



# Monastic Spirituality

A Primer



COMMUNITY OF THE GOSPEL

# Monastic Spirituality

## A Primer to Understanding Monastic Spirituality

This booklet is meant to provide the reader with some of the key topics that monastics initially deal with on their spiritual journey. It is not meant to be all inclusive, but should be used in conjunction with other material, such as the Outline of the Faith found in the Book of Common Prayer. The monastic is also encouraged to study the BCP Catechism and Baptismal Covenant as the basis for this journey.

The format offered here is in a question and answer format for ease of reference. This Monastic Primer does not represent the views of every Monastic or Christian Community. The reader and student are invited to explore each entry further and determine for him or herself if there is value in its offering. Embrace what helps, and leave the rest.

We use the masculine pronoun “He” in this Primer as a convention with the understanding that it is a limiting pronoun, and falls short of describing God’s full Nature. We capitalize this pronoun to emphasize this distinction.

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## **What is the most important underlying principle that guides us in Prayer, Study and Service?**

That God is love itself. This is the principle law above all else, and must be used as the standard by which all scripture is interpreted, and all actions taken. If the interpretation or action does not support a loving God, then it is probably in error.

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” 1 John 4:16

## **What is the nature of love (charity)? What is its purpose?**

When we love someone, we want them to reach their full potential as a human being based on their true self (we don't want to feed their ego needs). We have no self-interest in their development, as their progress is sufficient enough reward.

Love has some specific characteristics that make it genuine. First of all, as mentioned above, it is disinterested. This does not mean there is no interest in the growth of the person (or of self). What disinterest means is that there is no desire or intent on any reward or other benefit. Seeing the person become who s/he was meant to be is reward enough.

Secondly, love must be universal. That is, it should be available to anyone who needs it, at any time or anywhere. If it unfairly discriminates, given to some conditionally or not to others at all, then it is not really love.

Love is not really an emotion, even though an emotional situation may bring us to the awareness that some love is needed. Love is more an act of will, of choice, not as a reaction to an emotion.

Finally, humility is part of true love. It should not be to glorify one's ego at the expense of others. A good question to ask yourself is, “Would I do this act of love even if no one ever knew I did it?” Hopefully, the answer is yes.

“Love is patient; love is kind; it is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong-doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

### **What is the Nature of God? How should He be regarded?**

As noted in the Perennial Philosophy on page 21 (a good book by Aldous Huxley to consider studying), God is the spiritual absolute. He must be regarded as both transcendent, above all else, and as an intimate, loving Father to all. He is both all-powerful, and all-loving.

Because God is love itself, Monastics have come to know God as merciful, compassionate, and forgiving. He does not seek vengeance, retaliation, or compensation. He seeks to heal, and not to punish. He seeks unity and not division.

The nature of God can best be learned through the life of Jesus, as well as what we discover in our own true selves that is revealed by the Holy Advocate.

### **What is God's intention for His creation? What are His plans?**

Since God is love, His main purpose, as revealed to us through scripture and personal revelation, is to expand His love to all creation. It is God's desire to unite all His creation within His loving embrace.

### **How is my own purpose in life tied in with this? What is *my* purpose?**

Each person has two essential purposes in life. The first, an inner purpose, is to return to the unity of the Eternal God. To do this, we need God's Grace to dissolve the false self in us, and allow the true self to emerge. We must "die to ourselves" that our true selves may live in the knowledge of God. The false self is a barrier separating us from God. (There is more on the true self and false self in a later section.)

There must be an imitation of Christ before there can be identification with the Father. But God calls all His children to this union, and one way or another, all will finally come to it.

The second purpose is an outer one. That is, to know, love and serve God in our own unique way, using the specific gifts and interests that God has given us. These gifts are not to be valued based on society's norms, but by the love and compassion of God.

Both of these purposes can be realized with the help of God through our Baptismal vows and monastic practices.

### **What prevents a person from knowing God?**

When a person insists on becoming a “separate self,” totally encapsulated by a dysfunctional ego, they have built a most formidable obstacle to knowing God. A person must “die to themselves” in order to make room for realizing the presence of God in his or her life. Each person must lose their (false) life in order to find their true (soul) life. The Grace of God is necessary to making this happen.

