

A LITTLE RULE FOR BEGINNERS
SELECTIONS FROM THE RULE OF BENEDICT

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INTRODUCTION

St. Benedict writes his *Rule* about 525 AD. For almost 1,500 years, communities of both women and men have used this document to organize their daily activities and, more importantly, their relationships to one another and to God. This long tradition is itself a witness to the wisdom and humanity of the document. Many people, and not just Benedictines, continue to find the Rule a valuable source of practical insight for their own lives.

Benedict was a wise man, rather than a theologian or a philosopher. His genius lies in his good sense and moderation. Perhaps his most important contribution to the monastic tradition comes in his description of the abbot, as found particularly in chapters 2 and 64. Here Benedict sets out an ideal of humanity that has proved valid not just for the leader but also for the members of the community as well. The keystone is “discretion, the mother of virtue.” Within this context fit obedience and humility. Because these virtues have been so misunderstood and abused, many today find them uncomfortable at best. For Benedict, they become the foundation for that love which, “when perfect, casts out fear” (cf. Ch. 7:67). This happens slowly within a person, and Benedict is not anxious to rush the process. He only wants to provide “a little rule for beginners” (Ch. 73:8).

This particular edition was first put together for a group of educators interested in building communities on college campuses. The translation emphasizes the character of the monastery as a “school of the Lord’s service.” I have given the text a more immediate and more inclusive feel without abandoning its original character. It is a sixth-century document written for a group of men seeking God, and the translation does not pretend otherwise. Though parts seem strange and even wrong to our ways of thinking, still much that Benedict says transcends the sixth century, and the translation seeks to help bridge that gap.

For those who wish to read the full text with a commentary for people today, I recommend *The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages* by Joan Chittister, OSB. For scholarly approaches, see the *RB 1980*, edited by Timothy Frye, OSB, and now *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* by Terrence Kardong, OSB, a milestone in Benedictine studies. The *Rule* offers a rich world for those who take it up.

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The Prologue

LISTEN, my disciple, to the instruction of your teacher. Listen carefully with the ear of your heart. Freely accept and faithfully fulfill the counsel of a loving father so that you may return by the hard work of obedience to God from whom you had wandered away through lazy disobedience.

³ Therefore, I address my words to you, whoever you are: Renounce your own will, take up the powerful arms and shining armor of obedience, and fight for the Lord Christ, our true King.

⁴⁵ Given this, it is clear that we should found a School of the Lord's Service. ⁴⁶ In this we hope to set out nothing that is harsh or oppressive. ⁴⁷ Still, we may restrict some things a little, as reason may dictate, in order to correct faults or to preserve charity. ⁴⁸ If so, do not give into fear then and there and run from the way of salvation. In the beginning, a new way always seems narrow and confining.

⁴⁹ However, when you have advanced in this way of life and in faith, you shall run with your heart expanded and with the unspeakable sweetness of love on the way of God's commands. ⁵⁰ So, never departing from God's guidance but persevering in his teaching until death in the monastery, we shall by patient endurance share in the sufferings of Christ so that we may merit to be partakers of his kingdom. Amen.

Chapter 1: The various kinds of monks

IT is plain that there are four kinds of monks. ² The first are the cenobites, who live in a monastery and serve under a Rule and an Abbot.

³ The second are the anchorites or hermits. They are no longer in the first fervor of the monastic way of life but have come through a long probation in the monastery. ⁴ Helped by many others, the hermits have long since learned how to fight the Evil One. ⁵ Well armed, they have the strength to go forth from the battle ranks of their community to the single-handed combat of the desert. Even without the support of another, they are fearless; they depend only on their own strength and God's help to fight hand to hand against the vices of body and mind.

⁶ The third group of monks is a most shameful lot: the Sarabáites. They have neither learned from experience nor been tested by a rule, as gold is tried in the furnace. ⁷ Rather, being soft, like lead, they show loyalty to the world by their works, and their tonsure shows them to be liars before God. ⁸ In twos or threes or even alone, they live without a shepherd in a sheepfold of their own choosing, and not in the Lord's. They take their own will and passions and make that their law. ⁹ Whatever they think or decide, they call holy. Whatever does not please them, they consider forbidden.

