

RULE OF LIFE

A DISCIPLINE OF CHRSTIAN IDEALS OF PIETY, STUDY, AND ACTION

In times of renewal the experience of a person who finds his/her life wonderfully expanded by a fresh and vital encounter with God through a particular spiritual event, is special. The encounter may be a Christian Conference, a Cursillo Weekend, a Prayer Workshop, or a retreat. It is as if a flame has touched the dry stubble of his/her spirit; and suddenly there is light and warmth. God is real! Christ Is alive and present with is and in us'

The glow of an experience such as this remains fairly steady for a few weeks. Then the individual becomes gradually aware that there is a dwindling of what he/she had once felt. The influences of the secular have an erosive and corrosive effect upon his/her spirit. If there is no other factor in his/her life than the memory of that vivid experience of a few weeks ago he/she finds him/herself fading into his/her former state of life.

How does one prevent this spiritual slippage? By adopting the discipline of a rule of life immediately after the experience of awakening or renewal. There is no discipleship without self-discipline in spiritual matters on a daily individual basis! This personal rule of life leads, of course, into patterns of Christian fellowship as well; in small groups and in corporate worship. Then, inevitably, it leads to Christian action.

What follows is a rule of life which you may use as a guide. It allows for flexibility according to your own personal needs and therefore is not intended to be rigid format.

1. Regularity in Piety

Set a regular time each day for quiet prayer and study. Let it be as essential to

you as your pattern of eating. If we did not eat we would sicken and die. Spiritual nutrition is no less vital. Have your time with God whether you particularly feel like it or not. This kind of determination spells the difference between the soldier of Christ and the dilettante. Though prayers are essential throughout the day and into the evening, it is good to begin each day with these devotions. This "sets us up" for the whole day. We invoke God into our daily pursuits at its outset. It makes all the difference as we work, meet people, relate to our families, and encounter temptation.

2. Quiet

Spend the first part of your devotions in quiet, "be still and know". Too often we approach God in an attitude of impatience, with a form of spiritual activism. We need to practice the joy of simply being in His presence, seeking nothing except just to be with Him. Try to find a quiet place. Noise and confusion are obvious enemies of inner peace. There still may be noise within our spirits and we need to offer that up to the Lord. Do not begrudge time spent in quiet. It is productive, for God is beginning to arrange the disarray of your day as He comes into your being.

3. Prayer

It is artificial to distinguish between quiet and prayer but for the sake of progression in our devotions we need to understand that God, whom we know as the compassionate Christ, is ready to hear us. He is the one who said, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you." Therefore, take time to speak to Him, even to cry out from the depths of some need. In a productive rule of life it is good to have a pattern of prayer that allows for breadth. Narrowness of prayer such as the practice

of only petitioning God, often stifles our prayer life.

One helpful pattern is that of the Cross of Prayer. The vision of the cross is kept before your eyes to remind you of God's love for you, which alone makes prayer possible. As you think of the top of the cross you are led to adoration. Spend time in simply telling the Triune God of your love for Him and your joy in being of the redeemed in His holy presence. Then think of the left transept of the cross and offer God your Confession of sins. This naturally follows as we come into His holy presence. Sin is not simply what we have done or left undone, it is our lapse of trust in God in the totality of our lives. Think, then, of the right transept of the cross and enter into the prayer of Thanksgiving. Again, how appropriate this follows as you consider the Lord's gracious forgiveness. Ask for a spirit of gratitude so that all that you do in the ensuing day will be done not for duty's sake but as a joyful act of thanksgiving.

Move to the centre of the cross, the "crossing" where the two shafts of the cross meet and begin the prayer of Intercession. This reminds us that our lives cross other's lives and in love we lift them up before Him. Pray for all the members of your family. If you don't, who will? Certainly people outside your family wouldn't care as much on a daily basis. Then pray for the needs of those whom Christ places before your vision who are your neighbours (whether near or far). Each day pray for your larger family, which is the Church, remembering always your clergy. So often we leave these prayers to formal liturgical acts on Sundays. Now, move to the foot of the cross and pray the prayer of Petition. Here you are bringing your own needs before Him. To have this at the last, after adoring, repenting, thanking and interceding puts our requests in the proper perspective. Yet, do not hesitate to lay before your Lord your every thought of yourself. If it is worthy He will

honour your prayer, if it is unworthy He will deal with you in love and patient correction. Then remember that personal piety always leads us to corporate prayer (see No.7).

