



# RELIGIOUS LIFE

*Peter began to say to him, “We have given up everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.” Mark 10:28-30* <sup>[1]</sup>

## READING

### THE ALGERIAN TRAPPIST MARTYRS, OCSO<sup>[2]</sup>

Religious who follow the Benedictine Rule, including Trappists <sup>[3]</sup>, make vows of poverty and chastity. They also make special vows which originate in the Benedictine Rule—conversion of life, obedience, and stability. (“Stability” in this context means staying in the physical place and community God gives you.)

In 1997, seven Trappist monks were put to the test to live out fidelity to this vow in a special way.

The Trappist monks of Tibhirine, Algiers, had a special mission to give witness of Christ and His peace to their Muslim brothers and sisters. In the 1990s, factions of militant Islamic forces terrorized the countryside. The government begged the monks to leave, telling them they could not be guaranteed safety. After much prayer and consideration, the monks agreed that fidelity to their vocation meant fidelity to the specific vow they had made to stability. They had to stay with each other in the place and with the people God had given them. This decision shocked many, because it seemed like a “waste”—why would they stay and be killed surely, when they could leave and do good somewhere else?

One writer notes that “as Cistercian monks following the Rule of Saint Benedict, the brothers...had made a vow of stability binding them permanently to their chosen community. For them, this monastic vow now took on a peculiar dimension: it included fidelity to a people, to neighbors, to acquaintances, to Muslim friends, and to the Algerian Church...the idea of leaving the monastery or Algeria, even temporarily, without denying their vocation was impossible.” <sup>[4]</sup>

The superior, Dom Christian de Chergé told his brothers on January 4th, 1996, “we are truly being monks by continuing to live here the mystery of Christmas itself, of God living with human beings.”<sup>[5]</sup> God had chosen to live and stay with man, even though it meant death. He had gone to Jerusalem and He had stayed there, even though He knew it would kill him. This witness is the witness Benedictines make in the vow of stability. In another talk on December 14th,



*The Algerian Trappist (Cistercian) martyrs.*



*Monastery of the Cistercians in Tibhirine, Algiers.*

<sup>[1]</sup> Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>.

<sup>[2]</sup> A film of this story, *Of Gods and Men*, is available. Watch the trailer at <http://www.sonyclassics.com/ofgodsandmen/>

<sup>[3]</sup> Trappists, also known as the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, are rooted in a long history. The Benedictine Rule dates as far back as the 6th century, and religious have been living according to interpretations of it for more than a thousand years. St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century made popular the Cistercian interpretation. A reform at La Trappe, France in the 17th century led to the particular religious life which “Trappists” live.

<sup>[4]</sup> Christian Salenson, *Christian de Chergé: A Theology of Hope*, trans. by Nada Conic, Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2012, 160-161.

<sup>[5]</sup> Salenson, 161.



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1995, he encouraged his brother monks: “The answer is to stand firm and to stand together.”<sup>[6]</sup>

In Lent of 1996, Dom Christian de Chergé, Brother Luc Dochier, Father Christophe Lebreton, Brother Michel Fleury, Father Bruno Lemarchand, Father Célestin Ringiard, and Brother Paul Favre-Miville were taken hostage. Their bodies were discovered shortly after they were killed in May. The letter that follows was written by Dom Christian de Chergé (1937-1996) to be read in the event of his death. The letter was made public a few days later on the Feast of Pentecost.



If it should happen one day—and it could be today—that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to encompass all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, my family, to remember that my life was given to God and to this country. I ask them to accept that the One Master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to be able to associate such a death with the many other deaths that were just as violent, but forgotten through indifference and anonymity.

My life has no more value than any other. Nor any less value. In any case, it has not the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I share in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world, even in that which would strike me blindly. I should like, when the time comes, to have a clear space which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of all my fellow human beings, and at the same time to forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down.

I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder. It would be to pay too dearly for what will, perhaps, be called “the grace of martyrdom,” to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. I know the scorn with which Algerians as a whole can be regarded. I know also the caricature of Islam which a certain kind of Islamism encourages. It is too easy to give oneself a good conscience by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideologies of the extremists. For me, Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough, I believe, in the sure knowledge of what I have received in Algeria, in the respect of believing Muslims—finding there so often that true strand of the Gospel I learned at my mother’s knee, my very first Church.

