

CHOICES

FROM THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS OFFICE OF VOCATIONS

VOLUME 33, ISSUE 1



IN THIS ISSUE:

Following Jesus through Celibacy, Poverty, and Obedience



The Holy Cross Vocations Team: Fr. Jim Gallagher, C.S.C., and Fr. Drew Gawrych, C.S.C.

Our religious life is at the heart of who we are as priests and brothers of Holy Cross. We are a community of men who for the love of God have committed ourselves to a common life and work. We make this commitment to God through the vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience according to the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross. As our Constitutions mention, "Great is the mystery and meaning within these vows. And yet, their point is simple. They are an act of love for the God who first loved us" (Constitution 5:43).

In this issue of CHOICES, we offer reflections centered on each of these vows as well as how our community supports us in living them. It is an offering to help you reflect on these vows—what compels us to make them and how they become integrated into our lives. We commit ourselves to making sacrifices when we take these vows, yet they help to set us free to seek the Lord and serve our neighbor. They also bind us together as brothers in community that we might strive, as the first Christians did, to be united in our discipleship of Christ.

We also offer these reflections in the midst of our Congregation's celebration of the Year of the Brother. They shine a light on what is at the heart of the great vocation of the brother as a consecrated religious. These three vows and the communal life frame the brother's life offered in service to the Gospel. We give thanks for their witness to the Church and to the priests of Holy Cross who share their vows and common life.

Also offered in this issue of CHOICES is a reflection on Saint Joseph, the protector of the Universal Church and patron of Holy Cross brothers. Saint Joseph offers all of us a great witness to the grace that comes through opening our lives to the will of God.

We hope that these reflections may assist you in your discernment of God's will. If there are other ways that we may be of assistance, do not hesitate to contact us.

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The Blessings of Celibacy

Fr. Tom Looney, C.S.C.



Fourth Assistant Provincial
(Notre Dame, Ind.)
Final Vows:
August 12, 1986

Several months before taking Final Vows, I was engaged in pastoral ministry at Toronto General Hospital. As I headed toward the oncology

ward, I found myself lost in the complex maze of this enormous hospital. I made a wrong turn and instead of arriving at my intended destination, I found myself right in the middle of the maternity ward. Facing me just past the large glass pane were 20 or so sleeping, crying, restless newborns. The sight of those tiny babies shook me to the core. I quickly retreated to a nearby staircase where it hit me like a ton of bricks—if I took Final Vows, I would never have a child of my own.

I found myself quite surprised by my feelings that day. I certainly knew "intellectually" that I was, by my vow of celibacy, freely renouncing the great blessing of children. Yet, I had not let my heart in on this truth. However in that moment, as in other similar moments, I found myself invited to deeper intimacy with God. I found myself asking God to not only comfort me, but to strengthen me so that I could be totally His.

The surprising and sometimes painful feelings of vulnerability one experiences in the face of life's gifts and challenges happen often enough for all of us. But now I see how allowing my heart to acknowledge this vow of celibacy has brought me gifts that have surpassed what I originally asked. Since that unintended visit to the maternity ward years ago, I have been astonished by the blessings that come from a celibate life: the gift of companionship with my brothers in Holy Cross, the trust that others place in me simply because I am a priest, and the blessings of perseverance in prayer. In these "surprises" I find myself in awe of God's gracious love for me and that He chose me to be His son and to serve Him in religious life.

I learned over time that celibacy is above all else a matter of the heart. By vowing celibacy,



Fr. Mark Ghyselink, C.S.C., greets families during orientation at the University of Portland.

I have done so much more than promise not to marry or to have a family. I have promised to keep my love for God, neighbor, and myself alive by living with a generous heart.

I have promised not to hold my heart in reserve for certain experiences or just a few close relationships, for Jesus certainly did not. Jesus gave freely of His heart entering into every human struggle, including the struggle of surrender to the will of His Father.

