thanks be to God”.

### **Exhortation to pray the Divine Office**

This centuries–old tradition has been restored to the whole people of God to sustain and nourish our prayer life. By our anointing of the Holy Spirit in baptism, Christ gives each of us a share in his eternal priesthood. “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (*1 Pet 2:9*) We exercise this priesthood by praying the Divine Office, and when we are praying it, we are praying the prayer of Christ, praying through him, with him and in him. We offer praise and intercession, praising the glory of God and entering into the sufferings of the world.

“He (Christ) continues his priestly work through his Church. The Church, by celebrating the Eucharist and by other means, especially the celebration of the divine office, is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the entire world.” (*Const. on the Sacred Liturgy n. 83*) The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours states of the Office that “the praise of the Church is not to be considered either in its origins or of its nature as the preserve of clerics and monks; it belongs to the whole Christian community.” (n.270)

So we can pray the office in the company of religious when on retreat in their monasteries, or joining them in their communities, or when we gather in our regional meetings, days of recollection, biennial assemblies, when we are a small group of two or three, and even when alone. We are, in fact, never alone when we pray the Office, because we are joined by the Communion of saints, both living and in Heaven as we offer our praise and thanksgiving. Year in and year out, our minds become transformed as we meditate on the word of God, and let the Scriptures integrate into our minds and hearts, invigorating our faith and allowing us to discern God’s will. As St Paul said “Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness find a home in you.” (*Col 3:16*)

These days access to the Divine Office is possible in print or online. One can use the three-volume seasonal Divine Office, published by Collins in English since 1974, or use their single volume Morning and Evening Prayer, or the Shorter Morning and Evening Prayer. The latter two publications include Night Prayer, but not the little hours or the Office of Readings. In the digital world, the entire Office is readily accessible through the Universalis website, so carrying paper copies of the prayers, psalms and scriptural readings is no longer of material concern. Now people on the move, with little time, or in different time zones, can “click and go”, and immerse themselves in the prayer of the universal church wherever they may be. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to pray in us, and all we need is to cooperate, dedicate our time, and be faithful to the commitment. God will do the rest.

## Finding sources

## Sources for Lifelong Formation

Rev Fr Gerald O'Collins SJ; Emeritus Principal Chaplain, Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

In the second chapter of its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum* of 18 November 1965), the Second Vatican Council clarified the deep unity between inspired Scriptures and sacred tradition. They *arose* together from the one source, God's self-revelation, work together in mediating here and now divine revelation and salvation, and aim at the same wonderful goal, our eternal life with Christ in his heavenly kingdom.

### The Bible for Prayer and Spiritual Growth

In the closing two articles of that same constitution (articles 25 and 26), Vatican II repeatedly invited all Christians to prayerfully read the Sacred Scriptures. The Council 'vehemently' urged the faithful to quietly read the Bible for personal transformation rather than simply for intellectual information. They should surrender themselves to what they read and allow themselves to be guided and 'inspired' by the Holy Spirit.

Here Vatican II, without using the term *Lectio Divina*, was in fact strongly recommending that ancient method of biblical meditation. Reading the Scriptures slowly and devotedly allows us to be brought into the living presence of Christ.

In the third century Origen of Alexandria pioneered for individuals and groups the prayerful method of *Lectio Divina*. Around fifty years after his death, Bishop Theonas of Alexandria spoke for Origen when he wrote to a young friend who served the Roman emperor: 'Let no day pass without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, at such a convenient hour as offers, and giving some space to meditation. And never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures, because nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind so well as those sacred studies do.'

In a stirring conclusion to its document on divine revelation, Vatican II cited St Jerome: 'ignorance of the Scriptures means ignorance of Christ'. This maxim puts negatively a conviction cherished by Origen and his successors: 'a prayerful knowledge of the Scriptures brings a deep and prayerful knowledge of Christ'.

In our century Pope Benedict XVI did much to encourage the practice of *Lectio Divina* or the biblically based prayer developed by Origen. His successor, Pope Francis, used the 1600th anniversary of the death of Jerome, 30 September 2020, to publish an apostolic letter, *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus* (affection for the Sacred Scripture). Francis recalled that Jerome was not only the greatest translator of the Bible but also a champion of biblical prayer: 'Jerome spent the last years of his life in the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, both privately and in community'.

I spent some years in Rome with the late Carlo Maria Martini. Biblical prayer shaped his life as rector of the Biblical Institute and then of the Gregorian University. When he moved north to become Archbishop (later Cardinal Archbishop) of Milan, he regularly presided in his cathedral at services for young people. The services took the form of *Lectio Divina* in community. Martini's popular publications remain steeped in the Bible, emerging from and leading to *Lectio Divina*. Over the years the example of Martini encouraged me to publish works on the New Testament that emerged from and could lead to *Lectio Divina*.

### Praying in and with the Tradition

We need to be properly inclusive when we think of the Church's whole *tradition* and what it contributes to our faith, our Catholic life and, in particular, our life of prayer.

Liturgical celebrations, above all the eucharistic celebration and the other sacraments, have been shaped by traditional forms which have been handed on to us. Our seven sacraments blend wonderfully readings from the Scripture, prayers, and gestures that have been shaped over the centuries.

Our life of prayer continues to be enriched by the Divine Office, the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, pilgrimages (to Lourdes and elsewhere), the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, sacred music, icons, other forms of sacred art, church buildings, Christmas cribs, religious orders and their specific stories and charisms. These are all particular traditions that we have received from the past.

Reflecting over the long history of the Order of Malta and, specifically, reading the lives of those members who have been declared saints and blessed is a fruitful way of letting our tradition become effectively alive. Tradition has supplied us also with the official teaching on Christian faith in Christ and the Trinity. We continue to profess our faith in the Trinity approved at the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

Tradition has also handed on to us the classics of Christian spirituality—from the *Confessions* of St Augustine and the *Imitation of Christ* down to the autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux'. Reading those classics enriches our devotion to Christ and those who need our help.

The sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and the 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church are astonishing summaries of the whole Catholic tradition.

In my own way, I attempted to sum up that tradition in the longer *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford University Press) and *Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP). There is my *Tradition: Understanding Christian Tradition* (OUP).

#### Editor's Note:

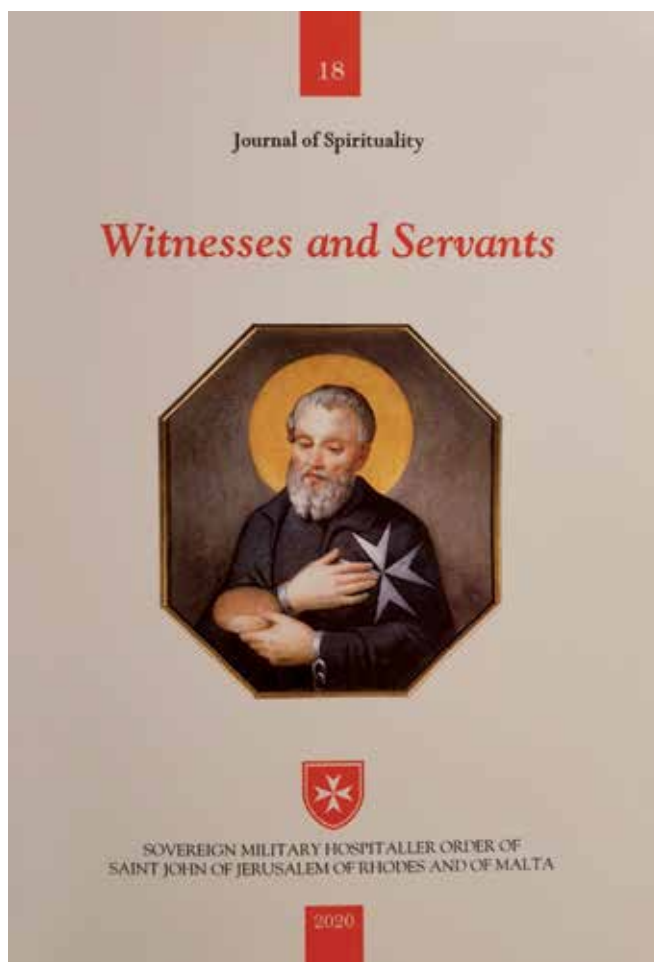
Fr Gerald O'Collins is much loved by members of The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception. By 2020, he had published 76 books with more in the pipeline. Some of these emerged from his practice of *Lectio Divina*. Readers would find his reflections helpful in their reflections of Sacred Scriptures. Consider this selection: *Following the Way: Jesus our Spiritual Director; Reflections for Busy People; The Lord's Prayer; Pause for Thought: Making Time for Prayer, Jesus and God* (Paulist Press); *Jesus a Portrait* (Darton, Longman & Todd) *Letters to Nevie: Learning from the Scriptures* (St Paul's Publishing, London); and *Moments of Grace* (Kevin Mayhew)

