

“You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24c). June 19<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the memorial of Saint Romuald. Although the strings of his heart pulled him towards God, his life of privilege pulled him in the opposite direction. Born into wealth and power in the middle of the tenth century, Romuald grew up never wanting for anything. His aristocratic family offered a life of leisure and luxury. With the snap of his fingers, he could have anything he wanted so he learned little in the way of self-restraint.

Although he was not raised in a religious atmosphere, his heart longed for a simpler life. Silence in the midst of the beauty of nature nurtured his soul and he was attracted to the monastic life. “Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them” (Mt 6:29b-29).

Longing for a simpler life, Romuald was horrified when his father killed a relative in a dispute over a piece of property. “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other” (Mt 6:24a-b). To atone for the sins of his father, Romuald left his father’s wealth for the quiet solitude offered by a monastery. There in the midst of 40 days of prayer and penance, Romuald found his life’s vocation.

Romuald lived alone in a life of monastic prayer in a hermitage near a monastery in France. Just as Christ suffered and died for our sins, Romuald lived very simply so that his sacrifices and penances could be offered up for the good of others. He was quite thankful to God when his father Sergius repented of his sins, renounced his wealth and became a monk.

Jesus tells us not to worry about food or drink or clothing. The transition from a life of luxury to one of evangelical poverty was difficult for Sergius and he considered abandoning the life of prayer he had set out on. Romuald came to his father’s aid to offer him the spiritual support he needed to stay the course and live out an authentic monastic life.

Romuald had a gift from God and he exercised it to help establish or reform almost 100 hermitages and monasteries. Romuald is known as the founder of the Camaldolese order combining individual hermits’ cells together with community life. Taking his direction from the early Desert Fathers, Romuald established a “Brief Rule” to guide others in this simple way of life:

- “Sit in your cell as in paradise. Put the whole world behind you and forget it. Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish. The path you must follow is in the Psalms – never leave it.
- If you have just come to the monastery, and in spite of your good will you cannot accomplish what you want, take every opportunity you can to sing the Psalms in your heart and to understand them with your mind. And if your mind wanders as you read, do not give up; hurry back and apply your mind to the words once more.
- Realize above all that you are in God’s presence, and stand there with the attitude of one who stands before the emperor. Empty yourself completely and sit waiting, content with the grace of God, like the chick who tastes nothing and eats nothing but what his mother brings him.”<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-romuald-510