I have promised to pray from the heart. More than simply choosing not to give my heart to another in marriage or to have any other human being as the center of my life, I have chosen to give my heart to God in imitation of Jesus who poured forth His heart to the Father in prayer. I am called not just to pray, but to pray like Jesus did, from the depths of my heart.

I have promised to live from the heart, giving and receiving hospitality by centering every relationship in my life within my relationship to God. Jesus lived an expansive and gracious hospitality, welcoming everyone He encountered into the heart of His relationship with God. I am called to live with a hospitable heart open to receiving and giving myself to others.

In Holy Cross we say that by our vow of celibacy we desire to reflect God's love for us "by faithful and loving relationships with friends and companions in mission" (Constitution 5:47); "We also promise loyalty, companionship, and affection to our confreres" (Constitution 5:47); and seek to live in "single-hearted intimacy with God" (Constitution 5:43). In so doing we vow to live in awareness of the deepest desires that God has placed within our hearts.

I find that living the vow of celibacy invites me into a whole series of inter-related and dynamic relationships that demand the fullness of my heart. What more could one desire in this life! I live this surprising vow with joy when I live in the awareness of God's great and tender love.



"We accept the Lord's call to pledge ourselves publicly and perpetually as members of the Congregation of Holy Cross by the vows of consecrated celibacy, poverty, and obedience."

Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, 5:43

The Riches of Vowed Poverty

Fr. Pat Neary, C.S.C.



Superior, District of East Africa
(Kampala, Uganda)
Final Vows:
September 1, 1990

When I finished my term as rector of Moreau Seminary in May 2010, it took a week to box up and store my worldly

possessions. For the past 14 months I have lived in East Africa, and everything I possess fits more or less into two big suitcases. I haven't missed a thing from my storage room, except maybe my fishing rods. Once again, my life has become simpler.

Though I'm living more simply, I do not claim to be an authority on living the vow of poverty. I like gadgets, and I like a good meal out once in a while. I have also been known to enjoy a round of golf. Still, I want to live an authentic religious life, and it cannot be so without regular reflection on the meaning of consecrated poverty.

The vow of poverty is not primarily about renouncing things. The vow is something interior and spiritual—not something easily quantifiable or measurable. It is primarily about our relationship to God, to things, and to others.

The first dimension of poverty concerns our relationship to God. This vow makes no sense if one is not passionately in love with Christ. He becomes the pearl of great price. One is prepared to leave all things behind for love of Him. In studying His life in the Scriptures, we find that far from renouncing life, Christ celebrated it. His first miracle involved winemaking, resulting in his opponents accusing Him of being a glutton and a drunkard.

This leads to the second level of the vow of poverty: our relationship to things. We learn, like Saint Paul, the secret of enjoying abundance and of being content with very little. That is the lesson that Africa is teaching me. We can begin by opening our eyes to the riches each day provides. How about the songbird I hear upon waking, the roses growing outside my office window, or the cook singing in the kitchen?



Holy Cross religious and families celebrate after a Mass of Final Profession of Vows.

How about the faces that I observe around the table, or the soft drumming at Mass and the host in my hands? For the man vowed to poverty, each day slowly becomes enough. We learn anew how to enjoy life as when we were little children. When our vision is clear, we even learn to appreciate what is ugly and unpleasant in life but given to us, nonetheless.

The third level of this vow concerns our relationship to others. The vow of poverty makes the most sense when lived in a religious community. In Holy Cross, we live much as I imagine Jesus and His disciples lived. They held a common purse, and their needs were provided for by women of means. They were neither destitute nor obsessed with personal comfort.

The vow of poverty is an invitation to be a man for others. It is not natural to live one's life for others. Most men only learn to turn from selfishness and self-centeredness by having a wife and children for whom to care. In Holy Cross, this vow is what helps turn us away from our innate self-seeking. No longer obsessed with our own needs, we can more readily focus on the needs of others, including those whose needs are the greatest.