Given the Order's focus on assisting the poor and the defence of the Church, we need to be well-informed and abreast of current controversies. Fr Danny Meagher recommends these documents from the social teaching of the Church:

- Christ and the Church in the modern world: *Redemptor Hominis* (John Paul II); *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis)
- Economics: *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II); *Laudato Si* (Francis)
- Clash of cultures/Sin/teachings on life: *Evangelium Vitae* (John Paul II)
- Role of Church's welfare work: *Deus Caritas Est* (Benedict); *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (John Paul II)
- [\*Compendium of the Social Documents of the Church\*](#) (Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace)

## Journal Of Spirituality

The Journal of Spirituality series is a publication of the Order directed by the Prelate of the Order. The articles reflect aspects of the spirituality of the Order and are written by members with considerable spiritual experience and knowledge. The first volume appeared in 2002.



See the appendix at the end of this book for an index of the Tables of Content in the entire series. Using it, you may “window shop” for articles on topics you like to focus on.

The hyperlink for the entire series of Journal of Spirituality may be opened in the PDF of this handbook.

[Journal of Spirituality and chapter index](#)



# Seeking guidance

## Spiritual Direction

Rev Dcn Adam Walk, Knight of Magistral Grace; Deacon, St Mary's Parish, South Brisbane, QLD;  
Chaplain (p/t), Queensland Police Service; Formation Advice Coordinator, Australian Association

### What is spiritual direction<sup>5</sup>?

Spiritual direction is an established practice among Christians since the earliest times. Believers who wanted to have a closer relationship with God and to live the Christian life sought out spiritual guides that could help them. Very often these were monks and priests who had a reputation for wisdom and virtue.

By way of example, John Cassian (c. 360-435), a monk and ascetic writer, in his *Institutes* emphasises the essential role of spiritual directors ("true physicians of the soul") in providing spiritual direction ("spiritual conferences") in a monastic context:

*"As clever physicians are accustomed not only to heal already existing diseases, but also by a wise skill to seek to obviate future ones, and to prevent them by their prescriptions and healing draughts, so these true physicians of the soul, by means of spiritual conferences, like some celestial antidote, destroy beforehand those maladies of the soul which would arise, and do not allow them to gain a footing in the minds of the juniors, as they unfold to them the causes of the passions which threaten them, and the remedies which will heal them."*<sup>6</sup>

It is thought that Cassian "greatly influenced St Benedict, while as a spiritual writer his heirs included St Dominic, St Philip Neri, St Francis de Sales and [St John Henry] Newman."<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual direction is the advice we receive for Christian holiness of life from any qualified spiritual director on a more or less regular basis. While the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) can sometimes accompany spiritual direction (when conducted with a priest), spiritual direction is not sought in order to receive absolution. Instead, spiritual direction is sought for guidance on living a holier life in the context of our respective vocations and situations.

### What makes for good spiritual direction?

Good spiritual direction depends on the following factors:

- Finding a spiritual director who will guide us according to the true teaching of the Gospel and the Church; and
- The person seeking spiritual direction being open and sincere about themselves.

Spiritual direction isn't a one-on-one tutorial designed to answer theoretical questions about subjects such as faith, morality, and Catholic doctrine. And, while it might be appropriate to mention things that have gone well, it is not like a job interview where we try to convince the spiritual director of our merits.

Instead, we should be talking about personal things such as:

- *Worries and weaknesses* – What is concerning me? What are the obstacles to my growth as a Christian? Where am I falling short? Do certain temptations recur? What can I do to conquer my weaknesses? How am I dealing with personal challenges?
- *The state of our faith life* – How is my faith in God, in Christ and with respect to the Church and its teachings? How do I pray, and what can help me pray better? Am I experiencing any difficulties in my relationship with God? What resources might help me with my spiritual, moral, and human development?
- *Sacraments* – Am I making use of the Church's sacraments – especially Holy Mass and Communion and Confession – to strengthen my love of God and my living of Christian virtues? In what ways do I show my love for and loyalty to the Church that provides me with these means?
- *How we are relating to people around us* – Because we are made in relationship to others, how we interact with family, friends, and strangers is important.<sup>8</sup> How are my relationships developing? How do I look upon others? How do I strive to live charity? What are my failings and problem areas? How might I address them?
- *Vocation and professional life* – What is my vocation in life? Am I responding to what God asks of me? What is my attitude to work, study, and other duties? How do I show my love of God and of my neighbour?

How am I serving the Church and my community? Do I try to give a good example? Do I bear witness to the faith with those around me (*CCC 1816*)? Am I “prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls [me] to account for the hope that is in [me]” (*1 Pet 3:15*)?

- *Order* – Do I “maintain exemplary Christian behaviour in their private and public life, [and contribute] to the maintenance of the Order’s traditions” as is required of members of the Order of Malta?<sup>9</sup> Do I strive to be true to the Order’s motto *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum*? Do I desire to reach out to the needy and sick, the marginalised and lonely, the unfairly treated, in ways that lie open to me?

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive but are instead offered to give the prospective directee a sense of the subject matter that is part of spiritual direction.

### **How often should spiritual direction take place?**

As with any program aimed at personal development – e.g. a fitness program – some regularity is essential to progress. Whether it be monthly, or more or less frequently, spiritual direction works best if we prepare what we wish to speak about. Such preparation can take place in a period of prayer and examination prior to spiritual direction.

### **Are there other ways of obtaining guidance?**

One other way to grow in the spiritual life is to maintain regular, but less formal, contact with what might be described as a “spiritual companion.” Unlike spiritual directors, spiritual companions need not have formal qualifications to take on this role, but they are usually longstanding committed Christians with a desire to support their fellow believers in their earthly pilgrimage.

Spiritual companions are often drawn to this role by some sense of personal calling, or by virtue of another vocation or commitment. For example, within the Order of Malta, Knights and Dames in Obedience (that is, members of the Second Class) are encouraged to fulfil this role for other members of the Order as one aspect of their particular vocation. Spiritual companionship has aspects of both friendship and mentorship in that the companion is available to assist the believer by means of encouragement and advice in the context of a peer-to-peer relationship. Such companionships inevitably bear fruit for both parties as each seeks to grow in faith.”

### **Summary**

Spiritual direction is about improving our faith life and so it requires openness and a willingness to be vulnerable, speaking honestly of our failings first and foremost. Only when we have shared honestly can a spiritual director give us the best form of encouragement and advice. It is then up to us to take the specific advice to heart: to remember it, to pray about it, and to try to put the advice into practice.

