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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

Once again we will be celebrating our patroness' feastday. Every time we do this, the event that automatically comes up is the rain incident—since we have no other incidents that have come down to us. And always the message is that St. Scholastica is a woman who knows how to love. We have reflected and wrote about this year after year. So I thought I will focus this year on two other traits of St. Scholastica which seems to me to be manifested in the rain incident. One is her healthy attitude towards rules and law. Not every nun will dare ask her brother monk to go against a rule in his convent. But St. Scholastica did. I think she understood what Jesus meant when he said: “The law is made for human beings, not human beings for the law.” In other words laws are made by human beings to facilitate life, relationships, living together, etc. But they are not absolute. They are guidelines, and in certain circumstances, a higher value can supersede them. Absolutized law or rule can tyrannize and can oppress rather than facilitate life. We should teach our students and formandees that conformity is not necessarily a virtue, although genuine obedience always is. It is important to educate these young people not to conformity but to responsible decision-making. This means the ability to analyze a situation, to have a healthy (not a lax or scrupulous) conscience, and the guts to take responsibility for the consequences of one's decision.

The second trait that St. Scholastica showed in the rain incident is persistence, single-mindedness, perseverance, stick-to-it-iveness. When St. Benedict refused, she could have acquiesced and said “O.K.” But she didn't. She persisted. She used the resources she had—love and prayer—to realize what she thought was important at that moment. And she got it. She truly believed the biblical injunction: “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find.”

Happy St. Scholastica's Day!

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O C O N F E R E N C E

CHARISM SEEKING GOD IN COMMUNITY By: Sister Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB

*Now, my whole heart say to God,
“I seek your face,
Lord, it is your face I seek.”*

*O Lord my God, teach my heart
Where and how to seek you,
Where and how to find you...
(St. Anselm - Prosologion I)*

There are three precious octogenarians in the Priory House. Each has her own exemplary way of seeking God in community.

Before Christmas '07. Sr. Asuncion, 81, spent her time quietly putting in individual bags the Christmas gifts of each sister of the whole priory. No fanfare. Each bag carefully and lovingly prepared in neatly fashion. On top of this she still had her daily chores to attend to—the parlor, the guest cells, the refectory and her work as treasurer of the community. Again, no fanfare. She did her job with much fervor. **Here is a sister who seeks God in community.**

On Christmas Day. Sr. Lioba, 82, asked to see her folks. She was allowed to do so provided she would go right after lunch and be back for vespers. Aha, this was impossible. The time spent in going to and from the place was not even enough to make her be present for vespers. The option left for her was to stay. No grumbling. No rancor in her heart. No sulking. She was the same Sr. Lioba before and after the permission sought. **Here is a sister who seeks God in community.**

During the Christmas break. The Priory House was quiet. There were only a handful of sisters around. Sr. Soledad, 86, found out that there was no sister available to fetch Sr. Asuncion from the airport. At once she volunteered to go with the driver to the airport. She looked so frail yet she was ready for anything. **Here is a sister who seeks God in community.**

What a joy to have these gems in the Priory House! They are embodiment of loving service and inspiration to the community. Indeed, there is HOPE in community living when young ones see their seniors vying with one another in rendering obedience, pursuing what is better for someone else and showing each other pure love. (RB 72:6-8). **THIS IS SEEKING GOD IN COMMUNITY.** As Pope Benedict XVI in his latest encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, puts it, “*We need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day.*” He continues,

But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end. His love alone gives us possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on hope.

God's Invitation

“O Lord teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you.”¹

“How could it have been possible? I had weak lungs. I was a product of a public school. I did not know any sister. My cousin, a noted benefactress of many seminarians, asked me to deliver sacks of rice and the monthly allowance of the Jesuits seminarians in Sta. Ana, Manila. It was the famous Fr. Henry Irwin, SJ, who received me at the parlor. In our conversation, I told him my desire to become a religious and he told me to proceed to St. Scholastica's College right away. My mother just died some months before my entrance. Because my father was against my entrance, I escaped,” narrates a doubting Antonia Tiamson who later became Sr. Lioba.

