

Rule of Life

Eremitical Life of Fr. Jeffrey Robideau

History

While in seminary I learned of the Desert Fathers and the concept of the hermit and the eremitical life was first taught to me. I had a special affection for them at the time, though I knew not why.

At my first assignment as a priest in 1997, I meet up with a group of Secular Carmelites. They taught me much that I was deprived of in the seminary as to the spiritual life. I then took it upon myself to do private study in the area of Spiritual Theology. In particular, I studied the Carmelite Spirituality. This led to my personal spiritual journey to begin.

Reading the Carmelite saints soon was not enough. I expanded my research to the study of Philosophical Psychology, systematic/theological writers on the mystical life, lives of the saints and spiritual/inspirational writings.

During my time as a priest, I have had many opportunities to speak at conferences and to give many retreats. I have also worked closely with several Secular Order of Carmelites, giving them many spiritual talks. All this has been beneficial to my own spiritual advancement as I must study and live what I am to preach and teach.

With my current assignment (started in fall 2010) at Saint John XXIII, I have lived on my farm in the spirit of a hermit. I have been living the spirit of *ora et labora* and ministering to SJ23. I have found this way of life to be very beneficial to my spiritual growth and it has not interfered with my ministry to SJ23.

The first few years, I had to help take care of my elderly parents. They have both passed unto eternal life. This leaves me freed from my 4th commandment obligations as it applies to them and there is nothing left that keeps me from more fully embracing this eremitical life.

In the spirit of the rich history of the Church and understanding of the life of the hermit, after much prayer and consultation with priests, friends and laity, I have petitioned (Fall 2014) the Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing, to discern with me a vocation to be a diocesan hermit for the Diocese of Lansing. With his permission and blessing, we have discerned the following understanding, life and mission of my being a hermit.

Understanding the Hermit and their way of life

Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? a prophet? Yea I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee. (Mt 11:7-10)

Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy

Spirit, and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's Kingdom, for the honor of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world, They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory. (CCL 573)

It is part of the rich history of the Catholic Church that men and women have chosen to enter a life of seclusion or semi-seclusion so as to dedicate their life to a scheduled regime of prayer, penance and work. This life has taken different forms, but the most ancient is that of the hermit or anchorite. These holy men and women chose to withdraw "further from the world and devote their lives to the praise of God and the salvation of the world through the silence of solitude and through constant prayer and penance." (CCL 603) And what a blessing their prayers have been to the Church!

The life of the hermit as that of the Religious Orders that grew from their example, the Secular Institutes of Consecrated Life, Consecrated Virgins and Widows, and Societies of Apostolic Life, is a great witness and example of total dedication to God that is meant to inspire and encourage the faithful in general to more fully embrace their call to follow God in everything.

The life of the hermit will include and focus on the following:

CHARITY

If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; Is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never falleth away: whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child. We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Cor 13)

Baltimore Catechism – Why did God make me? God made me to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this life so that I may be happy with Him forever in the next.

In reference to "knowing" God, We have Faith. St. Thomas Aquinas states that one cannot love that which one does not know. Dogmatic theology has this "knowing God" as its foundation. From it we gain Faith, the childlike trust that what is said is true. Child like trust does not negate reason. It is reason that says I can trust God like a child.

In reference to "serving" God, we have hope. A hope that says this God I know can be trusted and so I will live as He Wills, sacrificing my ways for His ways. Moral Theology directs us in how we are to serve Him well.

In reference to “loving” God, we have Charity. Charity, perfect love, the sum and fulfillment of the two great commandments to love God and to love neighbor as self. The infused virtue by which one loves God above all things for his own sake. Human love is but a mimicking at best of God’s love. But Charity is a true partaking and sharing in God who is love. It cannot be acquired by mere human effort, but must be infused in us by God. This requires much faith and hope accompanied by a life of prayer. Charity is worth all the effort.

We get to take at least four things with us from our life on earth when we go to heaven. The indelible marks on our soul of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders go with us to heaven. The fourth thing we take to heaven is all the love we have achieved on earth. As to faith and hope, we will not need them in heaven and they will be useless in hell. They are based on trust in the unknown. In Heaven we will know God as fact and not by faith. Hope is in what can be. In Heaven all is fulfilled and so nothing is hoped for. These are but two aids in this life to help us achieve Charity by opening our hearts and minds and the whole of our life to God in everything. Total surrender.

