

DIOCESAN ANCHORESS

There are two reasons I have chosen the identifying noun of *anchoress* over *hermitess* .

- 1) Having a firm sense of being called to solidarity with all through a life of prayer lived in the silence of solitude, I also know a call to hiddenness and permanence of place as were the anchoresses of the Middle Ages.
- 2) There is also a symbolic reason for my preference. The anchor of a ship is cast overboard and embedded in the floor of the ocean; hidden there, it secures the ship from drifting and is crucial to its safety. An anchoress is also hidden. She is embedded in the heart of the Church. Through prayer, humble work, and penance she provides security for the Church as she begs the Lord for purity of heart, that her prayer for the Church and all peoples of our globe might be received.

Our present culture calls for the creative influence of the Holy Spirit to ensure fidelity and authentic living of an eremitic lifestyle. One may see an anchoress attending Mass, in the grocery store, at the bank, or fulfilling other errands that may occasionally demand her absence from the hermitage. Each person who embraces an eremitic lifestyle lives it out very

personally and according to her own Rule; a Rule which has been approved by her bishop. The degree of solitude and other essential aspects of the desert life are spelled out within that Rule.

The one essential ingredient present within all the Rules of those called to an eremitic vocation is PRAYER. This is our primary ministry. The handwork we do to support ourselves is done to keep us “anchored” as lovers in the heart of the Church; it is work that is performed in silence and in prayer. The call to penance is a personal one. Each anchoress listens to the movements of grace within; sharing them with her spiritual director, she is led accordingly.

WHAT IS A DIOCESAN ANCHORESS?

A Diocesan Anchoress is an individual who professes public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the hands of her bishop. She lives according to her Rule of Life which has been approved by her bishop. She lives a Eucharistic-focused solitary life in silence, in humble work, in earnest prayer, most especially, for her bishop and the clergy of her diocese as well as for all people. Her profession of vows places her within the consecrated state. She loves to love God; in doing so, she opens herself to her own personal conversion and humbly accepts the mission of “simply being before the feet of the Lord” for ALL.

Sister Palma



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EREMITIC LIFE

The eremitic (desert) lifestyle, also called anchoritic, is an ancient form of consecrated life within the Church. Its roots harken back to the 1st hermits of the 3rd and 4th centuries, St.



Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony. Monastic life evolved from this eremitic tradition.

In early Christian writings, hermit and anchorite were synonymous in meaning. From their Greek roots, hermit or eremite means *desert dweller*; anchorite means *to withdraw*. Initially, the early desert dwellers lived alone in deserted surroundings within hermitages. The eremitic life might also be lived in community within what is called a *laura*; namely, hermitages built on the same property.

For ease in writing, the feminine form will be used; thus, hermitess and anchoress. I will also be referring to the “single solitary” in contrast to one living within a *laura*.

ANCHORESSES

In the Middle Ages, the anchoritic life took on a more restrictive form for the anchoress. The hermitess was able to move about freely while continuing to live an ascetic lifestyle; the anchoress lived a more reclusive, enclosed lifestyle with less social involvement with the outside world. An anchoress, within a liturgical ceremony, was often enclosed within a room or rooms within or attached to a local church, called an anchorhold. Mass attendance was possible through a window opening into the church; another window, and possibly a third, opened out to the public where food and other items were brought or counsel given or received. Anchoresses also lived apart from church buildings.



Support came through a local patron or patrons. Before the local bishop accepted public vows from an anchoress, a secure steady income for her enclosed life as well as discernment were essential. Before profession, her personal Rule of Life was approved by her bishop. This Rule would stipulate how she would live out a silent, solitary lifestyle under vow for God’s glory and the service of the Church through prayer and penance.

EREMITIC LIFE TODAY

Today, there is a revival of the eremitic vocation within our Church. It will, for obvious reasons, continue to be a path rarely taken. But the Church, in its revised 1983 Code of Canon Law, provides two paragraphs describing both the juridical and spiritual aspects essential to the eremitical life.

Canon 603 (Church Law)

- 1) *Besides institutes of consecrated life. The Church recognizes the eremitic or anchoritic life by which the Christian faithful devote their life to the praise of God and salvation of the world through a stricter separation from the world, the silence of solitude and assiduous prayer and penance.*
- 2) *A hermit is recognized in the law as one dedicated to God in a consecrated life if he or she publicly professes the three evangelical counsels, confirmed by a vow or other sacred bond, in the hands of the diocesan bishop and observes his or her own plan of life under his direction.*