“When I left home on December 8, 1947, it was very difficult. My mother was sick and I had to leave without permission because my father did not want me to enter the convent – at least, not then. I did ask permission, but he said, no; my mother did not say, no, but she cried all the time,” confesses Sr. Soledad Hilado.

“My father expressed the wish to have a priest-son. His second son did enter the seminary but he drowned at a boating excursion of seminarians. My youngest brother told my father that he would take the place of our brother who drowned and so became a Jesuit.² My father was very generous in giving his sons to God. I wondered if he would be ready to give up his only daughter,” recounts Sr. Asuncion Bonafe.

Excursus on Seeking God³

At the outset, it is God who desires a relationship with the human being. God anticipates us. In Jesus Christ, God's seeking for us became, as it were, incarnate. Benedict describes how God seeks his workers in the multitude (Prol 14), how Christ as the good shepherd searches for the lost sheep and goes after it (27:8).

Augustine says: “May we seek what needs to be found and still seek it after we have found it; for what is to be found is hidden so that it is sought, and what is found is infinite so that it is sought without ceasing (In John 63:1)

¹ St. Anselm. *Prosologion I.*

² The Jesuit priest of Sr. Asuncion is Fr. Juan Bonafe, SJ who stays at the La Ignatia, Sta. Ana, Manila.

³ The whole excursus is found in Aquinata Bockmann's book, *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict*, pp. 120-121.

The expression “seeking God” is certainly rooted in Sacred Scripture and must be understood in this context. In the Hebrew Scriptures, seeking God means to desire, to strive, to devote oneself with all one’s strength to this search. The expression occurs often in the context of praying. “Your face, Lord, do I seek” (Ps 27:8).

Seeking God also means: asking God’s advice, begging God’s guidance, discerning God’s will before making a decision. When our faith is strong, we take questions to Yahweh; when our faith is weak, we often go to the soothsayer.

Three octogenarians sought God in different ways and found themselves in a place where God put them together.

EAGERNESS FOR THE THREE “Os”

The threefold “Os” found in Chapter 58:7 of the Rule of St. Benedict are not only requirements for one who is aspiring to become a novice. It is for all, young and old alike, for Benedict considers us all as beginners. The door of the school of the Lord’s service does not close on the day of our profession. It is always open 24-hours a day where we can learn to listen to the precepts of the master (RB Prologue 1), where we can serve one another (RB 35) and lavish great care on the sick (RB 36), the pilgrims (RB 53), the elderly and the young (RB 37). It is a place where we can begin again and again.

First O - OPUS DEI. The value laid before us is ready obedience to the demands of the moment, a willingness to abandon any activity in favor of the community prayer. Many times our work demands our whole attention that prayer is relegated to the side. A monastic heart prefers nothing to the Opus Dei. *One who believes in God’s caring presence is able to let the world go for a day every week, to rely on God to maintain the world and take care of its people.*⁴ A monastic is able to leave work, even work of critical importance to the monastery to be with the community and sing God’s praises.⁵

Here is how Anselm Grun sees it:

*For Benedict prayer has the first place, and only out of prayer can I manage my work in such a way that it has a positive effect on my religious life. Prayer relieves us from the load of work. Prayer frees us from too much concern about our work. It makes us free to live entirely in the present, to be wholly present to our work but then to put aside our work so that it no longer occupies us internally.*⁶

In her latest book, *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict*, Sr. Aquinata demonstrates to us the broader meaning of the Opus Dei.

⁴ Jerome Kodell, OSB, *RB 72 –In the Workshop of the Monastery*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anselm Grun, *Benedict of Nursia, His Message for Today*.

In most cases, we translate Opus Dei as “worship.” Presumably this was the first and the practical meaning for Benedict. Yet the expression also resonates with a broader meaning. Opus Dei is God’s work in us, God’s creation and saving activity and especially the covenant with God’s people and the work that is accomplished by Jesus and was given to him by the Father. As a response to this, all our work is Opus Dei, work which we do for God, our life in faith and good works... the rule emphasizes the practice of good works, and the monastic is called worker.

