SLG Way of Life

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When I face my beloved with my entire surface, all the beauty of his form is reflected in me.

Gregory of Nyssa



We cannot see our own face, or know how we look to God, but we can hope and believe in his knowledge and love of us, specifically, as we are, and as we have yet to become. *Turning continually to the gaze of God as we meet it in Jesus is the heart of our contemplative vocation.* Out of this flows willingness to withhold nothing and be at God's service in a like love—one which is forgiving, sacrificial, redemptive, and life-giving.

From the beginning the Sisters of the Love of God have found themselves identifying with the love behind the Passion. The Community has tried to make its whole life and prayer available to God for the same purposes, in our contemporary world and beyond the limitations of space and time.

What we can do is tiny, but if it brings that fragment of space and time for which we are responsible into alignment with truth it will hasten the time when God shall be all in all. That is the end that we look to.

A Prayer for the Sisters of the Love of God

HOLY AND HALLOWING ONE

we cannot see our own face or know how we look to you, but you know and love us as we are, and as you see we can become.

Look on us.

Let us live in that light, meeting your gaze in Jesus.

In him we see

your willingness to withhold nothing from us.

In him we encounter

your forgiving, sacrificial, redemptive and life-giving love.

Draw us by your Holy Spirit
as you have drawn our Sisters before
us to enter into the love behind the Passion
as we engage with this world's pain.

Draw us

as you have drawn our Sisters before us to enter into mutual love and true worship.

Engage us more and more with the activity of your love.

Bring us to that end for which we long: the kingdom in which God is all and in all.

Biblical References for Pondering

Matt. 13: 31,32; Matt. 6: 21,22

Gregory of Nyssa (Turning continually to the gaze of God)

Heb. 12:1-2

Song of Songs 2:16; 7:10

Phil. 3:7-8, 12-14

Ex. 33:11; 34:29

Matt. 6:33

Num. 6:25

Ps. 27:4

2 Cor. 3:16-18; 4:6

Col. 1:27; 3:3

Forgiving Love

Matt. 18:35

Lk. 23:34; Mk 11:25

Sacrificial Love

Mk 12:33

Jn 10:17-18; 15:13

Rm. 12:1

Redemptive 'Work' with/participation with Christ

Lk. 24:21

Lk. 1:68

Life-giving Love

Lk. 1:75 Jn 10:10 Lk. 12:22

Jn 3:16

Jn 12:25 Jn 5:24

Reconciliation

2 Cor. 5:18-21

Col. 1:24

Combining these attributes

Jn 17:22

Jn 18:11

VISION

The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God is a Community of women who long for God and, by his grace, are learning to spend themselves in God's service.

A distinguishing characteristic of our Community is the inter-weaving of solitude and companionship.

We want to experience and express more of God's Love in our own lives.

We are called to share in a spiritual work that is vital for the peace and well-being of the world, and that begins and ends in the worship of God.

CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE



GO OUT INTO THE DESERT AND STAND BEFORE GOD

We live as human beings at the crossing point of knowing and unknowing, actuality and potential, meaning and bafflement, yearning and dread. Contemplative life is at home in these borderlands where the touch of God can be felt directly and he awakens in us responsive faith. The search for truth becomes a search for his face.

Turning continually to the gaze of God as we meet it in Jesus is the heart of our contemplative vocation. Here there is joy in the Holy Spirit and entry into the life of the Holy Trinity, revealed as self-giving love. As long as the compelling beauty and holiness of God are recognized somewhere among us, there will be light enough to purify our minds and lift up our hearts, and give us courage to continue in faith.

We inherit the church's long tradition of contemplative monastic life in a form which requires no outward ministry beyond lived prayer. Although we are a modern community and do not identify with any one order, this tradition gives us the characteristic features of our life: attentive silence; life steeped in scripture; rhythms of prayer in solitude and corporate worship, and in work and recreation together; a due measure of hiddenness and withdrawal; a love and respect for life in the cell. Let us make sure that these things remain alive among us because we understand them and know how to use them.

