



THE JOY OF BEING A CARTHUSIAN MONK TODAY

"Rabbi" where are you staying?

Come, and you will see.

Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. (Jn 1, 38-39)

Maybe, you are looking for Jesus too and wish to meet him.
He is waiting for you at this crossroad and invites you to follow him.

If you listen to him,
you will see where he stays, and where he wishes you to be
with him.

If we fix our gaze on the Lord
and are ready to follow him,
he will always give us light

It is he who asks Carthusian nuns to follow him to the desert:
Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert (Mt 4,1)

The "desert" of these nuns lack sand and oasis. It is the desert of monastic solitude, a corner of silence where -carrying all their brothers in their hearts- they live hidden in God.

Christ makes them participants in his death and resurrection.
He leads all who choose to be free for him to discover
his love and his joy



If you don't know the way the Lord wants you to follow, may be you will like to reflect with him on new trails... That is why we propose to you now -with a simple information in the form of a dialog- that you get to know a little about the life of Carthusian nuns.

1. The vocation

- When a young woman wishes to enter the Carthusian Order.....
- Usually she writes....
- To whom?
- Generally to M. Prioress.
- Who answers her?
- The Master of Novices sends her a letter together with an informative brochure and invites her to initiate the discernment process by sending a 'brief curriculum vitae'.
- And then.. ?
- If she persists in her project, and if considering her life course points to an authentic vocation, we invite her to a stay of some days in the charterhouse.
- And what kind of life does she lead there?
- To make her stay more fruitful the aspirant lives with the Community and follows the same time-schedule.
- Does the stay usually turn out to be illuminating?
- After some days, the aspirant develops a rather accurate idea of the life she wishes to adopt.
- Who takes care of the aspirant during these days?
- The Master of novices visits her frequently; the aspirant talks with her in a friendly way about her vocation and about everything that has to do with it.
- Which is exactly the goal of these dialogues?
- To go deeper into Carthusian spirituality in order to help the aspirant to discern her vocation.
- Which motives are not valid for becoming a Carthusian?
- Disillusionments of life, ... the wish for a quiet existence, with no problems..., and, in general any selfish motives. In fact, the only valid motive is the search for everlasting values, the search of God, if not clearly defined, known at least by a sort of intuition. We try to analyse vocations with the outmost prudence and patience.
- In practice, which are the age limits to enter the Charterhouse.
- Minimum age for admission is 20 years, but it is advisable to wait until 23 -24 years to attain a certain human maturity.
- And up to what age?
- Without a special permission given by the General Chapter or by the Reverend Father (that is to say, the Prior General of our Order), nobody can be admitted who is older than thirty five.



- And is this permission usually granted?
- If the age is not much above 35 years, permission can possibly be granted, but after that age adaptation to Carthusian observances turns out to be more difficult.
- Which are your requirements with respect to health?
- Previous to admission, our Statutes advise us to "consult experienced doctors, who are familiar with our way of life. ". Little problems of psychic unbalance that would go almost unnoticed somewhere else, undergo some sort of resonance in the solitude of the charterhouse that incapacitates the candidate for our daily living. Nowadays, medical examinations are considered necessary before the Noviciate and Profession.
- Regarding will power what are your requirements?
 - A vocation to solitude requires a strong will and a balanced judgment.
 - Then.... not all characters have the same chances...
 - Some are better endowed by nature, but what really matters is the call of God.
 - Being more precise, which is the essential quality that is required to enter?
 - A burning desire for God as an Absolute and being ready to live that in faith.
 - In this path, which is the mission of the Master of Novices?
 - To guide the novices in their formation, help them in their difficulties and in the " the temptations which are wont to beset the followers of Christ in the desert ".
 - Is any special method of prayer favoured in the Charterhouse?
 - Usually, the cathusian novice starts his training through the ways of "Lectio divina". This method of prayer, traditionally used in monasteries, was synthesized by Guigues II the Carthusian, and consists in reading slowly a passage of the Holy Scriptures, and meditating it leisurely. Then you silently take the sentiments and feelings of gratitude, praise and repentance that this passage generates within you and convert them into a prayer to the Lord. When that text no longer says anything to you or distraction supervenes, you turn to read another little fragment of the Holy Scripture and let it sink in the heart. This method of prayer is very simple and reduces distractions considerably. Everything in the ambient of the Charterhouse prepares the nun to let herself be overcome by prayer.
- Obviously all this requires time, training, and it depends largely on the personal grace and inclinations of each one. But it is something that penetrates the novice in a natural way, since she lives habitually in the presence of God, through of a continuous friendly and praying intercourse with the word of God in the Divine Office, the prayer of the Hours and in the moments devoted to "Lectio Divina"
- Do you consider training in the life of prayer to be very important?
 - It couldn't be otherwise. It is important that the novice's prayer will move towards simplification, becoming a simple and loving gaze to the Lord, even if it might go no further than a first step of the prayer of simple gaze or, stillness,
 - Isn't this too demanding for a simple novice?
 - Generally, if God grants the novice the grace of a contemplative experience, no matter how simple and brief it might be, she will be already prepared to overcome the moments of discouragement, dryness and crisis that aren't usually scarce, especially during the time of noviciate.