As this transition takes place, the person needs to fill the void with God’s love and a new way of thinking. (See Unitive Thinking below.)

### **Why does a person become separated from God in the first place?**

Since God is love, and we are part of His creation, we can love, too. But for love to exist, *it must be a choice* or it is not love. If we were forced to love, it would be programming and not freedom of choice. That is not love. Because love *is* a choice, there is also a risk that the person will intentionally or inadvertently choose another path – one that seeks material goods, power, or prestige out of greed, fear, or some other related reason. There are many things in this world that can come between us and a knowledge of God’s love. Most of these are attachments that serve the ego.

## **What are Attachments?**

Attachments are strong, psychological desires and needs related to a dysfunctional ego. These attachments will interfere with the person's connection to God and with discovering and developing their own true self. These attachments can be to people or things or ideas. They are inherently unhealthy because they simply feed ego needs such as power, greed, fear, shame, or prejudice, to name a few.

Ego attachments should not be confused with attachments of the true self. These are generally healthy as they promote further understanding of God's love and interconnectivity with other people and nature. They serve to unite, rather than divide.

Until we put an end to ego-attachments, there will be incomplete love. St. John of the Cross wrote, "The person that is [wrongly] attached to anything will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it is a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it still cannot fly..."

Attachments generally cannot be removed through direct effort. They tend to slip away primarily through recognition and awareness that one exists, and then observing how much it robs one of the good things in life. Present Moment Awareness is a key tool to paying attention to one's thoughts, words, and deeds.

The new monastic is encouraged to study Antony DeMello's book, *The Way to Love*, for a thorough discussion about attachments.

## **How can our separation from God happen inadvertently?**

Slipping away from union with God can be very subtle. The Holy Scriptures are full of stories of people who inadvertently, or intentionally, turned their backs to God.

The earliest warnings of this possibility go all the way back to the imagery of the Garden of Eden. God warned Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). Up to this point, Adam and Eve saw the beauty and unity of the Garden and all its wonders. There was no question that God created all these things, and that there was love in abundance.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil represents mankind's tendency to use the powers of discernment and discrimination (seeing things in specific ways or categories, such as big or small, fast or slow, colorful or dull, etc.) in places and at times where they should *not* be used at all.

Certainly, it is important to be able to distinguish between things, to learn about them by placing them in categories. But these activities can be harmful, too, because placing labels on things causes us to dismiss the greater multiplicity and interconnectedness that everything has with each other. When we do not see things deeply enough, in all their aspects, we tend to start thinking of some things as “good” and other things as “evil” when, in fact, they are neither all good nor all evil.

This binary-type thinking (“either / or”) begins the process of separation. It leads to unfair discrimination against some groups of people because of race, age, ethnicity, or other distinguishing characteristics. As we have seen many times throughout history, this can turn to prejudice, hatred or even violence toward others.

It could be argued that binary thinking is *the foundational problem* facing mankind today. Perhaps that is why it was emphasized so specifically as a warning by God in Eden!

## What is “Unitive Thinking”?

Unitive thinking is a way of looking at people and things *in their entirety*, and as part of an interconnected world. It is the opposite of binary thinking, the type of thinking God cautioned us *not* to use in the wrong places.

Binary thinking places everything in life into “this or that” categories, but not both. Things are either tall or short, light or heavy, black or white, etc. This is useful thinking to help us learn about things and understand the world, but it is harmful when used to excess.

Unitive thinking basically looks at people and objects more deeply, and considers not only “this” or “that” but “and/also.” People and things are *much more* than just “this” or “that.” They are very interconnected with other people and things. We need to look at people and things at a higher level, discovering where they are similar and connected, and not just stop when we see differences. There are far more commonalities than differences *which should make the differences insignificant* – and yet binary thinking inflates the differences into a false importance.

Unitive thinking dissolves paradox and conflict. We cannot understand the true nature of God unless we develop unitive thinking. (See below on “Third Force Thinking”)

“Discover the One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray.” - Kabir

## How can we develop our Unitive Thinking?

Unitive thinking starts with the understanding and acceptance that all of life is far more complex, both internally and externally, than we can see with our eyes or imagine with our binary thinking.