For more information about spiritual direction, please contact Deacon Adam Walk at:  
***formation@orderofmalta.org.au*** Adam is a member of the Order, based on Brisbane.

5. This section is based, in part, on the work of Fr Max Polak.

6. Cassian, John. *Institutes*, Book XI, Chapter 17. Retrieved from <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03404a.htm>.

7. “The saint whose guide on virtue was read every day by monks in the Middle Ages.” *Catholic Herald*, July 23, 2012. Retrieved from <https://catholicherald.co.uk/the-saint-whose-guide-on-virtue-was-read-every-day-by-monks-in-the-middle-ages/>.

8. cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para. 112.

9. “Spiritual Commitment.” *Order of Malta website*. Retrieved from <https://www.orderofmalta.int/sovereign-order-of-malta/spiritual-commitment/>.



# Deepening our faith

## Retreats, Recollection, Reflection

Very Rev Dr Kevin Lenehan; Master, Catholic Theological College, East Melbourne, VIC;  
Magistral Chaplain of the Order of Malta

‘Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves’ (*Mk 9:2*). We learn from the Gospels that periods of ‘withdrawal’ (*Mk 3:7*) or retreat were a feature of Jesus’ life with his disciples. Moving away from the crowds and the daily ministry to their needs, Jesus led his disciples into a sharing of his intimate relationship with his *abba*, Father. It is within this encounter with God that the identity and mission of Jesus and his disciples was formed and deepened.

Indeed, throughout the Old and New Testaments God leads his chosen ones into an experience of spiritual transformation, often depicted as a journey, through the desert, up a mountain or across the waters: from Abraham’s call to leave his homeland (*Gen 12*), to the Israelites’ journey through the Sinai wilderness (*Ex 18-20*), the prophet Elijah’s journey to Mt Horeb (*1 Kgs 19*), Jonah’s fateful sea journey (*Jon 1*), to Jesus’ testing in the Jordan wilderness (*Mk 1:12*) and Paul’s years of retreat in the Syrian desert (*Gal 1:17*).

Characteristic of these spiritual journeys are (a) an experience of ‘testing’ or confrontation with the destructive spiritual powers or demons at work within human hearts and minds, and (b) a renewed and deepened experience of our absolute dependence on God’s life-giving love. In the wilderness we learn what it means to be truly hungry, and who it is who offers us the true ‘bread from heaven’ (*Ex 16; Jn 6*).

In the wilderness of the Jordan, John the Baptist (patron of the Order) called people to a change of heart and mind, a *metanoia*, so that they might be receptive to the coming of God’s kingdom in their midst. In the desert of life, God ‘speaks to the heart’ of his beloved one (*Hos 2:14*) and leads us back to an awareness of his presence in our lives. In his mission for God’s kingdom, Jesus called people to this same attitude of *metanoia*, and taught his disciples to walk in his footsteps. For every Christian, this ongoing conversion of heart and mind, in ever-closer discipleship of the Lord and his Gospel, is the fundamental task of the spiritual life.

### Retreats

The practice of retreat is a powerful resource of the Church’s spiritual tradition that helps to foster this journey of continual conversion and closer discipleship in the life of Christians. ‘You must come away by yourselves to some lonely place and rest for a while’ (*Mk 6:31*). Withdrawing for a time from the activities and routines of our daily Christian life, we open ourselves to a period of spiritual encounter and renewal, with the aim of deepening our belonging to the Lord and strengthening our life of discipleship in his mission.

The period of retreat does not require unusual or specialist activity; rather, we simply extend and intensify the regular elements of the spiritual life:

- *Making time for the Lord* – we extend our daily rhythm of prayer over a longer period of time, e.g. 3, 5, 8, 15 or 30 days. There is no ideal length of time; our circumstances will determine what is possible. The more practised we are in daily prayer, the more quickly we will settle into a period of retreat. Some Christians undertake the ‘retreat in daily life’ by lengthening daily prayer time during several weeks while continuing their regular activities.
- *Silence and stillness* – we extend and deepen the silence in which God’s Word can be heard and recognised (*Wis 18:14-15*); we create a setting of exterior stillness and quiet so that an interior silence may open within us, focussing our minds and awakening our hearts. St John of the Cross wrote that ‘silence is God’s

first language.’ A prolonged period of silence can be a challenge for many people, and the rush of mental distractions that assails us when we begin to still ourselves can be disheartening. The saints encourage us to persevere, to let go of our anxieties and to trust in God’s loving presence.

- *Openness to the Holy Spirit* – our ongoing conversion and growth in holiness are the effects of the Holy Spirit given to us by the Risen Lord: He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (*Jn 20:22*). It is the gift of the Spirit, working within our hearts and minds, that draws us to Christ and empowers us to commit our lives to him and the way of the gospel. The Spirit holds us in the presence of God, and deepens our dwelling in the love of the Trinity; ‘he dwells in you, he will be in you’ (*Jn 14:17*). During a retreat, we prepare ourselves for the gift of the Spirit by the spiritual exercises of attentive awareness, interior stillness and wordless presence (*CCC, nn. 2709-2719*).
- *Abiding in the Word* – by the presence of the Holy Spirit, the inner ‘ear of the heart’ is opened to hear God’s Word addressing us in a personal and transformative way. Spending time meditating and reflecting on selected biblical texts in stillness and silence of a retreat, we enter more fully into the encounter with the Word who is speaking to us through the words of the text. While there is always distraction and restlessness on our part, the Word calls us to respond in a conversation, *colloquy*, made possible through the images, narratives and characters of the biblical text. Some people keep a prayer journal to record and deepen their conversation with the Lord.
- *Celebrating the Liturgy and Sacraments* – retreatants often structure the days of their retreat by celebrating parts of the Liturgy of the Hours alone or with others at designated times; where a priest is available, Mass is celebrated each day and the Sacrament of Penance if desired. Through the liturgy, individual retreatants are united in the communion of the whole Church.
- *Attending to our bodies* – meals, exercise and rest are important elements of a retreat, through which we attend to our physical needs and the embodied quality of the spiritual life. Our body is the locus of our prayer; bodily posture, deepened breathing and physical gestures can help us to be present in prayer. Some people include periods of fasting in their retreat experience; moderating our intake of food, sweet treats and alcohol can increase our attention in prayer.
- *Spiritual director and spiritual reading* – while the Holy Spirit is the ‘interior Master’ of prayer (*CCC, n. 2672*), many people find it helpful to meet regularly with a retreat director during a period of retreat. In the company of a director, the retreatant describes and reflects on the experience of prayer and seeks a deeper awareness of God’s presence in life. Many people include reading from books of spirituality or scriptural reflections during the days of retreat.
- *In the spirit of Mary* – every disciple of Jesus seeks to develop the spiritual attitude of the Mother of the Lord, who ‘hears the Word of God and keeps it’ (*Lk 11:28*). Our Lady is always in the midst of the community of disciples at prayer (*Acts 1:14*). A retreat is a time of closeness with Mary, who carries us to the presence of Christ and assists us to ‘do whatever he tells you’ (*Jn 2:6*).

Times of spiritual retreat ought to be a regular part of the rhythm of Christian life, in our lifelong journey of conversion and discipleship. An annual period of retreat is required or commonly practised by ordained, religious and lay Catholics. A retreat may be required or recommended before undertaking religious vows or undertaking new roles or ministries in the church. Some spiritual traditions recommend a period of retreat during times of discernment or transition in life. In the Order of Malta, an annual retreat is expected of all members.