4. Study and Meditation

Spend some time in prayerful study, preferably with the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul said, "Have this mind in you which is in Christ Jesus." To have the mind of Christ is to come to know Him more and more immediately in the Gospel narratives. This is so essential in coming to have more assurance about doing everything according to His will. We need to be able to ask ourselves in all that we think or do, "Is this the way of Christ?" By studying the Bible with openness to the illumination of the Holy Spirit we will come more and more into an awareness of His loving and righteous response to all things. Read systematically, not sporadically. Progress slowly, meditatively, through portions of scripture on a day-to-day basis. Don't skip difficult passages. These will prove to be the most helpful of all if you will pray them through. Let the practice of meditation lead you to Godly contemplation, affirmation and resolution.

5. All through the day

'This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it'. As we leave our devotions and launch into another day we need to go forth with a strong sense of the companionship of Christ. In our rule of life we do not leave this to a chance encounter. We make conscious recognition of Him throughout the day. We might adopt the process of the late Dr. Frank Laubach, the Apostle to the illiterate, who began to have a growing consciousness of Christ by thinking of him

once each hour. When he could do this he trained himself to think of Him every half hour. Later it was every 15 minutes.

Finally he got to a point where he could think of Christ every minute. There was nothing so great or trivial in his life that he could not constantly refer to Christ. In our rule of life we are taking seriously the promise of Christ, "Lo, I am with you always."

6. Small Groups

Small group fellowships for prayer or study are important in a rule of life for those who have shared some experience of renewal in Christ. Form a prayer group if there is not one already available. It only takes two or three people to begin. There should be no more than twelve in a group. For detailed guidelines on how to form healthy prayer groups, contact Anglican Fellowship of Prayer. Remember to let Christ be the leader in your prayer, study and action., "Where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them."

7. Worship

Remembering that the spiritual life of a Christian always leads into the whole experience of the Body of Christ; a rule of life always includes the corporate worship of the Church. The person who exercises daily prayer comes to the liturgical acts of the Church with the fervour that makes them alive to him/herself and also ignites the faith of others. What a difference there is in the hymning, praying, and communing of the daily Christ-bearer from those who come perfunctorily with no great expectation! Though it would be almost unthinkable that weekly worship would become a difficult effort, yet the same disciplines apply here as in daily prayer, worship Him whether you feel like

it or not. In all our discipleship we are called to live above the level of feeling: i.e. on the level of responsive obedience. Holy Communion is a command of Christ. "Do this", He said. Sacramental means of grace become power for action.

8. Christian Action

Action is always a part of Rule of Life. You are led from what could be sentimentality to a life of service. It obviously reaches into your stewardship. The tithe is a simple response to the Lord who has given you everything. Action has to do with your willingness to work in the parish as well. The church should be able to see a direct relationship between a new life in Christ and a life of offering.

Remember also that giving includes sharing with others what Christ means to you. Witnessing for Christ is, indeed, a reflection of what you are becoming as Christ walks with you daily. Beyond that it includes the unaffected speaking forth to others concerning the goodness of God. You are not asked to "button-hole" people but simply to be able to express your faith to those whom God puts in your path. Usually they will reach out to those whose life has certain power and serenity for which they hunger so deeply.

9. Reference

Page 555 Of the Canadian Book of Common Prayer (BCP) contains an excellent summary of the essential elements of a Rule of Life.

For further information or pamphlets please contact your AFP Diocesan Representative or the AFP (Canada) Resources Coordinator

www.anglicanprayer.org

10. A Spiritual Check List for My Rule of Life

PIETY

"Without Me you can do nothing"

1. What spiritual helps brought me closer to Christ this week?

Morning Prayer _____ Meditation _____

Holy Communion _____ Visit _____

Prayer Group _____ Family Prayer _____

Confession _____ Act of Restitution _____

Examination of Conscience _____

Evening Prayer _____ Retreat _____

Spiritual Direction. _____ Counselling _____

Other _____

2. At what moment did I feel closest to Christ this week?

STUDY

"If you knew the gift of God"

3. What have I studied this week in order to better know Christ and His Mystical Body?

Scriptural Reading

Spiritual Books and Periodicals

Study Group

Other Studies

ACTION

"I will make you fishers of men"

4. What did the Lord accomplish through me this week?
5. With what disappointment did the Lord test my discipleship this week?
6. Plan of my Christian witness.
 - How was last week's plan fulfilled?
 - What is my plan for the coming week?

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