

We all like to think of ourselves as being fundamentally good people....We like to think we are spiritual, that we do have some connection with God. In principle we like to be supportive of our church and parish. But let's try to be a little more specific. What does all this mean in practice? What makes us different? What does our catholic commitment actually consist of?

*When Paul and Barnabas went back through Lystra and Iconium to Antioch they put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. In the second reading, St John sees a vision of Heaven itself, the new Jerusalem....as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. And in the gospel, Jesus gives us a new commandment to love one another, just as I have loved you.*

These three facets of Christian living – perseverance, vision and loving people – don't happen of their own accord. Good intentions are not enough. What we need is a plan, a strategy, a routine that will actually enable some of these things to happen.

How do we ensure against flakiness and half-heartedness? How do we avoid going along with the flow and blending in with our contemporary culture? How, like St John, can we begin to see into heaven itself? How can we make sure that our loving is directed towards the people who actually need our love?

Classically what the Fathers and Mothers of the Church would say is that we need a rule of life. We need to make a realistic appraisal of where we are as human beings, where we are as Christians, where we are as members of His holy people. On the basis of this appraisal we can begin to put a strategy in place. This is where spiritual direction and confession come in. Finding a wise person who can help us move forward in our Christian lives.

Here are the bare bones of what a rule of life might look like:

How often am I going to commit myself to coming to Mass? How much time each day am I realistically going to spend in prayer, meditation and Bible study?

In what concrete ways can I be a better husband, wife, brother or sister?

In what specific ways can I try to make our world a better place?

What proportion of my income should I give to the work of the Church, to the work of charity?

In what specific ways can I contribute to the life of my parish or of the Church at large?

Vagueness, sitting on the sidelines, going with the flow, will not produce the goods. An honest and realistic rule of life will give our Christian lives some substance, will open us up to that vision of Heaven, will help us to be targeted and focused in our loving and will encourage us always to persevere.

God does live among us. *He will make his home among us; we shall be his people, and he will be our God.*

Fr Michael