Along the way, we awaken to the reality that we are richly provided for by Christ. As our Holy Cross Constitutions remind us, "He has nothing but gifts to offer" (Constitution 8:118). Our Constitutions then proceed, though, to challenge us to see even the Cross as a gift. It is precisely through living consecrated poverty and cultivating trusting dependence upon God that we can come to see how our choicest and richest blessings have come to us from the crosses we have borne. And that is why—although I may not be the perfect model of living the vow of poverty—since the moment I first professed this vow for love of Him, Christ has made me a rich man.

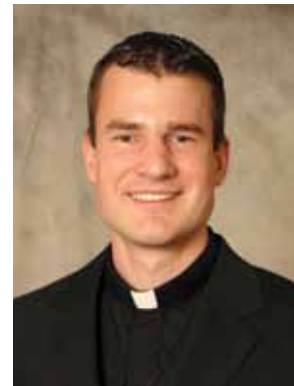


"Great is the mystery and meaning within these vows. And yet their point is simple. They are an act of love for the God who first loved us."

Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, 5:43

Obedience to God's Will

Fr. Aaron Michka, C.S.C.



Advanced Studies,
Anthropology
(Oxford University)
Final Vows:
August 30, 2008

In my last year of seminary, Provincial Fr. David Tyson, C.S.C., called unexpectedly to see if I was willing to go to Monterrey,

México, to serve at Parroquia Neustra Madre Santísima de La Luz and assist with formation work. I thought the test of my vow of obedience finally had arrived. This assignment was my first as a newly ordained priest. Given that I only had six weeks of intensive Spanish under my belt, I knew my eagerness to be obedient did not supplant my inexperience and naiveté. And so the vow I had once viewed with such romantic simplicity—do what is asked of you with a generous and unquestioning heart—now undertook a strange transformation. Instead of a simple "yes," I felt that holy obedience demanded of me a more honest response: "why me?"

Writing now, three years after my arrival in México, I can smile at my hesitation and fear before the task at hand. The experiences that



Fr. Tom Zurcher, C.S.C., blesses families in the Claustro of the Archdiocesan Office Center in Monterrey, México.



Fr. Dan Kayajan, C.S.C., Pastor of St. Rita Parish, Dade City, Fla., visits with parishioners after Mass.

colored my time in Monterrey, from preaching missions in forgotten villages to tutoring seminarians in the basics of algebra, were so powerful and formative that it now seems clear to me that Divine Providence was at work through Fr. Tyson's request. But I also recognize, especially now as I prepare to embark on yet another assignment, that our vow of obedience as religious is such that we must respond to it, and it is a response in which the enthusiastic "yes" and the trepid "why" go hand in hand.

Thankfully, I belong to a community that makes room for dialogue when assignments are handed out. I have always felt that my superiors listened to my hopes and anxieties when considering my future work in the Congregation. That being said, there is a subtle practice in Holy Cross of placing men outside their comfort zone so that they come to discover talents of which they had previously been unaware. There have been shy men who were transformed by parish work—a ministry whose demands leave even raging extroverts exhausted. Men constrained by self-doubts regarding their intellect have been liberated by the community's encouragement to continue with their studies and to teach. And there have been men convinced of their weakness and unworthiness whom the community chose to be their leaders and guides in discerning God's will.

I am confident that all such religious, when surrounded by others of such talent and achievement, asked of themselves "why me?" But thanks be to God, hesitation and fear do not keep the religious of Holy Cross from being challenged by the vow of obedience. If it did, we would never grow nor reach our full potential.



"By our vows we are committed to single-hearted intimacy with God, to trusting dependence upon God and to willing surrender to God."

Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, 5:43

Of course it is a mistake to look at obedience solely as a response to the assignments our superiors place before us. This vow, like the other two, cuts deep. Being obedient is a daily task. There are innumerable experiences—from simple community duties like washing dishes to confronting global issues such as poverty and abortion—that provoke our response as religious. In fact, I have come to ponder on the complexity of the vow, of its all-inclusive nature. How is it possible to be obedient in such a profound way to God's will?