The act of Charity then is a supernatural act, based on faith, where God is loved for Himself and not out of any hope of reward. It is a choice, an act of the will made in the freedom of body, mind, heart and conscience to love by sacrificing self for other. And no greater gift is there than this, that one should lay his life down for another. Christ proved His love on the Cross. How shall we prove ours?

Rules for Charity:

1. You cannot legislate love. It must be a free offering as an act of the will.
2. Strive to fulfill the two great commandments (love God & love neighbor as self).
3. Always work on deepening your understanding of Dogmatic theology that you may know Him, Moral theology that you may serve Him and Mystical theology that you may love Him.
4. Charity must be the thread that unites all the rules of life together in the spirit of being Christ like. In other words, Charity is the Rule of Life.
5. All other rules from here must be an application of Charity.

SOLITUDE and HOSPITALITY

And rising very early, going out, he went into a desert place: and there he prayed (Mk 1:35)

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the desert. (Lk 4:1)

But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee. (Mt 6:6)

Martha was busy about much serving. Who stood and said: Lord, hast thou no care that my sister hath left me alone to serve? Speak to her therefore, that she help me. And the Lord answering, said to her: Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her. (Lk 10:40-42)

Let the charity of the brotherhood abide in you. And hospitality do not forget; for by this some, being not aware of it, have entertained angels. (Heb 13:1-2)

We are by nature a social being, and so the aspect of communal life is important. But we must remember that solitude is just as important as the communal life. The Hermit sacrifices the communal life in favor of solitude with Christ. The value of this sacrifice can be seen in the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was busy with the worldly aspects of communal life while Mary sat in solitude with Jesus. Both are necessary and one would argue that everyone needs both in their life. The communal life draws us out of ourselves (e.g. pride) and solitude takes us to the deep recesses of understanding ourselves. This place of solitude, need not be about being cloistered from the world and people, but it does need to be spiritual. It needs to be an experience in the deep recesses of ones own heart where there is an encounter with Christ, in a space that only God can fill.

The hermit sacrifices the communal aspect, even as a form of penance, so as to teach the world how to find this inner place. The world, throughout history, and including today, find themselves preoccupied with the cares of the world and not enough with the cares of the soul. They busy themselves with many things: activities, recreation, comforts and pleasures, luxuries, material things, power, money, frivolous friendships and so on. The hermit separates himself from all these things that people find and think to be so important in their lives that they ignore the spiritual life. The hermit becomes a contradiction, and enigma and so an example to the world that there is something more important than the many things that cause them stress in their lives.

The hermit must also remember to balance his solitude with Charity. The hermit must be warm and welcoming to the occasional visitor and not see them as an intrusion on his solitude. Each visitor must be seen as Christ coming to visit and in charity the rule is to be set aside in order be present to the visitor.

Rules for solitude and stability:

1. Stay on the hermitage grounds.
2. May leave the property:
 - a. To do necessary business
 - b. To care for parishioners
 - c. To give retreats or conferences
 - d. A day of flexibility. This is not a day off. The hermit must still fulfill times of prayer, Mass and chores and must be in the hermitage in time for bed. These being fulfilled, he may visit a friend or do some other moral activity in the world.
 - e. For other ministry or apostolate reasons
3. While it is true that solitude with God on the hermitage is important, it cannot be stressed to the point where the hermit is not allowed to do what is necessary to avoid sin. Certain temptations cannot always be overcome by prayer but must be resisted by activity. As success in overcoming temptation is of utmost importance, if certain temptations arise that necessitate the hermit to engage different moral activities, including going off the hermitage, then that must be allowed.

Rules for hospitality:

1. No women are allowed in the hermitage (house) by them selves.
2. No one under age 18 is allowed in the hermitage (house) without a parent present.

3. Meeting people with an appointment is to be done at SJ23 rather than at the hermitage.
4. Unscheduled drop-ins should be greeted with courtesy and *ora et labora* is to be set aside in favor of charity.
5. Property and signs are to be developed so as to discourage unscheduled visitors to the hermitage. This is to be done with charity. People must still feel invited if they need to come, but in such a way that they are also asked to cooperate with the spirit of solitude.

