

WALKING
AS DAUGHTERS
OF
SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

A Day in the Life
of the

Georgetown Visitation
Monastery

BY MOTHER ANNE FRANCIS NG'ANG'A, VHM

St. Francis de Sales, our Holy Founder, providentially provided his spiritual daughters with a compact little book called *The Spiritual Directory*, in which he “walks” his daughters through the day from “Rising” and ending with “Going to Bed.” *The Directory* is Jesus seen, heard and received by us, Jesus opening and filling our hearts always. It is through *The Directory* that we truly fill our lives with Jesus. Thus, “Live + Jesus!” is transformed into “living Jesus.”

The Directory teaches us to do everything well and with intent. Through it we are led to be “daughters of prayer,” St. Francis de Sales’ desire for us. We are to seek Jesus day and night, endeavoring to make all things unite us to God. Everything we say or think, every act, whether it be an act of piety such as prayer, the Office, mental prayer, or the humblest labor, sleeping, eating or recreation, all should unite us with Jesus.

A TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VISITATION SISTER

6:00 a.m.

RISE

6:30–7:30

QUIET PRAYER

7:30

MASS

8:10

BREAKFAST

8:40

MORNING PRAYER

9:15

WORK

11:35

OFFICE OF READINGS

12:00 p.m.

NOON MEAL (DINNER)

1:00

MIDDAY PRAYER

1:15

WORK, SPIRITUAL READING

5:05

EVENING PRAYER

5:50

NIGHT MEAL (SUPPER)

7:00

RECREATION

7:45

NIGHT PRAYER

Rising, Prayer, and the Sun of our Day

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The **Rule** is the basic organization of a Visitation monastic community, providing guidelines for the Superior and explaining the Order's spiritual principles.



A typical bedroom in the Monastery

Unlike most cloistered orders, the Visitation was founded by St. Francis de Sales with a **Rule** that would be "livable" not only by the strong and healthy, but also by those who may be weak or infirm. Hence, we do not get up in the middle of the night to pray.

Our monastic day begins with rising at 6 a.m. Our Directory tells us that as soon as we awake, we should "cast our souls wholly upon God by some good and holy thoughts." Our first act in the morning is to declare that we are the spouses of Jesus Christ, that we belong wholly to God. It is a renewal of our consecration to Him. Then we make our morning offering, thanking our heavenly Father for His protection during the night and for this new day of grace, asking His help and protection in the new day and offering Him all we do and suffer.

By 6:30 a.m., we are in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart for an hour of mental prayer. Now we see the importance of that moment of waking, when we cast ourselves wholly into God. It helps to prepare us for mental prayer. Our Directory reminds us that the serious practice of this exercise is one of the most important of all in religion and spiritual life. It is a precious time when the soul holds familiar conversation with Our Lord and it prepares for the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which is usually at 7:30 a.m.** On Sundays, we rest, saying our morning prayers and meditating on our own before joining the community at 10 a.m. for Mass.

Our Holy Founder would have us humble ourselves before assisting at this highest, holiest, and most sanctifying act of our religion. Holy Mass is followed by a period of thanksgiving. Then we have a simple breakfast—a little more festive on feast days—and a short period of time before we pray Morning Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Breakfast is taken in silence.

The Sisters gather in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart for Mass.



The Bell for the Office; the Voice of the Spouse; and Work, a Living Prayer



The chapel bells

The **Choir** is where the Sisters gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Each year, on December 31, the Mother Superior assigns seats for the coming year.

The Direction of Intention

To help us in our work, St. Francis provides us with our Direction of Intention. Through it, we intend all our actions for God, we ask His grace, offer to Him and accept in advance all the good and pain that will come:

My God, grant me the grace to perform this action with you and through love of you.

I offer you in advance all the good that I may do and accept all the pain and trouble that I may meet therein as coming from your fatherly hand.

We begin our action by embracing Jesus.



At 8:40 a.m., the tower bell calls us to the Choir to pray Morning Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours, also called the Divine Office, is the official (or universal) prayer of the Church. This prayer expresses “the adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication of all humankind” (our Holy Constitutions). Five times a day the bell summons us to the **Choir** to pray on behalf of the Church and the world. In the bell, we hear the voice of the Spouse calling us.

The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed each day by those in Holy Orders and by monastic communities such as the Visitation. As we pray the Psalms in our Visitation chapel, we are mindful of the many needs and challenges of people in our world today and lift them to God in prayer. In a special way we remember the members of our widespread Visitation family.



It is now about 9:35 a.m., when we begin our work period. Sisters go to their various offices (the work assigned to them). Caring for the Sacristy, helping Sisters, house cleaning, and gardening are some of the work assigned to us—work that allows us to stay close to our Spouse. Our *Constitutions* tell us, “Work done through love becomes a sincere response to the call of God. Each sister can offer her work as a living prayer, as did the Virgin Mary in her home at Nazareth.”