### **Recollections**

Shorter periods of prayer and spiritual renewal, from a few hours to an all-day event, can refresh and strengthen the awareness of God's presence and our belonging to the life of the Church. While a time of individual recollection may be taken at any time, communal recollections can be arranged for people who share a spiritual tradition or membership of a parish or ecclesial community. A presenter with expertise in the spiritual life or church teaching may lead the recollection which could include input or teaching, time for silent prayer or spiritual reading, sharing of faith experience with others, a shared meal, or celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. Recollections may be connected to liturgical feasts and seasons, such as the Season of Lent or Feasts associated with the Order of Malta.

### **Reflections**

More informal periods of prayerful reflection, spiritual reading, or faith education can be undertaken by individuals or groups at any time. These activities, which promote spiritual growth and more conscious Christian living, should be a regular feature of our weekly or monthly schedule. Increasingly, high quality print and online resources are available to enrich the content of our prayer, inform about the Catholic faith and life, and enable interaction with others in sharing faith or praying together.

As discussed above, the Holy Scriptures, in particular the Gospels, should be the primary source of spiritual nourishment for Catholics, whether we hear the Word through the practice of *Lectio Divina*, celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, group reflection on the lectionary readings of the day, or private meditation and study. Reflections on particular topics of faith, morality or spiritual life, are a valuable means of strengthening our commitment to Christian discipleship and developing our understanding of the Catholic tradition.



# Silence and Solitude

H. Em. Cardinal George Pell; Bailiff Grand Cross of Honour and Devotion of the Order of Malta

## Silence

Silence is important to everyone, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, for our own physical health, and for our inner selves. In fact we need silence, just as we need exercise.

Many fear they could not cope with too much silence, because they are addicted to activity and noise, in flight from their hidden worries and hurts. In earlier more Godly and sinful ages, such as Shakespeare's, more would have realised they were fleeing from their consciences, which "makes cowards of us all", and from their God.

Today the constant noise and din of modern life, our unprecedented capacity to distract ourselves in any one of a dozen ways from crosswords to pornography, by phoning our friends, by checking social media, scrolling through feeds, watching a film—all this is not only diverting and entertaining, but can act as an anaesthetic to dull our unease or anguish, fill our emptiness, mask our sliding towards practical agnosticism, even atheism. Hate drives out peace.

For Christians on the other hand, silence is an opportunity and a challenge to understand more about ourselves, recognise God with the eyes of our heart and find peace.

### *Psalm 46*

Psalm 46 urges us 'to be still and know that I am God'. The first time this well-known passage caught my attention was when I was already an ordained priest and read it in a writing of Fr Michael Hollings, who had been Catholic chaplain when I was at Oxford University in the late 1960s.

I admired him greatly, as a fine priest, who had been a young officer in one of the Guards' regiments in Italy during the Second World War. He was a gruff man, who specialised in helping the down-and-out and aristocrats in difficulties and we were proud Mass was celebrated in a Nissen hut, like Jesus' birth in the stable of Bethlehem, in an Oxford which is filled with many splendid temples to the intellect and many beautiful college chapels, some Catholic, built before the Reformation. The Sunday Masses were thronged, celebrated in a variety of forms to meet the various liturgical tastes and confession was always heard during the main Mass as many students broke from the congregation to confess.

I was somewhat miffed that I had not been aware of the verse, because I had prayed the psalms daily, including Psalm 46 on Fridays since I had become a seminarian, read and studied them in an excellent course I had attended in Rome. But there it was, lurking unattached towards the end of the psalm.

Psalm 46 which opens by describing God as "our refuge and strength" is one of the Zion psalms and inspired Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God". God is protecting his people through the cosmic tumults of the last times when the mountains are shaking and trembling and the waters roaring and foaming.

God will not be moved as he gladdens the City of God with the river of life while nations rage and kingdoms totter; as he comes to the rescue.

In the last verse we are called to recognise the wonders of God, his astounding deeds on the earth, because he has caused wars to cease, shattering spears, breaking bows and burning the chariots with fire. Peace has come.

After this woe and chaos, unexpectedly and without warning we have the line, "Be still and know that I am God" as God rejoices in his exaltation on the earth and his people proclaim that the Lord of Hosts is with them and "the God of Jacob" is their refuge.

The line is useful for our purposes because in the midst of this frantic activity we are called to be still, to affirm our faith not only in the God of Jacob, but in that same God who is also the God of Abraham and Isaac and the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, supreme over nations and the world.

We stand today in that unique monotheist tradition, across nearly four thousand years, more convinced than ever that God is our mighty champion and that He loves us, because we are now better informed than King David the psalm's author. Jesus Christ, the true God's only Son, our Messiah, has taught us and redeemed us. We are monotheists, not just spiritual people who love nature and revere the cosmos.

We are never alone in our quiet and silence, even when we feel desolate, because God is always with us. In faith, we can believe this. Many have so believed, and they have been strengthened and consoled.

The psalms are good food for meditation during our times of silence. Meditation is not complicated, or it need not be made so. Meditation means musing, pondering over God and Godliness, especially as we know of God through Jesus Christ. It means talking to God and sometimes being quiet and listening.

I prefer a structure when I pray because my interests and attention are so scattered, that many different irreligious thoughts fill any space I wish to leave for God, but spiritual masters speak of simply being aware of God's presence, allowing Him to fill the time.

The quiet internal repetition of a short prayer or phrase, whether it is called an aspiration or a mantra, is a classical form of meditation. "Jesus, my Lord and my God"; or "God is love"; or "Jesus son of the living God have mercy on us. "Another form of silent prayer I practise is "*Lectio Divina*", a prayerful slow reading of a Scripture passage, because I find it easier and focused. What is the sacred author saying? What does it mean for me? Sum it up at the end with a short prayer of your own.

The psalms provide rich fruit for this form of prayer and somewhere in the psalms there is something for everyone whatever his mood. The psalmist often speaks of conflicts, of unjust enemies, of the obligation to fight evil (*Ps 35, 41, and 83*). He knows how to seek forgiveness of his own sins (*Ps 32*), to thank the Lord (*Ps 136*), realises that unless God is with him his work is in vain (*Ps 127*). The psalmist can rebuke God, ask why he is forgotten by God and oppressed by the enemy (*Ps 42*) and acknowledges that only those with clean hands and pure hearts can ascend the mountain of the Lord and stand in his only place (*Ps 24*).

#### *Our attractive decadent society*

This last psalm leads easily to a consideration of our religious situation in the Western World, when an increasing number claim to be abandoning all religion and even many good people seem uninterested or unable to believe, to know God. What is drying up our hearts?

This could be a topic for our silent meditation, as we ponder whether our personal spiritual dryness is deepened by our lifestyle, by shutting down the reminders from some trauma or a guilty conscience, or simply by always being on the move.

Today in some Church circles we are strongly encouraged to listen, and listen we must, but this can only be done usefully if we are tuned into a Christian wavelength.

In moments of relaxation, the first voices we hear are often those of the world, the flesh, and the Devil (*Eph 2:1-3*), loud and seductive. Jesus did not tell his apostles to go out into the world and listen, but to preach the good news, the Gospel. (*Mt 28:18-20*).

In silence we shut out the noise to listen and look for God's music, especially in the Scriptures and in the liturgy. Meditating on these sources will usually bring us a measure of peace and ultimately peace in Christ brings a peace the world cannot give (*Jn 14:27*), which can be felt in the most wretched situations.

When Elijah, one of the greatest champions of monotheism, a suitable patron for our age, was forced to flee for his

life to Mount Horeb after his violent and successful contest with the prophets of Baal, he did not find God in the mighty hurricane, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a small still voice, a light murmuring sound (*1 Kings 19*). Often in our personal journeys God will be found working silently like yeast in the flour, or a small buried seed, or the dewfall on the grass.