The young novice progressively frees herself from the tyranny of senses and passions,



from the strong call of the world of the senses that she cast away when entering the charterhouse but are still there hiding inside her. So she goes on overcoming the dissipation of the senses, the superficiality, the flightiness, and so her whole life gradually and almost imperceptibly becomes imbued with the nearness of God. Now in the stillness, in the interior silence that invade her spirit, sentiments of adoration, gratitude and joy become almost connatural to her soul. Should this pillar of contemplative prayer be lacking, the vocation would be permanently exposed to discouragement, to the unsteadiness of moody feelings, to the weariness, dryness and lack of enthusiasm for things of the spirit, that usually are in the roots of most desertions of monastic life.

2. THE STAGES IN THE WAY

A. The postulancy

- Let us assume that the Superiors of the Charterhouse consider that an aspirant to becoming a Carthusian nun has given signals of a true vocation. What then?

- She is admitted as a postulant.

- What is the Postulancy?

- The trial period that prepares for access to the Noviciate.

- How long does it last?

- Between six months and one year.

- What kind of life does the postulant lead?

- A very similar one to the nuns' life.

- Is it exactly the same one?

- The postulant is granted certain mitigations so that his adaptation to the new life might be achieved gradually.

- What kind of clothes does she wear?

- Secular clothes, but at the community gatherings she wears a black cloak and a black veil.

- Is there any special ceremony at the beginning of the Postulancy?

- Yes, a very simple one. It consists in the delivery by the Master of Novices of the cloak and veil that I have just mentioned as a sign of detachment from the world and entrance in the Community.

- How does the postulant spend her time?

- She dedicates the free time she has left after saying her prayers, to foster in herself the spirit of the Charterhouse. She learns the liturgical ceremonies. She also has time for some relaxation, for "*a bow, soon wears out and runs the risk of becoming useless, if it is kept continually taut.*»

-Does she study Latin?

- Yes. She studies leisurely to learn enough Latin to understand the liturgical books.



- Does it take long to learn Latin?
- Usually, after some months of effort, the postulant manages to get a modest knowledge that allows her to understand the liturgy books.

B. The noviciate

- Let us assume that, after finishing the months as a postulant, the candidate's behaviour is considered to be the adequate one.
- If the Community gives her a favourable vote, she is admitted to the Noviciate.
- How long does the Noviciate last?
- Two years.
- What does the novice do during the first year?
- She works to increase his knowledge of the spiritual life with special emphasis in the study of liturgy and Carthusian observances. She learns to work with a collected mind and begins a cycle of studies in order to complete her doctrinal and monastic training
- And where do these studies take place?
- Due to the requirements of our eremitic vocation of the Charterhouse, these studies are carried out in the solitude of the cell.
- But how?
- At regular intervals, students show their progress to the nun in charge of studies and ask for the explanations they might need. Sometimes we resort to biblical or theological mail courses.
- How do novices dress?
- They dress the same habit wore by the professed ones, but the veil they wear is white and the cowl is short and with no bands.
- What is a cowl?
- It is a vestige of the cloaks used by the primitive shepherds of Chartreuse.. It is a sort of scapular that covers the habit from the shoulders both at the front and at the back and is bound together by two side bands.

