

CHAPTER 3

"It is to me, however, that you have come for a rule of life in keeping with your avowed purpose, a rule you may hold fast to henceforward; and therefore:"

It seems as though there may be little to say about this chapter, and not much that could be profound. Here, seems to be a legalistic clause; a chapter that needs to be included for the sake of inclusion and not for any significant purpose in itself. It can appear that Albert is simply saying: "You asked me for a Rule, a way of life. Here it is. Follow it." Yet, if we keep in mind what he has already written, there may be a few nuggets of treasure even here.

"Many and varied are the ways..." but "it is to me, however, that you have come..."

Albert has recognized that the hermits on Mt. Carmel had an endless number of options of people and traditions to turn toward in establishing their way of life. They could have even turned toward one the "saintly forefathers," using their wisdom and foundation to perhaps draft a Rule for the brothers, or even to the small gathering of Eastern monks who lived nearby. Yet, turning to one of the others is not what the hermits of Mt. Carmel did. (This idea is a recognition that the *Spiritual Directory* also makes, that many are called to the vocation and work of consecrated religious life, within this call, some have chosen a particular way and path, which is a life in Carmel.) They chose Albert, "Patriarch of the church in Jerusalem," to be the author, and so comes the expectation for any author who is sought; that his, now subjects according to their freely made choice, live and abide according to the provisions he has provided. As our *Spiritual Directory* describes many centuries later, none of the hermits were under any obligation to profess obedience and observe the way that Albert laid forth, but having professed vows and accepted his leadership, they became obligated to follow them. They were no longer free to continue living as they had lived, nor to come up with new ways, nor to ignore what Albert has provided. By their own choice, the brothers living near the fount of Elijah, deliberately turned toward Albert, placed themselves under his care and so became bound to the agreement to live under the rule and way of life that he provided.

This short, and seemingly insignificant chapter tells us that we too, by our choice and profession of vows, are to "hold fast" to the Rule and all of the provisions it has provided. We have no rights to pick and to choose from among the chapters; or to consider it a suggested way of living; or to call it old and antiquated, no longer meaningful to modern times (if we believed that it is as such, then we should not have professed to live in accordance with such an antiquated and out of touch way of life); or to simply ignore its precepts because after 800 years we have

learned and know better. There are certainly places in these 800 years since the Rule was first written that have changed its relevance. To hold to the provision that we may own an ass does not translate literally to contemporary life in most countries, but the provision can be translated, nonetheless and should not simply be ignored. Perhaps a simple car suffices, as a basic mode of transportation, or computers and equipment that is needed to complete day-to-day work of the monastery. Whatever our translation may be, we should be as diligent and attentive as though we were translating an ancient language into a modern one. The Rule does translate into the 21st century and although difficult, the difficulty does not exempt us from the way of life that we requested, and which Albert provided. The translation should not be something that an individual brother should provide, but for the whole order, or the most mature and capable among them to discern how these words of Albert (and Innocent) and the means of life from the 12th and 13th centuries adapt to today's modern realities and ways of day-to-day living.

CHAPTER 3: AVOWED PURPOSE

Live with an avowed purpose



A rich man came to the Lord and said, “Master, I follow the law in every way and listen to every word of your teaching. What further must I do to inherit eternal life?” And the Lord said in reply, “Go and sell everything that you own and give it to the poor, the hungry and those in need. Then return to me and you shall inherit the Kingdom.”

In another place, our Lord also tells the story of a man who had been possessed by a demon, but the demon had been expelled from this man and sent away. While he was away, the demon scoured the countryside, finding more demons who joined him. One day, this demon saw the man walking in a field, and finding this man’s heart still empty, the demon entered him again with the many other demons that he had gathered with him. And so the man, having once been possessed by a single demon, was now worse than he had been before.

Live with an avowed purpose. Rather than an actual prescription that St. Albert suggests for us, he is making a basic and very practical observation about our human nature and a fundamental need. We are very passionate creatures. One only has to look at a sporting event, to the tee-shirts, the ball caps, painted faces, wigs, signs and all sorts of costumes that fans all around the world wear to see just how passionately and energetically we give ourselves over to a belief and cause. Every once and a while, we hear stories of brawls after a soccer match, and even riots have occurred in cities throughout this country following national championships. Sports fans are, at times, truly fanatical, and beyond the cheering, the shouts and celebrations at games, it can be truly unbelievable how much money people will spend on memorabilia and collectibles. All of these things hold true for music concerts, for our fascination with actors and actresses, some political leaders and even television shows and movies. One only has to scan the magazine rack in the grocery store to see how devoted and seemingly obsessed we become with

people who we don't really even know, and who may offer us little more than humorous entertainment or wit and wisdom about in-and-out fashion trends.