Second O – OBOEDIENTIA. Monastic obedience comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.

Sr. Soledad concretizes this obedience,

On February 2, at noon recreation I was told that I had to go with Sr. Ehrentrudis. I was only a candidate – 8 weeks in the convent. There was a jeep (it was not long after the War) waiting for us, and in it were Fr. Hugendobler, SJ and the brother of my brother-in-law driving. We drove off, me not knowing where we were off to. As soon as the jeep stopped, I jumped out and ran up the staircase to my mother’s room. My father stopped me from entering the room. As we—my sisters and brothers and I—were praying the Angelus, my auntie came and told us, “come and kiss your mother while she is still warm.” My mother had died. It was exactly eight weeks to the hour, after I had entered the convent. Later, my father told me to ask permission to join the family flying to Bacolod for the burial of my mother. Mother Prioress said, “your vocation is precious; it would be better for you not to go.”

Obedience is surrendering ourselves to someone who summons us to do otherwise. We put aside our own will knowing that our superiors have reasons for the decisions they make concerning us. In the case of Sr. Soledad, she found out later that her “magistra” had advised Mother Prioress⁷ against allowing her to go, lest the family bear on her to remain outside the convent for the sake of her father. Nonetheless, she believed what her magistra told her, that God sees “*to everything in our life if only we would let him.*”⁸

On the final profession of Sr. Lioba, her ex-suitors came to attend it thinking that they could still convince her to leave the religious life. A resolute Sr. Lioba reacts,

“I have already my ring and my decision to stay in the convent is final.”

Obedience is answering the call and being faithful to it. For Sr. Lioba her obedience is her undying fidelity to her vocation from the time she escaped from home until she meets her Creator face to face.

Obedience is a communitarian task as well. Mutual obedience strengthens the potentials of a community. We are encouraged to live in creative unity in the midst of plurality through obedience.

⁷ The Prioress at that time was Mother Stefana Gaechter, OSB.

⁸ The magistra or novice mistress of Sr. Soledad was Sr. Galla Caesar, OSB.

Third O – OBPROBIA (Trials, Hardships). Sr. Aquinata gives us a background of the types of trials during St. Benedict's time.

Probably these trials have a very concrete meaning and designate menial tasks, the normal services in a monastery or for guests...the Romans considered manual labor as demeaning, as slaves' work. It is easy to imagine that members of noble families who wanted to enter a monastery brought their slaves along in order to be well served in every respect...concretely, these trials probably consisted of weekly kitchen service that included cooking, washing dishes, cleaning the house, laundry, chopping wood, and serving the guests that included making beds, heating water, washing their feet.⁹

Today, trials in the monastery come in different forms. Sr. Asuncion talks of her experience,

I was then a grade school principal. There was this sister, who I think made me her "favorite." I received "love letters" from her every so often, admonishing me what to do, explaining to me how I failed in this and that, that all I did was wrong and that I was not a good administrator. Did these remarks make me cry? Ah no, my life in the grade school and in the clausura went on. I did not mind those "love letters," lest they would have affected me negatively. I just kept on praying for that sister.

We all have trials whether we live in or out of the convent. We cannot escape from them. Despite our efforts to curtail them, there will always be certain disturbances, contradictions, afflictions that cannot be avoided nor can be changed. One thing is sure, God loves us. *He is faithful and will never allow us to be tested beyond our strength, but with the testing he will provide the way out so that we might be able to endure it.¹⁰*

CHALLENGE

I started with our octogenarians' way of seeking God and I would like to end with their words of wisdom. Sr. Lioba, who at 82 still reports for office work at the CEAP, always wears a grateful heart. It all started during the Japanese occupation, barely in her teens, when there were so many relatives, friends and people whom she never knew but helped her and her family escape from the hands of the Japanese soldiers.