Unitive thinking is learning to see deeply into situations, people, and things, beyond what can be seen only with the two eyes. Seeing more deeply into things and people, we can see connections with many other parts of God's creation. Labels which we put on things and people (which limit our perceptions a great deal) begin to dissolve. We begin to see the multiplicity and complexity inherent in things and people, and soon discover that there are far more commonalities between us than there are differences. And the more commonalities we discover, the more we see how things are so interconnected.

These connections are very difficult, if not impossible, to see when a person is primarily a binary thinker. But unitive thinking takes a little more time, effort, and intention. Perhaps that is why it has fallen into disuse.

Things that could be done to develop our unitive thinking include:

- *Studying examples* of how unitive thinking has been used. Gospel stories and parables; biographies of those using unitive thinking such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., or many of the monastic mystics.
- *Accepting paradox and contradictions* as being understandable and reconcilable at the higher levels of unitive thinking.
- *Prayer and contemplation.* Creating time to become aware of God's Presence in your life, and to study the stories of the Bible from multiple perspectives.
- *Practice using* unitive thinking by exploring the interconnectivity in each and every present moment. Sit with another person and make a list together of all the things that are the same about both of you.
- *Observing* worldly activities. Recognize examples of when people are striving for higher levels of connection and understanding, and when they are stuck in a binary thinking mode.

Jesus says in the Beatitudes that only the pure in heart and the poor in spirit can come to the unitive knowledge of God. People must be at the point of emptying themselves of their false self, allowing the true self to emerge and understand. People must be ready for this – they can't be forced into it or it will be misunderstood.

Because God is love, He will offer the opportunity for unitive knowledge "until all sentient beings realize, in fact, who they really are." (Perennial Philosophy, p.21, Aldous Huxley.)

## What is Interconnectivity?

Interconnectivity is a fundamental principle in God's creation. It becomes more apparent the greater we can see the multiplicity of people and things. The deeper we can see, the more connections (similarities) we find between things.

Jesus declares this interconnectedness at the highest levels: "God and I are One," he said in John 10:30. He goes further in John 15 to emphasize how we are all connected with each other and with God. We also read in scripture how even the Godhead is interconnected; three in One, and yet three.

Knowing that everything and everyone is interconnected in God's love should bring us to a fresh approach to interacting with others and with our environment. There is no separation, as our dysfunctional ego would have us believe, because all things come from a common Source – God.

"My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself." St. Catherine of Genoa

"The ground of God and the ground of the soul are one and the same." Meister Eckhart

"I live, yet not I, but Christ in me." St. Paul

"When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness, we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been." Sen T'sen

And one other from Meister Eckhart, "When do people have mere understanding? When they can see one thing separated from another. And when are people *above* mere understanding? When they see all in all, then people stand beyond mere understanding."

Ruysbroeck notes that, "The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind. Each possesses it whole, entire, and undivided, and all together not more than one alone. In this way we are all One, intimately united in our eternal image, which is the image of God and the source in us of all our life."

## **What is meant by “true self” and “false self”?**

One way to understand the human mind is to consider some of its “constructs.” That is, major components of the human mind that have been identified as performing various functions. We have to keep in mind, however, that these various components are highly integrated, and should not be limited by labels themselves!

A popular system of describing mental constructs includes the true self (soul), the false self (dysfunctional ego), the public self (that which we wish others to see about us), and the “shadow self” or personal unconscious. There is also a “collective unconscious” that goes deeper into the history and culture of mankind in general.

At the core of our being is the soul, or true self. This is specially crafted by Our Creator and placed into our human shell, someday to return to Him. Our true self is connected with God and with other people. It consists of all the special gifts, talents, and interests given to us by God. So, even though it is in unity with all others, it also has unique characteristics that make it special.

The true self is the core of free will, and contains all the possibilities of love. With God’s Grace, it can decide what happens inside the person. It should be in charge.

The false self, or dysfunctional ego, emerges when the true self relinquishes control to decision-making or outside forces. A healthy “ego” is a good thing, as it helps us process all the information we receive from the outside world. Where things go wrong is when we begin to allow the ego to make decisions and judgments for us that should be made by the true self. Egos that go awry become dysfunctional and can encapsulate the true self.

### **What is the Public Self?**

The public self is what we want others to see about us. It's the image we wish to project to the outer world about who we want them to think we are.