C. Temporary profession

- Two years have gone by, the Community has given a favourable vote, what's next for the novice?
- The novice accedes to temporary profession.
- Why "temporary"?
- Because the votes of stability, obedience and conversion of life are made for three years only.
- What are the effects of temporary Profession?
- The young profess remains definitively bound to the charterhouse where she made



his votes. The years of antiquity within the Order are counted from the moment of this first profession.

- And once the Noviciate is finished?

- The young profess stays within the Noviciate as just another novice. The Master of Novices keeps accompanying her along her path of spiritual and human formation. During the following three years she goes more deeply into the spiritual formation that she started in the Noviciate.

- And ... after these three years have passed?

- The young profess renews his votes for two more years. The difference is that during these two years she will live among the solemn professes, experiencing more fully in this way how is the life she plans to embrace for the rest of her existence.

- Does she go on with her studies?

- She interrupts her studies during the last year to devote herself more fully to prayer and solitude in her cell.

D. Solemn profession

- Eight years have passed and ...

- The much desired moment of his definitive consecration comes at last.

- Is it an important day for a Carthusian nun?

- It certainly is. It is the moment in which the Church ratifies God's call accepting the gift of herself that the young profess makes to God.

- What are the commitments undertaken?

- The commitment to live exclusively for God's praise. Solemn Profession is the end result of a long chain of graces to which she has corresponded generously with a daily fidelity.

- What happens after solemn profession?

- In a certain way it is the beginning. The Carthusian nun has consecrated herself to God in a sublime act. Now she has to live that consecration day by day.

- What feelings fill the soul of the Carthusian nun on the day of his solemn Profession?

- I think that the same ones that with lyric accents, expressed our Father Saint Bruno in his letter to the Brothers of Chartreuse: *«Rejoice my dear brothers over your happy state and over the abundant graces that the hand of the Lord has poured on you, Rejoice over having evaded the many dangers and shipwrecks of the stormy sea of the world. Rejoice over having reached the quiet and safe refuge of the most sheltered port. How many did desire it, how many fought for it and yet did not obtained it! Many others after having obtained it were excluded from it because none of them had been granted this grace from above.*

Be certain, my brothers, that anyone who has finally lost this coveted benefit after having tasted it, will lament it all his lifetime".



- What is the Virginal Consecration?
- After solemn profession, nuns who wish it may receive the virginal Consecration. That brings the nun to a state of belonging to God.

3. CLOISTR NUNS AND CONVERSE NUNS

- So far we have been talking about postulants, novices and professed nuns in general, but aren't there different ways of living the Carthusian charisma?

- Yes, of course. When Saint Bruno retired to the Chartreuse desert, with six companions, four of them lived always in cell, while the other two also took care of works outside. They were the Order's first converse Brothers. In a similar way, there are among nuns different ways of consecrating their lives to God in the solitude of the Charterhouse:

- Cloister nuns stay in their cell for the most part of the day, devoted to prayer, study and work.

- Converse nuns lead an authentic solitary life, and, besides prayer and study, devote a large part of their time to work in the monastery outside their cells.

Cloister nuns and converse nuns share, under complementary forms, the responsibility of the mission that concerns Carthusian Communities: to make possible the existence of a family of solitaires, within the Church's bosom

- Are there any other differences?

- There aren't because Vatican Council II eliminated all those differences that were not essential to Carthusian vocation which is basically the same one.

- What sort of works are there in the Charterhouse?

- It must be emphasized that the nuns' work is above all monastic. They are not employees whose main reason was to make the monastery run. When we say that their work is monastic we mean that it is mainly a religious action that helps them to improve the practice of virtues and that gets them closer to God.

- How do they manage to keep the spirit of prayer and solitude in the middle of their work?

- The Statutes of the Order recommend the frequent use of ejaculatory prayers, and even to interrupt work with briefs moment of prayer.

-What sorts of works are not allowed at the Charterhouse?

- Those unrelated to monastic life.

- For instance?

- Those that imply going out of the monastery.

- Is silence important during work?

- Yes. It is very important to keep silence always. Our Statutes state that: Only self-recollection during work will make a contemplative out of a nun.

- What place does work hold in the life of a cloister nun?