My death, clearly, will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naive or idealistic: “Let him tell us now what he thinks of it!” But these people must realize that my most avid curiosity will then be satisfied. This is what I shall be able to do, if God wills—immerse my gaze in that of the Father, to contemplate with him his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, delighting in the differences.

For this life given up, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God who seems to have wished it entirely for the sake of that joy in everything and in spite of everything. In this “thank you,” which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and their families—the hundred-fold granted as was promised!

And you also, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you were doing. Yes, for you also I wish this “thank you”—and this “adieu”—to commend you to the God whose face I see in yours.

And may we find each other, happy “good thieves,” in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen.

Algiers, 1 December 1993

Christian+

<sup>[6]</sup> Salenson, 190.



## OPTIONAL READING

### ST. DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI, SS.CC. (1840-1889)<sup>[7]</sup>

Born in Belgium, Jozef Damien de Veuster joined the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in 1859. Long eager to go on mission, he asked permission to travel to Hawaii and serve there. He arrived in 1864 and was ordained the following year.

In those days there was no cure for the deadly disease of leprosy, nor were the disease and its causes well understood. Many people thought it was possibly a sexually transmitted disease. The Hawaiian Government dealt with the disease by permanently exiling anyone infected to the island of Molokai. Although the Bishop knew the island of Molokai desperately needed priests, he was worried about asking priests to go to a place which would surely kill them. Fr. Damien was one of four volunteers and the first to go.

Where there was sickness, he brought comfort. Where there was no law, he brought order. He built a hospital and a church; he blessed marriages, heard confessions, and offered mass. He got members of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Syracuse, New York, led by Bl. Marianne Cope, to come and nurse the sick.



*The coast of Molokai and the leper colony.*



*Father Damien in 1873, and shortly before his death*

When Fr. Damien finally caught leprosy, he not only had to endure the disease itself, but even false accusations that he must have caught the disease through sexually abusing the exiles. Some assumed the worst, but others knew that Fr. Damien had never broken his vows. They knew he had, in fact, lived a life of heroic virtue. They knew they were in the presence of greatness.

When Fr. Damien died in April, he had valiantly served the lepers of Molokai for 16 years.

### BLESSED MARIANNE COPE, SOSF (1838-1918)<sup>[8]</sup>

In 1838, Barbara Cope was born in Germany, and immigrated with her family to the United States the following year. When her father became ill, she delayed schooling and desires for religious life to work in a factory and support her family for several years.

She entered the Sisters of St. Francis at age 24, taking the religious name Sr. Marianne, and began teaching. She loved teaching, but her organizational abilities made her a prime candidate for administration. Soon she found herself assigned to work behind the scenes, which she found difficult because she worked less and less directly with the people she was serving.

<sup>[7]</sup> For more information: [vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/2009/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20091011\\_de-veuster\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/2009/ns_lit_doc_20091011_de-veuster_en.html). Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, also wrote a magnificent letter defending Fr. Damien which can be read at [gutenberg.org/files/281/281-h/281-h.htm](http://gutenberg.org/files/281/281-h/281-h.htm) [return to text]

<sup>[8]</sup> For more information visit [vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20050514\\_molokai\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20050514_molokai_en.html)



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However, being an administrator gave her connections and influence. In time, she was able to use this influence to found two hospitals in the area. She was able to begin working with people again—not teaching this time, but in a new field: nursing. She began to work in the hospitals, giving special attention to alcoholics. Who would have guessed, when she entered a religious order to teach, that she would change work so radically and be nursing full-time by the time she was in her forties. But that’s nothing compared to what happened next!

In 1883, after being elected as Superior General of her entire order, Mother Marianne received a letter begging for sisters to care for lepers in far-away Hawaii. It was almost 5,000 miles from New York, and there was no cure for leprosy in those days. To be near it was to contract the disease; to contract it was to die. Mother Marianne said: “I am hungry for the work and I wish with all my heart to be one of the chosen ones, whose privilege it will be to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the souls of the poor Islanders. . . . I am not afraid of any disease.”

In November of 1883, she and six sisters arrived in O’ahu where she took over management of a hospital for lepers. The worst cases were sent to Molokai. Eventually, Mother Marianne and two of the sisters moved to Molokai so that they could take care of Fr. Damien, who was dying, and to continue his work with the lepers.