Live with an avowed purpose. Every one of us gives our life over to something. This is part of our human nature. It is unavoidable, as though there is something inside us and a part of our soul that is empty and incomplete without some "other" to fill that void—like the poor man who was once possessed by a single demon and was freed, but then the demon returned to find this man's house empty, cleaned and prepared for something more. There is a part of us that yearns, without satisfaction, for something other than ourselves and it will neither be quenched, nor tamed without something to direct our energies and passions toward. The question is not whether we have an avowed purpose in life, as much as it is: What is our avowed purpose? Whether to our children, to a spouse, an alma-mater, a career, a local sports team, a fashionable celebrity, a political party, a favorite hobby, the pursuit of financial security, personal health, an author, an ideology, a particular field of learning, to our friends or family, a social cause or a particular service, there are purposes that are good for the soul and others that are harmful—it does not take much for one to see that the rewards for giving one's life to sacrifice for their children are much different from a life devoted to attaining personal wealth.

In this day and age of affluence and leisure time, we have to be all the more careful and vigilant in what we choose to devote our time and energy toward, in what we pursue as a purpose in life. Most of us will know at least one person who has given their life over to following a sports team, or to a particular musical group, or who follows every moment of a celebrity's life, or owns everything possible that is related to a favorite television show or movie. This has become their purpose, it is the standard and priority which motivates their actions, sometimes their relationships and radiates decisions about all other things. We can do the same with careers, with hobbies and even with the pursuit pleasure itself, that the purpose for many has become to seek relaxation, joy and entertainment; that decisions about finding a job are based on what is enjoyable; choices about what to eat are based on what is tasty rather than what is healthy; the morality of things is based on what feels good, or makes a person happy, instead of what leads us to become better people. And so we can see that whatever purpose we have given our life to is the direction that our life moves toward and we take on the qualities, the attitudes and the personality of whatever it is we are pursuing.

Some avowed purposes may seem to be good: to devote one's life to becoming a doctor; for a parent to sacrifice everything for the good of their children; to set immediate gratification aside and plan one's career around building a good and secure retirement. These things are good, but are they the ultimate good? Are they the final purpose and reason that can truly fulfill one's life?

Can any one of them bring salvation to the soul or be the dependable faith that provides in our times of need? What happens after you have been a doctor for 25 years and can no longer perform surgeries? Or when your children have grown, begun their own careers and started having children of their own? Or when you have retired and are looking for something to fill your days? Even though these things are good, we know that there is something more.

There is but one True Good and One Truly Fulfilling thing in this life. There is One Purpose which does not fail and which leads us to the good in all things. There is One to whom it is most worthwhile to give all that we possess and all that we are. There is One who truly loves us, seeks out our good and possesses the Wisdom to plan each moment of our life. There is One for whom it was good for the rich man to give all things. Must assuredly, if he obeyed the law of Moses and followed the teachings of Christ, all that belonged to him would be used for good things, but after being told to sell everything he owned, he was told to return. It was only after he returned to follow Christ that he would inherit the Kingdom. There is the one Way, one Purpose and One Lord to whom it is beneficial to promise our allegiance to. If we are to give ourselves to this One then we do not lose all of the things that we love, but gain the Kingdom itself.

Some have said and feared that to love God and to give ourselves utterly and completely to Him interferes with and takes away from our ability to love others and to experience the good things of this life. Yet the saints have discovered, along with all of those who have truly loved God, that there is no contradiction. There is neither conflict, nor discord between loving God and loving our neighbor. To show this, there are an endless number of stories and examples, but to recall the parable of the Good Samaritan should be sufficient. There is no choosing whether we serve God or serve other, but in serving one, we serve the other. In treating the wounds of the beaten, we treat the wounds of Christ; in showing compassion to the fallen, we show compassion to Christ; in loving Christ, we give our love to another. This is how true and faithful love is known.

Much more can be said about the manifestation of Love, but this is something that we already know and need only to be reminded of. Here, the matter at hand is the question of an avowed life and the purpose of our life. Whatever one's purpose may be, there his heart will lie and everything in his life will be affected and determined by that one, primary thing. To live a life that is in allegiance to Christ is the one purpose worthy of this life; it is the one purpose that will neither fail, nor betray us; it is the one purpose that will truly lead us to fulfillment of who we are, and the best things that we can become; it is the one purpose which always seeks our good, the good of others and leads us to love; and it is the purpose against which all other things are judged.

I should also take a quick moment to point out what may be a seemingly insignificant, and easily overlooked word. It is not alone that we should have a purpose in life, but St. Albert stresses that we should have an *avowed* purpose; that is, that we knowingly, consciously and with conviction give ourselves to the pursuit of this purpose. If it is an *avowed* purpose, then it is the one thing that we promise to fulfill, meaning that it is a purpose and pursuit toward which we are accountable. An *avowed* purpose is not something that catches us up in the popularity of a moment, it is not a passing trend or spontaneous endeavor that we adopt one day and then move on to something new the following day. An *avowed* purpose is made carefully and entered upon with great deliberation. An *avowed* purpose is also one that we have announced publicly, as our baptism was an act made publicly and in front of a community of witnesses. It is not something that we have promised in secret, nor under the protection of uncertainty, as though we could change our vow without anyone knowing the better. Our *avowed* purpose is known by others, that they can see the difference it has made in our life, give credit to the good that it reaps and so also, in a very real way, they also become witnesses and participants in the life that we have chosen. Is this not also the life to which we have been baptized into? A life not only graced by the forgiveness of sins, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, but a life already promised in the footsteps and allegiance to Christ? That what we may see underlying the Rule itself, is not something new and different, but a mere remembrance and renewal of those promises and vows that we already made when we were first born into this faith.