Because of the dominant values of the world around us, we have a particular responsibility to educate our consciences. We need to affirm simplicity in the midst of complexity and the sacramental quality of all material things. We need to learn to receive time as a gift and to resist splitting our lives up into compartments. Let us not claim to know too much, or indeed claim anything much for ourselves.

Let us trust that within us which only the love of God can satisfy, and keep our eyes open.

Focussing texts, among many:

Lk 12:32 & Matt. 6:22.

THE COMMON LIFE



KEEP STANDING DO NOT DISMISS ANY ONE OR ANYTHING

Drawn by God's love we come together to make the total gift of ourselves to him.

In Community there are many means of grace born of a shared common life. We are all members of the Body of Christ and celebrate this daily in liturgy and sacrament. The common life provides support within the Body and a training ground. It is both our joy and our cross. Entry into the common life of a contemplative community does entail a radical death, but does not separate from the power of Christ's resurrection. We have not chosen each other and may differ in many ways. At times we may not even like each other very much, but we can learn to trust the good will of all our Sisters and come to love each other and see God in each other. We need to be prepared not to walk away from difficult situations. These are often the occasion of conversion of heart, liberation and transformation as, little by little, we learn to lay down our lives for the sake of our Sisters and of the Community as a whole.

The common life is our joy because we need each other and each is a gift to the others. We have in common our humanity and our frailty, so we need to forgive each other and accept forgiveness all the time, learning more deeply the naked reality of being human but trusting, and sometimes learning more of, God's unconditional love. Letting go of our own perceptions and preconceptions, we can be open to wonder and surprise, and attend to people and things with proper reverence, care, welcome and delight.

Called to know God by love, that is by sharing in his own nature, our life in Community can witness to Christ's power to redeem human society as well as individuals. Our interaction with one another is one of the elements that will enable us to grow and mature both as Religious and as women.

All is undergirded by silence and solitude, and a gradual deepening stability which is a fruit of enclosure.

Focussing texts, among many:

Jn 15:12 & Lk 12:6-7

SILENCE



RECEIVE AND GIVE CHRIST'S PEACE

Silence is a witness and response to the presence and holiness of the living God. It is vital to our life and has a bearing on what is most central to it. By it we acknowledge that we are creatures and part of creation, waiting for God's word. It is an inner prostration and self-offering, such as we make outwardly in the ceremony of Life Profession. The discipline of silence in our daily life asks of us trust and perseverance in many guises. It is fostered by an attitude of alert contentedness, and thanksgiving flowing from the Eucharist.

Although there may be key moments in which we are joyfully aware of this, the value of silence does not depend upon such moments. We can expect silence to reveal to us the restless churning of our thoughts, our obsessions, and that in us which stands most in need of healing. Here the challenge is to be truthful and humble, open to the Holy Spirit and willing to take every opportunity to turn around anger, false judgements and fears. This task is characteristic of the monastic way, and to know that we are engaged in it can be a source of renewed hope.

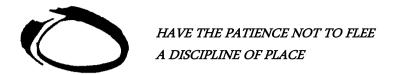
Let us treasure the tradition and practice of silence we have received, and seek to support each other in it hospitably, and with straightforward communication and mutual respect. Let us also be aware that silence can be treated as a weapon or a barrier, and that that is to misuse it. For the sake of charity it is sometimes better to speak a brief word than to cause hurt or misunderstandings.

The noisy environment in which we live brings out different ways of being aware of silence which always exists in, under and around the noise. It also gives us a responsibility to keep the waters of silence, to which we have access as to a reservoir, always clear and flowing.

Focussing texts, among many:

Ps. 46:10 & Matt. 5:8

GUARD THE HEART



The way of life which we embrace includes a limitation of personal mobility for the sake of freedom for and in God. We affirm that God is here, that we are within the life of the Holy Trinity, and we try to remain centred and present to him. Far from implying any limitation of God's presence, this, like the Incarnation itself, is an affirmation that God is in every place and circumstance.

In the ordinary way, and most of the time, we expect to stay on the property where we live, and where there is an area set apart for the Community's use. This enclosed area also serves as a reminder of the essential hiddenness of our life, and that within the body of Christ the Community has been called and set apart to pray.

