

## **1 - Why Do You Want to Become a Monastic? What are You Saying 'Yes' to?**

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People approach our Community to become members for various reasons. Many of these reasons are legitimate, and can lead to a healthy monastic practice. Others may not be, but may be transformed over time into something sustainable. In other cases the reason will be insufficient to sustain the journey.

Ultimately, whatever the reason, the monastic practice should fulfill the Charism of our Community: "To live the monastic values of Daily Prayer, Reflective Study and Personal Service that lead to personal transformation at the hands and heart of Christ. Although we live and work in different places, we have common roots that lead to unique responses to God's love in our lives."

We enter the Community and ground ourselves wherever we happen to be in life. The tools of Prayer, Study and Service help us to do this. We grow from our place, beginning to discover more of our true self, often coming to a completely different understanding of who and what we are. We begin to see the world differently, and our prayer, study and service begin to blend together into one force as it flows through each moment of time, becoming a single movement on the breath of the Holy Spirit.

We go out from our personal sanctuary to serve in the world, serving the Triune God in unique ways – not based on the expectations of others, but on the gentle nudges of the Holy Voice within that shout louder than those around us. As we grow, we begin to see people as the temples of God, things as gifts from God, nature as a sacred expression of God, and our actions as sacraments of God's love. We become whole.

### **Why Do People Want to Become a Monastic?**

As Guardian of this Community, I have had the opportunity to explore the various reasons why people want to become monastic. Following is a brief discussion of the main reasons I've encountered.

**Structure.** One of the most common reasons why people come to a monastic community is to have more structure in their lives. They may sense a need for more accountability and discipline, usually so that they don't "implode," and endanger their Christianity. It may be a "loss prevention" perspective, rather than one promoting spiritual growth.

Certainly, monasticism can provide that structure, particularly within a cloistered setting. There may be little as a solitary. In our dispersed Community, we can offer some structure and accountability, but again, the individual is pretty much on their own most of the day. Those who want structure must already be somewhat disciplined in their lives.

Eventually, it needs to be asked, "How far can this structure sustain them in their monastic practice?" Will the person get tired of it? Bored? What is the goal of having this structure in the first place? What do they hope to accomplish by it? What is the person saying "Yes" to? What is the connection they have for more structure and a personal relationship with Christ?

**Self-Development.** In this case the person is seeking to discover their "real self," removing any mental encumbrances that may be keeping them from a full life. The person may believe that the tools and methods provided by the monastic society will help them accomplish this.

Not all monastic societies are primarily focused on the development of a person's mental health. Many presume that this will occur in the context of their specific Charism, whether it be a music ministry, preaching the Gospel, or serving as missionaries in foreign lands. Resources within the Community may be available to assist the person in moving toward mental wholeness, but in more serious cases, professional help may be needed.

The Community of the Gospel is not a substitute for caring therapy or counseling. Certainly, it provides a solid spiritual foundation, and we do focus on the relationship of psychology and theology, but CG shouldn't replace professional services if needed.

Inquirers with this interest in mind should explore some questions like, "If I find my real self, what will I do with it?" What is the connection they have for finding their real self and a personal relationship with Christ?

**Life Offering.** For some people, the love of Jesus in their lives is strong. They know that God loves them, and they love God, and they are looking for a way to respond to that love. Sometimes they decide that they want to devote their lives to prayer, study and service as an offering to this love.

This may be one of the stronger, more sustainable reasons for becoming a monastic. But there are other ways, too, of making one's life an offering to God. Anyone engaged in productive work that contributes to society could view their work as an offering to God – teachers, counselors, tin smiths, garbage collectors, musicians, construction workers, professors – you name it!

Questions to explore further that might lead to a deeper commitment and understanding could include: "How do you know Jesus has this love for you?" or "What other ways can you make your life an offering to God in response to His/Her love for you?" "Why would you choose the monastic life rather than \_\_\_\_\_?"

**Relationship with Christ.** Some people seek to have a deeper relationship with Christ in their lives. They believe that the tools and methods of the Community will help them do this. Although this is similar to self-development, it has a specific intent to find Jesus inside their hearts and build a closer relationship with him.

Monasticism can certainly help the person get there, but what is the expectation when this happens? What changes does the person expect in their lives? Why are they doing this?

**Miscellaneous.** There are a few other reasons that occasionally pop up that are worth some space, too:

- "I don't like my current Community. I want to join yours."

While we certainly may be a better fit for this inquirer than his or her current community, it may also be a case of carrying the problem along. What is the problem you have with your current community? What have you done to try to resolve the issue?

- "I'm just interested in monasticism."

This may be the beginning of a commitment to the Community, but it should also be explored in other ways first. Has the person been on a retreat? What has been his or her exposure to monasticism thus far? What is it that interests him or her in monasticism?

- "I want to live apart from the world."

Well, me too, sometimes. But that's not the ultimate purpose of monasticism. Our Community hopes to have each member discover the talents, skills, and interests of their true selves so that they can become instruments of Christ in the orchestra of the world, serving Him in their own unique way.

- "It will help me serve penance for wrongdoings in the past."

Sometimes in our fast-paced world, we move too quickly past the harm or hurt that we have inflicted on ourselves or others. In acts of collective and individual confession, God forgives us and restores us. But our wrong doing may nonetheless have on-going painful consequences in the lives of others that cannot easily be dismissed. One devotional approach to the lingering awareness of having done harm is a healthy sense of penance that co-exists with a sense of God's forgiveness. Paul, the Apostle, carried this penitent sense long after he had experienced faith in Jesus. Healthy penance need not be morbid, ascetic or self-flagellating. Examples of penitent acts are community service, reaching out to those harmed when possible, or quiet meditative reflection on our brokenness. The great liturgical season for penance is Lent. Penance does its work of repair best when it is shared from time to time with others, such as partners, clergy, spiritual directors or counselors and other monastics. It may endure a short time or a long time. If it is gently acknowledged and given space, in time it will fade. While penance may be a part

of a monastic's rule of life, penitence as a sole motivator cannot sustain the monastic journey since it fixates on past sin instead of present moment possibility.

- "It will help me in my career."

Being a monastic might add an attractive item on one's resume. While this may be true, it is most ingenuous to simply "add another badge" to our list of things done. The lack of sincerity of one's monastic pursuit will quickly show, sabotaging the monastic journey, and it will quickly be brought to an end.

**Summary.** In many cases there is no single reason for a person to have an interest in monastic life. Multiple factors may be influencing his or her decision. The Postulancy is a time for discernment in this matter, and great care must be taken to explore the answers to the question, "What are you saying 'yes' to?"

It's also important to know the answer to the question, "What are you saying 'No' to?" Signing up to be a monastic often comes with a price. Family members and friends may not understand what you're doing or why you're doing it. Some may turn away from you because of their dislike for anything religious. You may decide that you need a change in jobs – one that better represents and serves your personal mission.

It also takes time to be a monastic; daily prayer time, study time, and in service to others. You may be spending hours each day doing things that keep you from doing other things of which you used to do more. In many cases this represents a major life change.

Are you sure this is for you? "Why do *YOU* want to become a monastic?" and "What are you saying 'Yes' to?"

Try drafting an answer to those questions here:

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