

A monk in a brown habit is seated in the foreground, reading a book. The background shows a church interior with a stone wall, a cross, and a statue of the Virgin Mary.

What is the **RELIGIOUS** **LIFE?**

*Understanding the consecrated
life through Scripture*

“**O**f you my heart has spoken, ‘Seek his face.’” (Ps 27:8). The human heart might set itself on a thousand and one things, but it is always seeking. It might attain all it had wanted, or fail on all accounts, but it will never, in this life, slake the thirst that drives its deepest desire. For however much of this life’s sweetness one is given to enjoy, the heart’s hunger for goodness is always greater. Blessed, then, are those who realize that only by seeking God shall they ever find rest and fulfillment. For as “deep is calling on deep,” so the deep abyss of human desire yearns for “depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33).

The rich young man was seeking. Though “he had many possessions” (Mk 10:22), he was not content. “Good Teacher,” he asked Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk 10:17). Jesus answered by pointing out two paths. The first was the way of the Commandments: “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” To wit, “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt 19:18-19). Yet for those who wish “be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48), and seek holiness with all their hearts, He presents another path; a road less taken, a narrower way: “go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the

poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21).

To follow Jesus means more than relinquishing all of one’s material possessions. For after the young man went away sad, “Peter said in reply, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’” (Mt 19:27). To leave everything; material goods, the goods of the body, and the goods of the soul. To leave these behind “for the sake of the Kingdom of God and its righteousness” is to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

All Christians are called to pursue holiness and to live the Evangelical counsels. But to vow to do so, in the company of others who have consecrated themselves to the same purpose, is the essence of the religious life.

A radical decision? Perhaps, when seen with regard to what is sacrificed. Yet compared to what one purchases by it—the Pearl of great price—it is to gain a hundredfold. The consecrated life frees one to seek God with a pure and undivided heart: for “the unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32). And this single-minded devotion is the recipe for fulfilling the heart’s desire, even in this life, to “see the face of God.” For as Our Lord said, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8). ■