I cannot forget the people who had done us good and I wish to repay them even if they are already dead. I can do this by doing good to others. Upon waking up, I thank God for another day. He has allowed me to age with gratitude in my heart despite my bodily aches. All I ask of Him now is that He will make me grow old gracefully as I SEEK HIM IN COMMUNITY.

⁹ Aquinata Bockmann, *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict*.

¹⁰ Corinthians 10:13.

Sr. Soledad, who is still very much involved with the PAASCU, the SSRDF, the studies of our Sisters, and the editing of the third history book of the Manila Priory, has lived 11 lives.

My operations have changed my “life style.” I had to get used to going to a hospital pretty often, to being about 25 pounds lighter. I guess God meets us in different places and different ways. But he is always there – and ready, very ready to be sought. I pray and I hope that I WILL ALWAYS SEEK HIM.

Sr. Asuncion, who holds the fort whenever the prioress and the sub-prioress are not around, loves to recall the time when she was superior of the Manila community.

I have fond memories of my stay in Manila. We were a community who longed to be back in the clausura right after our work in school. At recreation we had fun. At prayers and meals we were always together despite the demands of the school work. In the early morning at four we found ourselves sitting in the chapel, consecrating the day before lauds. No one among us initiated that we pray together. We simply were breathing the beauty of SEEKING GOD IN COMMUNITY.

How truly blessed are we for having these three octogenarians in our Priory.

Joan Chittister was right,

In a Benedictine community, all ages live side by side, the young with the old, the well with the infirm, and each learns from the other. The elderly learn from the young that life goes on, that creation keeps creating. The young learn from the elderly that life is about more than titles and careers, that someday we shall each be only what we are and no more.”¹¹

Yes, someday we each be only what we are. Finally, someday, there will be only one question to answer,

HAVE I TRULY SOUGHT GOD?

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¹¹ Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*.

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Interviews with Sr. Lioba Tiamson, OSB, Sr. Soledad Hilado, OSB, Sr. Asuncion Bonafe, OSB.

Guide Questions:

1. Which of the three Os was hard for me to do with eagerness in the early years of my religious life? Why?
2. What has kept me SEEKING GOD all these years?

Mid-Life Transition: Finding the Way
by Anne Brennan, C.S.J. and Janice Brewi, C.S.J.

Much has been written lately on the topic of mid-life. We are familiar now with the reality of mid-life crisis, mid-life transition, and the longer period of mid-life itself. Speaking of mid-life crisis, Nancy Mayer says:

The mid-life crisis is a stormy transitional period that is marked by internal changes, by conflicts and challenges. Like the turbulent period of adolescence, it leads to a new and calmer stage of life: middle age. But unlike the earlier crises, that which occurs in the middle years still seems mysterious and is often misunderstood. It is time we learn to recognize both the perils and the potentials of this crucial turning point.

The “perils and potentials” of this crucial turning point are exactly what makes this period a crisis. Sometimes we think it is the turbulence, the depression, the “mid-life crazies,” that are the crisis. But the crisis is: *Will I move on?* Will I leave behind the first half of my life, a leave-taking which demands a whole new way of being? Or will I continue to live out my lost youth—over and over again—and rob myself of all the potential of a “second journey”?

If a person can wholeheartedly enter into the transition period of mid-life, the mid-life period can be a genuinely freeing and expressive period where one becomes his or her own unique self, free to work, to play, to be. Mid-life is the real “coming of age.” The first half of life is dominated by our need to regulate our lives and find a place for ourselves in society. We meet the demands for being domesticated, for socialization, for schooling, for entering vocational fields, choosing life-styles, forming life-support relationships, and we go about all this with an active, industrious pattern of building our empire.

Just how many of our decisions and choices have been dictated to us by outside pressures, by inner determinisms, by false or invalid assumptions never dawn on us until we reach this natural period of reassessment and reevaluation. All the activity, ego-strength, and will-power developed in the first half of life will serve us now as we move into taking stock of who we are, and what aspects of our personality are lying dormant, what potentials lie hidden. Our second journey cannot be mapped out for us by “outer pressures, inner determinisms or false or invalid assumptions,” but by the reality of our own uniqueness and the gradual flowering of all our personal potential, not with the rush of activity of youth but with the dawning reality of the necessity of allowing each new day to be an event in itself.