- They take care of some of the Community's needs: washing and sewing the Community's clothes, vestry, bookbinding, secretarial works, etc. These works are carried out inside the cell taking care of maintaining the freedom of the spirit and interior silence.



4. The most characteristic aspect of Carthusian spirituality:

A. Only God

- Unlike religious men who lead a pastoral life, and engage in preaching, teaching, or the care of sick people, etc... what does the Carthusian Order actually do?
- Our place in the Church is what is traditionally referred to as "contemplative life".
- What is then the contemplative life for Carthusian nuns?
- A mystery akin to the mystery of God, in whose greatness and incompressibility they participate somehow. Beyond the care of worldly things; beyond even all human ideals and beyond their own perfection, Carthusian nuns search for God, live only for God, their bodies and souls devoted to praise God. This is the secret of a purely contemplative life: to live for God only, to have no other desire but God, know nothing but God and possess nothing but God. Those who feel God as the supreme value will easily understand this life of a radical consecration that actually is the life of Carthusian nuns.
- A beautiful ideal
- But this beautiful ideal requires an adequate climate to develop.
- And which is that adequate climate
- This climate is formed by our Carthusian uses and observances that find their true meaning this way. Considered separately with no relationship to their goal, those uses and observances would be impossible to understand and would be nothing but a collection of odd practices.
- Let's see....

B. Solitude and silence

- Which is the word that is more frequently repeated in Carthusian life?
- If somebody undertook the task of looking for the most frequently used words in the pages of our Statutes, we think that those words would be "solitude" and "silence".
- Has your spirituality any slogan?
- Carthusian spirituality is the spirituality of the desert.
- Is it a tradition?
- Our Statutes seem to think so when they tell us:
« The founding Fathers of our type of monastic life were followers of a star from the East, the example, namely, of those early Eastern monks, who, with the memory of the Blood shed by the Lord not long before still burning within them, thronged to the deserts to lead lives of solitude and poverty of spirit. ».
- Is it a merely personalistic spirituality or has it some foundations?
- It has its foundation of the Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church.
- Even if only as a mean, you tribute a real cult to solitude, Why?
- Because, as very rightly our Statutes, say quoting Dom Guigues, fourth successor of Saint Bruno in the hermitage of Chartreuse, solitude is the most apt mean for union



with God: *The founding Fathers of our type of monastic life were followers of a star from the East, the example, namely, of those early Eastern monks, who, with the memory of the Blood shed by the Lord not long before still burning within them, thronged to the deserts to lead lives of solitude and poverty of spirit.*

- Then, has this importance that the Charterhouse gives to solitude, any repercussion on the Order's juridical structure?

- The whole Charterhouse legislation tends to keep and promote this solitude and silence that are the most outstanding notes of the spirituality of the desert and of Carthusian spirituality.

- Can you point some features of your Statuts on Carthusian life of solitude.?

- For instance, our Statutes forbid Carthusian nun any pastoral work either in person or through writing, such as publishing books, giving spiritual direction by mail, etc.; excellent things in themselves but which are out of line with our eremitic vocation.

- So much rigidity couldn't possibly frighten the contemporary Catholic Church?

- On the contrary, this is precisely what the Church asks from Carthusians today.

Vatican Council II has stated clearly that the duty of contemplatives is: "to devote themselves exclusively to God in solitude and silence... no matter how pressing the needs for active apostolate might be" (Perfectae Caritatis, 7) Silence might very well be the preaching that today's world needs most.

- Carthusian nuns protect their contemplative vocation with solitude, but... how do you manage to escape the invasion of social communication means?

- To avoid this danger, there is no radio in the Charterhouse, nor television and our Statutes advise us to be very prudent about secular readings.

- So, you live alien from today's world?

- Our Statutes speak of the need to "*live alien from all worldly news*" as something crucial in our solitary life. In any case, the Prioress takes care to give the nuns those news that wouldn't be right for them to ignore so that the Community may present to the Lord the needs of mankind.

- Isn't there a danger that this hard and sharp observance might alter the spiritual ideal of the Charterhouse?

- Our whole legislation on silence and solitude is just the literal side of our observances. The nun sees in them the favourable climate for his eremitic vocation but she knows very well that this is neither everything nor even the main thing.