¹⁰ The fourth type of monks, called vagabonds, spend all their lives wandering about through different provinces, dwelling three or four days now in one monastery and now in another. ¹¹ Always wandering around, they never settle down. They are slaves to their own will and instincts. In every way, they are worse than even the Sarabáites.

¹² It is better to be silent than to say any more about the miserable monastic practice of such people. ¹³ Therefore, let us leave them behind and proceed with the help of the Lord to set out a rule for the strongest group: the cenobites.

Chapter 2: The qualities required of the Abbot

AN Abbot worthy of governing a monastery must always remember what he is called, and must make good the title of authority with deeds, ² for the Abbot is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery and is called by this title of Christ ³ as the Apostle says: "You have received a spirit of adoption as heirs, by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15). ⁴ Therefore the Abbot must not (God forbid!) teach or establish or command anything contrary to the law of the Lord. ⁵ Rather the Abbot's commands and teaching, like the leaven of God's justice, should be mixed throughout the minds of the disciples.

¹¹ Therefore, if you have received the name of Abbot, guide your disciples by a twofold teaching. ¹² Show forth all that is good and holy by both deeds and words, but more by deeds than words. ¹⁶ Show absolutely no favoritism in the monastery. ¹⁷ No one should be loved more than another unless it be for good works or obedience. ²² Therefore have an equal love for all, and apply one teaching in accord with what they deserve.

³⁰ As Abbot, always remember what you are and what you are called. ³¹ Know that those given much will also be required to give much in return. Realize that you have undertaken a hard and difficult work: you must direct souls and serve many personalities. Win some by kindness, others by correction, still others by persuasion. ³² Tailor and adapt yourself to the character and intelligence of each person so that you may not lose any of the flock entrusted to you. May you even have cause to rejoice in the increase of a virtuous flock.

³³ Above all, do not ignore or minimize the spiritual welfare of the lives entrusted to you, or you will worry too much about the passing and perishable things of the world. ³⁴ Instead think about your duty to direct souls: you must care for them and also give an account for them. ³⁵ Do not excuse yourself because you happen to have too little; rather remember what is written: "Seek first the kingdom of God and its justice, and all the rest will be given to you" (Matt 6:33). ³⁶ And also: "Those who fear God lack nothing" (Ps 34:10).

³⁷ Bear in mind that whoever undertakes the direction of souls must be ready to render an account for them.... ⁴⁰ In helping others to change by your counsel, you yourself will be freed of your own vices.

Chapter 3: Calling the community for counsel

WHENEVER there is something important to do in the monastery, let the Abbot assemble the whole community and present the matter at hand. ² After receiving the advice of the community, let the Abbot weigh the matter and then do what he judges most beneficial. ³ For that reason, we have said that all should be called for counsel because the Lord often reveals to a younger monk what is better.

⁴ The community should offer their various opinions with all humility and should not defend their opinion stubbornly. ⁵ Rather, they should let the matter rest with the discretion of the Abbot so that all may obey whatever he considers the better course to follow. ⁶ However, just as disciples should obey their teacher, so also the Abbot must see to everything with foresight and justice.

⁷ Therefore, everyone should follow the teaching of the Rule in everything, and no one should deviate from any of it without cause.

¹² If there are less important matters concerning the good of the monastery, let the Abbot take counsel with the seniors only, ¹³ as it is written: "Do nothing without counsel and you shall not regret what you have done" (Sir 32:24).

Chapter 4: The instruments of good works

FIRST of all, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

² Then love your neighbor as yourself.

³ Next, do not kill.

⁴ Do not commit adultery.

⁵ Do not steal.

⁶ Do not covet.

⁷ Do not give false witness.

⁸ Honor all people.

⁹ Do not do to another what you do not want done to you.

¹⁰ Deny yourself to follow Christ.

¹¹ Chastise the body.

¹² Do not surround yourself with enticement.

¹³ Love fasting.

¹⁴ Revive the poor.

¹⁵ Clothe the naked.

¹⁶ Visit the sick.

¹⁷ Bury the dead.