### **Solitude**

Many people in our society are lonely, leading isolated lives, desperately needing friends and community. Obviously, this is not the solitude recommended for Christians, although in faith we know God is always with us. Christians are called to be community members not isolates but Jesus also urged us to pray in our private rooms, in those secret places, so God our Father will reward us. (*Mt 6:5-6*).

When we are alone, we should develop the habit of, turning towards God, if only for a brief time, before turning on the television, starting the crosswords, checking on emails, or worse. When we are sick, or unemployed, or retired or old we might have plenty of time to fill usefully, but not by moping in self-pity.

It is a struggle to use our solitude well, because interior silence does not automatically follow from the absence of noise and people. We have to learn to control our tongue, the senses, the imagination and our memory. These can become iron prisons, dominating our loneliness. As we gain self-mastery, God comes closer, because self-mastery usually brings self-knowledge, and is much aided by our decisions to pause, to be alone. Coming from a different angle the ancient philosopher Socrates said that, “the unexamined life is not worth living”.

Many today find it useful to meditate in the quiet of the countryside, in the Australian bush with the gums and the wattle, whereas Jesus, and many before him such as John the Baptist, and many afterwards such as St Anthony, the hermit saint from early fourth century Egypt, went into the desert to pray.

Silence and solitude often bring to the surface memories and desires, hurts and fears that were buried or placed to one side. On most occasions we can process these, deal with them in faith, perhaps after a chat with someone wise. Having too many confidants is not useful; indeed it is often counterproductive and once in a while we should not be frightened to seek professional help.

Neither should we forget the Rosary, which is an ideal and easy prayer in our solitude, for example, when we cannot sleep. The meditation themes of each mystery and the repetitions are soothing, especially useful in times of tribulation. Solitude is also time for reading, even a religious book. It is not a good sign when an educated person never reads a book.

### **Conclusion**

Life is not a puzzle to be solved but a mystery to be entered and navigated with difficulty, at a price, where turbulence is often needed to come to peace, to establish a precarious harmony, spiritual equilibrium, God’s surroundings.

It is not just the hermits in the desert and the monks in the monasteries over nearly two thousand years who have embraced silence and solitude. We should remember God regularly.

We learn to pray and meditate by beginning to do so, then striving to set up patterns which are not beyond our capacity. We learn on the job, in the midst of our daily routines of work, family, leisure, and worship.

All of us can keep silence (a strange phrase), to our benefit and the glory of God.

P.S. Those who wish to go beyond these basic thoughts to learn for example, why speech is not necessary in Heaven, are invited to read Cardinal Robert Sarah’s 2016 book, “*The Power of Silence*” (Ignatius Press).

Rome, 3 December 2020, Feast of St Francis Xavier

## Our Prayer a Blueprint for Lifelong Formation

Lady Janette C Murray, Dame of Magistral Grace in Obedience

The spiritual formation of the members of the Order of Malta is a personal, lifelong commitment. This begins as a candidate preparing for membership, is developed as a member of the Third Class and as a member in Obedience and brought to fruition as a professed member of the Order. Primarily this is the work of God within each person, assisted by regular spiritual guidance.

The official *Prayer of the Order* might be the blueprint for spiritual formation throughout the life of the member, deepening and intensifying the life of service to the sick and the poor, underpinned by a firm spiritual foundation.

The Order's Prayer as our Blueprint for Service		
1.	Lord Jesus	We say this prayer to Christ and address Him as Lord, Creator, and Man.
2.	Thou hast seen fit to enlist me	A definite choice by Our Lord offered to each aspirant. What is this grace offered to us? What are we called to do? To be? What had led us to this point, to this moment?
3.	for Thy service	The reason the aspirant was chosen by the Lord Jesus to serve and glorify the Father. What service are we called to perform?
4.	amongst the Knights and Dames of St John of Jerusalem	What does it mean to be a member of the Order? What is the significance of having St John the Baptist as our patron? How is his life an example for us? What words did he utter and what actions did he take that can be translated into the way we live?
The Entreaty of the Prayer		
5.	I humbly entreat Thee	We recognise a need for assistance in this call. What are the dangers of pride and vanity in being a member of the Order?
6.	through the intercession	We name those most powerful and understanding to help us: the Mother of God, John the Baptist the proclaimer of Christ's coming, and Blessed Gerard who first responded to God's call to serve the sick and poor in the Holy Land, and all the Saints and Blessed of the Order. How much do we know of their lives and charisms?
7.	to keep me faithful to the traditions of our Order	The reason for our entreaties as we call on powerful heavenly help for the constant gift of fidelity. How can we remain steadfast to the traditions of the Order, the centuries old commitment to a pattern of thoughts, words and deeds?

## The Traditions of our Order

8.	Be it mine to practise the faith	A daily commitment to a personal way of life that deepens both understanding and practice. What are the visibles and invisibles when we practise the Faith?
9.	[be it mine] to defend the faith against the enemies of religion	A continuing call to live our lives in the light, never ashamed of our commitment to follow Christ. The enemies of religion surround us in the many contemporary forms which call us away from the imitation of Christ. In what way may we defend our faith in our small, everyday actions? How can we identify an enemy of religion? How do we fight the temptation of maintaining harmony by hiding our faith? What do we sacrifice to defend our faith?
10.	be it mine to practise charity towards my neighbours, especially the poor and the sick	This is the “tradition” which can develop into involvement in the works of the Order wherever they are evident by our insight into contemporary needs. What is “charity”? How is it practised? “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). In today’s world, who are the poor? the sick?

## Scripture underpins and nourishes all commitment to the Order

11.	Give me the strength I need	Recognition, again, of our need for daily help and perseverance in carrying out our resolution. How do we recognise the temptation of pride in self-sufficiency and being right?
12.	forgetful of myself	Strength for service that can only be carried out by self-forgetfulness in the interest of the other. How do we recognise our false self? How do we decrease while He increases?
13.	learning ever from Thy holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion	Strength and perseverance to carry out a daily learning and study of the Gospels which will gradually deepen our love of the Lord Jesus and give rise to a generous attitude of heart and mind. What are the time-tested approaches that will help us understand Christ who is at the core of the Gospels?
14.	striving ever to promote God’s glory	We ask for this strength to underpin our work in prayer and action so that God will be glorified in all. How do we promote God’s glory ceaselessly in everything, every place, every moment?
15.	[striving ever to promote] the world’s peace	Working always that the final commandment of the Lord Jesus to love be brought to fruition. To work ceaselessly in spite of all barriers to be channels of Our Lord’s peace to all around us.
16.	and all that may benefit the Order of St John of Jerusalem	Personal commitment to whatever may further and benefit the charism of the Order, defence (witnessing, nurturing, protecting) of the faith and loving preference for the poor and the sick. How do we maintain continuous focus and act daily on our charism?



# Manifesting our faith

## Faith without deeds is useless

*The Epistle of James 2: 14-26*

“How does it help, my brothers, when someone who has never done a single good act claims to have faith?

Will that faith bring salvation? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, ‘I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,’ without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that?

In the same way faith, if good deeds do not go with it, is quite dead. But someone may say: So you have faith and I have good deeds? Show me this faith of yours without deeds, then! It is by my deeds that I will show you my faith.

You believe in the one God -- that is creditable enough, but even the demons have the same belief, and they tremble with fear.

Fool! Would you not like to know that faith without deeds is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by his deed, because he offered his son Isaac on the altar? So you can see that his faith was working together with his deeds; his faith became perfect by what he did. In this way the scripture was fulfilled: Abraham put his faith in God, and this was considered as making him upright; and he received the name ‘friend of God’.