PRAYER (*Ora*) & PENNANCE

And he retired to the desert and prayed (Lk 5:16)

Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said to them: When you pray, say: Father, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. (Lk 1-4)

But if the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquity that he hath done. (Ez 18:21-22)

No, I say to you; but unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish. (Lk 13:3)

Prayer becomes of particular importance as this becomes the reason for solitude, to spend time alone with God. In this intimate and quiet time with God, one plunges into the depth of their own soul where God is found and one undergoes the three transformations in charity (the three stages of the spiritual life).

The Church does not consecrate hermits for the sake of the individual alone, but for the good of the whole Church. The hermit is to dedicate his life to more than just his own personal holiness. He is to dedicate his life to pray for the Church and all the faithful. The hermit will dedicate his solitude, prayers, penances and his labor to the building up of the Church and the kingdom of God on earth. He will also make his offering for the faithful, the people under his ministerial care, world peace, governments, the destitute, the poor souls in purgatory, and for an end to abortion and other crimes against humanity.

This life of regular and constant prayer is of great importance as it will be the fuel to enliven and develop the full and perfect expression of the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience) and the perfection of the individual. This life extends not only to the formal prayer times of the Divine Office and Mass, but also meditation, devotions, other times of personal prayer and the regular uplifting of the heart and mind to God in the form of ejaculations (short prayers) throughout the day.

Penance is also part of the plan of life for the hermit and religious. No one becomes a hermit, religious or priest for himself. Penance then must be seen as a communal act as well as a personal one. Penance must be done for one's own sins, but the hermit must also do penance for the sins of the world. This act keeps the hermit rooted in the community and to the world around him. This becomes an important aspect of why the hermit and religious withdraw from the world, not to escape, but to embrace. They embrace the sins of the world, a world that is so often times ignorant and oblivious of their crimes against God and

each other. The hermit embraces these sins and strives to atone for them with Christ on the Cross, that His grace may penetrate the hearts of many and all.

Rules for prayer life:

1. The spiritual discipline is to be primarily that of the Discalced Carmelite Spirituality.
2. Ascetical Life
 - a. Personal Prayer
 - i. Continue promises made as a Deacon and Priest (In particular, the reciting of the Divine Office, all 7 hours).
 - ii. Daily Holy Hour, *lectio divina* & meditation
 - iii. Ejaculatory prayers as inspired
 - iv. Additional prayers are to be scheduled throughout the day and the week. These may change as time and circumstances seem to dictate, but always to be included is the daily Rosary and daily Angelus. A prayer book should be developed to assure their consistency.
 - b. Intercessory prayer
 - i. The hermit will have a list of daily intercessions to follow each day.
 - c. Penance
 - i. A life of simplicity
 - ii. Offering up daily labor
 - iii. All Wednesdays observe a simple fast and abstinence
 - iv. All Fridays observe a strict fast and abstinence
 - v. Friday –The discipline may be used with meditation. The discipline is not to be used to inflict pain. Christ already suffered the pains of death for us. Rather, it is to be used as a form of mediation that we deserve the pains of death but for the grace of God.
 - vi. Should a Solemnity or Feast of 1st or 2nd class fall on a day of penance then the penance is not to be observed. Exception for Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and All Souls which are days of a penitential nature and need to be observed as such.
 - d. Sacraments
 - i. Daily Mass and reception of the Holy Eucharist
 - ii. Confession every 2 weeks or as needed
 - e. Plenary Indulgence
 - i. For self at least twice a year
 - ii. For the souls in purgatory as often as able
 - f. Personal Development
 - i. Spiritual direction
 - ii. Spend time each week in academic and professional reading especially in the area of ascetical and mystical theology.
 - iii. Read inspirational material and the lives of the saints
 - g. Purgation and Integration
 - i. Always work on eliminating concupiscence and all attachments to the world as this is a life long task. Especially work on eliminating the 7 Capital Sins.
 - ii. Always work on integrating:
 1. Theological, Cardinal & Capital Virtues

2. Gifts & Fruits of the Holy Spirit
 3. Beatitudes
 4. Evangelical Counsels
 5. Spiritual & Corporal Works of Mercy as they may apply to the hermit
 6. All moral virtues in general
3. Mystical life
 - a. The mystical life is the goal of any person who takes the spiritual life seriously.
 - b. As the mystical life is by divine inspiration only, the hermit should always be content with the ascetical life and live it faithfully and lovingly without regard to God's providence for him in the mystical life.
 - c. When God invites the hermit, he is to gently and humbly open his heart to let the Spirit move, inspire and direct the prayer in mystical contemplation.