The depression that accompanies both the crisis and the transition is meaningful in itself. There is, however, a possibility that the crisis may trigger off very deep and profound problems of areas in the past life of some that will need to be taken care of. Such people may go into clinical depression, and this would be a signal to seek professional help. In speaking of clinical depression, Roy Fairchild tells us: “Clinical depression refers to the slowing down of the whole organism—emotional, intellectual and physical—and not to mood alone.”

The non-clinical depression that occurs with the average person in mid-life crisis serves as a signal that “it is time to move on.” I have developed a certain aspect of myself, my psyche, in working toward the goals of my youth, and I must now enter into relinquishing them and searching for new unique goals and patterns that will allow me to develop the rest of myself and move toward wholeness and individuation.

Religious should not have to go through this period alone. All the theology of our tradition should be employed to help the person find meaning both in the crisis and in the transition period. At this moment more than any other, the past, present and future of the person come together in a climactic experience of depression. The task is to move the *gestalt* to an experience of faith, hope and love. It would be well to focus on the past, present and future and bring the virtues of faith, hope and love to each. We could consider this focusing on past, present and future as the three phases in a mid-life transition.

Faith demands that we embrace our human history and vibrate to its inner possibilities, not try to sidestep, ignore, despise, or nostalgically long for it. It is important for everyone at this time to look at his past with the eyes of faith. Can we literally embrace our human history? Through journals and dialogue on his or her personal history, the person can awaken within himself all the riches that the past has incorporated, all the unsung blessings, all the evils and misfortunes that have been lived through and overcome. Possible topics for a journal or dialogue could be the following:

1. *List the decades of your life and recall: a. the important people in each decade; b. the things that caused you the greatest joy during that period; c. the greatest sorrows; d. the greatest achievements of the decade; e. how and what you felt and thought about God in each decade.* I would urge the person to dialogue interiorly with each of the people, joys, sorrows and achievements.
2. *Recall the major events that have occurred in your lifetime in the Church, your country and the world.* The person would then dialogue with each of these events.
3. *As you look back, recall the moments in your life that cause you to know better who you are and what you want.* The person would then dialogue with each of these events.
4. In everyone’s lifetime there are depth experiences that are memorable, the source of many decisions, that have an integrative power—that is, they pull our myriad parts together a little more, and cause us to be a little more centered in our personality. Such moments can be profound religious experiences of the holy, or experiences of friendship, encounters, the call to moral protest, the awakening of some moral imperative, or depth-question moments of sin, despair or evil. *Look back over your life and discern the times that are memorable, the sources of the decisions you made and which were integrative for you.* Dialogue with these experiences.
5. *List the greatest disappointments of the first half of your life.* Dialogue with each of them.

Owning one's own history is a crucial element in evoking hope in mid-life. Unless we can discern the good in our past, despite whatever tragic events that may have taken place, there is little chance of evoking expectations for the present and future. Reconciliation with the past demands the surfacing of repressed and suppressed aspects of our lives, the healing of memories, and genuine forgiveness. Someone could have latent sorrow or repressed anger that must be worked through.

A personal journal or the sharing of our stories with others allows us to make a journey into the past, to discover the events that formed us and the myths out of which we have been living. We should be led to celebrate in prayer God's action in our ongoing creation, and the activation of our power to be co-creators in the ongoing creation of ourselves. Bringing our past to prayer with the use of the Scriptures can at this time allow the Word to be *word* as it has never been before.

Meditation on our personal creation may use scripture passages such as Psalm 139, "You knit me in my mother's womb..." or Jeremiah 18:1-6: "And whenever the vessel he was making came out wrong, as happens with clay handled by potters, he would start afresh and work it into another vessel as potters do." Prayer of forgiveness and healing can also be centered in the Scriptures, e.g. John 9:7, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam", John 8:11, "Neither do I condemn you, said Jesus, 'go and don't sin anymore.'"

