

The Rule of Life In the light of the Word of God



Brothers of Christian Instruction
On-going formation 2007-2008

Booklet 5

Prayer

PRAYER

How to use this booklet

1 -- The Superior distributes the booklet to each Brother. He presents the document asking each one to question how personal and community prayer is lived out, in the context of consecrated and apostolic life. He tries to see if prayer nourishes his experience of God and brightens up the understanding of mission or if it falls into the routine of spiritual practices and just a habit.

Then, he agrees objectives with the Brothers.

2 --Individual time.

Time is allowed for individual Brothers to read the chapters in the Rule of Life (Constitutions and Directory) devoted to prayer.

Reply to personal questions that might be asked.

Prepare the community approach to this task.

3—Community meetings

Exchange in community the community aspects of questions that arise.

AIMS

Live prayer as the source of unity which brings us to go beyond any dichotomy in our lives between prayer and action. To see that it is the same Spirit that inspires our prayer life and our apostolate.

To discover that the Word of God and the sacraments are central to our prayer life, both personal and at community level.

To see the deep connection between prayer and experiencing God which gives a unity to our lives and goes beyond prayer considered simply as a indication or practice of devotion.

To see how personal prayer and community prayer complement each other in the life of each Brother, called and brought together by God.

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To see that there is no community prayer without personal prayer. This latter, when it is real, puts me in communion with the Church and therefore with my Brothers, lay colleagues and young people.

TO START WITH

At a personal level

1. I value my personal prayer and devote time to it.
2. I see how prayer helps me to bring unity to my life, to nourish my experience of God and to live out my mission.
3. I watch over my physical and psychological condition so that my prayer is a true meeting with the Lord.
4. Mary is always present in my prayer. In union with her I meditate upon the mysteries of Christ
5. I make the Word of God the food of my prayer life. I make “lectio divina” the centre of my meditation.
6. My prayer is an apostolic prayer where children and young people are constantly present.
7. My prayer is open to the workings of the Spirit who leads me, if I let myself be led by him in ways of spiritual progress, through spiritual direction.
8. The Eucharist is central to my spiritual life and I approach the sacrament of reconciliation from time to time.

As a community

9. We look after our community prayer, we are always present and we share in leading it.
10. We are convinced that community prayer builds up the community and without community prayer it is impossible to live community life in any real sense.

PRAYER IN THE RULE OF LIFE

To understand the apostolic prayer of a Brother we must take into account certain principles that characterise his life style and prayer life.

PRINCIPLES

The constructive value of the apostolate

The apostolate, for a Brother, is not a distraction for him from God or something which drains him; on the contrary it is the source of his experience of God and of communion with Him.

“The same Spirit who vivifies the Brother’s whole life calls him to praise God in prayer and to serve him in the apostolate, a participation in Christ’s mission which leads to union with God.”
(D. 94)

The unity of personal and community prayer

Vocation is personal but it is born within a form of community life. The life of a Brother is a particular imitation of the life of Jesus and of his way of living the apostolate. Consequently the personal and community dimension cannot be separated.

The Brother must seek God personally, in his very being and action and he must seek God in community.

“Besides being a member of an apostolic community, the Brother is a unique person whom god calls by name to fulfil a role which no one else can assume. In response to God’s call, the Brother quests for God in the very depths of his being.” (C. 42)

The way forward to find God and his kingdom, includes a personal dimension which is irreplaceable.

“The Brother gradually discovers the path to God.” (D.91)

But the community plays an indispensable role in the Brother’s personal quest for God and cannot be an obstacle to his spiritual life.

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“The community aspect of their lives gives the Brother a sure guide in his quest for God.” (D.6)

Consequently, community prayer can never replace personal prayer, and neither can personal prayer replace community prayer

The community must live centred on the Kingdom of God of which it is both symbol and instrument.

« Each fraternity strives to become an evangelical community, witnessing to the already present Kingdom (C 35).

The Brother is not only called but summoned by God to work in the field of the Father along with his confreres. Seeking after God and the fulfilment the Kingdom carries with it a community dimension.

«United in response to the Spirit’s call and working together in the Lord’s vineyard, ... (D 77).

In community prayer, the Brother celebrates being summoned by the Father, becomes aware of Him and along with his Brothers sets to work in the Father’s field to which he has been sent. He celebrates being summoned and being sent. Summoning leads him to seek out the will of the Father with his confrere in building the Kingdom within the sphere that has been entrusted to them.

« It is in community that the Brothers seek God and exercise their apostolate. Together, they read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel” (D 6).