*Mother Marianne Cope with Father Damien after his death.*

Blessed Marianne Cope worked until she died a natural death at the age of 80. People considered it a miracle that she never contracted leprosy. God had preserved her to work among the incurably sick for more than 30 years.



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In the following images you can see religious sisters making their commitment to Christ as His bride with the same symbols as any bride wears on her wedding day - a wedding dress and a ring. This commitment is just as serious as marriage.



*Left: Sr. Rose Marie, a Passionist sister, receives her wedding ring, signifying her marriage to Christ. Below: These Carmelite Sisters, in preparation for becoming Brides of Christ, are wearing their wedding dresses to signify their marriage to Him.*

Religious do not view themselves as “childless.” The Carmelite Monks of Wyoming write: “Just as a loving father provides for the needs of his children, so the spiritual father, the Carmelite monk, provides for the supernatural needs of his children through the giving of his life in love. Many of these children he will never see until he enters the glory of heaven, but let him nonetheless be convinced that these children are real and that their eternal salvation is very much dependent on his sacrificial love.”



*Fr. Benedict Croell, a Dominican priest, talking to one of his spiritual children at a youth retreat.*





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<b>A Day in the Life</b>	<b>Poor Clares of Kokomo (contemplative women's order)</b>	<b>Clear Creek Benedictines (contemplative men's order)</b>	<b>Missionaries of Charity (active women's order)</b>	<b>Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (active men's order)</b>
Midnight	Office of Readings			
Between 4:30-5:20 AM	30 minutes to rise & get ready	30 minutes to rise & get ready	30 minutes to rise & get ready	30 minutes to rise & get ready
Early morning	Prayers and Mass   Eucharistic Adoration (2 hr 40 min)	Office of Readings   Prayers and Mass (2 hr 15 min)	Prayers and Mass (1.5 hrs)	Office of Readings   1 hour Morning Meditation   Prayers and Mass (1hr 45 min)
	Breakfast (30 min)	Breakfast (30 min)	Breakfast & Clean-up (1.5 hrs)	Breakfast (30 min)
Morning—Prayer / Work	Work Period   Sext: Midday Prayer (3 hrs 15 min)	Prime   Lectio Divina   Terce prayer, High Mass   Study or Work Period   Sext: Midday Prayer (4.5 hrs)	Work Period (4.5 hrs)	Work Period   Sext: Midday Prayer (4.5 hrs)
Around Noon	Lunch and rest period (1 hr 45 minutes)	Lunch and rest period (1 hr)	Lunch and rest period (1 hr 45 min)	Lunch and rest period (1.5 hrs)
Afternoon-- Prayer and Work	None: Midafternoon Prayer & Work Period (2 hrs 20 min)	None: Midafternoon Prayer & Work Period (2 hrs 55 min)	Spiritual reading and meditation (30 min)   Break (15 min)   Eucharistic Adoration (1 hr)	Work Period (3 hrs)
	Eucharistic Adoration   Vespers: Evening Prayer (1.5 hrs)		Work Period (3 hrs)	Evening Prayer   Holy Hour with Eucharistic Adoration (1.5 hrs)
Early Evening	Dinner & Recreation (2 hrs)	Dinner (30 min)		Dinner & Recreation (3 hrs 15 min; includes night ministries)
		Vespers: Evening Prayer   Silent Prayer   Lectio Divina or Conference (1.5 hrs)		
End of the day: anytime between 7:30-9:15 PM	Compline: Night Prayer	Recreation (1 hr), followed by Night Prayer	Dinner & Recreation (1.5 hrs) followed by Night Prayer	Compline: Night Prayer & Rosary (30 min)
Between 9-10 PM	Bedtime	Bedtime	Bedtime	Bedtime
Total hrs of prayer	Approx 6	Approx 8	Approx 3.5	Approx 3.75 hrs
Total hours of work	Approx 4.5	Approx 3.5	Approx 7.5	Approx 7.5-8
Total hrs of meals / recreation / breaks	Approx 4.5	Approx 3.5	Approx 4.5	Approx 4-5
Total hours of sleep	Approx 7.25, with a midnight rising	Approx 7.25	Approx 6.75	Approx 7



## CLOSING READING

### ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (1491-1556) AND THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE <sup>[27]</sup>

Obedience. It's never been fashionable, but it's always been important.

