

THE REVIEW OF LIFE

What the Review of Life Is

It is based on two fundamental convictions:

- God is present in my life;
- God is revealed most fully by looking objectively at my prayer life and by sharing that discovery with others.

The review involves a remembering of an event that reveals the Lord to me, a praying over what I have identified, and a sharing within a fraternity setting.

The monthly commitment to review our lives with our brothers is grounded in a contemplative attitude which is nurtured by three fraternity practices:

- 1) regular reflection on the Word of God.
- 2) a monthly Day in the Desert - a substantial part of a day spent in solitude, away from our place of ministry.
- 3) a daily Hour of Adoration on the eucharistic mystery.

These practices are shared in a vocal Review of Life which helps us understand Jesus' presence in the small and ordinary events of our daily lives; Brother Charles said, "Cry the Gospel with your Life!" The review of Life helps priests do just that.

- It is based on one "fact" or "event" of our lives that is grounded and incarnated in something real.

It is an opening up of ourselves to the harsh truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the full light of faith.

- It is a prayerful examination of the Holy Spirit working within us to make us Christ-like.
- It is a discernment of spirits, examining the impulses of our heart, and the thrust of our thought in the presence of Christ who sees us through the eyes of our brothers.
- It is based on a "fact", which is a concrete event of our life or a movement of the heart. We lay it before our brothers with the feeling and emotion with which it is wrapped.
- It is a response to the question: "in the midst of all that I am doing for Christ, what is Christ doing within me?"
- It is a genuine effort to be faithful to our vocation by revealing the humanness of the event and whether we are moving towards or away from the Lord.

The Review of life is an exercise in attentiveness, in paying attention to the desires of our heart. Our true desires can be manifested in our behavior, not in our wishes. Our wishes are grounded in fantasy: in what we would like to be. Behavior is grounded in what is, and reveals who I am.

In the Review of Life I seek to listen to my heart speak. Using images can be most helpful. In sharing my Review with the brothers, they listen

with me and to me that they may come to know me and love me as I am and so help me "remember the blessing."

Behold the Sandpiper! Observe the behavior of this bird it is always looking down at the ocean, the source of its food, and therefore the source of its life. It is constantly looking, prodding in the sand or water so that it can eat. If one day it said, "I am tired of looking down in this attentive way. I won't do it anymore, "it would die. So must we be attentive to our lives, our behavior, our desires, now and always, or we will die. The Review of Life is a source of our living.

What it is Not

- It is not talking about general problems or general concerns, either of the Church or of ourselves or the world.
- It is not a review of our calendar or a summary of what is going on in our personal lives.
- It is not the psychological analysis of a situation.
- It is not a vocal exercise in the theory of ministry.
- It is not a detailed examination of conscience, nor is it a particular examen on some moral failing.

A SUGGESTED METHOD

1. The Responsible leads the group in the Prayer of Abandonment.
2. The members have determined the order in which they will share. Someone speaks a prayer over the person about to share, asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. The brother shares his review of life.
4. The responsible invites clarifying questions. Then all pray quietly.
5. Each brother has an opportunity to speak about the review presented. All will listen for repetition, indicating that some thought has struck more than one person and may have special significance.
6. The brother who has shared indicates if he feels satisfied, or if he wants to add something further.

SIX PATTERNS FOR FOCUSING OUR ATTENTIVENESS

This is a way to organize our personal story as we prepare for our fraternity meeting. The operative question for organizing my thoughts is: what are my behaviors in each area? What do these behaviors say about me and about the desires of my heart at this point of my life?

1. Biological Pattern

- a. Sleep disorders are on the rise. We are created to live a biological rhythm for which sleep is essential. Am I obedient to the Lord in how I sleep? The best test of wellness is how I sleep?
- b. Nutrition. There is a direct correlation between food and the quality of life. How do I eat? What do I eat? The best test of how I feel in the morning is what I ate the day before.
- c. Sexuality. Biological sex is connected to so many other aspects of our life. I must know its rhythm.

2. Aesthetic Pattern

We need to relate to and celebrate beauty. What are my living conditions? What does my room look like: relaxing, inviting, a place of rest and repose, or bombed out chaos? Do I listen to good music? Take in good art? Speak language correctly?

3. Mystical Pattern

Do I seek to be aware of God's presence? Do I even believe that God is present to me? Do I practice the discernment of spirits?

4. Work Pattern

I must hold myself accountable for what I do. Do I prioritize? Is my life controlled by doorbell and phone? Am I always on duty? Why do I carry a pager or cell phone? Do I know my role? When engaged in a task, do I stay on task to completion or do I allow interruption and never return to finish what I have begun? Is there avoidance here? Work without supervision is dangerous - my work needs checking and evaluation. So much is demanded of priests that often we are in an identity fog and need to talk out what we are about.

5. Dramatic Pattern

Take seriously your giftedness as God has blessed you. Being anonymous is not a virtue. If I feel anonymous I will act anonymously, generically. I will lack color and form. I will believe myself to be nobody. This is a disaster, a denial of our original blessing. What are my accomplishments in which I take pride?

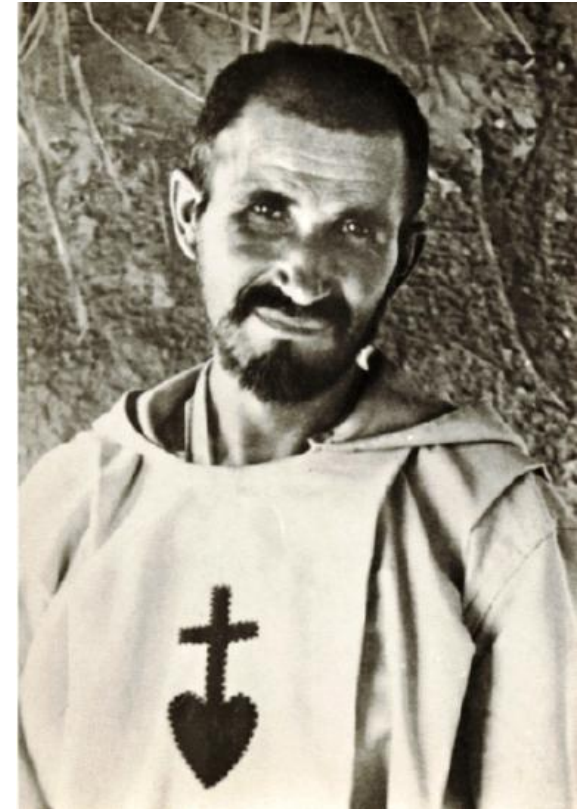
6. Intellectual Pattern

What do I study? Am I energized by knowledge of some topic? Do I take time to lose myself in some special interest and become refreshed? Do I share something new with others?

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The Practice of the Review of Life



The Review of Life is a central practice in the life of fraternities. It helps us truly to live in the full light of faith.