We are most comfortable and healthy when the public image most closely represents the true self, and not the ego-self. The closer together these three are in consistency, the healthier and happier we are as people.

### **What is the Shadow Self?**

The shadow self is the totality of things we want to keep out of our consciousness – bad experiences, troubles, unpleasant ideas, and the like. For some of us, there is an expansive array of things we don't want to remember.

Ultimately, to be truly healthy, we need to delve into these things and learn to understand and accept them as part of who we are. Putting them into the right frame, considering the interconnectedness of all things, and seeing deeply into each event, will help us to integrate these things into our lives. It is very important to have professional help available to do this as needed. It takes time, so be patient!

## **What is the Collective Unconscious?**

This concept is not accepted by everyone, but it is one worth considering, as it explains much about who we are, and why people sometimes behave the way they do.

The idea is that it is similar to our physical history. We are products of our ancestry, stemming back millions of years (or about 6,000 years if you're not into evolution). That means our physical nature contains the results and remnants of genetic strands that were shaped over a long time. The way we look, and walk, and talk is in large part how our ancestors looked, walked, and talked.

In a similar way, much of our psychological make-up has been shaped by what happened in the past as well. Human experiences have helped shape our thought patterns over time, too. Survival needs, procreation needs, and personal growth needs have affected all of us one way or another. Much of the psychological past has come down to us through behavior patterns, often called archetypes, which for the most part, remain unconscious.

The archetypes of our ancient ancestors can awaken and emerge within us at times and places we least expect them to. Yes, they can help us to survive and grow, but sometimes they may encourage us to act much differently than our true self would be comfortable with. Sometimes we ascribe these behaviors to "demons" or tempting forces around us, but they are actually quite normal. They are not sinful unless they lead us to improper actions. We must recognize them for what they are when they occur, and either use them because they are helpful, or dismiss them as remnants of the past.

We can become familiar with the various archetypes that may occur (there are some common ones), so that we recognize their presence when they occur.

### **Is there a Collective *Conscious* then, too?**

Yes, but this is a little different concept than the collective *unconscious*. The collective conscious occurs in present time when one or more people are affected by the thoughts or influence of another. This can come in various forms, and we can see it happening in certain common situations. For example, the enthusiasm of a crowd at a sports game can be contagious. The laughter of one person can cause others to laugh, too. And seeing the sadness of a person can bring us to tears, as well.

More serious forms of the collective conscious can be seen during times of civil unrest and the mob mentality that can ensue. People in crazed crowds can find themselves doing things that they normally would not do. Being aware that this can happen will help one to recognize it, and remove themselves from that situation.

Other more ethereal examples include “free-floating anxiety.” Keen perceptions can detect this when there is a raised amount of anxiety “in the air.” This could emanate from people threatened by war, famine or disease, even in far off places.

A proper response to this is prayer. Send your love out to meet this feeling and put it in God’s hands.

### **What is meant by monastic “One-Pointedness”?**

Monastics strive for “one-pointedness,” that is, their minds are solely on re-uniting with God as one in Spirit, pursuing the knowledge of eternal reality. This is the like-mindedness we have, while recognizing the diversity among as well. One-pointedness keeps us from worshipping other false gods, like power, prestige, or privilege.

While much of the (Western) Church is based on “belief and behavior,” while classic monasticism is based on “being.” We believe in fully recognizing and identifying with the God within us – that is NOT to say we *are* God, or even at God’s level. It *is* saying that God is part of us, and we are a part of God. To accept and appreciate this is to move toward unity with God, a Oneness, shedding our false selves, and truly becoming who God made us to be, so that we can know, love and serve God in our own unique way.

## **What is Present Moment Awareness?**

One of the great tools we have as monastics is to pay attention to the present moment. The present moment is the only known portal to the Kingdom of God. It is not available in the past, nor is it available in the future (because the future never gets here!).

Yes, we can learn from the past, and we should honor it. But having our minds in the past on a consistent basis robs us of the wonders and powers of the present moment. Each present moment provides a wealth of opportunities to pray, study and serve others. We can't do that in the past or the future. Yes, we can, and should, plan for the future, but we must live in the present.