Community prayer builds the community. Each Brother knows that the community is not a community of flesh and blood. He knows that it is a community of the Kingdom, where Christ is present and ensures unity. It is this presence of Christ, lived and celebrated, which is the very essence of the community and which builds up. Community prayer lives and celebrates this presence and, builds the community. In the same way personal prayer contributes to the whole. Personal prayer builds the community and contributes to unity in listening to the Spirit so as to discern the signs of God, of the times. Personal prayer and community prayer cannot be separated. It is the very strength of our Rule as desired by Jean-Marie de La Mennais. Keeping a balance between these two in our Rule is a must of our founder in order to support a true life in the Spirit.

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“They consider the regular participation in community prayers an important element in the building of true community.” (D.81)

“Religious community life...cannot exist without communal prayer.” (D. 63)

The purpose of spiritual exercises is to integrate our life

Spiritual practices, as proposed by the Rule, have as their goal to unify prayer and action. It is in this light that they should be lived, judged and evaluated.

“.....using the spiritual exercises prescribed in the Rule of Life (to the Brother) to integrate prayer and action.” (D 83)

Prayer and asceticism

Every meeting between persons demands an intimate atmosphere, attention towards the other, openness and being well disposed. At the same time, for every meeting with the Lord we must create the atmosphere that makes us give attention to God.

“The growth of the spirit of prayer requires adequate physical and mental health as well as Christian asceticism and interior silence to control the vagaries of the imagination and of the emotions. In the midst of a turbulent world and of absorbing occupations, the brother centres his life on God, who calls him to walk in his presence in peace of soul, the fruit of single-hearted love.” (D 79)

THE SCOPE OF PRAYER

TRINITARIAN DIMENSION

Prayer introduces us to the relations within the Trinity.

In prayer we learn how to live our filial relationship with the Father, through constant and familiar union with him, in union with Christ the sole mediator, in communion with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

“The Brother seeks in meditation....to live in familiar and constant companionship with the Father, through Jesus Christ, his Son, in the Holy Spirit.” (D 86)

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Christ is the model of our prayer

The prayer of the Brother, like that of Christ, flows from closeness to the Father. Prayer is only a pious exercise without a filial relationship.

*“Christ’s prayer... flowed from his intimate union with the Father.”
(D 75)*

He prays constantly and invites his disciples to pray in all circumstances. Prayer comes from the Kingdom, the object of his desire.

The “Our Father” shows us the wishes of Jesus which are those of the Father.

“He taught his disciples the greatest of prayers and urged them to pray relentlessly with the assurance of being heard when, in faith, they sought the Kingdom of God and its justice.” (D 75).

The goal is to preserve union of life with Jesus

The aim of prayer is to preserve communion with Jesus in all circumstances, in our being, in our actions. Our whole being should be anchored in Him. Union with Him is the true source of grace.

Personal union

“The Brother reserves certain times for prayer, which he needs to stay united with Christ in his daily occupations.” (D 94)

“Prayer...is loving attention to the Word and the free surrender to a person.” (D 80)

“...An ever-closer union with Christ, the source of his being and the goal of his existence.” (D 94)

“The Brother seeks Christ in the meditation of the Word of God and the contemplation of his mysteries.” (D 86)

Community union with Him, edifying builder of community.

“Their community participation in prayer and liturgical worship, and the mutual support which they bring to their spiritual lives are

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the bonds of brotherhood that unite them with Christ present among them.” (D 77)

The Brother lives with Christ, Priest supreme, his shared priesthood

It is this priesthood that binds his life together which is to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He celebrates this priesthood through the Eucharist.

“The Eucharistic worship unites the Brothers in the sacrifice of Christ.” (D 84)

The Spirit of Jesus as source of prayer

The basic experience of prayer is the spirit of sonship which makes us cry out: Father! It is the Spirit which guarantees that we are sons.

“ The ever-living Christ intercedes for us; he appropriates the prayer of the Church and pours forth on men the Spirit that inspires them to say: Father! “ (D 76)

PRAYER ROOTED IN THE WORD OF GOD

In the life of the Brother, the word of God is:

- The food of his prayer, the divine manna with which he nourishes his spiritual life...
- The source of his understanding Christ, the image of God visible from the Father. Thanks to the Word of God the Brother finds the true face of Christ and the Father, eliminating any false pictures.
- The real key which opens the door of the mystery

“They (the Brothers) set aside a minimum of two hours each week for spiritual reading, especially of the Scriptures.” (C 45)

“ nurtured by the daily reading of the Scripture, the Brother.....” (D78)

“The Brother understands that he is personally responsible for the quality of his prayer life, which he sees less as a subjection to a schedule of prayers than the loving attention to the Word and the free surrender to a Person.” (D 80)

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“The Brother attaches great importance to the Scriptures and studies them diligently. He strives, by assiduous reading, to gain “the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus”. He knows “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” (D 87)

ECCLESIAL DIMENSION

The community must always consider itself as an ecclesial community, part of the people of God, which, like the Church has at heart the service of the Kingdom of God. With the Church she asks for the coming of the Kingdom of God and with the Church she works so that this Kingdom becomes part of our experience. In prayer the Church celebrates its salvation in praise and intercedes for the salvation of the world: may God’s Kingdom come. The religious community unites itself with this prayer of the Church.