- Please resume in one word all that is necessary for Carthusian nuns.

- To be enamoured of God to the point of transforming solitude into a privileged place for living the intercourse and intimacy with the Lord..

- Would any Carthusian nun who was faithful to these principles, be happy?

- Yes, because every nun who is perfectly faithful to her vocation will feel that God calls her to solitudes and silences increasingly deeper.



C. Spiritual quietness

- ... Increasingly deeper solitudes and silences?
- Yes, exterior solitude creates the propitious atmosphere for a more perfect solitude to be developed, the interior solitude.
- What is this interior solitude?
- It is a spiritual process through which memory, intellect and will progressively die to every interest and complacency for things. God begins, instead, to be felt as the only one who can satisfy the deep realms of the spirit. It is only when the Carthusian nun discovers, bathed in admiration, that only God satisfies her, that she begins to really be a true contemplative nun. Feeling that only God can satisfy her produces such a feeling of interior freedom and joy that it is difficult to express it in words.
- Is this contemplative experience something typical of the Charterhouse and restricted to it?
- It is a spiritual process that we find already described in the spirituality of the Fathers of the Desert that initiated eremitic and cenobitic life in Egypt and Palestine: Anthony, Pacomio, Eutimia, Hillarie and many others.
- How do you Carthusians resume it?
- I think that this whole process could be summed up in a word that was well beloved by Saint Bruno and by the first Carthusians: "quies", that is to say, stillness or spiritual peacefulness.
- If I have understood you correctly, you mean that all this Carthusian atmosphere leads to
- The ambience of solitude, the absence of any disturbing noise and of worldly desires and images, the quiet and calm attention of the mind to God, helped by prayer and leisurely reading, flow into that "quies" or "rest" of the soul in God. A simple and joyful rest, full of God, that leads the nun to feel, in some way, the beauty of eternal life.

D. Fidelity to the Cross

- You have the reputation of being very penitent.
- On this topic as on many others there are the strangest ideas. Penitences, for us, are just simple means *to be freed from the tendencies of our lower nature and enabled to follow the Lord more readily and cheerfully.*
- But as you know, personal penitence is not considered an infallible mean nowadays.... we live in times of understanding and dialogue.
- Penitences and in general everything that involves sacrifice and self-denial has a bad press today and is talked about with remarkable inconsistency. Nevertheless, everybody approves sportsmen depriving themselves of many licit things and submitting their bodies to painful trainings.
- Carthusian nuns wish to live as the "new man" that Holy Scriptures demand. Could you specify which are the basic penitences?
- Yes. Removal from the world and absence of news and pastimes. Very possibly,



these are the hardest self-denials and the ones novices consider being the hardest ones. The partition of sleep in two parts, our clothes, the simplicity of our food diet...

- What do you eat?

- We never eat meat inside the monastery. Breakfast is reduced to a warm drink and a little bit of bread. There is a meal at noon, which consists of legumes, fish or eggs and dessert. On the days that we don't fast, supper consists in soup, one egg and some fruit.

- When do you fast?

- Fasting starts on September 15th and goes on until Easter. In this period, supper is reduced to soup, salad, bread and dry fruits.

- Is there anything special on Fridays?

- On Fridays we have a day of abstinence. This means that we don't have eggs, fish or dairy products. On Good Friday and Ash Wednesday we have just bread and water.

- Aspirants and novices are also compelled to fast?

- Adaptation to our kind of life requires time and prudence. This is why aspirants and novices become initiated to our uses and practices little by little under the surveillance and counsel of the Master of Novices.

- And the sick ones?

- Our Statutes say that: *« if, in a particular case, or with the passage of time, a nun finds that any of the aforesaid observances is beyond her strength, and that she is hindered rather than helped in the following of Christ, let her in a filial spirit arrange some suitable measure of relaxation with the Prioress, at least for a time ».*

- Is smoking allowed?

- Tobacco is forbidden for "reasons of self-denial and poverty" .

- In brief...