It is important to note that generally those who idolize the past develop a reactionary memory that cause the most trouble in the present moment. They want to return to what was, and will go to great lengths to achieve it. It's also true of those who demand the utopian dream of the future. They, too, can get very intense about what is needed to achieve the utopian dream. Either of these positions can lead to violence.

Certainly, there will always be a Kingdom of God. But God wants us to work on this *now*. People have needs now, there are hurts now, there is beauty to enjoy now, there is love now! How we deal with the *now* determines what kind of a future we will have.

Present Moment Awareness asks us to slow up, pause and look at what's around us in a deeper way. What interconnects do we see? What is the multiplicity of what's happening? Can we feel ourselves using binary thinking, or can we move closer to unitive thinking?

## What is Third-Force Thinking?

Third-force thinking is a type of unitive thinking. It has been used for centuries by great thinkers to resolve seemingly unresolvable issues, and recently it has been made popular by contemporary contemplatives like Fr. Richard Rohr and Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault. The idea is to overcome opposite positions on some issue by introducing a third, overarching position. This new position doesn't eliminate the original two positions, but finds a way to reconcile the differences by some higher principle. It is overcoming seeming opposites by uncovering a reconciling third idea that is bigger than both parts. It raises the discussion to a whole new level.

A prime example of this is when Jesus encounters the adulterous woman who is about to be stoned for her offenses. (John 8) On the one hand we have a woman who has committed an offense against the law (but we don't know *why* she did this, which would be an exercise in unitive thinking), and on the other hand we have the opposing forces ready to stone her. What to do to bring out the love of God?

Jesus brings in the third-force idea: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

This brought the whole situation out of the binary "good-bad" world, into the unitive, connected world. We are *all* in need of God's Grace. We must consider *why* a person does what s/he does. Perhaps in some interconnected way, we all have contributed to the problem!

When we look deeply enough at any situation, we can trace root causes to defects in social systems, peer pressures, or even bad nutrition! This does not excuse the acts of the offender, of course, but it does demand a different response to restoration. This is the restorative justice of unitive thinking, not just the punitive justice that we find in binary thought systems.

## What is Salvation?

Salvation culminates, of course, when we fully enter the Kingdom in the next life. But salvation is not necessarily a singular event, and God fully intends that it can start here and now. “For the Grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly.” Titus 2:11-12

We move toward salvation, liberation, and enlightenment by perceiving the unperceived good that is already within us. It is by shedding the scales over our eyes (like those of St. Paul on the road to Damascus), allowing our true selves to emerge into the Light of God’s love. This is the process of Kenosis, described in a later section.

Mainline Christianity teaches that Christ saved us *from* our sins through his death on the cross. A ransom was paid through this death that somehow redeemed us in the eyes of God – a debt that went all the way back to man’s fall in the Garden of Eden. While this perspective suggests a cosmic transaction beyond our comprehension, its completion doesn’t give us free reign to do as we please now, even though the score has been settled.

Another perspective on the crucifixion event is that Jesus saved us *through* our sins. The basis of this idea is that no matter what evil we could do, even to God’s own Son, God would *not* stop loving us, and would continue to work toward bringing us all into union with Him one way or another. God would prove His love for us, and prove that the message of love that Jesus brought to us from God was true, by resurrecting Jesus from the dead. God would not take revenge on the people for killing His Son, but would instead show His love for them. Not even death on the cross could separate God and His love for us! Realizing the implications of this immense love, people should now turn to this loving God and transform their lives.

Whichever scenario you prefer depends on how you view God. There’s plenty of scriptural support to go either way. But as we learned earlier about unitive thinking, both may indeed be true, too.

Bottom line, salvation is the process by which we come to fully realize our true self; the soul that God gave to us as a gift, now returns to reunite with Him in eternal Oneness.

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” Rev. 7:10

## **What is Kenosis?**

St. Paul describes kenosis in his letter to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, and thought it proper to be equal with God, still humbled himself and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of mankind. And being found in this fashion, he emptied himself, and become obedient unto death, even a death on a cross.” (Phili. 2:5-8)

What St. Paul describes is the process of “dying to oneself” to make room for the true self to grow properly. The false self needs to be emptied out, to die, so to speak, so that the new life can be found. This is also referred to as being “born again.”

It is usually not a one-time event, but rather a process. And it is almost always a process of subtraction and not addition. When we subtract the characteristics and folly of the ego-self, the true self (being good and true) will naturally start to blossom.

