

# On the Profession of Vows For Novices of the North American Preceptory

*June 13, 2021*

“God who is unchanging and eternal, does not approve of fickle hearts but rather desires a holy intention once undertaken to be carried through right to the end of the act of obligation” Pope Innocent II, *Omne Datum Optimum* (Bull of Privileges to the Knights Templar), March 29, 1139

## Profession should be the normal end of the Novitate

If a Novice completes his novitiate with willingness, devotion and zeal it is appropriate to pursue a profession. The same can be said of the simply professed who have received the gift of stability in their life.

Oppositely, if a Novice has not pursued their vocation, or has only for a little time displayed willingness, devotion and zeal it is not yet time to pursue a profession of vows. For vows make a deep change in one's life, binding oneself either permanently or temporarily to what leads to perfection. Committing to living a certain way that one has not hitherto pursued with willingness, devotion and zeal is to attempt to lift weights one is not strong enough to lift which will lead to strain and the injury of one's soul.

## How to Examine if One has been Willing, Devoted and Zealous

### One Must Keep the Commandments of God and Precepts of the Church

First and foremost one must examine if they “Above all love God Our Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength; and then your neighbour as yourself.” First, we must examine our strictness at keeping the commandments of God for our Lord taught; “If you love me, keep my commandments.” St. John 14:15.

If in examining yourself you find that you frequently commit grave sins (IE weekly), one should not pursue profession. It is hard to speak of something as hateful as grave sin analytically, but we must. Grave sins should be an exceedingly rare occurrence in the Novitiate. It is a good thing if the exercises and discipline in the life of a Poor Knight have caused the occurrences of grave sin to greatly diminish, but if they are still frequent it is still not yet the right time to pursue profession. One can still pursue profession, if the grave sins they had the misfortune to commit were quickly repented of and did not become or remain habitual.

Ideally, by the end of the Novitate not only does a Knight not commit any grave sins, but he abhors even venial sin, and takes great pain to avoid it. Especially venial sins that would set a bad example in outward conduct that would detract the Knights ability to provide a bold confession of the Catholic faith at all times and places.

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## One Must Understand Their Obligations

It is of the utmost importance that there be no worries in the conscience towards understanding regarding one's duties that arise out of profession. Questions on the observance of the Rule, The love of the brotherhood, and the nature of Obedience, detachment, chastity and public witness should have all been answered to the point that there are no standing doubts or worries.

Should a person upon examining their conscience not understand one or more of the duties or obligations that arise this can be quickly remedied. If one even feels a slight discomfort in regards to some precept they should seek to have their understanding confirmed by their Novice Master or Superior.

## One Must Keep the Spirit of the Positive Precepts

In examining our conscience we must not start from the point of view that we must be perfect in all aspects of the rule in regard to positive precepts. "Deny yourself completely" is the work of a lifetime, and this complete denial of self despite our best efforts will often need to be restarted many times, sometimes even many times within the course of a day.

A Novice by the end of their novitiate should have a mind that has become habituated to judging actions based on the Rule. If we do not walk with the memory of the rule (that is at least parts of the rule when we make actions) then we should not bind ourselves to a rule we frequently forget. Going into profession a person wants a great inner reverence for the rule.

## One Must Keep the Binding Precepts Strictly

In regards to the binding precepts. That is: the practice of obedience, the recital of the Divine Office, the frequent reception of the sacraments, the submission to a spiritual director, abstinence from meat on friday, no fashionable clothing etc. These obligations should have for most of the Novitiate, and most especially now be done with willingness, a spirit of devotion, and zeal.

Inner feelings of dread regarding one or more aspects of the binding precepts is a defect that should be remedied before making a profession. I do not speak of occasional dryness at prayer, or these occasional coolings of zeal which occur for numerous reasons. Rather, I speak of a sad inner horror similar to the feelings one has when one is forced to go somewhere and do something that one would not do because the circumstance of the place or time greatly agitate the spirit.

A Novice should try to recall how well he kept both positive and binding precepts during times of distress, illness, or any other disruptive periods. Was it a source of strength, where these

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exercises abandoned, did his conscience provide a dispensation from these exercises? It is a positive sign if in times of trial these were either steadfastly kept or even a source of strength.

## One Should be Living out the Full Life of a Knight

Due to the reality of the Life in the Church today it is more frequent than not that various aspects of the Rule: finding a spiritual director, joining an apostolate, and the like may take a great amount of time to develop the circumstances where it can be fully observed.

Nevertheless, if after 3 years these circumstances have never materialized it is not possible to make a profession. Our vocation is a work of providence, and if providence makes it impossible to fully live out the obligation then we cannot by a vow agree to do deeds that it does not appear God wishes to allow. "And it is much better not to vow, than after a vow not to perform the things promised." Ecclesiastes 5:5

## One Must Be Moving Towards Perfection

A Novice should have made significant progress in the spiritual life. This is to be judged by their spiritual director. One cannot judge well if they have or have not made progress well "He who constitutes himself his own director, becomes the disciple of a fool" " Letter 87, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

## The Life of the Cross

"Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God." Col 3, 1-3

To ask for the Habit of the Poor Knights of Christ is to agree to a life of sacrifice, affliction and persecution. The rewards in this life are not material, but the spiritual fruits are abundant to those who despite being sinners, deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ. To attempt to take up the Cross while not possessing the qualities above is to not be in imitation of Christ, but of the bad thief who was afflicted, crucified but without consolation.

Pray with great reverence, discern with great attention, be diligent in examination, and seek counsel before asking to make a profession. To put the work here does not undermine our vocation nor is it an exercise in second guessing, but rather allows for a bold disposition which says " I will take the chalice of salvation; and I will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord before all his people:" Psalm 115 13-15