

## A Time Apart (August 2015)

Greetings to all of my dear COCEMO friends! I am writing from St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado where I am enjoying a wondrous retreat. I am grateful to report that I've had the pleasure of visiting with the Monks, including Fr. Thomas Keating, who at 92 years of age is holding his own very nicely.

In his wonderful book, Open Heart Open Mind, Fr. Thomas teaches that most of us must find our path of transformation via the vicissitudes of ordinary, daily life, unlike Monastics who live their lives according to the dictates of an official *Rule of Life*. This is an invaluable lesson to learn and the person who truly understands it and integrates the wisdom it imparts into their *ordinary daily life* is wise indeed.

However, as much as I agree wholeheartedly with Fr. Thomas I personally believe that ordinary lay folks and non-monastic religious alike, would be wise to create their own *Rule of Life!* Perhaps it is not as official as a monastic rule, but just as it is for a monk, a "rule of life" can be an invaluable aid to help us, to assist us as we strive to commit to our spiritual path, and the disciplines our path requires and demands.

After all, consider St. Paul's lament in the seventh chapter of the Letter to the Romans, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." I don't know about you, but I relate to Paul's challenge. A rule of life helps me to stay on track ... it helps me to do the things I want to do.

In considering a rule of life, it is helpful to consider the habits you would like to cultivate in your life. What practices and routines do you know from experience, will help you and keep you on the right path? Are some of these practices negotiable, while others are not?

A rule of life can support our commitment to these actions, these habits we want to cultivate. It will help us when the going gets tough. If you keep a rule long enough, in time, you will realize the rule will begin to keep you.

These reflections bring to mind a wonderful and wise old teaching:

*Watch your thoughts; they become words.  
Watch your words; they become actions.  
Watch your actions; they become habits.  
Watch your habits; they become character.  
Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.*

In my own rule of life, I commit to a twice daily practice of Centering Prayer and some Lectio Divina each day with Scripture along with my morning and evening prayer. I am also very committed to making yearly retreats. For me, retreats are one of the non-negotiables.

Retreats are a way to take our relationship with God and our contemplative practice to a deeper level. In our Scripture, Christ continually models for us the importance of a time apart. He is forever slipping away, “up the mountain” “into the desert” “to a deserted place” to spend time alone with His Father in prayer.

Retreats provide us with the time and space to get away from the incessant busyness and demands of our ordinary daily lives, and they allow our mind, body, and spirit to surrender to God's presence and action within, in a much more profound and significant way. It has been both my own personal experience, as well as observing in others, that retreats are where the really substantial spiritual shifts take place within.

Retreats are a common practice in many spiritual traditions and are a valuable tool to aid one's interior transformation in Christ. I am very grateful that COCEMO has now established annual retreats, which we sponsor. We now offer a Weekend Retreat each Spring, and a more substantial Seven-Day Intensive Retreat each Fall. Please visit our website to learn more, and of course, we'll always send out announcements reminding you that a retreat is being offered.