St. Ignatius of Loyola began life as a soldier; he was passionate, talented, and smart. He could take and give orders. But his career came to a crashing halt when cannon fire wounded one leg and broke the other during a battle. The healing process was terribly complicated and painful. At one point when it became clear the bones were not setting right, doctors had to re-break and reset the leg. There was no anesthesia in this time; for the rest of his life he would limp.

Over the months of recuperation, Ignatius was so bored he turned to reading, and the only books available were a life of Christ and some saint stories. These changed his life forever. He would then go on a long search to find his place in the world of the Catholic Church and the spreading of the Gospel. In this, he was always willing to humble himself. When he had to study Latin to become a priest, he was willing to sit in a classroom of children and learn with the rest of them. He was willing to open and close religious houses wherever the Church directed him.

Ignatius of Loyola made obedience, especially to the Pope, one of the main vows when he founded the Society of Jesus. When infighting and disobedience in a section of the new order threatened the order's very existence—more than 130 religious had left—Ignatius had to take the matter in hand. Vocations were at stake. So he explained just why obedience matters and how to strengthen

### Excerpt of a letter from St. Ignatius <sup>[28]</sup>

March 26, 1553, Rome

Saint Gregory says: "obedience is the only virtue which plants all the other virtues in the mind, and preserves them once they are planted." And insofar as this virtue flourishes, all the other virtues will flourish and bring forth the fruit which I desire in your souls, and which He claims who, by His obedience, redeemed the world after it had been destroyed by the lack of it, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross [Phil. 2:8].

. . . I am very desirous, my dear brothers, that they who serve God in this Society should be conspicuous, so that by this virtue its true sons may be recognized as men who regard not the person whom they obey, but in him Christ our Lord, for whose sake they obey...

I will place before you three [ways] especially which will give you great assistance in attaining this perfection of obedience.

See God in the Superior [and here Ignatius explains and quotes "Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as serving the Lord, and not men, knowing that you will receive from the Lord the inheritance as your reward. Serve the Lord Christ" (3:23-24)].

The second means is that you be quick to look for reasons to defend what the superior commands, or to what he is inclined, rather than to disapprove of it. . . .

The third means to subject the understanding which is even easier and surer, and in use among the holy Fathers, is to presuppose and believe, very much as we are accustomed to do in matters of faith, that what the superior enjoins is the command of God our Lord and His holy will. . . . What I mean is that this manner of subjecting one's own judgment, without further inquiry, supposing that the command is holy and in conformity with God's will, is in use among the saints and ought to be imitated by anyone who wishes to obey perfectly in all things, where manifestly there appears no sin.

this virtue. [See letter.]

St. Ignatius goes on to say that no one needs to obey something which is clearly wrong. He also says that everyone should feel free to go to the person in charge and share his opinion, "should

<sup>[27]</sup> Read more at [newadvent.org/cathen/07639c.htm](http://newadvent.org/cathen/07639c.htm).

<sup>[28]</sup> See entire letter at [woodstock.georgetown.edu/ignatius/letter25.htm](http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/ignatius/letter25.htm).



*St. Ignatius of Loyola*

something occur to you different from his opinion, provided you pray over it, and it seems to you in God's presence that you ought to make the representation to the superior."

He ends by saying that God organized the world so that obedience is a way we help each other. The world is organized so that people can cooperate, sometimes giving commands, sometimes obeying them, as we work together to get to heaven: "It is by this means that Divine Providence gently disposes all things, bringing to their appointed end the lowest by the middlemost, and the middlemost by the highest. Even in the angels there is the subordination of one hierarchy to another,

and in the heavens, and all the bodies that are moved, the lowest by the highest and the highest in their turn unto the Supreme Mover of all."

Pope Pius XI said "this was the special gift of God to Ignatius: to lead men back to the practice of the virtue of obedience."<sup>[29]</sup> Ignatius' advice has been very controversial over the years because people tend to equate any obedience to "blind obedience", which is stupidly following orders without discernment, or making oneself a doormat. But even if one takes the time to understand true obedience, it is a virtue that does not make any sense to the worldly.

However, obedience is the virtue that keeps us close to God. Christ in His Agony said "If it be possible let this cup pass from me, but not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). If we think about it, we owe our redemption to the fact that Christ was willing to do what the Father wanted. As hard as it was to suffer and die, He was perfectly obedient.