¹⁸ Reach out to those in distress.

¹⁹ Comfort those who grieve.

²⁰ Show yourself a foreigner in this world by your actions.

²¹ Put nothing before the love of Christ.

²² Do not act in anger.

²³ Do not stay angry.

²⁴ Do not be false-hearted.

²⁵ Do not make a false peace.

²⁶ Do not abandon charity.

²⁷ Do not swear lest by chance you perjure yourself.

²⁸ Do not return evil for good.

²⁹ Speak the truth with heart and mouth.

³⁰ Cause no hurt, but bear hurt patiently.

- 31 Love your enemies.
- 32 Do not curse those who curse you; rather bless them all the more.
- 33 Bear persecution for the sake of justice (Matt 5:10).
- 34 Do not be proud.
- 35 Do not be a drunk.
- 36 Do not be a glutton.
- 37 Do not be sleepy.
- 38 Do not be lazy.
- 39 Do not be a murmurer or a complainer.
- 40 Do not run people down.
- 41 Put your hope in God.
- 42 Attribute the good in yourself to God and not to yourself.
- 43 Know that your evil is always yours, and accept it as yours.
- 44 Fear the day of judgment.
- 45 Dread hell.
- 46 With all spiritual desire, long for eternal life.
- 47 Keep death daily before your eyes.
- 48 Always be aware of what you do.
- 49 Know for certain that God sees you in every place.
- 50 As soon as thoughts leading to evil come into your heart, dash them against Christ, and reveal them to your spiritual director.
- 51 Guard your mouth against evil and vicious talk.
- 52 Do not love a lot of talk.
- 53 Say nothing vain, nothing to cause ridicule.
- 54 Do not love excessive or disruptive laughter.
- 55 Listen wholeheartedly to holy reading.
- 56 Give yourself often to prayer.
- 57 With real sadness and feeling, confess to God in prayer every day the evil you have not dealt with.
- 58 Free yourself from this evil in the future.
- 59 Do not act on the desires of the flesh.
- 60 Hate your own will.
- 61 Obey the Abbot's command in everything; should he himself act otherwise (God forbid!), remember the Lord's command: "Do what they say and not what they do."
- 62 Do not wish to be called holy before you are holy, but first be holy so that you may be called holy in truth.
- 63 Fulfill the commandments of God daily by your deeds.

- ⁶⁴ Love chastity.
⁶⁵ Hate no one.
⁶⁶ Do not be jealous.
⁶⁷ Do not act out of envy.
⁶⁸ Do not love strife.
⁶⁹ Flee arrogance.
⁷⁰ Respect your seniors.
⁷¹ Love your juniors.
⁷² In the love of Christ, pray for your enemies.
⁷³ In conflict make peace with the other before the sun sets.
⁷⁴ And never despair of God's mercy.

⁷⁵ Behold, these are the tools of the spiritual workshop. ⁷⁶ If we use them consistently day and night and then bring them back on the day of judgment, we shall gain the reward which the Lord indeed has promised: ⁷⁷ "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). ⁷⁸ In the workshop, we must work carefully at all these tasks, and our workshop is the enclosure of the monastery and our stable life within the community.

Chapter 5: Obedience

THE first step toward humility is obedience without delay. ² This obedience is characteristic of those who hold nothing more precious than Christ.

⁵ The Lord says about them: "No sooner did they hear than they obeyed me" (Ps 17:45). ⁶ He also says to teachers: "Whoever hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). Therefore, such people immediately drop what they are doing, and abandon what they want. Leaving their work unfinished, they follow the voice of authority with the quick step of obedience. Almost as soon as the teacher gives the command, the disciple finishes the work.

¹⁰ Love for the journey to unending life pushes them on. So they seize the narrow way of which the Lord says: "Narrow is the way which leads to life" (Matt 7:14). They do not live by their own judgment or obey their own passions and pleasures. Rather they follow the judgment and command of another, and they desire to live in the presence of an Abbot.

¹⁷ For if you as disciples obey with ill will and murmuring and complaining—not only with your lips but also in your heart—¹⁸ even though the command is fulfilled, still the deed will not be acceptable to God, who sees the murmuring and complaining heart. ¹⁹ For this you will receive no thanks but will incur the punishment of murmurers and complainers, unless you change and set things right.