The answer, as found in the Gospels, is simple: one step at a time. When Christ talks of the coming Kingdom, we hear of the lilies of the field, the mustard seed so small that its size betrays its enormous potential, the grain of wheat whose death is only a step toward nourishment and life. These images tell us that our conformity to God's will—the bending and shaping and reforming of our ego's desires to what obedience calls forth from us—is a slow, cumbersome, and occasionally painful process. And yet, in becoming a sown grain of wheat or a mustard seed planted in fertile soil, we learn that obedience moves us beyond our enthusiastic "yes" or a fearful "why" to a simple embrace of Christ Himself. That is because, in the end, we are obedient not out of fear or duty, but simply out of love of the God who first loved us.



Rev. Mr. Matt Kuczora, C.S.C., receives a blessing after having made his Final Profession of Vows.

A Community of Brotherhood

Fr. John DeRiso, C.S.C.



Pastor, St. Joseph Parish
(South Bend, Ind.)
Final Vows:
September 1, 2001

One of my favorite rituals as a Holy Cross religious is the annual procession to our community cemetery on the Feast of All

Souls. Following Mass in one of our religious houses, a long line of Holy Cross priests and brothers forms outside the chapel. We fall in step, walking side by side, chanting the Litany of Saints as we go. Upon arrival at the cemetery, we break formation and walk amid the crosses that mark the resting places of our brothers, silently offering prayers for the men “who had made and lived by their vows, men who had walked side by side in their following of the Lord” (Constitution 1:5).

On this day, I know just where I want to go—to the crosses that mark the resting places of those who were most important to me as I started out in religious life: Fr. Jerry Wilson, C.S.C., who modeled patience and kindness even as his body failed in his later years; Br. Chester Ziemba, C.S.C., who encouraged me in my seminary days when I was beset with apprehension and self-doubt; Fr. Joe Pawlicki, C.S.C., who taught me about zeal in the service of the Gospel as he ministered tirelessly to the Spanish-speaking community in the Southwest.

Author Simone Weil observed that “nothing among human things has such power to keep our gaze fixed ever more intensely upon God than friendship for the friends of God.” My friendship with the men of Holy Cross who have taught me, encouraged me, and challenged me, strengthens my fidelity to the vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience that fix my gaze ever more intensely upon God. If the vows are how we live and minister as priests and brothers of Holy Cross, then community is the context in which we do so.

I am grateful to the Lord for choosing the men of Holy Cross for me. I am privileged to “fall in step” with them; to be “part of the family



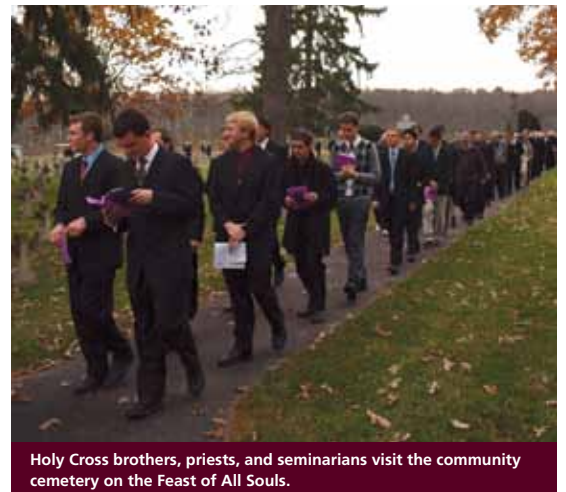
“We wish thus to live in the image of Jesus, who was sent in love to announce God’s rule and who beckons to us to follow Him.”

Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, 5:43

they formed in order to share in their life and work” (Constitution 1:5). They are the ones with whom I have shared my joy in times of favor, and the ones whom I have leaned on in times of challenge. They are my “closest neighbors, trustworthy friends, brothers” (Constitution 4:42), and I couldn’t imagine my life as a priest without them.

