

COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

“Bear one another burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ”
(Gal 6:2)

Michel Casey OCSO in his book, “Fully Human Fully Divine”, says:

“There must be the will to community and there must be something that binds all the members to one another. In our case this unitive force is the Holy Spirit who enrolls us in the school of Christ and causes us to be reformed in Christ’s likeness. **We can not ourselves create community**; what is needed is a corporate openness to the work of the Spirit who provides us with “**the glue of love**” that binds together otherwise disparate personalities”.

“Through the interaction, in community, we go **discovering who we are** and discovering Christ in others. School of love that **makes us grow** in acceptance and compassion” (1)

“Community is part of the message and method of Jesus”

Andree Louf OCSO says:

“If we are to form a real bond with others, **we must know ourselves** and our limitations and faults. We are not better than others. We too need mercy and if the truth be known we need it more than others...”

TESTIMONIES

Let me give you several testimonies from members of our community in Conyers.

One of the members says:

“I will always remember the point in my life which occurred about a year after I become a Lay-Cistercian in which I found myself totally **disillusioned** with community life. We were dealing with establishing procedures for community governance and it was my job to facilitate the process. I was angry and emotionally drained as I dealt with the full range of personalities in the community, but my biggest problem, which I was unaware of at that time, was my own requirement for “**controlling**” the process and the need to arrive at closure in a timely manner. I fondly remember going to Dom Armand (at that time Abbot in Conyers) and telling him that I thought that I would prefer to pursue my lay contemplative vocation in an heremetical context rather than a communal one. He smiled kindly and told me that a communal experience is key to grow in the spirit in that it continually reflects back to you “**who you are**”. I have tried to embrace this inside ever since, reminding myself that how others act is not as important as my reaction to them.”

“Patiently bear one another’s weaknesses whether of body or of behavior” RB Chapter 72

Another sharing:

“In community we learn to love. It is difficult to love a person when his/her personality is not of our sympathy. However, that person not only should be accepted but loved. In these circumstances to love is not easy. To live community I found it very difficult. I must accept the weakness of my personality and pray God to give me the strength to love and accept the people as they are without exceptions.”

“The concept of community is intriguing to me. It attracts me without cease and yet eludes my comprehension”.

“Community is a mystery”, says Casey in his book.

Let us continue with testimonies:

“What is happening in the solitude of the individual soul is what is brought to community life”.

So, it is very important to protect this solitude of the soul. Mother Gail Fitzpatrick in her book, “Seasons of Grace”, makes a wonderful meditation on this issue. In Chapter 29 call “Circles of Solitude”, she says that we should render reverence to all and honor the mystery and uniqueness of each person. This circle of solitude or boundary that surrounds each person should be protected and honor.

“Our Lay-Cistercian experience of being a community we make a commitment to gather at the monastery one Sunday a month for prayer, monastic teaching, business and just being together. By its very nature it is a loose configuration of community life, yet it sets up certain demands that help us avoid the trap of behaving as sarabites or gyrovagues. Our statues move us beyond wandering around the world of theory and intellectual interest.”

“Community allows me to become more myself, demands that I become less self motivated and more Christ motivated.

Community shows me what is of true value and what is a meager interest.

Community permits me to fail and yet experience being accepted.

Community encourages me to begin, to begin, and to begin.

Community makes me tired, grumpy, nervous and makes me ask God what His will is at that moment.

So, community is my training for petitioning to be admitted into the heavenly Communion of Saints”.

“My community exists of me and my husband, members of the Holy Spirit Lay-Cistercians, and every one I encounter in my daily life. My marriage vows bind me to my husband and my lay contemplative promise binds me to my Lay contemplative community. These promises were made to God and to one another. I consider my monastic enclosure my home within the institution of Marriage.”

“I belong to a Lay-Cistercian community and, although, we do not live together in a monastery, we stay in touch with each others’ lives, births, deaths, marriages, and enter into a deep reverence in prayer at our monthly meetings. From the formation my membership provides, I can act toward my family at home with the same deference, the same sense of order and simplicity, the same love of silence and solitude that allows my home to be a place of rest. It takes much prayer, honesty and practice to understand the joy of detaching with love within community. Dom Augustine Moore likened community life to a bunch of rough stones rubbing against each other enough so that the sharp edges become rounded and smooth”.

I found myself the most difficult the life in community but the most rewarding spiritually. In this interaction with others I find my own brokenness. Again, it is no so much important what other people do or don’t do but how I react to them. Many times the acts I dislike the most are the ones that reflect, like a mirror, my own brokenness. How can I come to terms with myself if I do not have community? I will continue in my own illusions or delusions.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

I invite you to reflect in what is your personal community. Is it family? Working relationships? Our Lay-Cistercian group? The world that surround us in which we live? I think it is all of them.

What parallel can we make, secular people living in the world, from the school of love described in the RB for monastic communities?

How do we deal with conflict?
What is the quality of our community life?
How do we communicate with one another?
Trust, respect, boundaries, bonding...

We are all in the same boat traveling home, and our way to holiness and personal wholeness lies through and with our fellow travelers.

“A spirit of forgiving love is a key to joyful community living”

“Community is built by communication on the deeper levels, in a climate of non-judgmental openness, sincere truthfulness and understanding cordiality” (Casey)

A perfect community does not exist; it is an illusion to think the contrary. We come together with our own limitations and brokenness. The bonding which allows our communities to exist and thrive is a gift from the Holy Spirit living in us, among us. Our life of prayer brings all this about.

FINAL PRAYER

Let us pray to the Lord that by the power of the Holy Spirit, His Spirit of Love, to makes us one, to makes us community. Amen.