You see now that it is by deeds, and not only by believing, that someone is justified. There is another example of the same kind: Rahab the prostitute, was she not justified by her deeds because she welcomed the messengers and showed them a different way to leave? As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds.”

## Who is my neighbour?

*The Gospel of Luke 10:29-37*

But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ In answer Jesus said, ‘A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him and passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, “Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have.”

Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits’ hands?’ He replied, ‘The one who showed pity towards him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go, and do the same yourself.’”



## Seeing your good works

*The Gospel of Matthew 5:15-16*

No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lampstand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven."

## Do it to me

*The Gospel of Matthew Ch 25: 31-46*

When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and you made me welcome,  
lacking clothes and you clothed me,  
sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me."

Then the upright will say to him in reply,

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,  
or thirsty and give you drink?  
When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome,  
lacking clothes and clothe you?  
When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?  
And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you never gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink,  
I was a stranger and you never made me welcome,  
lacking clothes and you never clothed me,  
sick and in prison and you never visited me."

Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?"

Then he will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life."

## It is against the law

*The Gospel of Mark 6: 17-28*

Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married.

For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.'

As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.'

She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.'

The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her.

At once the king sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother."

## Always have your answer ready

*The First Letter of Peter 3:14-16*

No one can hurt you if you are determined to do only what is right; and blessed are you if you have to suffer for being upright. Have no dread of them; have no fear. Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience, so that those who slander your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their accusations. And if it is the will of God that you should suffer, it is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong."

## Charitable Work 1

Very Rev Dr David Pascoe; Parish Priest, Living Waters Catholic Parish, Caboolture, QLD;  
Magistral Chaplain of the Order of Malta

The Prayer After Communion in the Mass for the 33rd Sunday in the Church's Liturgical year reads: *We have partaken of the gifts of this sacred mystery, humbly imploring, O Lord, that what your Son commanded us to do in memory of him may bring us growth in charity.*

At first reading this is a simple prayer. However, it is also full in its depth for the way our spirit might be given direction with the connection between what God does with and for us in the Mass through, with and in Christ in unity with the Holy Spirit, and our being sent into the world with charity in heart, mind and by way of our hands. As we re-member Jesus in the Eucharist we are drawn again and again by the power of the Spirit to follow in Jesus way. We are called to, and enabled to love as Jesus did in his early way, to go out into the world, and dedicate ourselves especially to the poor and vulnerable. We hear and replicate Jesus' question to the blind beggar who called out to him as Jesus passed by: "What can I do for you?" (*Lk 18: 35-43*)

Pope Francis acknowledged this way of discipleship on the First World Day of the Poor in 2017, also now celebrated on each 33rd Sunday of each Year. He reminded us then with the injunction, "Let us love not with words, but with deeds" that we are loved so that we might love. He says: "The Son of God's way of loving is well-known, and John spells it out clearly. It stands on two pillars: God loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10.19), and he loved us by giving completely of himself, even to laying down his life (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).

*"Such love cannot go unanswered. Even though offered unconditionally, asking nothing in return, it so sets hearts on fire that all who experience it are led to love back, despite their limitations and sins. Yet this can only happen if we welcome God's grace, his merciful charity, as fully as possible into our hearts, so that our will and even our emotions are drawn to love both God and neighbour. In this way, the mercy that wells up – as it were – from the heart of the Trinity can shape our lives and bring forth compassion and works of mercy for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in need."* (Message for First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017).

In the Order's long tradition this is the way of its members. It is to meet our brothers and sisters who are poor in the circumstances of their lives. The first and most important resource we have is ourselves as men and women of faithful discipleship to touch the lives of the poor, so that we too will be touched and become one with them in Jesus Christ. Pope Francis makes the connection between this way of the disciple in unity with the broken Body of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist:

*"We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our occasional volunteer work, or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be for making us sensitive to people's needs and the injustices that are often their cause, they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life. Our prayer and our journey of discipleship and conversion find the confirmation of their evangelic authenticity in precisely such charity and sharing. This way of life gives rise to joy and peace of soul, because we touch with our own hands the flesh of Christ. If we truly wish to encounter Christ, we have to touch his body in the suffering bodies of the poor, as a response to the sacramental communion bestowed in the Eucharist. The Body of Christ, broken in the sacred liturgy, can be seen, through charity and sharing, in the faces and persons of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. St John Chrysostom's admonition remains ever timely: "If you want to honour the body of Christ, do not scorn it when it is naked; do not honour the Eucharistic Christ with silk vestments, and then, leaving the church, neglect the other Christ suffering from cold and nakedness." (Hom. in Matthaeum, 50.4: PG 58)."*

This guides us, as Pope Francis says, to a particular way of Christian living that brings peace and joy. It is a reflective way of life at the centre of which is prayer and enables engagement with people in the concrete circumstances of their lives. Jesus responded to his disciples request to learn how to pray as he did with the Our Father. Pope Francis calls us again to this prayer in our attention to the poor and vulnerable with whom we are brothers and sisters.

*“Let us not forget that the Our Father is the prayer of the poor. Our asking for bread expresses our entrustment to God for our basic needs in life. Everything that Jesus taught us in this prayer expresses and brings together the cry of all who suffer from life’s uncertainties and the lack of what they need. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he answered in the words with which the poor speak to our one Father, in whom all acknowledge themselves as brothers and sisters. The Our Father is a prayer said in the plural: the bread for which we ask is “ours”, and that entails sharing, participation and joint responsibility. In this prayer, all of us recognize our need to overcome every form of selfishness, in order to enter into the joy of mutual acceptance.”*

In Christian charity we become one with Christ and so with the poor whom we are called to serve.

## Charitable Work 2

Rev Fr Danny Meagher; Emeritus Rector of the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Homebush, NSW;  
Magistral Chaplain of the Order of Malta

To be faithful to the Order's traditions, our charitable work needs to be person to person, face to face. We ought to get to know the homeless and the needy and become friends. We offer them ourselves and they should become important to us.

It also means we will share our faith with them, if appropriate, as an offering of love, our greatest treasure. We become vulnerable with them, poor ourselves; they are our Lords.

It is not enough, if we are to be faithful to the Order, to just give money or attend meetings. People, God's people, now in their concrete circumstances, come before projects, buildings, and donations.

Our work also needs to be reflected on – first personally so as to improve our interactions. It is good to have someone to discuss these questions with:

- How did I feel?
- How did I react?
- What was difficult for me in the situation?

We also reflect on our work professionally:

- What can the Order contribute here?
- What can be done better?

The “professional” questions can only come once we know and love our people.

## Solidarity and Christian Charity\*

H.E. Rev Monsignor Jean Laffitte; Titular Bishop of Entrevaux; Prelate of the Order of Malta

Many others also wonder if there is a difference between the acts of solidarity towards the needy, the poor and the sick performed by Christians, and the acts performed by those who do not declare themselves to be of Christian faith.

At first glance, an altruistic action towards a poor or sick person includes various intrinsic values, regardless of the person who acts: respect for the poor or the sick, attention to their immediate needs, generosity ...

However, Christians refer to their historical heritage: they know that their faith and their culture fostered many institutions that are today at the centre of all civil legislation: hospitals, maternity wards, nursing homes for the elderly, hospices for the terminally ill, leproseries. And even today, many of these works are managed by Christians, or are carried out in Christian confessional structures: palliative care centres, hospices or others with variations depending on the different regions of the world. Adoption of children with disabilities occurs mainly in the context of Christian families.

The general historical context does not answer the initial question. How is Christian action specific, regardless of this specific denomination?