- These are the most important aspects of Carthusian asceticism. Our Order considers them sufficient and with a great sense of prudence, formally commands that *« No one is to indulge in penitential practices over and above those prescribed by the Statutes without the knowledge and approval of the Prioress ».* The Charterhouse has inherited from Saint Bruno his moderation and equilibrium. In his letter to his friend Raoul the Saint describes with enthusiasm the beauty of Calabria's landscapes and in case his friend might be surprised by these not so spiritual commentaries, he explains: *«... It is true, though that our rather feeble nature is renewed and finds new life in such perspectives, wearied by its spiritual pursuits and austere mode of life. It is like a bow, which soon wears out and runs the risk of becoming useless, if it is kept continually taut.»*

- To conclude this topic, which are the main traits of the Carthusian spirit?

- Solitude, silence, the Carthusian "quies", simplicity of practices, and an austere life define the most outstanding traits of the Carthusian spirit, which are coincident with the master features of the spirituality of the desert.



5. PECULIARITIES OF THE CHARTERHOUSE

A. The Carthusian nun , an eremite incorporated in a monastic family

- After all we have already talked, it seems to me that the most characteristic feature in Carthusian life is living in solitude and silence. I have read somewhere that, among all the monastic Orders, at least in the West, you are the one that underlines eremitism in a more prominent way.

- Probably. This is our clearest identity mark and our specific charisma.

- But then, won't this solitude charisma of the Charterhouse banish to the shadows such important and evangelic things as the love and service to our neighbours? Saint Basilio, father of oriental monarchism said: "How could I wash my neighbour's feet if I live enclosed in an hermitage? "

- Yes, but we should not forget that, as Saint Paul said, not all the members have the same function in the Church. "The Carthusians' life is devoted to the praise of God and to prayer of intercession in favour of all men"

- Then?

- Although our specific charisma is not taking care of the sick, preaching, nor educating youth, the charterhouse isn't a purely eremitic institution; solitary life is balanced with an important share of communitarian life that is also an essential part of our charisma.

- Is that so?

- It is and it has been so since the very beginnings of the Order. Our Father Saint Bruno was not a solitary in the traditional style, such as eremites Paul, Anthony or Benedict who started living totally alone in the desert. Saint Bruno is never seen alone, but accompanied always by a group of friends who share his same ideals.

- That is a very interesting point...

- It is important for us to live as eremites in our cells, but forming at the same time a close family in the bosom of the monastery. In past centuries the word 'family' was the one used when referring to Carthusian communities. Our present Statutes also use it.

- And how do you actually live this 'family' aspect?

- Liturgy is the foundation of our family life. "When we assemble for the Eucharist, the unity of the Carthusian family is consummated in Christ". And the same thing could be said about Matins and Vespers that congregate us in church daily. On Sundays and solemnities, lunch at the refectory and a recreation, supply that solace that is characteristic of family life. Besides we meet at a weekly walk that we call spatiament, and all this gives our eremitic life a familiar, human and evangelic atmosphere that helps us to maintain a healthy equilibrium.

B. The cells

- You have used repeatedly the word "cell" as if it was something specific of the Charterhouse. What is really a Carthusian cell?

- Cells are something very characteristic in the Charterhouse. Basically the cells of



all charterhouses have the same elements even if their distribution may sometimes vary between them.

- Could you describe cells briefly?

- Cells are located in the great cloister which is a long corridor in a quadrilateral shape usually.

The word "cell" suggests spontaneously the idea of a small room but a Carthusian cell is really a small house with one or two floors. As a sign of unity, each individual cell is bound together with its neighbours by a common cloister (a vast quadrilateral corridor). A crucifix and an image of Virgin Mary preside over each cell's entrance. Every time the Carthusian nun enters her cell, she prays an Ave Maria. In the main room of the cell, the Carthusian nun prays, reads, eats and sleeps. This piece is called "cubiculum". It is furnished with a prie-dieu, a table, a bookcase, a bed, and communicates with a small toilet room.

The other room is the workshop, a well-lighted room where the nun does various works for which she is provided with the necessary tools and materials.

This is the Carthusian cell; the nun spends here her days and years in silence, alone with the Lord. The nun eats alone in her cell. It is only on Sundays and solemnities that she eats with the Community in the monastic refectory.

Taking care of the garden, that each nun cultivates according to her taste and to the needs of the community, is used both as a physical exercise and for spiritual relief.