Chapter 6: Quiet

LET us do what the Prophet David has said: "I shall keep watch over my ways so that I may not sin with my tongue. I have placed a guard over my mouth. I said nothing and was humble. I did not speak even when it was good" (Ps 39:2-3). ² The Prophet David

shows that at times we should refrain from good words for the sake of quiet. How much more then should we put an end to evil words on account of the punishment due sin.

⁶ It is fitting for the teacher to speak and to teach, and it is right for the disciple to be quiet and to listen.

Chapter 7: Humility

DISCIPLES, the Holy Scripture cries out to us: "All who exalt themselves shall be humbled, and those who humble themselves shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). In saying this, therefore, the Scriptures point out to us that every rising up is a kind of pride.

⁵ If we want to reach the lofty summit of humility and arrive quickly at the highest joy of heaven, climbed in this present life only by humility, then we should set up the ladder...

⁶ which appeared to Jacob in his sleep with its angels ascending and descending. Indeed the ladder is itself our life in this world.

⁸ We can think of our body and soul as the sides of the ladder. ⁹ Our call by God has fitted into the sides the rungs of humility and discipleship which we are to climb. [These are twelve steps of humility:]

¹⁰ The first step of humility: Always keep the fear of God before your eyes, avoid forgetting it at all cost.

³¹ The second step: Do not love your own will; do not be enticed to fulfill your own passions.

³⁴ The third step: Place yourself under the one in charge, and obey for the love of God.

³⁵ The fourth step: As you obey, although things are hard or go against you, hold on to endurance, even in injustice, with a quiet heart.

⁴⁴ The fifth step: Humbly confess and do not hide from your Abbot the evil thoughts that come into your heart or the sins that you commit in secret.

⁴⁹ The sixth step: Be content with whatever work, even if it is a low and menial job.

⁵¹ The seventh step: With all your heart and in what you say, do not consider yourself better than any other person.

⁵⁵ The eighth step: Do nothing except what the common rule and the example of those in charge urge.

⁵⁶ The ninth step: Keep quiet and do not speak until someone asks a question.

⁵⁹ The tenth step: Do not laugh too easily or too quickly.

⁶⁰ The eleventh step: Speak gently without laughter, humbly and seriously, with a few, reasonable words.

⁶² The twelfth step: Not only in your heart but even in your body, let your humility always show forth to those who see you: whether at the Work of God or in the oratory, in the monastery or garden, on the road or in the field, wherever you are sitting or walking or standing.

⁶⁷ Then, having climbed all these steps of humility, you will soon reach that love of God which, "when perfect, casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). ⁶⁸ In this love, you will carry out everything, once done out of fear, naturally and without effort because of habit. You will

do this no longer because you fear hell, but you will do it from good habit, the joy of virtue, and for the love of Christ. ⁷⁰By the Holy Spirit the Lord will reveal all of this in you, his worker, now cleansed of vice and sin.

Chapter 19: Instructions for singing the psalms

WE believe that the Divine Presence is everywhere, and that “the eyes of the Lord behold the good and the evil in every place” (Prov 15:3). ²Beyond all doubt, we believe this to be true especially when we take part in the Work of God [that is, the prayer of the community].

³ Therefore we should always remember what the Prophet says: “Serve the Lord in fear,” (Ps 2:11) ⁴ and also “Sing wisely,” (Ps 47:8) ⁵ and “Before the angels I shall sing to you” (Ps 138:1).

⁶ Therefore let us take care how we act in the presence of God and his angels when we stand to pray the psalms so that our mind and our voice may be of one heart.

Chapter 20: Reverence at prayer

WHEN we want to bring up something to people of power, we do not presume to do it except with humility and respect. ² How much more should we make our prayer to the Lord God of all things with complete humility and pure devotion. ³ Remember that we shall be heard not for our many words, but for our purity of heart and tears of contrition. ⁴ Therefore prayer ought to be short and pure, unless prolonged by the inspiration of God’s grace.

