

Developing a Personal Prayer Rule

Based off of the The Rule, Constitutions and Decrees of the Militia Templi

“By wisdom the house shall be built, and by prudence it shall be strengthened. By instruction the storerooms shall be filled with all precious and most beautiful wealth. A wise man is strong: and a knowing man, stout and valiant. Because war is managed by due ordering: and there shall be safety where there are many counsels.” *Proverbs 24 3-6*

Aristotle taught that “We are what we repeatedly do.” To become a Knight in the Militia Templi requires certain acts that must be done daily, one of which is that we “shall address each day their supplications to God, Lord of all things, in total humbleness and sincere devotion.” All Christians are bound to prayer, and even to “Pray without ceasing” (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*). Knights, however, “contemn (*treat with contempt*) their own will” and as such we must manage our spiritual war by the counsels of our superiors, brethren and the binding documents of our order.

In order to ensure this conformity we must have a daily (and perhaps even a weekday and weekend) prayer rule. A prayer rule (also sometimes referred to as a cell rule) specifies the types, places and times of prayer. The practice of keeping a prayer rule is ancient, and it is still practiced in monasteries and among devout Christians who are under spiritual direction. There are many benefits to keeping a prayer rule: it forces us to make an outline of our daily prayer routine, which gives us an idea of whether or not we are being faithful to our daily duty to worship God in justice, and we approach God with the utmost sincerity respecting his absolute Holiness by, in a way, tithing a part of our day in a specific manner.

For the poor knight of Christ there are other important reasons to keep a prayer rule, but chiefly to ensure that the prayers of the Poor Knights—attendance at Holy Mass, the Divine Office, the Rosary, and mental prayer—receive the first place. Other devotions such as chaplets, attendance at extra-liturgical events (benediction) or even daily Mass, participation in confraternities and the like, while being very good and wholesome, should not displace what a knight must do first, which are the prayers he has a duty to say. A Knight does not have the liberty to decide that he will omit hours of the Divine Office in favor of a personal devotion. This is a very important practice of Obedience and is echoed by the spiritual masters such as our Holy Father, St Bernard:

“One little private prayer of his own seems to him more commendable than the recitation of all the Psalms set for an entire night.” and “But while active in all his private devotions, he is indolent in public worship.” St. Bernard, 12 Degrees of Humility and Pride, Chapter XIV on Eccentricity

A written prayer rule gives a Novice Master the ability to fulfill this part of the rule which states: “the aptitude of the Novice for prayer shall thus be examined, and he shall in particular be directed towards the constant practice of reciting the Divine Office.” Your Novice Master has a duty to inquire on whether or not you are keeping your prayer rule, and to correct you if you start to favor personal prayers to those of the Militia. It is also to help you, dear brother, to realize the extent of a commitment you are making to a life of prayer.

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The Prayer rule must be written, or typed. It must be complete and address more than one circumstance, with perhaps a prayer rule that is different for days on or off of work. The prayer rule should be used to examine one's conscience against, and faults against it should be discussed with one's Director and with one's Novice Master. During your novitiate and throughout your life as a Knight, as you should grow in strength your prayer rule may be modified to indicate new growth. Heed the counsel of your spiritual director if he believes you are taking on too much, and remember that your director will need to provide for you a letter stating you are able to meet the obligations of a Knight.

When developing your prayer rule do so based on your normal rhythm of life. All of us have emergencies, sickness and chaotic days from time to time, and also consider that you will not have ideal circumstances every day, especially in domestic life. If you are married you should review your prayer rule with your wife. When joining our brotherhood you will need both her blessing and support, because increasing your prayer rule will perhaps impact her. It is not uncommon for a Knight to need to withdraw from his domestic life and say those prayers which are common to the brotherhood but not, perhaps, to his household.

There is not a specific format that you must follow when writing your prayer rule. Rather the Knights are looking for certain elements to exist within your prayer rule which should include the when and where of:

- The reading of the rule.
- The hours of the Divine Office you will recite.
- The frequency of attending Mass.
- The frequency of receiving sacramental confession (minimum once per month)
- Make mental prayer (minimum 15 minutes per day)
- Recite the rosary (novices must frequently recite the Rosary)
- Do spiritual reading. (there are required spiritual books to read in the novitiate)
- Study as required by the novitiate program.
- Engage in an Apostolate, or if assigned to specific Militia tasks.