The discipline of faithfulness to the place where we are is not easy to apply in the midst of a culture which often equates freedom with freedom of mobility, and has invested in it as if that were an absolute value. The discipline we practice is not an absolute; how much we go out, and where we go, rightly varies for different Sisters at different times. Discernment about this will take into account the interests of the Church; the needs of the Sister and her family; the needs of the Community; and the abundant life of the kingdom to which our lives should bear witness.

If we become narrow-minded and peevish we will have gone wrong somewhere, and will be betraying that characteristic expansiveness of spirit in which we can rejoice and grow. Let us seek a right balance between privacy and openness so that we feel at ease, and others can be at home with us. At the same time, let us support each other in allowing our hearts to be tested in the desert conditions of our life. This is where the nature of our desires can be seen more clearly, and we can be drawn more and more into the sufficiency of God for everything and everyone.

Focussing texts, among many:

Matt. 7:13,14; Ps. 132:14; Luke 12:34

SOLITUDE



LET GOD BE ALL IN ALL

Each Sister has a cell which, in the ordinary way, no one else will enter. The cell witnesses to something other than a certain standard of civilized living; it is given us by the Community in acknowledgement of God's unique and particular love for each one of us, so that we may know and respond to that love. We are asked to embrace the time we spend alone in the cell, and the solitude which permeates our life, as precious and full of potential. Through it, night and day, and in the midst of life together, we may have a real taste of the desert as it is known in Scripture. Through it we may come to know that God is one, and that we are made in his image; through it we may come to know that God is relationship and that we are not alone but connected with all that is.

Solitude is for beginners as well as those with long experience in the spiritual life. The place to begin is where we are, with whatever expectations we happen to bring to it, whether positive or negative. It is wise to take the Scriptures into solitude with us and to attend to them slowly and perseveringly, especially the psalms and the gospels. It is wise too, if possible, to disclose to a trusted friend in Christ, from time to time or at least occasionally, what arises in our hearts when we are in solitude. He or she may help us to know how much solitude is right for us at any particular stage. Each one's solitude is unique, but leads mysteriously to solidarity.

If we stop short at privacy rather than solitude it will become isolating and a trap. So that solitude may be an arena for self-knowledge and growth in prayer we need community life as well, and a balance and rhythm between the two. It is normal to experience solitude sometimes as a refuge from other people, and sometimes as a burning fiery furnace. The endurance of loneliness and boredom are part of the asceticism required of us, but there is nothing wrong in welcoming and enjoying the times of delight and refreshment. We can expect to be most happy, most contented, when we can see that all that comes to us, whether alone or in company, is a gift of God.

Focussing texts, among many:

Ex. 33:21,22; John 10:9; Rev. 2:17

REPENTANCE



STOP DENYING MAKE ROOM FOR WHAT YOU CANNOT BEAR AND FOR GRACE

When, by grace, we hear Christ's imperative, 'Repent for the kingdom of God is near!', other words and human logic fall away. A great door is opened to us. Excuses, explanations, scruples, have no place and, by grace, we may allow ourselves to be rescued and set free. Such naked knowing and being known is both surprise and homecoming. It can bring us to silent wonder, tears, and true confession; all these bear witness that we are coming back to life. Whenever this happens to us, there will be deep sorrow, joy, and something specific which we must do. It is likely to be love in some form, for the neighbour, the stranger, ourselves, God.

Let us pray to be given such repentance throughout our lives. It is life-giving and quite different from anything routine, sham, or guilt-ridden. We are not asked to be successful or to achieve repentance, but to be humble, real, and willing to begin again and again. The confession we make formally at Compline each day reminds us of this, and the Sunday Eucharist marks a fresh start to each week, but God's love and mercy are there in all their fullness, for each of us, all of the time.

As part of our serious commitment to repentance, let us train ourselves not to delay in admitting our faults, and be ready to apologize and ask forgiveness as the need arises. Bringing these things to light simply as soon as they happen will help us not to brood or get stuck in self-despair. In the regular Community assessments we recognize our responsibility to each other, and take into account the more-than-personal effect of our actions, thoughts and words. We acknowledge our complicity in the sin of the world and seek, under the mercy of God, to become a community of repentance.