- Is the cell a heaven or a purgatory?

- I would like to think that the most precious gift in this vocation is to have been called to live just for God. In fact, monks in all ages have experienced and praised the beauty of solitary life in the cell where they spend their days in an intimate intercourse with the Lord. Our Statutes join this long monastic tradition that considers the cell as the ante-chamber of heaven" *«This is holy ground, a place where, as a man with his friend, the Lord and his servant often speak together; there is the faithful soul frequently united with the Word of God; there is the bride made one with her spouse; there is earth joined to heaven, the divine to the human».*

-Nevertheless, considering the ambience of noise, images, and distractions that is characteristic of our culture, isn't it difficult for young people to adapt to such a strict a life of silence and solitude as the one lived in the Charterhouse?

- The cell generally requires from the novice a more or less long adaptation process -we could call it de-intoxication- to be able to make silence inside her, to quiet his fantasies, her affections, her senses, until she manages to calm the spirit, to become centred on the substantive, on transcendental values, that are the only ones that can in fact satisfy the deepest yearnings of the soul.

- What would you advice to a young woman that arrives from the world and begins to live in the eremitic cell her new life so different from the life she has lead until now?

- In the first place she should put her trust in Jesus; if He has made that vocation to be born, He will carry it to a good end. She should also trust the Master of Novices, who will indicate her a precise time-schedule so that the young novice can spend her day in an orderly and profitable way; she will also teach her to how to fight against



discouragement temptations and to get used gradually to the peaceful listening of the heart and to let God enter in her interior.

Above all she will advise the novice to trust the Lord who has given her this predilection vocation and will also grant her the necessary grace to carry it to a happy end.

C. The Charterhouse time schedules.

Midnight Matins and Lauds

- The Charterhouse time schedules are a bit odd, aren't they?
 - A bit peculiar perhaps.
 - ¿At what time do you go to bed?
 - At half past seven or eight p.m.. The sun is still on the horizon in the summer.
 - In bed at seven thirty or eight at what time do you get up?
 - Although there might be slight differences from one house to another, we usually get up at eleven forty-five p.m. At that time the tower bell summons Carthusians to prayer.
 - So the day starts at eleven forty-five for Carthusian nuns.
 - Yes.
 - And what do you do at those hours?
 - At that time, kneeling at the cell's prieu-dieu, we begin our mission of praise praying Matins of the Office of the Virgin.
 - Right, so the day begins.....
 - At about midnight thirty, the tower bell tolls again and the whole Community goes to the church through the empty cloisters, barely lighted.
 - And once they are in church....
 - Once in church, with the books set on the lecterns, lights are turn out and there is a profound silence. At a signal chanting of Matins starts.
 - What are Matins?
 - Matins or "Nocturn Vigil" are a foremost part of our communitarian liturgy. Psalms and readings from the Scriptures or the Holy Fathers follow each other. On Sundays and on some other important days, a reading from the Gospel of the day puts an end to Matins; on the rest of days, Matins end with some beautiful preces for the needs of the Church and of the world.
- Matins are followed by the Office of Lauds which ends with the chanting of the Benedictus, an antiphon in honour of our Lady and the midnight Angelus, while a bell tolls slowly.
- Then you go back to your cell and go to bed?
 - Not quite yet. Back at our cells we pray Lauds from the Virgin's Office; then we go to bed with no further delay.
 - At what time would that be?
 - The time for going to bed varies according to the length of the Offices. It varies



between two and three hours..

- And why all this?

- Because according to the Holy Scripture and the tradition of ancient monks, it is a especially favourable time for a self-collected intercourse with God. That is why Carthusians have predilection for these hours of nocturnal praise.

The day's morning

- All right... and at what time do they get up again?

- At a suitable time so that we are ready to pray Prime at seven o'clock. A small time for prayer follows just before conventual Mass.

- Mass is at what time?

- At eight we get together in church to celebrate conventual Mass. This is always a chanted Mass and it lasts about one hour.

-Once the conventual Mass is over?

- After Mass we pray Terce in the cell's oratory. From then until noon we distribute the time left among 'Lectio', study and work.

- And at noon?