If you have two widely divergent schedules (such as your work week and your weekend) you should have two separate prayer rules. Should you radically diverge from your day-to-day routine because of life changes (birth of children, new job, terminal illness) or temporary circumstances (vacation, moving, etc), you should take the time to reevaluate your prayer rule.

The prayer rule should cover a minimum of four times a day: morning, early afternoon, late afternoon or evening, and before bed. More times a day are permissible, but these are the times outlined in the Growth and Criteria for Growth approved by the General Chapter of the Knights in 2003.

For those unfamiliar with the length of time it takes to perform certain hours of prayer, the below are estimates with the idea that the recitation of the office will be careful, deliberate and devout

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in the time to perform the prayers. All the estimates are based on a private recitation; prayers said in common can take longer.

- Lauds and Vespers 13-18 minutes.
- Prime and Compline 10-13 minutes
- Terce, Sext and Nona 4-6 minutes.
- 5 decades of the Rosary (18-27 minutes depending on the manner in which it is said: with meditations, scriptural rosary, in private, with others etc).

Included below is a sample prayer rules to provide an example. It is permissible to choose this prayer rule as your prayer rule to begin with.

Sample 1: This is the sample prayer rule of a married man, with: an 8-5 job Monday-Friday job, a half an hour daily commute, an hour lunch break, and several children. He keeps 2 prayer rules because his schedule varies so radically between week and weekend.

Sample Prayer Rule for Married Man with Children Weekdays

Morning Prayer 6:15am-6:55am: Act of Consecration to our Lady Queen of the Militia, Lauds, Prime and 15 minutes mental prayer made using a book, concluded by reading chapter of rule. Where: In bedroom privately.

Afternoon Prayer 12:00pm-1:00pm: Before lunch break Terce, after lunch Sext. Where: Made in car or breakroom privately.

Evening 5:05pm: After finishing work recite Nona before heading home. Where: Made in car privately.

Late Evening 6:30pm: Recite Family Rosary, read a chapter of the Gospel. Where: In Living room with family.

Night Prayer 8:30pm: Say Vespers and Compline. Followed by spiritual reading of 10 minutes in a spiritual classic.

Sample Prayer Rule for Married Man with Children Weekends

Morning Prayer 6:15am-6:35am: Act of Consecration to our Lady Queen of the Militia, Lauds, Where: In bedroom privately.

Later morning prayer 7:30-8:35am: Prime and 15 minutes mental prayer made using the missal of the day. (On Saturday) Followed by hearing mass and Terce offered as thanksgiving. Where: At Church on Saturday or at home on Sunday.

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On Sundays : Mass at 10:30pm with family arrive at 10pm and go to confession every 2 weeks.

Where: At Church in front of blessed sacrament.

Afternoon Prayer 12:00pm-1:00pm: Before lunch with family sext, after lunch Nona.

Where: Made in bedroom privately

On Saturday 1-2:30pm: Work at apostolate.

Evening 4:30pm-5:30pm: Read a chapter of the rule do assigned novice reading and complete assignments, followed by saying Vespers.

Where: At desk in study.

Late Evening 6:30pm: Recite Family Rosary, read a chapter of the Gospel.

Where: In Living room with family.

Night Prayer 8:30pm: Say Compline. Followed by spiritual reading of 20 minutes in a spiritual classic.

It important to note that the above is a beginners prayer rule. To quote Abbot Lehodey: "As the members of a community have not all the same tastes or aptitude, our constitutions impose only a minimum accessible to everyone." A careful examination of this married man's life would have allowed for him to have done more with his family perhaps attending benediction on Fridays, include the daily angelus, say additional decades of the rosary or the divine mercy chaplet in the car, etc... With that being said, his effort is satisfactory and he is attending to God and his spiritual life with the proper care and diligence to grow in the love of God and his vocation as a Poor Knight of Christ.

May the Holy Ghost grant you wisdom and prudence as your write out your prayer rule, and through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary may you be strengthened unto everlasting life.