

Various writers on the Domestic monastery

An article on Julian of Norwich, who lived during Europe's Black Plague:

<https://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org/monks-our-midst/alejandra-oliva-julian-norwich-and-social-distancing>

Thoughts from Ron Rohlheiser—

What is a monastery? A monastery is not so much a place set apart for monks and nuns as it is a place set apart (period). It is also a place to learn the value of powerlessness and a place to learn that time is not ours, but God's.

Our home and our duties can, just like a monastery, teach us those things.... For example, the mother who stays home with small children experiences a very real withdrawal from the world. Her existence is definitely monastic. Her tasks and preoccupations remove her from the centres of power and social importance. And she feels it. Moreover her sustained contact with young children (the mildest of the mild) gives her a privileged opportunity to be in harmony with the mild, that is, to attune herself to the powerlessness rather than to the powerful.

Moreover, the demands of young children also provide her with what St. Bernard, one of the great architects of monasticism, called the "monastic bell". All monasteries have a bell. Bernard, in writing his rules for monasticism, told his monks that whenever the monastic bell rang, they were to drop whatever they were doing and go immediately to the particular activity (prayer, meals, work, study, sleep) to which the bell was summoning them. He was adamant that they respond immediately, stating that if they were writing a letter they were to stop in mid-sentence when the bell rang. The idea in his mind was that when the bell called, it called you to the next task and you were to respond immediately, not because you want to, but because it's time for that task and time isn't your time, it's God's time. For him, the monastic bell was intended as a discipline to stretch the heart by always taking you beyond your own agenda to God's agenda.

Hence, a mother raising children, perhaps in a more privileged way even than a professional contemplative, is forced, almost against her will, to constantly stretch her heart. For years, while raising children, her time is never her own, her own needs have to be kept in second place, and every time she turns around a hand is reaching out and demanding something. She hears the monastic bell many times during the day and she has to drop things in mid-sentence and respond, not because she wants to, but because it's time for that activity and time isn't her time, but God's time. The rest of us experience the monastic bell each morning when our alarm clock rings and we get out of bed and ready ourselves for the day, not because we want to, but because it's time.

For the complete article, see

<https://ronrolheiser.com/the-domestic-monastery/#.Xqcu6mhKhPY>

An excerpt from *The Domestic Monastery: The Rule of Saint Benedict*, Dwight Longenecker

Benedict wants the monastery to be a secure and welcoming place. Every guest is to be welcomed as Christ. So too the Christian home is to be a place where the whole family lives together in abundant simplicity and looks outward with warm generosity. Modern Christian parents can look to the Rule of Saint Benedict for a sane and balanced approach to life; an approach which applies today, yet links them with a time-honoured tradition.

At the heart of Benedict's wisdom is the assumption that the Christian family is a community of prayer. He gives detailed liturgical instructions, but, balancing all the rules, he speaks clearly about the need for prayer to be natural and from the heart. "Indeed we must grasp that it is not by using many words that we shall get our prayers answered, but by purity of heart... Prayer therefore should be short and pure." The oratory is the prayer chapel of the monastery, and it should be kept free so "if a brother should have a mind to pray by himself, he will not be disturbed." For a Christian family, it makes sense to have a special place in the home dedicated to prayer time. If it is decorated with an icon or some candles and flowers, all the better. Every family will be relieved to discover that Benedict disapproves of long prayers. Prayer is better short and sharp than lengthy and long-winded.

<https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2019/05/domestic-monastery-saint-benedict-rule-dwight-longenecker.html>

Lessons from the Monastic Cell

Here's some advice from the Desert Fathers and Mothers: Go to your cell, and your cell will teach you everything you need to know. Here's another counsel from Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*: Every time you leave your cell you come back less a person.

On the surface, these counsels are directed at monks, and cell refers to the private room of a monk, with its small single cot, its single chair, its writing desk, its small basin or sink, and its kneeler. The counsels suggest that there is a lot to be learned by staying inside that space, and there are real dangers in stepping outside it. What can this possibly say to someone who is not a monk or contemplative nun?

These counsels were written for monks, but the deep principles underlying them can be extrapolated to shed wisdom on everyone's life.

What's the deep wisdom here? ... Cell, as referred to here, is a metaphor, an image, a place

inside life, rather than someone's private bedroom. Cell refers to duty, vocation, and commitment. In essence, this is what's being said:

Go to your cell, and your cell will teach you everything you need to know: Stay inside your vocation, inside your commitments..., inside your church, inside your family, and they will teach you where life is found and what love means. Be faithful to your commitments, and what you are ultimately looking for will be found there.

Every time you leave your cell you come back less a person: This is telling us that every time we step outside our commitments, every time we are unfaithful, every time we walk away from what we should legitimately be doing, we come back less a person for that betrayal.

There's a rich spirituality in these principles: Stay inside your commitments, be faithful, your place of work is a seminary, your work is a sacrament, your family is a monastery, your home is a sanctuary. Stay inside them, don't betray them, learn what they are teaching you without constantly looking for life elsewhere and without constantly believing that God is elsewhere.

What we have committed ourselves to constitutes our monastic cell. When we are faithful to that, namely, to the duties that come to us from our personal relationships and our place of work, we learn life's lessons by osmosis. Conversely, whenever we betray our commitments as they pertain to our relationships or to our work, we become less than what we are.

We are all monks, and it matters not whether we are in a monastery or are in the world as spouses, parents, friends, ministers in the church, teachers, doctors, nurses, laborers, artisans, social workers, bankers, economic advisors, salespersons, politicians, lawyers, mental health workers, contractors, or retirees. Each of us has our cell, and that cell can teach us what we need to know.

—Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, *Domestic Monastery*