- At noon, after the Hour of Sexte prayer, there is lunch that each one eats alone in the cell, except on Sundays and festivities.

- And after lunch?

- After lunch, there is some free time that each one uses according to his will: walking, light works in the garden, cleaning of the cell.... . Then, after praying None, time is devoted to manual work, until Vespers.

- And isn't there any possible variation in this time schedule...?

- Yes. On Sundays and festivities the Hour of None is sung in the church and right after it we get together in the Chapter room and listen there to a reading from the Gospel or from the Statutes. After that we have a fraternal gathering.

The day's evening

- And what do you do in the evening?

- After praying None and until fifteen minutes before Vespers, we do some working. The Vespers Office usually takes about half an hour and comprises an hymn, four psalms with their antiphons, a responsory, the Magnificat and it ends with some beautiful preces and the singing of a Salve whose lyrics and melody differ slightly from the Roman rite Salve.

The time after Vespers is devoted to spiritual exercises, that students alternate with their studies.

- At what time do you have supper?

- Supper, or a collation on fast days, takes place at six.

- What do you do after supper?



- After supper, just as after lunch, there is an interval of free time.
 - How and when does the day end?
 - At seven p.m. the bell tolls for praying the evening angelus. Nuns may prolong their prayer or spiritual reading for one more hour although they are advised not to delay going to bed. The day ends with the angelus followed by Complines through which they thank to God for all the day's benefits and beg his protection for the night.
- So, between seven thirty and eight p.m. ends the day that has been spent waiting for coming of the Lord.

A time schedule presided by liturgical life.

- I guess your time schedules are ruled largely by liturgy, are they not?
- Right. Midnight Matins, the conventual Mass celebrated early in the morning and the Vespers Office at the end of the afternoon set the rhythm of our days. These Offices are the strong moments of the day for which nuns abandon their cells and go to the church.
- What place holds liturgy in the Carthusian nun's life?
- Since our vocation consists in giving praise, with Christ and in Christ, to the Father through our ministry of praise and intercession, the Eucharist celebrated and sung by the Community every morning with its Gregorian melodies is "the centre ad summit of our life".
- And the Divine Office?
 - Although Carthusians pray a large part of the Divine Office alone in their cells, they know that theirs is not an individual, solitary voice lost in the immensity of the world, but Christ's prayer itself and the prayer of the whole Church too, because in the liturgy, Christ, as our Head, prays within us in a way that allows us to recognise our voices in Him and His voice in us.

6. The origins of the Carthusian Order.

- Well, let me put to you an elementary question: What is the Charterhouse?
- A monastic Order that was born towards the end of the XI century; an Evangelic path that has been going on for more than nine centuries
 - Its founder was?
 - Rather than founder, I would say that the "initiator" of this way of life was Saint Bruno, born in Cologne, Germany, circa 1030. Student and later Canon and Rector of the famous Cathedral School of Reims, France, he retreated together with six companions to a solitary and hidden spot in the Alps of the Dauphiné, called Chartreuse, at about thirty kilometres from Grenoble. There still stand the headquarters House of the Order.
 - How do you mean when you say that Saint Bruno was not the founder but just the "initiator" of the Charterhouse?



- I mean that Saint Bruno did not write any monastic Rule. He didn't even reside long in the hermitage of Chartreuse. Pope Urbano II, who had been his disciple at Reims called him and he had to go to Rome and accompany the Pope in his travels through southern Italy. Urbano II sensitive to Saint Bruno's eremitic charisma, allowed him to retire again to a secluded place in Calabria, Saint Mary of the Tower, where together with other companions he started another hermitage similar to the one in Chartreuse. Saint Bruno died at Saint Mary of the Tower in 1101. It is there where his bones lie, but it was his first foundation in Chartreuse the one that did keep his spirit and would become many years later the monastic Order of the Charterhouse.

- And who was the founder of Carthusian nuns?

- Curiously, we Carthusian nuns are daughters of Saint Bruno too.

Towards 1145, a community of nuns in Prebayon, at the South of France, felt attracted to the genre of life of the Charterhouse and decide to adopt the "Customs" of the monks. The General Chapter granted them the affiliation. Since then and until our present days, the Charterhouse is a one and only family integrated by a masculine branch and a feminine one.