We can identify the following elements:

- a. Only Christians use the concept of “charity”. It has a deeper meaning than that of “solidarity” used by everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike. For Christians, charity necessarily has a transcendent dimension, insofar as they see God as the origin of charity: God is charity, God is love (*Deus caritas est*).
- b. Their faith renders their humanitarian actions a coherent whole. They refer to them as “services” to people. For a Christian, a human person’s horizon is not limited to this world. The Christian who serves the Sick and the Poor knows with the certitude of faith that everyone, even the weakest and the most undermined in health, has a future in the afterlife. For this reason, Christian charity has two dimensions: material and spiritual. This distinction exists in the Bible: it deals with the binomial “compassion- mercy”. For this reason, Christians have often offered to those whom they help, the possibility of a spiritual help, which is particularly precious for the dying. Given the prospects of a life beyond physical death, the dignity recognised to the person in need must also include their spiritual dimension. This explains why sometimes among Christians we find a radicality in the service to people: the example of Mother Teresa of Calcutta enlightened those who shared her Christian faith as well as a great part of the Hindu cultural context in which she served.

A generous and selfless person, who would notwithstanding profess a radical atheism, would not be able to fully grasp the full meaning of “dignity” of the person whom he would generously like to help.

- c. There is another decisive element for the committed Christian, who serves the poor and the sick: his radicality derives from the fact that he recognises in them the person of Christ, who identified Himself with “*the least of his brothers and sisters*”.

In the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, this element is made implicit by the centuries-old expression “Our Lords the Sick and the Poor”, by which the Knights of Malta have always designated the recipients of their care.

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Going further

## Taking the Promise of Obedience

Prof David Kissane, Knight of Magistral grace in Obedience;  
Regent, The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

*An Update of a Presentation delivered at the 9th Asia Pacific Conference,  
Melbourne, 21st-24th November 2019*

Let us begin this reflection by talking about the nature of our Promise of Obedience. In the Evangelical Counsel of Obedience, Canon Law (Canon 601) describes a spirit of faith and love in following Christ, who was obedient even unto death. If we looked at Christ's suffering, for instance in Andrea Mantegna's painting of his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus begged that his suffering be taken away, but then said, "Not my will, but yours be done." Similarly, his Mother, Mary, as portrayed vividly in several paintings of the Annunciation (for example Botticelli's), was obedient when she said, "I am the Handmaiden of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your Word."

### Obedience

Obedience is a virtue wherein the aspirant seeks to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ, who became obedient even unto death on the cross. There may be a simple concept of obedience to a superior, but I see that superior as representative of Christ, and believe that the Promise of Obedience is ultimately about obedience to God, to the Lord, to the Holy Spirit.

In Obedience, we strive for an ever-greater involvement in the Christian life, in the spirit of our Hospitaller Order. This is what the Emeritus Principal Chaplain of our Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception, Rev Fr Professor Gerald O'Collins, SJ, who taught at the Gregorian University for more than thirty years, describes as a call to holiness, to a more intense spiritual life, with a deep spirit of humility, such that one lets go of one's own desires or preferences, and accepts whatever work needs to be done, not taking one's own training, role, or position too seriously. It is a step down into greater generosity and deeper humility. A survey of the American Association a few years back revealed that the top perceived need that their members had was to deepen their spirituality. Taking Obedience is one pathway to do that.

The Promise of Obedience is thus about our imitation of Christ, to become a servant of Our Lords the Sick. In accordance with our fundamental state in life, this means to be a better spouse, a better parent, a better parishioner, a more involved member of the Order, to be stretched to the limits, in prayer, in attending Mass, and in working for the poor and sick. The wonderful charism given to us by Blessed Fra' Gerard is, in modern times, so beautifully exemplified by the work of palliative care, to accompany and pray with the dying, to care for them deeply, simply because they need this care.

The Late Fra' Richard Divall, as a member of our Subpriory, said "That desire, that longing for Vocation, to devote something of ourselves to Christ, is something that comes directly to you from God and from Christ, and that is how it should be. Seek quietly for that Vocation, and seek through Prayers. You will receive an answer." Pope St John 23rd saw this pathway of Obedience as developing a greater peace, what became known as the secret of his serenity.

Monsignor Dimech of the Maltese Association wrote once that in the context of our charism of *Obsequium Pauperum*, Obedience demands a dedication to the needs of the poor and sick, the elderly, the handicapped, the outcast, the imprisoned and the refugee. In our times, the most pressing challenge to our faith in Australia is euthanasia, and this leads me to see palliative care as one of the most important works that the Order in Australia should be doing, hands on work for the sick and dying who are receiving palliative care.



The scapular is worn as a symbol of this Promise of Obedience and is intended as a reminder of this call to service! In the Promise ceremony, the witnessing of the cross is our symbol of our commitment to serve Christ, serve him in the sick, the disabled, the poor and the suffering.

The charism of *Obsequium Pauperum* is most loved by the members of our Order, for through it we fulfill the work of the original Hospital founded by Blessed Fra' Gerard. Yet the charism of *Tuitio Fidei* is equally important to our Order, protecting, nurturing and standing up as a witness to our Catholic faith. In the ceremony of the Promise of Obedience, the Knight or Dame offers personal witness to the Cross of Christ. Thus, members in Obedience commit themselves ever more deeply to the spiritual formation of the Order. One way that they may do this is as Masters of Probation, assisted by priests, preferably Chaplains of the Order, to provide guidance and supervision to other members during their year of preparation to take their Promise of Obedience. They can also support candidates preparing to join the Order.

So, having said this much about what Obedience is, let us now talk for a moment about the Australian Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception as our home for members who take Obedience.

### **Formation of a Subpriory**

The Australian Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception was approved by the late Grand Master, Fra' Andrew Bertie, on Australia Day 2007. We give thanks for the work of the President of the Australian Association of that era, HE Confrère Antony Macken, for developing the proposal and drafting the Statutes of the Subpriory that were adopted as it was formed. Confrère Macken recorded that the patronage of the Immaculate Conception was inspired by three reasons: 1) that Australia is the Great Southern Land of the Holy Spirit; 2) that the Immaculate Conception is known as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and 3) our great tradition of Marian devotion, reflected in our Order's deep devotion to Lourdes and Our Lady of Philermos.

The Immaculate Conception reflects that state of holiness bestowed upon Mary who was destined to become the Mother of God, but especially given the Order's commitment to taking pilgrimages of the sick to Lourdes, it recalls Our Lady saying to St Bernadette at the Grotto, "I am The Immaculate Conception."

In fact, our late Confrère Ambrose Galvin was the first Australian to take the Promise of Obedience, doing so in 1979, well before Australia established its Subpriory. This is a relevant point for other Associations in the Asia Pacific, that members can take Obedience before a Subpriory is formed. However, the presence of a Subpriory means that a community forms, a community that focuses on spiritual development, and this is enormously enriching to the Order. So, the notion of an Asian Pacific Subpriory being created is, indeed, very worthy of prayer and consideration. The Australian Subpriory clearly grew by an early group of members steadily indicating their commitment.

Membership of our Subpriory has grown steadily across the past fourteen years so that by the time of our Chapter in 2021 we will have over 40 members. Only 4 members have died over the life of our Subpriory. Some Regents of other Subpriories have told me that you can expect an average of 10% of members in an Association to take Obedience. But if members of any Association steadily deepen their spirituality, why would this not become 15% or 20% over time? And I would like to acknowledge that within our Subpriory we have members from the Associations in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Singapore, illustrating how one Subpriory can nurture development and help to form a quorum that could launch another Subpriory, such as an Asian-Pacific Subpriory.