Labor (*Labora*)

And to Adam he said: ...cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life...In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth... (Gn 3:17-19)

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing, but in labour and in toil we worked night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you. Not as if we had not power: but that we might give ourselves a pattern unto you, to imitate us. For also when we were with you, this we declared to you: that, if any man will not work, neither let him eat. (2Th 3:8-10)

By work, we mean manual labor and not that of the apostolate or ministry. Work is good for the soul. The great saints agree that one cannot spend every moment in formal prayer. No. They must go out and work as God commanded Adam and Eve. Work is often times seen as a punishment from God, but in fact it was His blessing to us. Even Jesus worked as a carpenter and St. Joseph, His Father, is honored with the title of "the worker." St. Paul made it clear that he earned his way as a tent maker and the second Letter to the Thessalonians says "let those who do not work not eat." With a spiritual understanding of work, we have the opportunity to cooperate with God in His ongoing Creation. We get to be a part of building the Kingdom of God on earth. With this mindset, our labor becomes a prayer and it contributes to giving God glory and praise.

This example of labor keeps the hermit humble as he must get dirty and so never see himself above the drudgeries of life that all must endure. It further reminds him that as a hermit, he withdraws from the world of pride in all its forms. He does not withdraw from the world as a form of escape. He is then empowered to remain engaged in the world and its labors. He is never to forget that God labored for 6 days to create the world and that Jesus worked as a carpenter. Embracing the labors the world affords us, we participate with God in the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The efforts of manual labor must be seen as part of the continuous prayer. By offering up our labors to God we make of them a sacrifice to Him. We offer all our labors to God that they may bear fruit in both the material world and in our spiritual life. Recognizing that labor is good for the body and soul, it must be an integral part of a hermit's Rule of Life.

Rules for Labor:

1. Maintain the grounds, hermitage and chapel
2. Have some activity that requires appropriate manual labor and that does not interfere with prayer, ministry and other duties.
3. Other work as is necessary to fulfill what is described under Ecclesial and Apostolate
4. When the hermit becomes feeble or physically unable to do manual labor:
 - a. This rule does not provide the amount or type or labor necessary each day or week. It only assumes that labor is to be done daily for as long as the hermit is able to fulfill this rule.
 - b. The hermit must be honest with God and himself and also with his Bishop and spiritual director, as to how much and what type of work he can and should fulfill.
5. This rule keeps in mind the spiritual benefit of physical aches and pains of manual labor to be offered up as sacrifice and penance (with out being masochistic).
6. This rule does not oblige the impossible but encourages heroic suffering in fulfilling ones duties.

ECCLESIAL

The state of persons who profess the evangelical counsels in these institutes belong to the life and holiness of the Church... Some of Christ's faithful are specially called by God to this state, so that they may benefit from the special gift in the life of the Church and contribute to its saving mission according to the purpose and spirit of each institute. (CCL 547)

The role of the Church, her whole mission is wrapped up in two goals; to give glory to God and to bring salvation to souls. It was for this reason that God gave to Peter the Keys by which he binds and looses. The mission of the Bride of Christ is one not to be taken lightly and only with fear and trembling for one is accountable before God for what he has done and failed to do in the building up of the kingdom of God on earth. To foster her mission, the Church has established many things: Scripture, tradition, doctrine, morality, Canon Law, practices (Liturgy, prayers, penance, devotions and other customs), gestures (sign of the cross, kneeling, genuflecting, folding of hands...), institutions (schools, hospitals, seminaries, monasteries, charities...). An important work of the Church is that of being continually in prayer. For this, things like the Divine Office and the Forty Hour Devotions are used. But there are also communities of people in the monastery and convents that take part in this mission through their continuous and tireless role of *ora et labora*. And also individuals in the role of perpetual virgins or consecrated widows who spend their time in prayer as does the hermit.

Not every diocese does or can have its own monastery filled with men or women dedicated to praying for the diocese. In fact, monasteries do not generally belong to the diocese, but to the community itself. While the monastery is within the jurisdiction of a particular diocese, they are independent of the diocese and pray for their own intentions. These intentions naturally include praying for the Church and perhaps even for the diocese in which they reside.