We remain united to God by continually renewing our intention through the use of small prayers—“Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you”—those little arrows of love that we send into His Heart. St. Francis de Sales counsels that we are not to omit “this in even small things or those that are agreeable such as eating, resting, recreating, etc. ...whatever we may do be done in the name of God and for his sole pleasure.” Each article of our Directory is a more specific way of directing our intention for the glory of God.



It is now 11:35 a.m., and again we hear the voice of our Spouse calling us to the Choir to pray the Office of Readings. The hours of the Office spread throughout the day sanctify our whole day. It is a special time when we go before the throne of God as the Church’s ambassadors, presenting her praise and her needs to the Divine Majesty.



Sister Marguerite-Marie Nguyen, VHM, tends to the priests’ vestments in the Sacristy.



Sister Rose Wangui, VHM, stands to read during the Liturgy of the Hours in the Choir.

Meals and Recreation

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At noon, we pray the Angelus as we gather in the Refectory for dinner. The Directory advises that the Sisters are not to go to the refectory only to eat, but also to obey God and the Rule. Thus, we feed not only our bodies but also our souls. Our sister Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque wanted to make of each morsel of food a spiritual communion. She resolved: "When I take my refectory, I will unite it to that divine nourishment with which Jesus feeds our souls in the holy Eucharist, begging Him to cause each portion to become a Spiritual Communion, to unite and transform me entirely into Him." Thus, we fulfill the reminder given us by our Directory that we do not go to the refectory just to eat—that all we do should be done for the glory of God and for his good pleasure. Unlike at breakfast, we listen to readings and engage in conversation at dinner and supper.



The Sisters
enjoy dinner
together.



The Voice of the Spouse Calls to Midday Prayer

A **Ciborium** is a chalice-like vessel used to contain the Blessed Sacrament.

1 www.newadvent.org/cathen/03767a.htm

Sr. Mary Alicia Sours, VHM with a member of the Monastery health team, who provide loving care to the Sisters.



At 1:00 p.m., the bell calls us to Midday Prayer. We are thus constant adorers of our God who dwells within us. Our whole life can thus be an act of adoration and we are a “living” **ciborium**¹ carrying Him to each other.



At 4:00 p.m., we have a half hour of spiritual reading. This helps to stimulate love in our hearts and brings us closer to the Lord. Just as in the Upper Room, Mary in her heart, with her prayerful presence, watched over the origins of the Church, so too now the Church’s journey is entrusted to the loving heart and praying hands of the Sisters. It is a time when we hold familiar converse with our Spouse, humbly attentive to Him and gazing upon the loveliness of his face. Thus our day is a flow of prayer and work helping us to keep our gaze fixed on the transfigured and crucified face of our Spouse.



Evening Prayer is chanted at 5:10 p.m. The voice of the Spouse summons us through the bell and we leave behind our work to praise God and to bring before Him the needs of all mankind—“their joys and their sorrows; the cries of the poor, the lowly, and oppressed; the pain of the sinful and suffering.”



Evening Meal and Recreation

*“From time to time
one must recreate
and relax in mind
and body.”*

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



At 5:40 p.m., we again pray the Angelus in private and then proceed to the Refectory for supper. Silence is observed as we listen to a short reading from a spiritual book.



Recreation begins at 7:00 p.m. and we share with one another as we complete our duties. The evening recreation lasts about thirty minutes; we mend, embroider, knit, crochet, make potholders, etc. This recreation is, as our Constitutions tell us, indispensable not only to ensure wholesome relaxation but also to foster a true family spirit. Recreation is a communal exercise in which the human gifts and virtues of each one is shared. We “re-create” ourselves and are thus ready for that sacred silence that keeps us united to our Spouse. On Mondays, we enjoy movie night; on Tuesdays, we do something together as a community exercise; and on Wednesdays and Fridays we usually have game night. Sr. Marguerite-Marie and I particularly enjoy Rummikub.



The Sisters enjoy
crafts, movies, and
reading during
Recreation.



Night Prayer and the Great Silence

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We are now at the close of our day. After working, praying in an atmosphere of silence and recollection, and praising our Lord in our meals and recreating, at 7:30 p.m., we go for a last time to the choir to pray Night Prayer together. After this, the Great Silence begins. From after Night Prayer until after Mass the following morning, a strict silence is kept unless it is absolutely necessary to speak.

This last action of our day possesses something very solemn. By it we begin our eternity. The soul, at the close of life, leaves the things of earth, detaches herself from creatures in order to go and take her repose in God alone. So, the Visitandine, at the evening of her day, separates herself from conversation with creatures, and leaves work, cares, annoyances, etc. A profound silence reigns about her, she finds herself with God in order to go and take her repose in Him. That is why our Holy Founder wishes that we perform this action as if we saw Our Lord with our own eyes, and that we fall asleep with some good thoughts in order that sleep itself may not interrupt our union with God.

We see that the Directory does not leave us during the day. It takes us by the hand from the morning to lead us to God, to unite us to Him, to nourish us with Him and it will lead us to a blessed eternity.