To live with an avowed purpose, is nothing more than to bring our baptism to life every day. I encourage you to begin each day with such a prayer and if you are not able to begin the day with a celebration of the eucharist, enter each day as you enter the church, with a touch of holy water and with the sign and name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*Hold fast to the Rule, and to the faith of the Church,
and to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ*

Perhaps there is little more to be said than beyond offering this encouragement: *Hold fast to the Rule, and to the faith of the Church, and to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This life is filled with times of struggles, uncertainty and weariness. There are times when we, and our faith, are being tested. At others, we are being challenged and feel the pangs of growth, of the Lord transforming us into a more clear and life-like image of his very own likeness--this is the *Dark Night* and Ascent of Mt. Carmel that John of the Cross has described for us; that journey and way along the slopes of *perfection* that can be long and arduous at times, but as we know from our daily life and the normal way of things, significant rewards require significant work and investment. And as a good friend reminded me in one of my darker hours: “No cross, no Crown.” That the rewards of heaven and the fruit of a life of *perfection* come through such times of toil and hardship. Not even the Son of God could escape this mystery of things: “Father, I pray that if possible, take this cup from me...but only that your will is done”; even he, the one who himself conquered death and was raised by his own power, could not have been raised the King of Heaven without such suffering; that the Son of Man, to be raised in Glory, was to be handed over, tortured, abused, mocked and sacrificed for our sins.

But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.--Is. 53:6-10

We also spend much of this life in uncertainty. Nearly every day we face questions and challenges to which we may not know the answers—perhaps no one knows this truth better than a parent. Each of us, however, regularly faces new questions and encounters new situations that we may not know how we are supposed to act, what the kindest solution may be, or what is the true act of love.

In a similar way, we all grow weary and tired at times. There are moments when we know how to act but simply feel too tired. We may grow short tempered; we may do a careless job or altogether skip our responsibilities; we may cut corners, find excuses or place the burden on someone else when normally we would not; we may long to feel generous and giving of our time,

but need attention ourselves; we may want to be the rock who comforts, yet scream out for someone to embrace us; we may even fall into sin because, for a moment, we simply lack the strength and energy to ward off temptation; we may desire to turn the other cheek, but rage in anger and strike out fiercely. At these times be encouraged: Hold fast to the Rule, and to the faith of the Church, and to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and you will be led to safety.

These are not arbitrary, nor obsolete burdens that someone places on us to add to the difficulties and weight of our struggles in this life. But as our Lord has promised, that we are to lay down our burdens and take up His yoke. His is not the yoke of a master whose fields we are to plow day-after-day in futility, as slaves under the burden of toil for mere scraps. It is not the yoke of the cheap landlord who ties together the cheapest and heaviest things and rest them upon our shoulders. Our Lord's is not the yoke of a judge having sentenced us to a term of hard labor, nor is it the yoke of one who is isolated and charged with carrying his burden alone. It is the well-harnessed, formed and comforting yoke of one that builds strength and is united with teams of brothers and sisters toward the same work. It is the yoke of perfection, not given to a select few who have proven, or claim amongst themselves to be perfect, but the yoke that is and leads to the work of perfection.

Hold fast to the Rule, and to the faith of the Church, and to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and be encouraged that even in the moments that may appear to be adding to our burden, meaningless to the task that is immediately at hand, or irrelevant to a life in the 21st century or simply beyond our ability to overcome in the moment, that we are being trained and strengthened in the way of love; that in fasting we become better suited to overcome momentary discomforts, and better able to sacrifice for those we love; in obedience we experience the fruits of humility and benefit from wisdom that may exceed our own; in prayer we experience the immediate presence of love that we may reflect it onto others; in the renunciation of ownership we place ourselves in solidarity with the poor; in scripture we gain the wisdom to meet our daily challenges in the world; in silence we gain attentiveness to the presence and needs of others; in discipline we gain patience; in our own illnesses we experience the love of a caretaker, that we may then be better caretakers; and in being tested we grow stronger and more enduring. Through all of these we are being prepared and transformed in order to love more perfectly. This is the Way of Perfection that Carmel has long practiced and taught--the Way that does not begin, but ends in perfection.

Hold fast to the Rule, and to the faith of the Church, and to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and you will indeed be rewarded by the most valuable treasures and encouraged to endure until the end.