Chapter 23: Excommunication for faults

IF anyone in the community is found to be stubborn, disobedient or proud, to be a murmurer or a complainer, or if anyone acts contrary to the Holy Rule in any way or shows contempt for the orders of their seniors, ² then let the seniors point out the problem privately once or twice according to our Lord's commandment. ³ If an offender does not change, then rebuke the person in public before all. ⁴ If even then they do not reform, let them be excommunicated, as long as they understand the nature of that punishment. ⁵ If they are shameless, let them undergo physical punishment.

Chapter 24: The types of excommunication

THE measure of the excommunication or punishment should be in proportion to the seriousness of the fault, ² and the Abbot shall make this judgment. ³ Anyone in the community found guilty of a minor fault should only be excluded from meals with the community.

Chapter 25: More serious faults

ANYONE found guilty of a more serious fault should be excluded both from the table and from the oratory. The community shall not associate with or speak to the person.

Chapter 27: The concern that the Abbot should exercise toward the excommunicated

LET the Abbot take care and show every concern for offenders because “the healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do need one” (Matt 9:12). ² Therefore, like a wise

physician, the Abbot should use every possible means. He should send wise seniors of mature years ³ so that they can console the troubled in secret and call on them to set things right with humility. These seniors should offer comfort “lest someone be overwhelmed by too much sorrow” (2 Cor 2:7). ⁴ Moreover, as the Apostle says, “Assure them of your love for them” (2 Cor 2:8), and let everyone pray for them.

⁵ The Abbot must show the greatest concern and must move quickly with all wisdom and zeal lest he lose any of the sheep entrusted to him. ⁶ He should recognize that he has taken up the care and cure of souls that are sick and not the high-handed rule of the healthy.

Chapter 28: Those who, though often corrected, do not change for the better

IF those frequently corrected for some fault, or even excommunicated, do not change for the better, let them receive a more severe punishment: that is, let corporal punishment be imposed upon them. ² If even then they do not reform, or perhaps, puffed up with pride (God forbid!), they even want to defend their deeds, then let the Abbot act as a skillful physician would. ³ Once the Abbot has applied the salve and ointment of his pleas, the medicine of the Holy Scriptures, and at last the cleansing fire of excommunication or corporal punishment, ⁴ but sees that his zeal brings no change, then let the Abbot make use of a still more powerful remedy. Let the Abbot use his own prayers and those of the whole community ⁵ so that the Lord, who can do all things, may work a cure in the sick monk. ⁶ But, if even this does not heal the monk, then the Abbot should indeed use the knife and amputate... ⁸ lest one sick sheep spread disease through the whole flock.

Chapter 31: The manager of the monastery

FROM the community let there be chosen a manager who is wise and mature in character, well-balanced and not voracious. This person should be neither proud, stormy, nor hurtful, neither lazy nor wasteful. ² Rather the manager should fear God and provide for the whole community like a parent.

³ If chosen to be manager, you should look after everything, ⁴ but do nothing without the Abbot’s permission, and observe every command. ⁵ Watch over everything entrusted to you ⁶ and do not become a source of grief for the community. ⁷ If anyone in the community makes an unreasonable request, do not wound their feelings by spurning them. Rather refuse the improper request with reason and humility.

⁹ Show special care and concern for the sick, the young, and the poor, for you should realize that you will have to give an account of all these people on the day of judgment.

¹⁰ Look upon all the vessels and goods of the monastery as if they were the consecrated vessels of the altar. ¹¹ See that nothing is overlooked. ¹² Do not be greedy or wasteful. Do not squander the goods of the monastery, but do everything in moderation and according to the instruction of the Abbot. ¹³ Above all else, be humble.

If you do not have the means to meet the request of a someone in the community, at least reply with a kind word, ¹⁴ for it is written: “A good word surpasses the best gift” (Sir 18:17). ¹⁵ You should take care of all that the Abbot entrusts to you. Do not presume to meddle in whatever the Abbot prohibits.

¹⁶ See that the community receives its food without any pride or delay. ¹⁸ People should ask at a set time for what they need, and you should provide it ¹⁹ so that no one will be troubled or grieved in the House of God.