Keeping a journal, dialoguing, and praying about one's past life can take weeks or even months. Hopefully the time will come when the person will be at peace with the past and be able to bring about some kind of closure to the process. Celebrating the past in prayer can facilitate that kind of closure. At this time the person will be experiencing a new kind of strength, a sense of being freed from the constrictions and the determinism in which the past had entrenched him. A rising sense of autonomy will allow the person to enter into the present moment despite the fact that it is vibrant with fear for the unknown and with anxiety about a future he cannot imagine. The prayer for closure is at once also a prayer for new beginnings.

Our first birth, if we were like most babies, was a lot of hard work on our part, but it was not volitional. This second birth of ours, the birth into the second half of life, will also be a lot of hardwork, but this time it can be intentional. As co-creators with God—"God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27)—we can enter intentionally into our own creation.

Building on our past, we must find in our present selves the seeds for our potential growth. Once again we can use a series of topics for a personal journal or dialogue for the purpose of intentionally addressing the present:

1. *When do you feel most alive?* Dialogue with each such time.
2. *At present, what are your greatest fears?* Dialogue with each of them.
3. *What people at present do you find most inspiring?* Express why.

4. *If you could change three things in your life, what three things would you change? Describe what your life would be like these changes.*
5. *Who are the most important people in your life at this time? Express why they are important to you.*
6. *Keep a daily log for one month. See how you actually spend your time. How could you rearrange your day and use your time more intentionally?*
7. *Describe yourself going through an average day of your life as you would like it to be. Go through the activities of the twenty-four hours and give your feelings and reflections about each segment of this ideal day.*
8. *If you could have anything you wanted, something personal for yourself, what would it be? What would it mean to you?*
9. *What are the greatest obstacles to growth in you at this present moment? Dialogue with these obstacles.*

Once again this journal and this dialogue could take weeks or even months. In this activity the person comes to a new realization of what his or her present joys and sorrows and values really are. He discovers his own creative sources of inner vitality, regeneration, and transformation. A theology of creation can encourage us to discover the inner well of life-giving waters that are deep within us. We can evoke them by imaging and fantasizing.

I would encourage the person to enter into periods of contemplation or meditation in order to address her need for solitude and its opportunity to encounter God and herself. Many people find meditation through music helpful in creating an environment to stimulate the “letting go” of prayer and allowing the Spirit to take them where it will.

This kind of prayer is also helpful for a group. It gives to some the needed support of witness and companionship on their prayer journey. Such prayer can activate in the person a keen sense of God’s presence and providential care, awaken inner strength and possibilities, and be the source of imaginings and future hopes.

The use of Scripture, again, is helpful. One could use the Emmaus story from the Gospel of Luke as a source to integrate the past, present and future with an emphasis on the present. Here we see the two disciples leaving Jerusalem. Their dreams are shattered. Disillusioned and disenchanted they are returning home, broken people. The stranger comes and, in conversation and dialogue, he explains the significance and meaning of the past events. Their minds are opened to all the false assumptions they had made regarding the Christ, his mission and their place in it. Their consciousness expanded, they realize that their hope had been placed in these false assumptions—“we had hoped.” Now they are invited into a large vision of what the mission of Jesus, and their mission, is all about: “Weren’t our hearts burning within us as he spoke?”

Using such passages as guided imagery, individuals can write out their own frustrations and disillusionments, what they thought their life mission was all about, their false assumptions. In dialogue with them, Jesus could respond and open up for them the meaning of their lives.

This process is the beginning of the third phase: activating hope in future. Why did the disciples in the Emmaus story return to Jerusalem? What does their expanded consciousness mean to them? How do they see their mission and purpose now? What is the significance of their lives, and what purpose do they have at this moment?

In George Bernard Shaw's play about that heroine, Joan of Arc is being interrogated by the English about her alleged visions and messages from God. Finally, the interrogator, ridiculing her, says: "That's not God. That's just your imagination!" Calmly and with the assurance Joan replies: "How else would God communicate with me?"

