

GUIDE FOR FORMATION – 7

THE WORD OF GOD – THE SOURCE OF OUR LIFE (2/3)

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3. THE RULE.

Certainly times have changed and if we have reviewed the past, it is because history can repeat itself.

We don't start from zero. The actual Rule as the decree of approbation says "is the faithful expression of the charisma of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and of the tradition of his Institute". In it we find the source of inspiration to live at the present time the charisma of the Founder.

How does the Rule present to us the theme of the Word of God?

READING (lectio)

- "The Brothers shall continually nourish themselves with the Word of God". (6)
- "The Brothers shall find the primordial source of their vocation in the Holy Scripture.. They shall read it every day..". (67)
- "The Brothers shall pray together..; they shall listen together...to the Word of God". (50)
- "...in listening to the Word, they shall realize in community the unity of hearts in the same Spirit..". (70)

Two elements stand out. In the first place, "primordial" and "continual" clearly suggest the **primacy and the proximity** of the Word of God in the life of the Brother. In the second place we are invited to listen **together**. It is interesting to follow the path of **together** which insistently appears in the Rule on various occasions, and not by chance. **Together** in a way we read, according to the ancient Rule, the Word of God in beginning spiritual reading and in the refectory. What "**together**" does the actual Rule suggest?

Certainly this **together** points us more to the future than to the past. It invites us to a creative and prophetic reflection on this **together** which there in the Rule is raising questions for us.

- "The beginning of the novitiate is signaled by a special ceremony in which the candidate receives some tokens of his entry into the Institute, such as **the Bible**". (91b)

Here we have an element to give life in the ceremony of initiation to the religious life of our youth from the perspective of our history and our Rule. It is not the moment to speak of the ceremony of initiation. We give only this point.

MEDITATION.

- "Thanks to the study of the biblical and theological sciences, the Brothers nourish and fortify their faith". (6)
- "The Brothers shall study, meditate on, and share with each other the Word of God". (6)
- "Every day...they shall meditate on the Word of God and prolong this contact with the Lord through spiritual reading". (67)
- "They shall arrange their occupations so as to be able to devote to spiritual reading the time necessary to deepen their faith. The personal project takes account of this". (67a)
- "The superiors and the communities shall try to give each Brother conditions of life and means to permit him to pursue his spiritual, theological and professional formation". (101)
- "Each community ought to elaborate an effective and continuous plan of formation for itself as a group, and evaluate it as an integral part of the community project". (101b)

Three elements to underline:

Meditation (reading and study) is a personal responsibility.

The community as such ought to program and evaluate meditation in community.

A very important new aspect: invoke **the personal project and the community project**.

PRAYER

- "The Brothers find the primordial source of their prayer in the Holy Scripture and in the liturgy..." (67)
- "The Brothers ought to cherish mental prayer, esteeming it as the first and principal of their daily exercises..." (69)
- "The community of the Brothers is a community of prayer. The Brothers pray together.." (50)
- "...the Brothers offer God at least two hours of daily mental prayer.." (73)
- "At the beginning of each year, when they work out their community project, the Brothers regulate the order, the hour, and the rhythm of their various prayer meetings.." (73a)
- "In their prayer encounters.. they shall share their intentions, their reflections, and even their prayer.." (71b)

Elements to underline:

It does not suffice to value mental prayer as the first and principal exercise. We are invited to love it. It is strongly emphasized that the Brothers pray together and share: insistence in sharing the Word of God (6), the experience of God (48).

The minimum is marked out, never the maximum. **The community project is invoked.** It is the community that ought to afford a space sufficiently tranquil and ample so we can have a heartfelt prayer. The call on personal responsibility and the **personal project** are by way of addition.

On the theme of prayer the Rule has specific annotations for the time of the novitiate, which affects us directly. The following:

– "The novitiate is organized so as to be able to create a climate favorable to recollection and the experience of God". (91)

– "Successful attaining of the objectives of the novitiate requires long periods dedicated to prayer.." (91d) Speaking of the novitiate program, the novice should propose to himself: "To initiate himself into a more personal encounter with Christ. ..to form himself in prayer..taking into account biblical, liturgical, and theological contributions.." (91c)

ACTION

- "The gospel is the first and the principal rule". (6)
- "...the Brothers judge all earthly realities in the light of the gospel..(5)
- "...the Brothers take note that God is present in their work, preoccupations and joys". (5)
- "...they will apply themselves as far as possible, to execute all their actions guided by God, moved by his Spirit, and with the intention of pleasing him". (6)
- "The Brothers will consider their employment as a ministry". (13)
- "The Brothers live their faith as a gift received for the ministry of Christian education". (20)
- "The whole life of the Brothers is transfigured by the presence of God who calls, consecrates, transfigures, and saves". (21)

To underline: The living synthesis which the Rule offers us between the spirit of the Institute and the mission of the Institute is born in the depths of the heart and is manifested and expressed in the mission which the Church has confided to us.

Behold here how the Rule actualizes, for our days, the living tradition of the Institute. The actual Rule is more a "book of life" than a normative rule. Whence arises the permanent recourse to the **personal project and to the community project**. This is a significant datum for the style of religious life we have to live, and to which we have to form our novices.