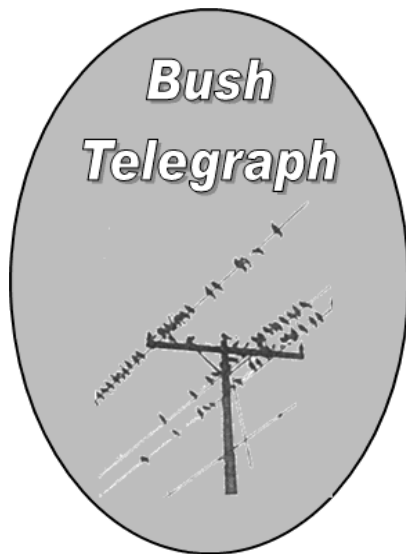


Bush Telegraph

An irregular newsletter



2023

WORK OF GOD

DIVINE OFFICE

As Brothers living at the hermitage to love Christ is to love prayer, to be ready at every moment to drop everything and hurry to that place where God is about to speak his word to us and is waiting for our response.



The Liturgy of the Hours through the rhythm of the day, allows us to reaffirm our loving choice very concretely seven times a day. Whatever the pressing needs of work nothing is more important than the one work for which we have been called to as Franciscan Brothers living at the hermitage – the work of God, the Divine Office. This is so called not only because it is entirely devoted to God, but also and especially because God is himself at work in the heart which is open to him.

FROM FRANCIS' RULE FOR BROTHERS LIVING IN A HERMITAGE

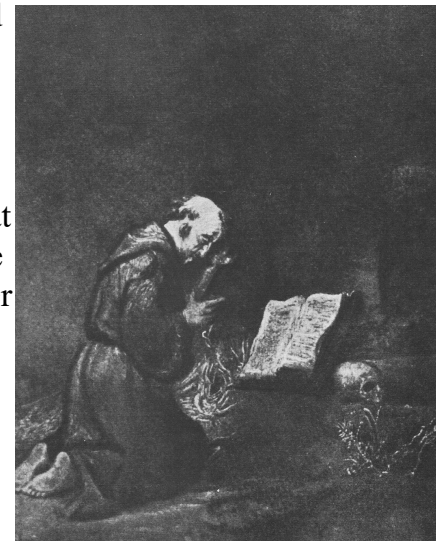
...Immediately after sunset they should say Compline of the day. They must be careful to keep silence and say their Office, rising for Mattins.

Their first care should be to strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Prime and Terce should be said at the proper time, and after Terce the silence ends and they can speak and go to their mothers. If they wish, they may beg alms from them for love of the Lord God, like any other ordinary poor people. Afterwards, they should say Sext and None, with Vespers at the proper time.

Scholars agree 'The Rule' is an authentic document written by St. Francis.

FRANCIS' COMMITMENT TO THE DIVINE OFFICE

Although Francis had been troubled for many years by the infirmities already described, he was so devout and reverent at prayer and the Divine Office he would never lean against a wall or support. He always stood upright and bareheaded, although he sometimes knelt.



Indeed, Francis devoted the greater part of the day and night to prayer, and even when he was travelling around on foot, he would always halt when he wished to say the Liturgy of the Hours. But if he were riding because of his infirmity, he would always dismount to say the Office.

One day it was raining heavily, and he was riding because of his infirmity and pressing need. And although Francis was already drenched to the skin, he dismounted from the horse when he wished to say the Hours, and said the Office standing in the road with the rain pouring down on him, as if he had been in a church or cell and he said to his companion:

If the body likes to take its food in peace and at ease, although it becomes food for worms, how much greater should be the soul's reverence and devotion when it receives the food which is God Himself.

From the 'Mirror of Perfection' an early biography of Francis

A PERSONAL JOURNEY SOLITUDE

The role of community and the role of the individual in solitude is an important one for living in a Franciscan Hermitage. This is impressed in the simple but informative Rule written by Francis.

Not more than three, or at the most, four Brothers should go together to a hermitage to lead a religious life there. Two of these should act as mothers, with the other two, or the other one, as their sons. The mothers are to lead a life of Martha; the other two, or one, the life of Mary. Those who live the life of Mary are to have a separate enclosure and each should have a place to himself in which he may pray and sleep.

From the Rule for Hermitages by Saint Francis (1217-1221)

Francis describes the idea in living together by using that beautiful metaphor of Mother and Son. It is profound as it is simple. It is also straight forward and universal to the modern reader. It describes the relationship of the two based on the principle of Christian love and gospel teaching drawn from the Martha and Mary story at Bethany. I would like to endeavour to put a little flesh upon this wonderful principle Francis has given us in his Rule, by using my own experience of Solitude within the life of our community.

Picking up Francis's idea of mother and son, community it seems to me, has been my mother. The first infant steps of my venture into solitude has been a gift of community in this place we live. By its own life and generosity, community has enabled me to explore and develop this time "Alone with God". The whole idea of living together in 3 or at the most 4 in number as a Hermitage makes it a sound and protected proposition for one to venture into solitude with its hazards and difficulties that a brother is bound to face. To know there is a committed loving community at your back, living a religious life and pointed in the same direction as you are, is frankly, a great help and blessing from God. This is then the central idea of Franciscan Hermitage that Francis maps out for us. To make possible in a setting of simple life and prayer, to seek Gods will in the structure and rule of its life.