The diocesan hermit is different. He is a man who separates himself from the world like the monks and nuns, but he remains under the immediate jurisdiction of the Local Bishop. His obedience, loyalty and ministry remain localized to the diocese and the people of the diocese.

The Diocese then has its own monk like person (the hermit) who separates himself from the world in order to more fully embrace the life of intimate union with God through *ora et labora* and the living of the evangelical counsels. The Hermit does not enter this life of seeking Christian perfection only for himself, but that he may pray more perfectly for the Church, the diocese and the people of God. The daily sacrifice of solitude from the goods of the world is offered for such intentions.

By having and supporting a hermit, the diocese is providing an avenue for much grace to be gained for the diocese and the people of God. Over and above the individual's prayers, the prayers of the divine office and the prayers of the Mass (most effective indeed), the prayers and sacrifices of the hermit serve to support and uplift the diocese and the faithful. They further serve to inspire and encourage the individual effort to enter the spiritual journey of Christian Perfection and provides a real example of self sacrifice for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Rules for Ecclesial Matters:

1. Diocesan Bishop
 - a. The hermit will make the promises of the evangelical councils of poverty, chastity and obedience according to canon 603.
 - b. Canon 681 is to be applied as it applies to a written agreement. (This Rule of Life satisfies this canon)
 - c. The bishop will keep in mind Canon 578 without detriment to other canons that give him governance over the hermit.
 - d. The Bishop must keep in mind the solitude necessary for the hermit and not diminish the value of the solitude with too much public ministry.
2. Ecclesial Ministry
 - a. The hermit will continue formal ecclesial ministry as the Bishop may direct him. In particular, the hermit is to provide the Extraordinary Form of the Latin Rite for those who have a preference for it. Liturgy is the most important prayer of the Church. What becomes most interesting is that the word liturgy means public work or duty. Liturgy is the synthesis of *ora et labora*. Liturgy is the sum of all prayer and work and it is the heart of the whole spiritual life.
 - b. The hermit will continue as Chaplain of St. John XXIII Community.
3. Hermit may keep the Holy Eucharist in the Saintly Acres Chapel. He must follow all Church laws governing this practice.
4. Process for consecration as a hermit.
 - a. Develop Rule of life to be approved by the Bishop.
 - b. Stages of becoming a hermit:
 - i. Novitiate for 4 years.
 - ii. Temporary promises for 5 years.
 - iii. Final perpetual promises for life.

APOSTOLATE

All Christ's faithful have the obligation and the right to strive so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all people of all times and all places. (CCL 211) Since they share the Church's mission, all Christ's faithful have the right to promote and support apostolic action, by their own initiative, undertaken according to their state and condition (CCL 216) ... so that they may be able to live according to this teaching [knowledge of the Christian teaching], to proclaim it and if necessary to defend it, and may be capable of playing their part in the exercise of the apostolate. (CCL 229)

Living the life of *ora et labora* (prayer & work), and growing in personal holiness, the hermit can share his experience with people who strive to find solitude in their own lives. It is true that one does not have to be a hermit to find solitude or to grow in personal holiness. The reason for doing so is to be a powerful witness and example that one can live without the world that so often gets in the way. A hermit gives up much more of the world than that which God asks for in the normal course of the spiritual life. The hermit, in this extraordinary way, can say from experience and witness to the fact that people can give up a little if he is able to give up a lot. This life is given as another form of witnessing to Christ in that God gave up much more on the Cross than He ever asks us to sacrifice.

Living in solitude from the world certainly gives the hermit the special (extraordinary) opportunity to work on the spiritual life, but this life is not meant to be hidden from the world. The hermit is to be an example to the world and so must let the world in to some degree in order to teach the world the importance of solitude with conferences, retreats, newsletters and spiritual direction.

One can say in many ways that spiritual direction began with the hermit. People saw their holiness and would go out to the desert to seek their advice. By providing conferences, retreats, newsletters and spiritual direction, the hermit will let the world in to see and learn what solitude with God means and how they can do it in their lives, even though they live in the world. They will learn from the spiritual masters like St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis De Sales and so many others. They will also learn from great systematic writers like Garrigou-Lagrange and Tanqueray. In addition to these, they will learn from the hermit's personal experiences of success and failures and his ongoing studies in the spiritual life.