Focussing texts, among many:

Psalm 51; Luke 15

MYSTERIES OF CHRIST



CREATION

REDEMPTION

SANCTIFICATION

Any revelation of God which we are able to receive is necessarily a mystery: God hides himself so that we can meet him. Being alive gives us our primary experience of receiving his gift. Being also awakens in us some sense of what *his* being is like, and holds a promise yet to be fulfilled. Our bodies engage us intimately and dynamically with the material creation; they open possibilities, and set limits. We are placed in relationship with others, and we know that we will die. Consequently, we are vulnerable to frustration and the fear of death; we experience sin and the fruits of sin; and we are moved by longings for eternal life.

The mystery of the Incarnation, with the person of Christ at its heart, crowns God's self-disclosure to us, and is the means of our redemption. From him the faith and sacraments of the church derive; and she sees the Risen Lord drawing all creation to a point of completion and transcendence. Those who are baptised orient themselves to this end and enter into a new kind of life, sealed by the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Eucharist.

This stream of divine life is the context of monastic living and of our search for holiness. It brings joy and leads us to worship and give thanks. Through it we learn to value the material world without idolatry; and to banish pride, hatred and lies from our relationships.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is flowing towards us through everything.

Focussing texts, among many:

Psalm 139; Col. 1:17-20; Rom. 8:18-23

WORK



WORK TO PUT IN LOVE WHERE LOVE IS NOT

What we are seeking to do in our daily work is very simple and direct, requiring practice rather than many words of explanation. The tasks vary greatly, but in them all we have the chance to glorify God through service of others, and through attentive obedience to what is needed.

With this in view, let us do the very best we can with what is before us. The result can be life-giving and joyful, even if we do not achieve everything we hoped for, and even in failure. It is best not to worry about self-fulfilment and job-satisfaction. Work will humiliate or frustrate us only if we lose sight of our inner task, or if we are set on using work for our own ends. As part of monastic life it offers us a constant and freeing asceticism in which God meets and ministers to us.

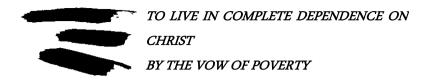
Those who allocate work within the Community, whether the tasks are small or great, have a duty to listen to both Sisters and circumstances, so as to help each member of the of the Community to give the most she can, and so that our energies are focussed on God. Sometimes this will mean asking for simple obedience and trust; sometimes it will mean asking and acting upon a Sister's advice. Work is also an opportunity for us to travel patiently together through layers of fear and questioning; to support each other; and to give and receive the peace of Christ.

Materially, the Community relies upon income from capital derived from the gifts of past and present benefactors. Their provision for our needs is a sign of God's care for us, and can encourage us to be true to our calling. Because we are dependent upon the generosity of others for our livelihood, we know that we cannot be separated from other people, or from the social sins of our world. It means that we do not have to go out to work to earn our daily bread; and it sharpens our obligation to make integrity and generous love the basis of the work we do and the way in which we do it.

Focussing texts, among many:

Matt. 6:31-34; Rom. 8:19-21; Lk. 22:27

POVERTY



By our vow of poverty we undertake to follow Christ who emptied himself to become human, and handed over his life on the cross. The poverty and limitation of Bethlehem and Calvary underlie Christ's risen presence and power in every circumstance. By monastic poverty we affirm his sufficiency and our desire to live in entire dependence upon him, and we have before us the inspiration of those early Christians who believed, who were of one heart, and who held all things in common (Acts 2:44 and 4:32).

In practice poverty means that we renounce personal ownership of money and possessions. We rely upon the Community to give us what we need for our livelihood day by day, and we are required to use the many things entrusted to us well and responsibly. When that provision is ample, we need to guard against taking material well-being for granted. When, for any reason, we have to go without what we need, or what we want, we can treasure the chance to share momentarily in the lot of those for whom poverty is not a matter of choice. And in everything give thanks.

