

## Why is Monastic Decorum so Important to Us?

**W**hat does it mean to our personality to be a monastic? What does it mean to our personality to be a Christian? We are told by St Paul that the fruit of the Spirit are things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The implication here is that if we are good monastics, and continue to pray, study, and serve others, we will eventually begin to reap these rewards. Who in their right mind would not want these? So, we strive to please God, and to please our formation guides, and to please our Guardian 😊, and hope to claim as many of these fruits of the Spirit as we can in our journey. And, to be sure, this path will often produce some of the results we long to have.

But there is another approach which we sometimes overlook – monastic decorum – not realizing how effective it can be in furthering this goal.

“Decorum” (for lack of a better term) is often defined as behavior in keeping with good taste and propriety. It is appropriateness of behavior or conduct. Charles Cummings in *Monastic Practices* defines it as, “...the personal manner according to which people conduct themselves appropriately to a situation. For monastics, a basic decorum conformable to ordinary standards of civilized behavior is expected. It brings a quality of graciousness and propriety to everything we say or do.”

What he is describing in contemporary terms is exactly what St Paul was writing about two thousand years ago. Monastic decorum is based on the fruits of the Spirit described by St Paul.

So, what does this all mean? It simply means that *in addition* to the regular activities we engage in as monastics (prayer, study, and service) we also need to practice *how* we do these things. The two must go together.

You are probably aware that we can often predict people’s behaviors if we know their attitude about something. But it may surprise you that our actions also have an influence on our attitudes. Science has shown in multiple studies that if we engage in a behavior in a particular way, we can gradually integrate the attitude within it.

Do you want to be more loving, joyful, and peaceful? Practice it! Do you seek goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness? Practice it!

Even the mere act of smiling can lift your mood, lower stress, boost your immune system and possibly even prolong your life, according to science. But it's not just science that knows how to change attitudes and become what you want through practicing it – even St Paul knew it. He wrote in Galatians 5:16, “Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the false self.”

“Walk by the Spirit!” We do that by practicing the fruits of the Spirit!

We *do* need to practice what we preach, and for good reason. It helps us to achieve the internal spiritual consonance we're looking for. Monastic decorum is a critical piece in our journey to a closer relationship with, and realization of, God. Live like you've already received the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (They're in there someplace anyway – just let them out!)

And that's why we call it a “monastic practice.”

Joyfully submitted,  
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