Rules for Apostolate:

1. May give retreats and conferences a few times a year.
2. May provide Spiritual Direction to those whom he feels called to provide it.
3. Maintain a web site as a way to teach and to let people know what is happening at Saintly Acres.
4. Publish a magazine called Heroic Virtue to offer spiritual advice and as a form of a newsletter.
5. Other Apostolates may also be developed and lived so long as they do not interfere with the solitude and *ora et labora* of the hermit.

EVANGELICAL COUNCELS

The Evangelical Counsels, based on the teaching and example of Christ the Master, are a divine gift that the Church received from the Lord and which by His grace it preserves always. (CCL 575)

“Christian monasticism can be traced to the Gospel as its origin. Its goal is to follow Christ unreservedly, guided by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Note well that they are counsels and not obligation. These counsels bestow a freedom that has enabled countless saints in all ages to accomplish outstanding works. The counsels start in precisely those areas where a human being is most intensely afflicted by demonic promptings and temptations – in the desire for possessions, in the satisfaction of carnal appetites, and in egotistical self-assertion – and they raise our sights to that treasure in heaven which neither rust nor moth consumes (Mt 6:19).” (The Desert Fathers: Saint Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism by Peter Gorg)

The Evangelical Counsels (poverty, chastity and obedience) are particular means toward the objective of Christian holiness and perfect charity (love). While all are called to Christian perfection, not all are called to the Evangelical Counsels. Other particular means are also available and are time honored by the Church as well. These are commended to the people to live: remaining single, marriage, virginity, fulfilling ones duties in life, the apostolate, and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy to name a few.

As to the Counsels themselves:

Poverty

Poverty can take on several forms, but two important forms are poverty from the world and poverty of the spirit. Poverty is not meant to mean poor or destitute, for no one should suffer such violations of human dignity. Rather, poverty means a form of self renunciation.

A soul that has the spirit of poverty is one that is humbled before God by recognizing that all creation belongs to God and that we are but stewards of His creation. As it is said of the many stewards mentioned in Scripture, we too will have to make an accounting for what we possessed in the life and how we used it.

What all is included in the spirit of poverty? First, it is important to understand that poverty and being poor are two different things. In particular, poverty is about money and the ownership of material things in the world like housing, food and clothing. At the same time, it is not about the quantity one has or has not of these things. One could possess millions of dollars and still have the spirit of poverty, though Scripture makes it clear that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It says easier, not impossible. The spirit of poverty is not about quantity, but about ones understanding of why they have material things and how they are to use them. One, with this spirit of poverty, will say that my possessions, no matter how many or how few, belong to God. He has blessed me with it and now I must use it as He commands.

The rich will see that being rich is not for ones self, but for what they can do with their riches. The man in Scripture failed when he had a great harvest and he chose to hoard it rather than share it.

As quantity is not of importance to the spirit of poverty, the poor who have little in the way of money or possessions, should also be humbled before God. That they

suffer is undeniable, but poverty is not about suffering either. Even when destitute, one can have a greedy spirit and so does not possess the spirit of poverty. Those who maintain the humility necessary for the virtue of poverty, will refrain from becoming bitter against God and the wealthy.

In a much broader sense of the spirit of poverty, we see that we cannot become greedy in other forms of plenty that may come our way: food, drink, pleasure, happiness, talents, fame, success... Nor will we become bitter at the lack of any of these. In all things, plenty or famine, we see the blessing of God and seek to use them according to His will, not ours.

For the hermit, poverty certainly means that he should not live in luxury, but it does not mean that he has to wear rags and live on the street either. His life should be a healthy mix of earning his way in the world and in humility, depending on the generosity of others. He should possess the basics of life necessary so that he may fully enter into solitude with God, but never so much that he does not experience some discomfort in order that he may never think himself to be above or better than the trials of life.

While the mendicant orders and their spirit of poverty have a place of dignity in the history of the Church, it is not the intent of this hermit to become an unnecessary burden on people when he can earn his way in life. Too many able bodies today have chosen to be a burden on others who are simply trying to feed their families. While a life of prayer dedicated to the world is worthy of alms, this hermit sees an opportunity to show the world the beauty and dignity of work and the moral responsibility of caring for ones self to the extent that one is able. Only after one has done this, are they to seek alms. While some alms will be sought, it is not to be the main source of income. An approach of being a mendicant would take much time away from the required solitude desired.

