

# Reflections

On

*A Common Rule for Monastics:*

## Prayer

(Chapter 9)



**“Prayer is the cornerstone to our vocation.”**

Paragraph 6, Line 1

In construction, the cornerstone is that stone which is laid first in the foundation, and all other stones are set in reference to it. This stone is important because its placement, being the first, determines the health of the structure. It must be set straight. If the other stones are not set in alignment to the cornerstone, the integrity of the foundation cannot be guaranteed. The soundness of the building is dependent on the correctness of the cornerstone and all the other stones set in its foundation.

What do we glean from this metaphor **“prayer is the cornerstone to our vocation”**? Before getting into this further, allow me to remind myself what my vocation is, should be and will be. To me, I describe (with the help of Google) my vocation with these selected definitions, which I have *personalized*:

- *My* strong feeling of suitability for a particular path.
- A type of work that *I* feel that *I* am suited to doing and to which *I* should give all *my* time and energy.
- *My* vocation is *my* response to a call from beyond *myself* to use *my* strengths and gifts to make the world a better place through service, etc. ...
- *My* divine call to God's service or to the Christian life, a function or station in life to which *I am* called by God.

As a Postulant in a dispersed monastic community I have several vocations. I cherish all of them and prioritize and balance them according to the role engaged in at a particular moment. For the sake of this reflection, which is about prayer, my focus is on my monastic vocation.

If I hope to achieve any degree of success in, and if I am serious about my vocation, however defined, and whatever they are, I had to ensure that prayer was the first stone laid and all the other facets of my vocation were lined up and levelled with prayer. Prayer must be the golden ticket for entrance into vocations. It must be the fuel that moves our vocations forward, and it must be the oil which keeps all parts of the journey moving in friction-free harmony.

The most common and simplified definition of prayer is “talking to God”, and so it is. It is also total communication with the Divine: talking **with** God and listening to God. Prayer is the means by which we become even more aware of an ever-present God. Prayer takes many forms and may adopt differing postures. Those are minor. What is most important is that we do pray. That we, like older folks used to say (some still do), *“come as an empty pitcher to The Full Fountain ... come naked to Him for dress.”* Yes, we come emptied of ourselves – no egos allowed, with open hearts and minds to receive of Him who is our only source of that which is good.

The One who knows how to give good gifts. The One who gives rest to the weary. The One who strengthens us with His Joy. If we are to proceed and succeed, it is in our best interest to pray – to the One who directs our paths. Failure to pray is a recipe for disaster and powerlessness. More prayer, more power: the type referred to in Acts 1:8. The power of the Holy Spirit is needed to do the work of God, which according John 6:28-29, is to believe in Jesus and the One who sent Him. The Spirit, who we received because we asked – in prayer (Luke 11:13).

If prayer is not the cornerstone, if it was not the first stone that was set, all the other stones (aspects) of our vocation will be out-of-alignment and doomed to crumble. We may not have all started out with a firm foundation, but our prayers now, can still cause an alignment to take place. The most important alignment being our actions and God's will. To keep in alignment, pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17). Always talk to God. Always seek His Will. Always listen to Him. Always praise, worship and adore Him. Always have a heart for His creation, for which we intercede. Always bask in His presence.

“Suppose I don't feel like praying?” “What if I do not know how or what to pray?” Our gracious God knew you'd ask that question, therefore He took care of it. He assigned an advocate to assist us. According to Romans 8:26, the Holy Spirit, because of our weakness, intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray as we ought to.

For those in any vocation, especially in Religious Life, prayer is not an elective but a required course of action. Let me hasten to say that we pray not out of obligation, but in response to a loving God, who reveals Himself to us and we to ourselves when we pray. We need to get to the point where we pray with God not just to Him. This is possible, because we are one with Him.

For some reason I am being reminded of St. Benedict's Ladder of Humility, which requires us to climb many rungs before we achieve true humility. So too, we must constantly experience various levels of prayer and varying types of prayer in our climb to reach our full potential in Christ. Prayer is not a one-shot-deal to success. That is why we are admonished to pray without ceasing. Keeping in constant, prayerful contact with God, allows us to ascend to heights in our spiritual life, to which Christ is calling us.

***Prayer is the cornerstone to our vocations.*** But it is not the only stone. Our spiritual acts, religious deeds and monastic practices, etc. are the other stones of our vocation. Without prayer, solidly anchored in the essence of who we are, the best we can hope for a weakened and compromised vocation. How so? Because the other stones cannot be give glory to God, in all effectiveness, if they were laid in association with a wobbly, unsound, or worse yet, an absent cornerstone of prayer. Prayer must precede everything we do. Just as the cornerstone is laid first, so must our prayers. Prayer is a lifeline. If we cut the lifeline, we are bound to flat-line.

**“Pray without ceasing.”**

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