The woman in mid-life crisis has grown in her awareness of God's presence in her personal history, of God's communication and ongoing revelation in the midst of her life-situations, and now it is important to extend that realization of God's guidance and inspiration through her imagination. Imaging a future rooted in, and flowing from, our own creative gifts and uniqueness is important. Yet, in one sense, the future can be totally new to us because there are so many aspects of ourselves of which we have as yet no knowledge. The inner depths are as strange to us, and as foreign, as outer space is to the astronaut. Our imaginings, then, may well touch some unknown inner chord, some untapped inner potential.

We begin this task with a hope, no matter how faint, a hope that there are possibilities *for me* now and in the future. This hope is bedded in the faith we are renewing. The religious' primary concern ought not be what *he* hopes to achieve. It ought rather be what God can achieve through him, much of which may well be unanticipated.

In imaging the future, it is important to activate in oneself a wholly other level of consciousness, and then sharing that imaging with a caring person or community. Following are some possible topics to be approached on this other level of consciousness:

1. *What would you like to accomplish before you die?* Dialogue with each such accomplishment..
2. *What would you like your life to be like one year from now?* Write the stepping-stones to that new creation.
3. *How old would you like to be when you die? Why did you choose that age?*
4. *What are your fears about the future?* Dialogue with them.
5. *What are your hopes about the future?* Dialogue with them.
6. *If you could be any animal you wanted to be, which animal would you choose? Why?*
7. *If you could be a musical instrument, which one would you be? Why?*

8. *What contribution would you like to make in the next five years to the Church, your country, the world?*

Prayer over the future is crucial. Possible readings from Scripture are: “When the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth” (Jn 16:16); “I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit” (Jn 15:16); “His name is God-With-Them” (Rv 21:3); “Why look among the dead for the living? He is not here, he has gone before you into Galilee” (Lk 24:5).

Working with a group of people allows for the use of liturgies of prayer for all these phases: past, present, future. Such liturgies elicit the use of symbols, rituals and the word of Scripture, and thus evoke a participation that creates a milieu for total involvement of the person. Such total involvement of the person, in itself, symbolizes the rebirth of the person in the second half of life. We are pilgrims on the way. In the time for dialogue, sharing the wealth of the experiences of all becomes the material for imaging and implementing more meaningful styles of living as we move into mid-life in mass numbers, and intentionally design the second half of our lives. We are all pioneers in this new frontier. We give each other tremendous support in witnessing by our stories in the light of faith. “Many persons in mid-life bring unique resources to this adventure: the realism and mature perspective which come from long experience; the blend of toughness and tenderness derived from coping with pain and problems; the awareness of the need to revivify one’s own faith and guiding values; the conviction that the quality of one’s relationships—with self, others, nature and God—is, in the final analysis, what matters most.”

The transition period, with its emphasis on the past, present and future, should issue in a mid-life period that allows the person to change in a process of continual growth in self-knowledge, continued expansion of consciousness, continued use of hidden potential, continued harmonizing of the polarities of life, continued emphasis on inner renewal and inwardness. The activity of the first half of life and the frenzied building of our empire is taken over by a greater contentment with the present and with our gradual enlightenment. Conformity to the outside world is given over to the gradual development of our inner world and its potential. Compulsive activity and inner and outer determinisms are relinquished for inner freedom, for being who we really are. The frantic desire to please others and make friends is overcome by the desire to be friends with oneself, to find genuine companions and genuine mutuality. Anxiety over accomplishing great tasks is given over to being content with whatever small contribution we can genuinely make to the kingdom of God. The role playing so important to self-identity in the earlier stages is relinquished because we have come to know who we really are and have no need of harboring our identity behind barriers. This is the time when we can make our greatest contribution to society, for what we give comes from our centered selves and flows from who we really are and what is truly our own. We have come of age. Sorrow will still be ours. We will experience many other personal dyings. But having experienced the major resurrection of new life we can anticipate overcoming.