

CLOISTERED LIFE

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S the world races recklessly in its wild flight, it pays little attention to those who have retreated from it in order to cultivate their spiritual life. For the most part forgotten, the Religious in the cloister pray day and night for themselves and all mankind, entreating the Father of all men to grant to each the graces necessary for salvation.

For centuries people have heard of this place and there are almost as many different ideas about it as there are years of its existence. To some because of the 'novel-nun' and 'stage-nun,' the cloister appears to be a place of romance. In a religious sense it is a life of romance, for it is there that the religious dwell with and serve the God Whom they love. However in the worldly sense, there is not much romance in the cloister. Where is the romance in rising at dawn and working until dark, day after day, unseen by almost all others? "If thou wilt be My disciple take up thy Cross and follow Me." Only the lover of Christ can find romance in the cloister. For just as the mother does not consider it a task to care for and watch at the bedside of her sick child because of her great love, so the love for God makes any crosses found in the cloistered life welcome to the genuine religious.

To others the cloister seems to be a place where the selfish abide. Precisely the opposite is true. It is a fact that those in the cloister seek their own salvation, but they also help others to attain eternal happiness. The life of the cloister is one of service and sacrifice, and both of these are opposed to selfishness. The life of the cloister is modeled after that of our Lord—one of sacrifice and prayer, of mortification and self-denial, and this life is lived for love of Him.

The cloister is also viewed as a life of monotony and penance. Many who enter have this very reason in view. They want to do something difficult in order to show their love for God. It is easy for anyone to do agreeable things, but only those who love can do things that are disagreeable and ruinous to one's self-love.

To those outside the faith, the life of the cloister is a mystery. They see religious deprived of everything that the world holds dear. Those abiding in the cloister, however, are more content than the richest amongst men. "How can this be?" the world asks. It is because religious realize what life means, what heaven means, what peace of conscience means. The religious finds there the true scale of values. In God's love and in obedience to His will the religious finds happiness in this life and a hope of eternal glory.

A non-Catholic once remarked that it was cruel to enclose anyone in the cloister behind the grating and to give her no occupation except adoration and penance. It must be made clear that no one is locked in the cloister, but that all who are there have freely chosen to live there. The grating is not repellent to behold for those enclosed. Rather it makes them feel that nothing can disturb or interfere with the communion they hold with their Master. This is not selfish because their sacrifices are offered to God for men. By loving God, by serving Him, by praising His wonderful mercies, they pay to God the debt which all men owe to Him. By their adoration and service, their pleadings and prayers they draw down untold blessings on us all and thus help to accomplish Christ's own work—the salvation of souls.

Thus we understand why St. Dominic first founded the cloistered nuns at Prouille. This was to be the spiritual dynamo—the means of obtaining God's grace so that His blessing would precede, accompany and follow after his preaching Order. It is evident that God has blessed the Dominican Order, because both the cloistered nuns and the preaching sons of Dominic have increased. Great work has been done by both and many are the saints the Dominican cloister has produced. In the United States there are many convents of cloistered Dominican nuns: The Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament in Detroit is one of these hallowed houses of praise and service.

This monastery is an excellent example of the cloistered life. The Sisters in this convent make Solemn Vows and are pledged to the contemplative life. Those who make a special duty of serving in choir devote much of their time to the study of the sacred liturgy and constantly try to imbibe the spirit of the Church's beautiful prayers and ceremonies. All the Sisters apply themselves to the study of Christian doctrine in order to expand spiritually, as a knowledge of God's infinite beauty and perfection will help them to love Him more perfectly. The lay Sisters do not chant the Divine Office but keep the nocturnal watch and recite the Rosary. To them is entrusted the manual labor of the Monastery. The Outside Sisters attend to the

external needs of the convent. They also are privileged to care for the Sanctuary. Amid the silent hush of the cloister those who have heard the Master's call, cheerfully and willingly sacrifice themselves in order that they may share in the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Day and night, by turns, they take their place before the Tabernacle, adoring the Ruler of the world and praying fervently for all mankind. Each day they have Benediction during which they sing the beautiful words of the *Tantum Ergo* written by one of the Saints of the Dominican family, St. Thomas Aquinas. They beg God's special blessing on each member of their order and it is in this manner that they share in the work of those who have the responsibility of guiding and directing souls.

The whole life of those in the cloister is a prayer. Their words, thoughts and actions are offered to God as they chant the Divine Office—adoring Him, asking Him for blessings, thanking Him for favors received or begging pardon for their own sins and for those of their fellowmen. We should learn to love and cherish the cloister for in this day of ours, while the world rushes on unrestrained, busy about many things to the neglect of God, those in the cloister are making reparation for those who forget Him. God is their Ruler and Master. He is their light and life; Him they adore and serve.

That religious life in the cloister demands generous sacrifice and a deep appreciation of things spiritual is evident to all. At the same time the "peace that surpasseth understanding" is ample reward for a life that is spent in God's courts. The great power of prayer and the good it accomplishes in sending God's grace to the hearts of men is a continual source of consolation and stimulation.

Day by day they offer their life's activity to God, laying down their lives for Him Who died on the cross to redeem mankind. As the lily closes its petals when the sunlight fades away, only to open the following morning more beautiful and more fair than before, so the religious of the cloister end their earthly mission only to wake in heaven to reign with their Master in eternal bliss.