Practicing obedience with people—our parents, teachers, the government when it does not command immoral things, or a religious superior, is a way to help grow this virtue in us and keep us close to God. We don't always see the fruits of obedience because the main fruit is spiritual—obedience to God's will.

As of 2010 there were 18,266 Jesuits on every continent. Pope Francis is a Jesuit and Jesuits count 42 canonized saints, including some of history's greatest martyrs: St. Edmund Campion, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Jean de Brebeuf, and Bl. Miguel Pro. The Jesuits have baptized and educated an uncountable numbers of souls. You never know what excellent results holy obedience will produce!

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<sup>[29]</sup> Epistola Apostolica, Third Century of the Canonization of St. Ignatius, Dec. 3, 1923, AAS, XIV, 628; you can read this quote and more in Fr. John Hardon, SJ's wonderful essay, "St. Ignatius' Letter on Obedience" ([http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Virtues/Virtues\\_003.htm](http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Virtues/Virtues_003.htm))





## HOMEWORK: INVESTIGATE RELIGIOUS ORDERS

Investigate two religious orders. Research and write about each, answering questions below for each order. The following suggestions include the orders mentioned as examples in this unit. This list is not exhaustive; for more examples visit <http://www.pathsoflove.com/religious-communities.html>.

### SUGGESTED WOMEN’S ORDERS

#### Active Orders

Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, Ann Arbor, MI: [sistersofmary.org](http://sistersofmary.org)

Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, Nashville, TN: [nashvilledominican.org](http://nashvilledominican.org)

Little Sisters of the Poor, Baltimore, MD: [littlesistersofthepoorbaltimore.org](http://littlesistersofthepoorbaltimore.org)

Missionaries of Charity: Do not have an official website, but see [cmswr.org/member-communities](http://cmswr.org/member-communities) for contact information for each USA region.

Sisters of Life, New York, NY: [sistersoflife.org](http://sistersoflife.org)

#### Contemplative Orders

Benedictine Nuns, Abbey of St. Walburga, Virginia Dale, CO: [walburga.org](http://walburga.org)

Dominican Nuns of Summit, NJ: [nunsopsummit.org](http://nunsopsummit.org)

Passionist Nuns, Whitesville, KY: [passionistnuns.org](http://passionistnuns.org)

Poor Clares, Kokomo, IN: [thepoorclares.org](http://thepoorclares.org)

Savannah Carmelites, Savannah, GA: [carmelofsavannah.org](http://carmelofsavannah.org)

### SUGGESTED MEN’S ORDERS

#### Active Orders

Community of St. John, Princeville, IL: [communityofstjohn.com](http://communityofstjohn.com)

Dominicans, Washington, DC: [dominicanfriars.org](http://dominicanfriars.org)

Fathers of Mercy, Auburn, KY: [fathersofmercy.com](http://fathersofmercy.com)

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, New York, NY: [franciscanfriars.com](http://franciscanfriars.com)

Norbertine Fathers, St. Michael’s Abbey, Silverado, CA: [stmichaelsabbey.com](http://stmichaelsabbey.com)

#### Contemplative Orders

Benedictines of Norcia, Italy: [osbnorcia.org](http://osbnorcia.org)

Benedictines of Clear Creek, Hulbert, OK: [clearcreekmonks.org](http://clearcreekmonks.org)

Carmelites Monks of Wyoming, Cody, WY: [carmelitemonks.org](http://carmelitemonks.org)

Maronite Monks of Adoration, Petersham, MA: [maronitemonks.org](http://maronitemonks.org)

Trappist Abbey of Genesee, Piffard, NY: [geneseeabbey.org](http://geneseeabbey.org)

## ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Who founded the order? If you can find out its history, read it and tell about something that interested you. (This may be somewhat complicated, since there could be a founder of the order which is different from the founder of a specific community of the order!)
2. How do members of the community spend mornings and afternoons?
3. What was something that caught your eye or seemed interesting on this website?

4. Does this order mention if it:
  - Has a special vow in addition to poverty, chastity, obedience? If so, what is it?
  - Practices enclosure? How do they explain it?
  - Has a religious “habit”—distinctive clothing? Describe it.
5. If someone wants to apply to this order, whom does he/she contact and how does one get started?