For this reason, this hermit will live within his means according to what he earns as a chaplain for SJ23, and from the other sources stated in the Rules for Poverty.

Chastity

But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Mt 5:28)

And Jesus said to them: The children of this world marry and are given in marriage: But they that shall be accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection from the dead shall neither be married nor take wives. Neither can they die anymore for they are equal to the angels and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Lk 20:34-36)

Chastity is the virtue that moderates the desire for sexual pleasure according to the principals of faith and right reason according to the state of one's life. With chastity, one practices purity, modesty and decency. With chastity, one refrains from all that is lewd, salacious, lustful and the licentious.

Sexuality is a good and beautiful gift from God through which He desired to propagate the human race. It is not without it's limits. It needs the virtue of chastity

to properly order men to women and women to men for the purpose of procreation within the context of a marriage of one man to one woman for life, until death.

While sexuality is a very powerful and overwhelming drive, for which many question God's design, we are still called to humbly submit to His will. This is troublesome for many throughout history. So much so that our Blessed Mother revealed to Lucia of Fatima that more souls go to hell for the sin of immodesty than any other sin.

With this in mind, some who are strong enough, fully surrender this desire in the form of celibacy in order to give themselves over to God alone. They do this in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit that this is God plan for them in order for them to become holy. They further do so as a witness to the world of now the beauty of the world that is to come where we will be whole united to God.

Chastity lived in the form of celibacy, is a great gift to the world. It shows them that physical passions can be controlled and regulated to a higher purpose and cause. It is also a great gift to the individual who lives it as it becomes one of the most powerful and meaningful sacrifices one can make to God and so the source of much grace.

Obedience

Servants, be obedient to them that are you lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ. (Eph 6:5)

And going a little further, he fell upon his face, praying and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt. (Mt 26:39)

A huge challenge in becoming holy is the relinquishing of power over self. Free will is a gift from God, a gift that gives us power over God in that we can say yes or no to God and his divine will. In confidence, trust and humility, we surrender this gift back to God and become His slave. Why? We surrender one gift for a greater gift. By surrendering our will to God we make the greatest use of our free will, to choose to love and serve God before all else.

If I use my will to find happiness or any other passion, I will inevitably find some; even a blind squirrel finds a nut every now and then. The happiness I find is fleeting and leaves me wanting more and more and more... In truth, if I had all the joy life could offer, I would not be happy. If I possessed the whole universe, all it's joy, pleasures, power, possessions, fame and money, I still would not be satisfied. I would still want more. Why? Because I am a spiritual being. My flesh may be satisfied for a time with any of these things, but my spirit will never be satisfied. My spirit is infinite and so only the infinite can fill it. Only God can fill my heart and satisfy it completely. My soul was made for God and not for the world.

With this understanding, we see that we must surrender our will to God and let Him direct us in life to know Him, love Him and serve Him so that we will be happy forever with him in the next (Baltimore Catechism).

The council of obedience is an aid to help us learn to surrender, to set aside our ego and desire to assert our will.

What should obedience look like? It should look like our goal, complete surrender to the mind and will of God, without exception and without forcing God to make it a command, we should do it at the slightest suggestion.

We know of mortal sin and venial sins. Many people work on these because they fear the pains of hell. Fewer still work on them for the love of God. Imperfections, while not a sin, still need to be worked on also if one chooses perfect obedience. It is here that we respond to God's slightest request or suggestion without fail.

A parent may see it this way. You suggest that your child should clean his room, "Your room looks a bit messy don't you think?" is all you say and they clean it. Compare this to the child you have to get angry with and yell at multiple times before they grudgingly clean their room somewhat. Which child did your will? The first, right? And so this is obedience to God.

Obedience to our superiors needs to be the same. They ask, we do. We may make inquiries like our Blessed Mother (how can this be since I know not man), but then we must obey and do so with joy in our hearts (God loves a joyful giver). This second part is understandably more difficult.

Limits to obedience is that no superior can ask us to believe heresy, to do evil or to do that which is against our human dignity. With God we do not have to worry about this as He would never ask such things. On the other hand, men will. We owe them no obedience in these matters, but where they are justified, and within their authority, we do.

