

Fraternity

Communion

The image of a *communion of persons* refers to the unity or “common union” established when persons mutually give and receive “the sincere gift of self.” The male-female communion of persons in marriage is a created image of *the* Communion of Persons found in the Trinity.

What is said concerning the spousal union holds true in many ways for us who have responded to the vocation to live the religious life in common. Our supreme model for communion is the Trinity. We are invited to participate within the dynamics of Trinitarian love.

Fraternities that are schools of communion ‘teach’ by their very lifestyle such lessons as: being authentically concerned for one another, mutually respectful, interdependence, and shared responsibility. Provinces are only as strong as their local fraternities; and local fraternities are only as strong as the individual’s vocation to the common life. Therefore, it is imperative that in all honesty we reflect upon just how and by what means we contribute (or detract) to the health and welfare of the common life.

Presence

Christ traveling with the disciples on the road to Emmaus is our model par excellence for *presence* (Lk. 24: 13-35). Christ was truly present to the disciples as they journeyed along the dusty road to Emmaus; their hearts heavy with the sadness of past events and the seemingly hopeless situation in which they had invested so much. Here Our Lord enters into their midst in a gentle, almost unseen manner. Step by step as the disciples unfold their package of woes before their unnamed companion, the Lord listens. He allows them to have the space and time to explain themselves and to reveal who and what they are as persons. We can learn from this example of how we can be present to our fellow brothers in community. When we commit ourselves to patient accompaniment and heartfelt compassion, we can incarnate the healing, teaching, encouraging power of the Lord in often unseen ways. We have the capacity to become channels of God’s grace—a grace which always brings forth new life.

Minority

“Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!” (Philippians 2: 6-8)

“Man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself” (Gaudium et Spes, 24). To say that we can only find ourselves through the “sincere gift of self” is to say that we can only realize who we are by loving as Christ loves. This, of course, is Christ’s new commandment; “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

This will forever entail the self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving acts of *service*. Sincere self-giving means that love is realized in and through self-donation. “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity” (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.).

To love as He loves means that our love must be: *free, total, faithful, and fruitful*. These four qualities of Christ’s love are openly displayed upon the cross of Calvary.

Points for Reflection

The three areas of: *speech, thought, and action* provide ample material for personal and communal reflection. Using the benchmarks of *content* and *quality* as the criteria for evaluation, assess or describe my (our) particular interaction within the fraternity.

- Speech

Language can build up or tear down. The spoken word has tremendous force. A young postulant once remarked “You can be sure that the one who talks about others in front of you, talks about you in front of others.”

*How can my words ‘build up’ or ‘tear down’ my fraternity?

“Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things people need to hear, things that will really help them. Do nothing to sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, all passion and anger, harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind. In place of these, be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ” (Ephesians 4:29-32).

- Thought

Prayer often calls forth and develops within us a greater personal integrity and simplicity. What fills my mind? What is my fundamental orientation? How much is clutter, and how much is essence?

“Finally, my brothers, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8).

- Action

The early Christians were known for their love for one another, it was clearly visible to others. Paul’s analogy of the body (1 Corinthians 12), and James’ terse lines regarding faith and works (James 2:14) are just two of the many passages in Sacred Scripture that admonish and inspire us to altruistic service.

Where is the majority of my energy directed? What is the motivation for doing what I do?

“He picked up a towel and tied it around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel he had around him” (John 13:4-5).

Pax et Bonum