The warm blood, if I can use a metaphor like Francis, is like the daily round of Offices that flows through its body faithfully each day.

So, as a mother the community has made my solitude a 'born reality'. And as mother the community's role continues over time, lending its wisdom and strength and stability as it sees fit. One of the positive themes I have encountered with community in solitude is that it has always been for me a good corrective and grounding. One simple wisdom saying I have found noteworthy is expressed in the words- "*One must live rightly with men before you have the tools to live rightly in solitude*". To put it another way, the simple cut and thrust of relations with your brothers is an important ingredient to develop the necessary skills for a balanced and healthy life and for a life in solitude. If the community life is healthy it follows that wisdom and a right judgement in all things will follow. The community has been the steady hand offering support and good reason keeping a healthy perspective on my own venture into solitude.

This interplay of solitude and the simple community life of a small group of religious, is the ideal Francis was writing about in his Rule. Using the gospel text and the universal image of mother and son, he has left us words that are rich, full of simple wisdom and I would think, comes out from Francis' own personal experience with his brothers. What Francis has left us in his Rule is perennial in nature. Perennial for two reasons; first - it holds God and His Kingdom at the centre of its teaching and goal; second - the dynamic of human relationship (which is what Francis is dealing with here) remains what they are down the ages - in the human experience a source for much pain and suffering, but also, the potential to much joy and happiness in life.



Francis is rowed by a devoted friend to a remote island on a lake to spend time 'Alone with God'

TO LIVE SIMPLY, IS NOT SO SIMPLE!

At the beginning when we established the hermitage we felt strongly that we wanted to live a simple life-style. We deliberately chose the hermitage in a isolated location and this also meant we had to be as self reliant as possible.

Each hermitage has its own 'stand alone' solar power system. A panel and battery supplies the simple requirements for a few lights etc... Sounds simple!

To try and live a simple lifestyle involves a commitment to every part of the day. It will include all the areas and activities that we are involved. Chopping wood for hot showers and fuel for our kitchen stove are just two ongoing jobs that have to happen.

'The following photos reveal just what simple really means –!'

STEP 1: Setting out on a journey with help



STEP 2: The next stage is taken alone. Crossing the dry creek, which is not possible when in flood without the aid of this bridge.



STEP 3: Now the ascent to the hermitage



STEP 4: Journey continues up a winding and difficult path. Battery weighs approx 50kg but seems to be getting much heavier!



STEP 5: At last!! Lights.



SO BEAUTIFUL, BUT!



These colourful attractive birds live in flocks of 20 to 40 strong. They nest in communes numbering 20 or 40 and sometimes more. They help one another dig their nesting burrows which they dig with their bills and then scrape out rapidly with their feet. They also share the duties of incubation, brooding and feeding the young. Up to 8 birds have been seen assisting a single burrow. Their diet consists of dragonflies, damsel flies, beetles, bees and other insects of similar size. They are elegant flyers performing convoluted aerial sallies, fluttering, gliding, twisting, wheeling and swooping with ease. But when flocks of these otherwise beautiful birds, arrive at our little apiary it spells disaster! They have hit the jackpot. Each bird will take several hundred bees in one day. They remain until every single bee that leaves the hive is devoured. In the past we have tried various methods to scare them off, but this last year nothing has worked until we hit on a rather novel idea using nature itself. The trees in the apiary the birds use to swoop from and take the unsuspecting bees are used also by the Kookaburras when feeding. So lets get help! We call in our much loved Kookaburras which arrive around the apiary site, and quickly scatter the Bee-eaters and take-off.



'It's not only his mind which has been broadened by years of contemplation — !'

The CANTICLE below celebrates the dimension of solitude in our life at the Hermitage

O Solitude: that enlightens us to the presence of Jesus, which invokes our adoration, our love, and our joy.

O Solitude: that gives opportunity for holy leisure, inviting a deeper wisdom in the school of reading and prayer.

O Solitude: that invokes in us a profound gratitude for our vocation, guiding and strengthening us, deepening our love for our brothers.

O Solitude: that leads the soul by hidden paths and in desert places; as a cloud by day and fire at night; and is the fiery furnace of Babylon where the three saw the Son of God.

O Solitude: you expose in us our shortcomings inviting the opportunity for sorrow and repentance, that by His grace we can begin again.

O Solitude: that is a bridled discipline for the eyes, ears and tongue, preparing a fertile soil for the increase in the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

O Solitude: that awakens in us a wonder and joy to the beauty of the night and the glory of the day, for sun and moon and the whole of creation that we encounter in this place.

O Solitude: that deepens our awareness and appreciation to the gift of place – *Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the House of God. This is the Gate of Heaven.*

Bush Telegraph

We are dependent on the good will of others to pass it on, photocopy it and financially support us. We are grateful for those who do this and wish to thank them and encourage others to join us and them in the distribution of the Bush Telegraph.

Little Brothers of Francis.

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We are a recognised Contemplative Religious Order in the Anglican Church.