“Through the divine office, religious participate in the official prayer of the church, ‘which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.’ (D 85)

THE SACRAMENTAL DIMENSION OF PRAYER

The sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, as sources of grace and gifts of Christ to his Church, should feed in a particular way the prayer of the Brother and of the community. These are channels of grace through which Christ gives life to his Church.

“The Eucharist, ‘sign of unity and bond of charity’, is the summit towards which the life of the community is directed.

“It is the source of divine love, of zeal and of selflessness which has given strength to the martyrs, fashioned the purity of virgins and formed all the saints.”

“The Eucharist worship unites the Brothers in the sacrifice of Christ. At Mass, the Brothers renew their consecration which unites them with the supreme and ongoing sacrifice of the Redeemer.

“When the community finds it impossible to participate in the Mass, the Brothers are urged to join in the liturgy of the Word and in the sacrament of communion.

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“The Brothers visit the Blessed Sacrament to express their love and gratitude, and to render to their Lord due homage and adoration.” (D 84)

“In the sacrament of Reconciliation, the Brother acknowledges his failings and gratefully the Father’s forgiveness. He thus strengthens his bonds with the Church which he had weakened by his sinfulness.” (D90)

THE APOSTOLIC DIMENSION

The spiritual life is that life animated by the Spirit. The Spirit is the starting point of our prayer since it is the Spirit who prays in us and makes us cry: Father!

But it is also the Spirit who leads us to share in the mission of Christ who is the source of communion with God and not simply a task to complete, even less a cause of distancing from God.

“The same Spirit who vivifies the Brother’s whole life calls him to praise God in prayer and to serve him in the apostolate, a participation in Christ’s mission which leads to union with God.” (D 94)

The Brother’s life is characterised by his search for the will of God. The events of life are the revelation of this will and its impulses: these are invitations of grace to be in communion with this will, revealed and lived .

“The Brother ‘carefully detects the signs of God’s will and the impulses of his grace in the various happenings of life’.”(D 78)

The essential thing is that the Brother centres his life on God, walks in his presence. The right intention coming from a pure heart is a privileged means for his apostolic life.

“The Brother centres his life on God, who calls him to walk in his presence in peace of soul, the fruit of single-hearted love.” (D 79)

The Kingdom is the horizon of the Brother’s prayer. The Kingdom is his passion. His mission and his life are centred on the Kingdom, lived, sought after, practised.

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“... with the assurance of being heard when, in faith, they (the Brothers)sought the Kingdom of God and its justice.” (D 75)

THE MARIAN DIMENSION

The community of the apostles praying with Mary in the Cenacle, while waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, is the model of community prayer. The Brothers pray with Mary to ask for the strength of the Spirit in the exercise of their mission.

“Like the Apostles, the early Christians, together with Mary, ‘devoted themselves to constant prayer’”. (D 76)

Mary leads us to understanding the mystery of her Son. She helps us to understand our mission in the plan of salvation and to live it in the same way as she did.

“The Brother has a great love and veneration for the Virgin Mary. In the Scriptures, he meditates on her role in salvation history and in the liturgy, he relives with her the mysteries of her divine Son’s life. To liturgical celebrations in her honour, he adds acts of devotion inspired by true faith. He entrusts to her maternal solicitude his religious and apostolic life.” (D 93)

“ The Brothers venerate Mary in the mystery of Christ and of the Church In the handmaid of the Lord fully docile to the Holy Spirit and totally devoted to the person and to the work of the Lord, they see the outstanding model of the consecrated life of chastity, obedience and poverty.

“Faithful to a long-standing tradition of the Congregation, they honour Saint Joseph as model of educators and patron of religious vocations.” (D 12)

“Having been called to work at the growth of divine life in souls, the Brothers seek Mary’s help in their ministry of evangelisation and try to promote her devotion among their students. The Virgin Mother indeed gave birth to a Son, whom God made ‘the first-born of many brothers’ whom she surrounds with her love as she participates in their birth and development.” (D 118)

The rosary, a traditional devotion in the Congregation, is the practical way to honour Mary in the mysteries of her Son.