Chapter 33: Whether monks should have anything of their own

ABOVE all, let this vice be rooted out of the monastery: ² No one shall presume to give or to receive anything without the permission of the Abbot. ³ You shall keep nothing as your own, absolutely nothing at all: neither book nor writing tablet nor pen nor anything whatsoever, ⁴ for those in community should not have even their bodies or wills at their own disposal. ⁶ “Everything should be held in common” by all, as it is written, “so that no one call anything their own” (Acts 4:32).

Chapter 34: Whether all without distinction are to receive that which is necessary

AS the Scriptures say: “Distribution was made to everyone as they had need” (Acts 4:35). ² This does not mean that anyone should receive special favor (God forbid!)—only that consideration should be made for weaknesses. ³ So if you require less, give thanks to God, and do not be sad. ⁴ If you require more, be humbled by your weakness, and do not grow proud because of the compassion shown to you. ⁵ In this way all shall be at peace.

⁶ Above all things, the evil of murmuring and complaining must not show itself by a word or a sign for any reason whatsoever. ⁷ Anyone found guilty of murmuring and complaining should be severely punished.

Chapter 35: Kitchen servers of the week

TAKE turns and serve each other in the kitchen and at table. Except for the sick and those with other pressing business, excuse no one from this duty, ² for this service brings the greater reward of charity and love.... ⁶ Serve one another in charity and love.

Chapter 36: The sick

BEFORE all things and above all things, you must care for the sick so that they may be served truly as Christ himself, ² for he said, “I was sick and you visited me” (Matt 25:36), ³ and “What you did for one of the least of these, you did for me” (Matt 25:40). ⁴ The sick themselves should realize that they are served for God’s honor; so they should not trouble those serving them with too many things. ⁵ Still you must bear with the sick, for in this way you will get a much larger reward. ⁶ So the Abbot must take the greatest care to see that they suffer no neglect.

Chapter 43: Coming late for the Work of God or for table

AS soon as you hear the signal for the community’s prayer, stop whatever you are doing and go straightway ² with proper seriousness and without any foolishness. Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God.

Chapter 46: Faults committed in other matters

IF you commit a fault at work...³ go before the Abbot and the community, admit the fault, and set things right. ⁵ However, if the sin lies hidden in your own soul, make it known

only to the Abbot or to those wise in the spirit⁶ who know how to heal their own wounds and also the wounds of others without exposing and broadcasting them.

Chapter 48: The daily manual labor

IDLENESS is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the community should have times for manual labor, and other times for prayerful reading.

¹⁴ During the days of Lent, they should have time to read until mid morning....¹⁵ For Lent let them receive a book from the library and read it from the beginning to the end.²² On Sundays everyone should be free to read except for those with assigned duties.²⁴ The sick and the weak should be given some work or craft so that they will have something to do. Still the demands of the work should not oppress them and drive them away. The Abbot should take their weakness into consideration.

Chapter 49: The observance of Lent

WHILE monastic life should always have the marks of Lent, few have the stamina for it.² For Lent then we advise the whole community to keep their way of life completely pure and to clear up the faults of other times during these holy days.⁴ We can do this worthily if we keep away from every vice and give ourselves to prayer with tears, to reading, to heartfelt contrition, and to self-denial.

⁵ Therefore, during these days, let us add something to our usual duty: private prayers or fasting from food and drink⁶ so that each one may freely offer God something over and above the regular measure with “the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thes 1:6).⁷ Everyone should restrain their body from food and drink, from sleep, from too many words, and from foolishness. With great longing and in the joy of the Holy Spirit let them await the holy feast of Easter.

⁸ Everyone should let the Abbot know what they are going to offer up so that it may be done with the Abbot’s prayer and approval,⁹ for if you take up anything without the permission of your spiritual director, it counts as pride and vainglory and not as profit.¹⁰ Therefore do everything with the approval of the Abbot.

Chapter 52: The oratory of the monastery

LET the oratory be what it is called: a place of prayer. Let nothing else be done or kept there.² When the Work of God is finished, all should leave in deep silence and with reverence for God³ so that anyone wishing to pray alone may not be bothered by another’s lack of consideration.¹⁴ Those wishing to pray in private should enter without show. They should not pray in a loud voice, but with tears and the full attention of the heart.