### **Formation for Obedience**

Training is necessary to enter into this call to holiness, to humility, to service. We call this training Formation. Before taking the Promise of Obedience, we need to work hard at deepening our spirituality, and thus establish the routine, the practice, the habit, which will help to sustain this lifestyle. Formation helps us to do this over a year of preparation. We submit to the guidance and supervision of a Master of Probation who is a priest and spiritual director, preferably a Chaplain of the Order. Together they will help nurture our habits of prayer, of conversation with God, of contemplation, and love of our faith. And we join with our Confrères and Consoeurs in prayer together, to attend Mass daily, and to work in the service of the sick and poor.

The Year of Preparation is book-ended by two five-day retreats under the guidance of the Master of Probation. Now, the root derivation of the word Obedience is to listen, to hear...to hear the word of the Lord in the quietness of our prayer...Latin, *obedire*, obey, to give ear, to listen and hear. So, in Luke 6:46, we read,

*“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on a ground without foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”*

So there are two ways to hear... just hear, or to really listen and understand...to obey! Jesus said: *“He who has ears, let him hear.”* And also, *“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”* And he also said, *“Blessed are your ears because they hear.”*

If we listen carefully, we act, we obey, we do the works of the Order. We grow strong roots like the good seed, and produce fruit. To obey, at its root, means to listen, to hear, to understand, and then we will take action.

At the end of the Year of Preparation, the Master of Probation certifies that the candidate has reached some level of deeper spiritual maturity, a readiness and ability to witness the Faith, strong engagement in the practice of *Obsequium Pauperium*, a good understanding and knowledge of the Order, an appropriate attitude towards the Order and its Superiors, respect for and affinity with fellow Members, and both humility and discretion.

So the spiritual life of the Knight or Dame in Obedience is enriched by their prayer, especially their attendance at daily mass and receiving of holy communion, their devotion to the hands-on works of the Order, and their continuing involvement in the Subpriory, including attending one of its annual retreats. The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception offers two retreats each year, in different months and parts of the country. This flexibility allows for the busy lives of members. The organisation of these retreats has become a wonderful team effort, contributed to by several members, while our Chaplains alternate in providing spiritual guidance, and some members attend both retreats.

Choice is also available for sources of daily prayer. Most use *Universalis*, some the traditional Office, others the Magnificat. The Australian Subpriory developed an editorial subcommittee to create our prayer book, *A Spiritual Companion*, to assist our members in their prayer life.

We have developed a Formation Guide for members in Preparation, a relatively brief approach that has worked well for our members. Again, a subcommittee took responsibility for the drafting of this document for the Subpriory. This proves helpful to promote a standard of formation across our members during their year of Preparation. We include a reading list, which is fluid and always needs review and enrichment. Spiritual reading is a vital activity for members in Obedience.

### **Continued formation through the Subpriory**

The Subpriory creates a spiritual community to mutually support one another in the development of our spirituality, our humility, and our engagement with the hands-on works of the Order. Our formation never ceases. It is a lifelong journey. Truly a vocation.

Members of the Subpriory are very active in our Association, committed to its works, its growth, and its nurturance of the spirituality of all members. The Subpriory has been a wonderful gift to our Association. The Promise of Obedience is worthy of prayer and deep consideration by all members of our Order.

Members who are interested in this vocation within the Order are invited to contact Prof David Kissane,  
Regent of The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception at:  
*[david.kissane@monash.edu.au](mailto:david.kissane@monash.edu.au)*

## Professing the Evangelical Vows: A Consecrated Life in the Order

Daniel Kwok, Knight of Magistral Grace in Obedience; National Coordinator for Formation, Australian Association; Councillor, The Subpriory of The Immaculate Conception

*(CCC 915) “Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty, and obedience. It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognised by the Church, that characterises the life consecrated to God.”*

As one seeks deeper union with Our Lord, one may well hear His call to a consecrated life.

The Order of Malta has been a religious order of the Catholic Church since its confirmation by Pope Paschal II in 1113. It is a *lay religious order* with knights who profess the evangelical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience but are not ordained. They are Knights of Justice or Professed Members who make up the First Class of our membership.

Of the 13,500 members today, 42 are Professed Members. It is a small number, but their existence is the reason the Order of Malta continues to be a religious order. Like religious of any order in the Church, prior to taking the vows, they would discern and undergo a period of formation. Vows taken, a consecrated life follows which is particular to a rule of life and the charism of the order.

In April 2017, Fra’ Giacomo Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto, after he was elected Lieutenant to the Grand Master, initiated the project to reform the formation and rule of life of Professed Members in response to a call by Pope Francis.

Since then, much work has been done through a Working Group co-ordinated by the Prelate H.E. Rev Monsignor Jean Laffitte. Its proposals were presented in January 2019 to H.M.E.H. Fra’ Giacomo, by then the Grand Master, and the Grand Chancellor, H.E. Albrecht Freiherr von Boeslager.

The reforms will “include a more rigorous observance of the vows taken”, said Fra’ Giacomo in his closing speech at the Ordinary General Chapter in May 2019. In particular, he referred to conformance to Canon Law in living the vow of poverty, and living in community. He also referred to a two-year novitiate and a formation program focused on theological studies, spiritual formation, service to our Lords the sick and the poor, and community life experience.

Sadly, Fra’ Giacomo passed away on 29 April 2020 without having been able to preside over the General Chapter he would have liked to convene to ratify the Reform of the Statutes of the Order which by then was ready for ratification.

The Prelate and the Undersecretary of the Congregation of the Clergy, Monsignor Andrea Ripa examined articles in the Order’s Constitutional Charter and Code related to the First Class and details of the Reform project, and verified their compatibility with Canon Law.

In the proposals, for future novices, the process of becoming Professed Members will begin with approval of their candidacy by a Discernment Committee comprising the Grand Master, the Grand Commander, the Grand Chancellor, the Prelate, two chaplains, and a Second Class member.

The novitiate will be preceded by a postulancy of at least six months, intended to verify the motivations of the candidate for the choice of religious life in the Order, as well as his willingness to serve our Lords the sick and the poor.

During the two-year novitiate, conducted at an academic institute of religious sciences, the novice will receive spiritual and intellectual formation and live a fraternal life in community. “Order of Malta” courses will be carried out by visiting professors. Services to the poor and the sick will be performed during summer breaks and holidays. Guided by a Novice Master, and assisted by spiritual directors, the novice will conduct a life of prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, daily participation in the Eucharist, meditation of the Word of God and regular recourse to Confession. Discernment to profess the evangelical vows continues throughout the entire time of the novitiate.

We must note that all the above indications are proposals and will have to be examined later by the General Chapter that will deliberate on the larger project of the Reform of the Order. Hence this first edition of the handbook should be considered as a transitory document. Of course, any further position taken during that Chapter will be integrated in the following definitive edition of this handbook.

Members who are interested in living a consecrated life in the Order are invited to contact  
The Hon James Douglas, President of the Australia at [jdouglas@orderofmalta.org.au](mailto:jdouglas@orderofmalta.org.au) for advice from  
Grand Magistry regarding the steps to take.



## Appendix

### **What is in the Journal of Spirituality?**

The Journal of Spirituality series is a publication of the Order under the direction of the Prelate of the Order. Articles reflect aspects of the spirituality of the Order and are written by members with considerable spiritual experience and knowledge. The entire series of Journal of Spirituality may be opened in the PDF version of this handbook with this hyperlink: [Journal of Spirituality series with index to content](#)

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*Our Brotherhood will be an everlasting one,  
for the soil in which it is rooted is the misery of the world,  
and God willing, there will always be people who seek to reduce  
this misery and make distress easier to bear.*

Blessed Gerard  
1113, Jerusalem

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