Rules for the Evangelical Counsels:

1. Poverty

a. Definition

- i. Poverty is first of all to be in spirit and second in fact. Detachment is the most important part of poverty, that one owns the property and not the property owning the person. Nor does poverty mean the absence of necessary property to live and fulfill one's duties. Poverty is the disinterestedness in having property. With this disinterested state of mind and heart, one only cares about having property only to the extent that one needs it to fulfill their duty. Beyond that, one cares nothing about having property and so poverty in fact is lived.
- ii. Duties that necessitate property:
 1. Ministry and apostolates
 2. Means for labor
 3. Maintaining life and health of body, mind, soul
- iii. Other reasons for property
 1. A few months supplies for emergency reasons
 2. A few mementoes
 3. Retirement fund

- b. Hermit
 - i. The hermit will rely upon wages, gifts, stipends from private Masses, donations of the faithful, dues from associate members, conferences and retreats, spiritual direction, and income from any business.
 - ii. Hermit may own personal property, but must do so in the spirit of poverty and simplicity.
 - c. Retirement
 - i. The Hermit should set aside and save a reasonable amount of funds for retirement.
 - ii. The amount saved for retirement should take into account Social Security and Pension.
 - iii. While we are to trust God for all we need, sometimes He gives now for future needs. It is important that we use reason and prudence when thinking of the future. Moses stored food for an impending seven-year famine. When we know there will be future needs, it is prudent and wise to save what one can now. This is different from the man who stored his bountiful harvest as a form of greed and not prudent preparation. Retirement is a reality and in all prudence and wisdom, one must provide for it to the best of their ability. They must also be sure that they do not become excessive in their savings as a form of greed. To not do this makes one an undo burden on society.
 - d. Debt
 - i. Once established, there may be no debts. Exceptions for expensive items. In order to incur such debts, there must be reasonable and sound judgment that the hermit will be able to make the payments.
2. Chastity – Remains as promised as a deacon and priest
 3. Obedience – Remains to the bishop and his successors, but to God and the Church first.

PERSONAL MATTERS

Rules for Personal Matters:

1. Hygiene

Although it is a secular saying, it is true that Cleanliness is next to Godliness.

Jesus saith to him: He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly. And you are clean, but not all. (Jn13:10)

- a. Must shower, shave and brush teeth daily.
- b. Cleanliness is also important to hospitality. Must be presentable and approachable by anyone who may need to visit.

2. Diet

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but what cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. (Mt 15:11)

- a. Gluttony is about pride and greed. All of which is contrary to spiritual growth.
- b. Meals may be taken three times a day.

- c. Meals are to be modest in amount.
 - d. Snacking is discouraged.
 - e. More elaborate meals may be taken on solemnities or when charity dictates.
3. Clothing

But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings. (Mt 11:7)

- a. The standard dress is regular clerical garb, either the cassock or tab style shirt.
- b. When working - dress in work clothes.
- c. When visiting family or friends on the day of flexibility, civilian attire is allowed if seen as useful or convenient.

OLD AGE - DISSABILITY

Rules for matters pertaining to old age, disability or other like matters

1. Should the upkeep of Saintly Acres become a burden or heartache, the property may be sold in favor of a smaller property.
2. If maintaining any property is too much, then selling the property in favor of renting an apartment or diocesan priest dwelling is also acceptable.
3. Should assisted living or nursing home become necessary, then the hermit should, to the best of his ability, live his life of prayer there, maintaining whatever sense of solitude he can.

DEATH

1. The Hermit will have instructions for his funeral arrangements.
2. The executor of the will should have this information.

SECULAR LEGAL MATTERS

Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and to God, the things that are God's (Mt 22:21)

1. Hermit must have a will and an executor of the will.
2. Hermit should have Advanced Directives for Health Care.
3. Hermit must invest in Social Security and Medicare.

CHANGES TO THE RULE OF LIFE

1. Hermit should consult his spiritual director
2. Hermit then may ask permission from the Bishop
3. With Bishops approval and signature on the new draft of the Rule of Life the changes take effect.

SIGNATURE & DATE

The signatures below of the Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing and Fr. Jeffrey Robideau recognize and approve the Rules listed above and obliges both to their adherence.

Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing

Date

Hermit

Date