



MARY IN THE LIFE OF THE CARTHUSIANS

Since its origins, the Carthusian Order has paid a special homage to the Mother of God. Mary is the Order's principal Patron (along with St. John the Baptist), ever the Christian, full of redemptive grace. As the Mother of Christ and of the Mystical Body, she begets her son spiritually in the soul. In this awareness, the Carthusian naturally prays with and to Christ's Mother.

For every Christian, and for every human being, Mary is the one who first believed. Out of her faith as Spouse and Mother, she desires to act upon all those who entrust themselves to her as her children. And the more her children persevere and progress in this attitude, the nearer Mary leads them to the "unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephesians 3:8) They recognize ever more clearly the dignity of man in all its fullness and the definitive meaning of his vocation, for "Christ fully reveals man to man himself." (Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, #22)

Mary plays a primary role in the solitary life of the monk. As far as human

frailty allows, his soul continually strives to draw close to God and remain faithful to this spousal covenant of love. This effort unites the Carthusian in a special way with the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we are accustomed to call *Mater Singularis Cartusiensium* (the Mother in particular of all Carthusians). We honor her with a special affection by daily reciting her Little Office and by consecrating our church and community to her Immaculate Heart.

Devotion to Mary leads us into a living communion with her Son Jesus and allows us to experience the depth of His love. She teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own pilgrimage of faith. Her “school” leads to a harvest of holiness as we contemplate the beauty of the countenance of Jesus and the mystery of His life. Mary invites us to follow her example at the Annunciation, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) She guides us to ask humbly for that which opens us to the light and, in the end, leads to the obedience of faith.

In addition to the Canonical Divine Office, the Carthusian begins and ends each day with Our Lady so the entire day is lovingly enclosed in her maternal embrace. The monk recites the Office of the Blessed Virgin each day in his cell. To implore the continuous protection of Mary, every Charterhouse celebrates a daily Mass in her honor. On Saturday, this Mass is celebrated as the Community Mass. On other days it is said in private.

Other daily devotions to Mary include the singing of the *Salve Regina* at the end of Vespers and the *Ave Maria* at the end of Lauds, and the recitation of the *Angelus* in her honor four times daily where each of the three Hail Marys is preceded by a *veniam* (the monk kisses the floor). Monks also recite a Hail Mary each time they enter their cell from the outside. Particularly beautiful is the Carthusian custom of reciting the Little Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary before the corresponding Canonical Hours (except at Compline when we recite her Office last). The Order thus addresses its first and last words of the day “to Jesus through Mary.”



VOCATION

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

Who is called to a life such as this? The vocation so centers in God and is directed by Him and for Him that the choice cannot possibly come from man. The hermit cannot progress along this often perplexing path unless God wishes it and calls the person to it, and gives him the graces for it. God must summon the person; otherwise it would be without substantial content or meaning, and hardly possible to live fruitfully. The most essential element in a Carthusian vocation is the grace of a call in which God makes Himself known to the soul.

THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED



The conviction of a call to this life, however, requires discernment and judgment to avoid possibilities of error. A candidate needs fairly good, though not exceptional, physical health to sustain the rigors of the vocation. In particular, given the more intense stresses of solitude, a candidate must be free of any serious emotional and psychological pathology; indeed even

lesser degrees of trauma can prove an obstacle. The common practice is, therefore, to have candidates take psychological testing before admittance into the community.

The Carthusian life requires significant human maturity and sound judgment. The Statutes allow no one under 20 to be admitted, and in fact, given the delayed maturity in the West today, a person does not enter before he is 23. Since adaptability to such a life becomes increasingly difficult after mid-life, the upper age limit is 45, though candidates over 40 are not often considered. A reposed, open and sociable character is very desirable. In addition, cloister candidates are asked to have some knowledge of Latin and a liberal arts background if at all possible, with at least two years of college. The brothers are encouraged to have a high school education or the equivalent.

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Once the applicant has contacted the community, the Charterhouse sends a questionnaire concerning personal information and references. If the Superiors discover there is sufficient possibility of a vocation, they invite him to make a retreat of at least a month's duration (if possible) at the monastery. During his retreat, he is gradually introduced to the Carthusian life and encouraged to participate as fully as his capacity permits. If at its end, the applicant remains convinced of his calling and wishes to take the next step, and if the Superiors, with the assistance of the grace of God, validate his discernment, then together they decide when he should enter the novitiate.

Once admitted, the candidate becomes an *aspirant* for a period of about six months and receives a black mantle and skullcap. He next undertakes a *postulancy* of about a year and receives a longer mantle with a hood. During this period, it is discerned whether he should proceed to the state of *novice* where he becomes a member of the community. Once admitted to the novitiate, the candidate receives the monastic habit consisting of a white tunic and a short cowl without bands over which is worn a black hooded mantle. He remains in this state for two years.

If he remains firm in the conviction of his calling, the candidate may be allowed to take the vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life (in which are implicitly included chastity and poverty) for three years. He then replaces the black mantle and short cowl with a long cowl with bands. At the end of this first term, he renews his vows for two additional years. After this second term, he leaves the novitiate and the supervision of the Novice Master to live among the solemn professed and perpetual donates where he slowly forms himself to the maturity of a solitary. If assurances appear that he is called to and capable of the Carthusian life, the monk makes his final and solemn profession.



CALL TO ACT

Although we do not use the Internet, the Order has established websites in various languages to meet conveniently the needs of those interested. The websites contain a variety of information about the Carthusian life, history, monasteries, Statutes, and diverse bibliographies, as well as email addresses, photographs, liturgies, and links to other points of interest. The official website of the Carthusian Order, <http://www.chartreux.org>, also will link you to the other Carthusian sites.

After reviewing the additional information on these Carthusian websites, persons who understand that they are called to this life are invited to contact:

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MESSAGE FROM THE POPE

Pope John Paul II's message to Reverend Father Marcellin Theeuwes and to all members of the Carthusian family on the 900th anniversary of the death of our Father, St. Bruno:

"I invite all members of the Carthusian family, through the holiness and simplicity of their life, to remain like a city on a hilltop and like a light on a lamp stand. Rooted in the Word of God, nourished by the sacraments of the Church, sustained by the prayer of St. Bruno and his brothers, may they remain for the whole Church and in the center of the world places of hope...where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion, is called to become a pattern of life and source of joy.

"As a visible expression of the offering of one's whole life lived in union with that of Christ, the cloistered life which makes one feel the precariousness of life, invites one to trust in God alone. It sharpens the thirst to receive the graces granted by meditation on the Word of God. It is also the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren, where the limitation of space and contacts works to the advantage of interiorizing Gospel values....(cf. #3).

"...The ninth centenary of the dies natalis of St. Bruno gives me the opportunity to renew my strong trust in the Carthusian Order in its mission of selfless contemplation and intercession for the Church and for the world...seeking to Be rather than to Do, the Carthusian Order gives the Church strength and courage in its mission, in order to put out into deep waters and permit the Good News of Christ to inflame all humanity.... (cf. #4).

"...I ardently ask the Lord to make resound in the hearts of numerous young men the call to leave everything to follow Christ poor, along the demanding but freeing journey of the Carthusian vocation."(cf. #4).