After several minutes of private prayer among the graves of our beloved departed brothers, we set aside our individual paths, rejoin the procession, and chant in unison the “Salve Regina” for our deceased brothers. For love of the Lord, we men of Holy Cross have set aside our individual paths to join a procession; to chant in unison our life and our life’s work. Ours is a shared mission and a mutual interest: the love of God and of neighbor, the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and the sanctification of ourselves, of one another, and of the world. One of our religious, Servant of God Patrick Peyton, popularized the phrase: “The family that prays together stays together.” Prayer with my brothers in the family of Holy Cross recommits me to Christ and to this “union of hearts” envisioned by our holy founder, Blessed Basil Moreau.

At the conclusion of the “Salve Regina,” we take leave of our departed brothers and of one another; but our leave-taking is no separation, for we remain members of one another, bound by our vows and supporting each other in our common pursuit of the life of the Spirit. Departing the cemetery, I am grateful for all my brothers who have supported me and helped form me into the priest and religious I am today, and I long, in turn, to be as good a brother to them. I am heartened also by the knowledge that one day there will be a cross marking my resting place, and my brothers, with whom I will remain joined, will offer prayers for me there, too.



Holy Cross brothers, priests, and seminarians visit the community cemetery on the Feast of All Souls.



Blessed Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, modeled his religious family of priests, brothers, and sisters on the Holy Family. In doing so, he placed the brothers under the patronage of Saint Joseph. During this Year of the Brother, we reflect on the role that Saint Joseph plays as a patron for the Congregation of Holy Cross.



Saint Joseph does not speak one word in the Scriptures. Yet, we know that God chose him for a unique and lofty role. Saint Joseph placed his trust in the plan that the Lord sought to unfold in his life and in the life of his betrothed wife, Mary. Saint Joseph became the first to see the Christ Child and the first to hold Him. Except for Mary, he knew Jesus more intimately than anyone on earth. It stands to reason that when we go to Saint Joseph, he will lead us into greater intimacy with his foster Son. "If Mary is the Queen of all the blessed," wrote Moreau, "Saint Joseph is undoubtedly first among the saints."

In the Holy Family, Moreau saw an earthly representation of the Holy Trinity. The love among Jesus, Mary, and Joseph gives us an earthly glimpse of the perfect love and unity of the Trinity. Therefore, Moreau notes, "Saint Joseph represented the first person of the Blessed Trinity on earth." Saint Joseph's intercession and example have much to offer us as a model of religious life.

Saint Joseph was not afraid to take Mary as his wife, even though she was with child. He dutifully took his family to Egypt in response to the message of the angel. In his faith and by his actions, he becomes an example to the members of the Holy Cross family who follow Moreau in professing a profound trust in Divine Providence.

We also are inspired by this silent, hard worker, whose labors earned the food that fed the Body of Christ, even though He would be broken for the life of the world. In a similar manner, we labor not that we might receive adulation or reward, but that others may encounter Christ and come to know and love Him.

Saint Joseph was one of Jesus' first educators, tenderly caring for Jesus as a young child and leading Him as He developed in wisdom, age, and favor before God and man. So too, we serve God as members of the Congregation and educators in the faith, looking to see in each student's face the image of Christ and helping those students grow to become who God is calling them to be.

God entrusted Saint Joseph with the task of clothing, feeding and protecting the Incarnate Word and His Blessed Mother. So too does God offer Saint Joseph to us as the protector of the Universal Church. We pray that his intercession may help us to follow his selfless and tireless example of service to the Church.

As Blessed Moreau wrote to the community, "I ask you to obtain from Saint Joseph for us all, and especially for me who feels myself most in need of his aid, the grace of not hampering in any way the work which God has been pleased to entrust to us; rather, [I] ask that we may cooperate in every way with His designs by refusing no sacrifice to His grace. In other words, let us pray to him [Saint Joseph] for the grace always to judge, feel, speak, and act according to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit."

Year of the Brother

Lives Given to God, Love Given to All

October 17, 2011 to October 17, 2012



The Congregation of Holy Cross invites you to join us in this year of thanksgiving, celebration, and prayer.

holycrossvocations.org