

DISTRIBUTION OF "THE RULE OF LIFE"

For those of us who were born before 1950 when we joined the SSS order, we made our vows, be they first vows, be they renewal of vows or perpetual profession, on the Constitutions of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation. This was primarily to be adorers and to be committed: *'to the perpetual service of adoration of the service of our God and Lord Jesus Christ'*. As we seminarians studied theology after Vatican II, we encountered a new approach to the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist with a combined biblical, liturgical and pastoral focus, which saw the celebration of the Eucharist as primary and fundamental. This might have seemed at first to be a minor, side stream issue to the established practice of perpetual exposition but before too long this confluence of the streams created a turbulence within the Congregation worldwide, especially the question of Mass during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Some religious left our order, some priests joined various dioceses, others were either confused or unsettled by the changes and recruits became fewer.

Externally this turbulence was evident in our General Renewal Chapters of 1969 and 1971, and a new set of guidelines was developed, called an experimental rule. After many community meetings, revisions and reformulations, the Congregation submitted the proposed rule to the Vatican for approval. We must acknowledge here the key role played in this process by one of our very own religious, who is present here today with us. I refer to Fr Tony McSweeney who was the General Leader at that time.

The Rule of Life was approved by the General Chapter of 1981 and then by the Vatican on the feast of St Peter Julian Eymard in 1984, namely by the Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes. The religious of the whole Australian Province recommitted themselves to the new Rule in 1985 using the then brand new red covered edition. Today we have a new publication of the Rule of Life in an enhanced format, quite a handsome production for which a word of thanks is due to both Damien Cash and Graeme Duro.

The heart of the Rule is well captured in the profession formula which reads in part:

I wish to live the Paschal Mystery, to internalize it in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament,

and to share with others the life that springs from it. ROL 102

[Note that the mature Eymard coined expressions like *the inner cenacle* and *the gift of self.*]

This is the Rule which you will now receive in the ritual distribution. We welcome especially the presence of our lay staff. We are delighted that you are joining us in this ritual today. You are our partners in the mission of St Peter Julian Eymard to bring the Eucharist to the people of God in our time and place. I would refer above all to no 34 (*The Eucharist – source of our mission*) which asks how can our churches become more centred on the Eucharist.

For a deeper reflection and study of the Rule of Life, refer to the excellent Commentary by Fr Tony, located on the SSS Curia web site which tallies up to 366 pages.

Fr Jo Dirks SSS, St Francis' Church, 6 March 2017