## What are Spiritual Exercises?

Public worship uses such things as rites, sacraments, ceremonies and liturgies. They are designed to remind the congregation of the true nature of things, and their proper relationship to one another. Hopefully, they create greater awareness of God's love and the connections we all have with each other as part of God's family.

What all these are to public worship, spiritual exercises are to private devotion used by monastics and others dedicated to spiritual practices outside of the corporate environment. Spiritual exercises are similar to public worship activities but have some differences.

Examples of spiritual practices include your Daily Office, meditation, fasting, contemplation, yoga and tai chi sessions, walks in nature, journaling, and similar activities.

The purpose of these spiritual exercises is to prepare the intellect and emotions for higher forms of prayer in which the soul is essentially passive in God's presence, letting Him work on you without interference. The other thing that happens is a greater awareness of self. This is essential in deeper connections with God and His creation, and helps make us more effective in our service to others.

Spiritual exercises do *not* take precedence over the call to charity. We don't abandon the "action" part of our monastic practice for the contemplative side when the present moment situation calls for our service. This would be to neglect the purpose for the sake of the means.

The simplest and most widely used spiritual exercise is repetition of the divine name or of some phrase affirming God's love and the soul's dependence on Him. Many use the Jesus prayer, or some form of it ("Jesus, have mercy on me..."). Others use something like, "Jesus, My Savior, I am yours." Or, just one word may be used, like "love" or "God."

It is important not to let the spiritual practice become the thing worshipped. It is a tool to get you someplace else, and should not be a destination in itself. We must turn from our ego selves as we turn toward God. Turning toward God while continually feeding the ego will have little or no positive effect. (See "Kenosis") A good spiritual exercise will help a person to selflessness, openness and to that love of pure Divinity.

Will you have mental distractions? Oh, yes. But these can be made a part of the spiritual exercise, as they can be used to examine one's mind. Follow them back to their origins to see what's causing them. This will teach you more about yourself. If you don't explore them, they will return at some point again anyway. They can actually be holy interruptions.

## **What Service work should I be doing?**

When we think of service to others, we often fill our head with images of journeys to third world nations to cure diseases or stop famines. While these things certainly are very important, we are all not born to do these types of things. We can support them in other ways through prayer, donations, and keeping our legislators aware of these types of causes.

Just as important to God are the “littler” acts of service to others – people we see on a day by day basis. There are so many people hurting in this world, and they are all around us. Sometimes a well-place smile or “hello” is just what can save another person.

Each of us has been formed by God with a special set of gifts and interests. It is one of our chief challenges in life to discover who we really are so that we can live our lives to the fullest. It has often been said that we “can be anything we set our minds to be.” Unfortunately, this is not true. We must become who God made us to be. This is the place where true happiness and fulfillment can be found, and nowhere else.

“Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Col. 3:17

“Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever.” I Peter 4:11

What guidepost can we use to determine what service we do? The standard to which we must turn rests in the higher ideals of our Baptismal vows: "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" This can be done in every personal encounter as we walk through every moment of each day.

We glorify God when we become who He made us to be, and then we serve to our fullest within this ideal.

## **How did monasticism begin?**

People have been drawn to a life of special dedication ever since recorded history began. The type of religious life we call monasticism began to take shape almost seventeen hundred years ago shortly after Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in about 313 A.D.

Why did this happen? It is believed that from the time of Christ, and for the next 300 hundred years, the basis of Christianity was rooted in personal devotion and service, family and local community services, and a somewhat integrated network between communities. People were deeply involved spiritually with their own relationship with Christ, and worked hard at their prayers, study of the scriptures, and service to each other. And, of course, they were severely persecuted by the State, too.

Once Christianity became the state religion, the persecutions subsided, but the focus began to change, too. Instead of being a religion for the people on the fringe, it became an inside organization that spent much time and energy maintaining and sustaining itself. People began to feel that something was missing, and sought to replace what was lost. Some moved from the city into the desert to seek that which was lost; others began to practice their spirituality within their own homes.

Gradually, various systems of instructions for formation were developed, as well as rules to live by in community or as solitaries. Monasticism was born, and has served as the conscience of the Church throughout the centuries.

More to come...