The corporate life of the Community, as well as the lives of its individual members, should reflect the values of the kingdom of God in concern for others, right-living and peace (Luke 6:20). Our spiritual lives will flourish best in a certain sparseness of material things, but

that does not imply that we wish to praise or pursue hard physical poverty as a desirable condition for any human life. The poverty we mean leads to joy.

We seek to stand still before God in our naked humanity. When we have exhausted all our own resources, we have nothing left but to turn to God, to rely on his strength. To achieve such simplicity, we must grow increasingly in detachment from own desires, and from our own ideas of what is good and what is necessary, in order that God can fill the space. Anxieties, self-centredness, self-hate, can be allowed to fall away. Let us choose not to acquire small token possessions to compensate for our emptiness. Let us support one another in the lifelong work of freeing ourselves from acquisitiveness and possessiveness. As we learn from experience how impossible this is for us (Mark 10:27), so we learn to depend empty-handedly on Christ. Often our most costly experience of poverty will be that of our own selves, our awareness of our inadequacies and failings. Gradually we learn to accept and to forgive each other, aware that we are loved just as we are, and that we have nothing that we have not been given (1 Cor. 4:7).

CHASTITY



TO DEDICATE EVERY FACULTY
OF BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT
TO GOD
BY THE VOW OF CHASTITY

By our vow of chastity we undertake to follow Christ in self-giving love. He set aside grasping and exploitation, and directed his whole life to a single purpose. His earthly life narrowed down to the point of death; his death for the sake of others engendered life and new creation. Chastity as a disposition of the heart comes from letting the mind of Christ be in us. In him the nature of love is revealed as holy, strong, and life-giving, with its source and end in God. Jesus is our model of chastity.

Our vow includes voluntary perpetual celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matt 19:11–12). By remaining single and renouncing sexual activity, we maintain boundaries to guard the inner core of our being and witness to God's indwelling. Restraint, which is not repression, allows us to focus and channel our passions on God. This is not something we can do alone; it has to be done by God and we have to choose to let God do it. It will lead to growth in self-knowledge, as we allow God to work in us, cleaning, pruning and purifying all that is wayward and grasping in us. The practice of chastity should lead us to purity of heart and singleness of purpose; and it is in chastity, which is the whole being set on God, that the hidden joy which is beyond all natural attainment will be found.

In the twenty-first century we are exposed to stimulation from a great variety of sources. In the face of such abundance, we need training in discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to make choices in keeping with our calling. To this end, let us give ourselves to prayer and cultivate familiarity with the things of God. Nothing will more quickly blind our eyes to the image of God in another than our own disordered passions, but passions redirected towards God put us, through him, into communion with all. In the love of God all relationships are made perfect, both in this world and in the whole unseen world.

OBEDIENCE



TO UNITE OUR WILLS
WITH THE WILL OF GOD
IN THIS COMMUNITY
BY THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

By our vow of obedience we undertake to follow Christ who knew the obedience of a Son but took the form of a servant. He shows us the way of humility and invites us to take his yoke and learn from him (Matt. 11:29), within a community based on obedient love (Phil. 2: 1–13).

The desire and possibility of living together in this way springs from Love at its Source, that is, the nature of God. We must, therefore, root our obedience in prayer, and seek to let ourselves be governed primarily by Christ's law, Christ's covenant, and Christ's life within and among us, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the context of our common obedience to the Community's Rule, Statutes, customs and way of life; and of our obedience to legitimately appointed authority, exercised in faithfulness. It is the context of the mutual obedience we seek to practice, Sister to Sister.

Obedience tests the heart, both of the one asking obedience, and the one responding to it. It is not childish dependence on authority figures, or licence to react against authority, or licence to undermine the efforts of others. On occasions when obedience is difficult, freely given self-surrender to God in the hands of another is often the source of the pruning and

shaping that leads to growth and vitality. No one may ask another to act against her conscience; it is expected of us that our consciences should be informed, and that we do not misuse this safeguard.

All this requires discipline, detachment, and deep listening for the presence of God's truth in all circumstances. We can support each other in our obedience through mutual confidence, helping each one to discover her individual responsibility, setting each other free from fear and the limitations of self-will. We can take steps towards communion by acknowledging and respecting our diversity and entering into dialogue. Praying and listening together, learning from each other in a genuine search for the will of God, we can become a more obedient community.