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“The Brothers love to give daily expression to their veneration of the Virgin Mary.” (C 44)

Directory No. 78

This is perhaps the best resumé of what the Brother’s prayer should be.

“ *Enlightened by faith, nurtured by the daily reading of the Scripture, the Brothers ‘carefully detect the signs of God’s will and the impulses of his grace in the various happenings of life’. The Brothers unite their prayer to that of God’s people for the joys, the hopes and the worries of mankind. Through prayer, they obtain the light and strength needed ‘to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society’ and thus add validity to their efforts as religious working to educate youth on whom rest so many hopes for the future.*” (D 78)

Enlightened by faith

Nurtured by the daily reading of Scriptures *Lectio divina*.

He carefully detects the signs of God’s will and the impulses of his grace in the various happenings of life. *Lectio vitae*

His prayer

It unites it to that of the people of God

It gives it strength and discernment “to be the witness of Christ”.

It sums up his whole effort as a religious working for the education of youth, the future and hope of the world: *unity of life*.

THE WORD OF GOD

Luke 18, 1-7

“Then Jesus told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. ‘ There was a judge in a certain town’ he said ‘who had neither fear of God nor respect for man. In the same town there was a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, “I want justice from you against my enemy!” For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, “ Maybe I have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death”.

And the Lord said, “You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not god see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them?(JB translation)

Perseverance can soften a hardened heart, closed to all relations and justice. What fruits there are to such perseverance, that raise confidence in the Father who wants and desires the wellbeing of his children. Perseverance is the sign of unwavering confidence in love of the Father who always listens to his children, even though these do not always know what is in their best interests.

Hebrews 7, 25-27

“It follows, then, that his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him. To suit us, the ideal high priest would have to be holy, innocent and uncontaminated, beyond the influence of sinners, and raised up above the heavens; one who would not need to offer sacrifices every day, as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people, because he has done this once for all by offering himself.”

Intercession is a priestly function. Jesus interceded for those who came to him while addressing himself to God, as St John likewise tells us.(Jn 13,13-14)

Jesus did not offer an animal as a victim; he offered himself as a victim.

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Acts 1, 14

“ All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Acts 1, 13-14 is a summary bringing together two very important accounts of this part of the Acts of the Apostles, the Ascension and Pentecost. Luke tells us that this time between the Ascension and Pentecost is a time for prayer together and for preparing for the coming of the Spirit. Luke highlights the person of Mary, presented as a witness of Jesus. Mary who was with Jesus from the beginning, as related in Lk 2, fulfilled more than anyone the necessary attributes of a witness: to have been with Him from the beginning.

Luke unites two elements: the life of communion “ unanimes”, and perseverance in the life of prayer, *“they were assiduous in prayer”*.

Acts 2, 46-47

“ They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone, Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.”

Luke presents here the liturgical life of the community. The community praised God publicly in the Temple. The Christian community is the new Israel; that is why it chooses the Temple as the place for prayer.

Luke underlines again perseverance and communion as essential characteristics of community prayer.

Matthew 18, 20

“For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.”

This verse from Matthew reflects a belief of the Christian community: it recognises in the homage given to Christ, homage directed to God. This text is only in Matthew and it explains the presence of Christ at the centre of the community. A true presence of Christ and not simply in the mind. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, is at the centre of the disciples at prayer.

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Matthew says again that in order to pray we must be united. Unity is a necessary condition for prayer.

Philippians 3,8

“Not only that, but I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ.”

This text recalls considering reasonable texts on the relative value of Wisdom (*Wisdom 7*). For Paul everything is rubbish compared with knowing Christ. Knowledge, born of deep experience of the love of God, as he relates in the letter to the Galatians: *“ I live in the faith of Christ who lives in me. (Gal 2 ,20)*

1 Timothy 4,6

“If you put all this to the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus and show that you have really digested the teaching of the faith and the good doctrine you have always followed.”

In order to become good ministers of Christ we should be nourished on the teaching of faith. Being informed, especially in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church, will help us to feed our life of prayer and make it more ardent.

1 Corinthians 8,6

“Still for us there is one God, the Father from whom all things come and for whom we exist; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things come and through whom we exist.”

Paul reaffirms his faith in one God with a liturgical doxology: The god recognised by Paul is God the Father, the rule of all to whom we all move; and with Him he accepts Jesus as Lord, mediator in the creation of the world and our Christian existence.

One Lord corresponds to a single God.