God seeks our obedience in order that we may be more fully converted to him, that our lives may be renewed and transformed. In this endeavour we discover our own and others' limitations, how stuck we are—and how free we can become if we move with the energy which is born of God (Jn 1:12,13). This is risky and will involve sacrifice. When we fail, God is faithful and continues to call us to follow him, and we learn anew that we are sinners in need of healing.

Obedience is a place where we will learn of the faithfulness of God, and recognise the leading of the Holy Spirit in the Community.

RELIGIOUS VOWS & THE VOWED LIFE



SUSTAIN ME ACCORDING TO YOUR
PROMISE THAT I MAY LIVE
LET ME NOT BE DISAPPOINTED OF MY
HOPE

The vows we make are binding and public promises by which we give ourselves to God. They are made voluntarily and recall God's covenant relationship with Israel, figured by marriage, and always dependent upon God's mercy and grace (Hos. 2:19,20). In scripture, a vow is a prayer as well as a promise.

Already joined to Christ in baptism, we resolve at Profession to follow him under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, witnessed and accepted by the church. All previous acts of self-oblation are renewed, and we entrust the future, whatever it holds, to God. Monastic Profession also involves a mutual obligation between the religious and the Community, in which all are bound by the same obligations to God and to each other.

By our vowed living, we seek to grow in holiness and to return to God the whole of our life, for the whole of our lives. We are given a way of redirecting and transforming our energies so that our deep desire to be set wholly on God may come to fruition. As we seek to live faithfully by the vows, our attitudes and actions are transformed to be like those of Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18, Phil. 2:5), and our minds are renewed (Rom. 12:2) as we die to self and learn to live for God (Gal. 2:20).

Paradoxically, commitment to stay through changing circumstances leads to freedom. The lifelong responsibility which we have accepted nails us to the cross of our order and becomes, by the grace of God, a shelter for the Spirit. Each day is a new day for us to begin again.

OUR SHARE IN THE WORK OF CHRIST



MADE FREE OF THE THINGS OF SELF, TO BE USED MORE AND MORE IN THE SERVICE OF REDEEMING LOVE

The prayer to which we are called engages us in the work as well as the worship of Redeeming Love. What Christ has done to undo sin and bring creation to its fulfilment works like leaven through history and time. Our task in our time is to co-operate with this dynamic transformation and look to the end (I Cor. 15:19–28) in the midst of all that conflicts with it.

If we sometimes ache to be with the Crucified and Risen Lord in the world today, and if we are to be true to the vocation of the Community, we lay ourselves open to knowing something of his experience of sin, righteousness and judgement (Jn 16:7–15). In the power of the Spirit, as we pray Christ's prayer to the Father, it may also be given to us to feel the pressure of his conflict with evil and to know depths of alienation. This is the point at which the Spirit intercedes in us with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8: 26) and we may become, without knowing at all how it can be so, a channel of God's peace.

The formative Rule of the Community was drawn up in the stress of the First World War with a view to bringing light into the world by contemplation and what was then called 'reparation'. This teaching linked the Sisters' personal and common life with the purposes of Jesus in his Life and Passion, and with the urgent needs of the contemporary world. It is vital for us to make those connections too. We

may be tempted to think that there is nothing we can do, or that the contemplative life is worthless. Let us combat such doubts and discouragement by identifying wholeheartedly with Christ in our daily choices, both small and great, and so release the power of divine love in the world.

Turning continually to the gaze of God as we meet it in Jesus aligns us with his mind and his peace, and draws us more and more to engage with him in the overcoming of evil and the work of unity and reconciliation. This is God's work—in us, in our Community, the Church and the world at large. It will mean costly sacrifice as it did for Christ. It is a work in which we will be tested, sometimes to the limits. We need to keep close to him, and hold on to the knowledge that the victory is already his. We must never forget that we are in him and he is in us. Resting in that place, nourished by the sacraments, most particularly those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, we are slowly strengthened and transformed, and drawn into all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14–21; Col. 1:13–20)

'To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.'

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UK March 2015