Chapter 53: The reception of guests

WHEN guests arrive at the monastery, receive them all as Christ himself, for he will say, “I was a stranger and you took me in” (Matt 25:35).

¹⁵ Show great care and concern particularly when you receive the poor and pilgrims, for in them you more especially receive Christ because our very fear of the rich sees to their honor.

Chapter 58: The manner of receiving members into the community

DO not easily admit just anyone who comes to the monastic life,² but, as the Apostle says: “Test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1).³ Therefore when they come, see if they keep knocking at the gate and endure patiently for four or five days the harsh treatment and difficulties set in the way of their entering the community. If they persist in their petition,⁴ then allow them to enter and stay in the guest house for a few days.

⁵ After this let them live in the novitiate where the novices study, eat, and sleep.⁶ Assign to them a senior monk skilled in gaining souls.⁷ This senior monk shall watch over their conduct with real concern and consider carefully whether they truly seek God and whether they are zealous for the Work of God, for obedience, and for trials.⁸ They should be told all the hardships and difficulties which lead to God.

⁹ At the end of two months, read this entire Rule to everyone who promises enduring stability in the monastery.¹⁰ Afterwards say to them: “Behold the law under which you wish to serve; if you can observe it, enter; if you cannot, you are free to depart.”¹¹ Take whoever perseveres back to the novitiate and test them again in all that demands patience.¹² After six months, read the Rule to them again so that they may know what they are getting into.¹³ Finally after four months read this same Rule to anyone who remains steadfast.¹⁴ If a novice after careful consideration promises to guard and keep everything commanded, then receive that person into the community.¹⁵ However, all should know that from this day forward, as legislated by the Rule, that they may no longer leave the monastery¹⁶ or shake off the yoke of the Rule, which they were free either to refuse or to accept during their lengthy deliberations.

¹⁷ The reception shall take place before all in the oratory. Each new member shall promise obedience, stability, and conversion to the monastic life.¹⁸ They shall do this before God and the saints so that they may realize that those who act contrary to this shall be condemned by the one whom they mock.²³ From that day forward, they shall be counted as one of the community.

Chapter 61: The reception of pilgrim monks

IF pilgrim monks arrive from distant parts and wish to dwell in the monastery as guests,² receive them for as long as they wish, provided they are content with the customs of the place and do not trouble the monastery with unreasonable demands.³ Such monks should be satisfied simply with what they find.⁴ Should one of them with good reason and humble charity criticize or point out anything, let the Abbot weigh the matter prudently since the Lord may have sent the monk for this very purpose.

Chapter 63: The order of the community

THE monks should take their place in the ranks of the monastery according to day of taking on the monastic way of life, the merit of their lives, or as the Abbot decides.² The Abbot should not stir up the flock entrusted to him as though he had the power to do just whatever he wished. ...¹⁰ Let the juniors respect their seniors, and let the seniors love their juniors.

Chapter 64: The appointment of the Abbot

WHEN you appoint the Abbot, observe this principle: The entire community, inspired by the fear of God, shall choose the Abbot unanimously, or, after more mature deliberation, a majority of the community, no matter how small, shall make the choice.² Choose an Abbot whose life demonstrates virtue and whose teaching reveals wisdom, even though this person may hold the lowest rank in the community.

⁷ If you are appointed Abbot, always bear in mind what burden you have taken on yourself, and to whom you will have “to give an account of your stewardship” (Luke 16:2).⁸ Know that it is your duty to serve the community rather than to lord it over them.⁹ You must, therefore, be well versed in the Divine Law so that you know how to “bring forth things new and old” (Matt 13:52). You must be chaste, sober, and merciful.¹⁰ Always “let mercy triumph over justice” (Jas 2:13) so that you yourself may find mercy.¹¹ Love everyone in the community as family, but hate their vices.

¹² When you correct faults, act prudently, and avoid extreme measures; otherwise, in trying too hard to scrape off the rust, you will break the pot.¹³ Be wary of your own weakness. Remember that “the bruised reed must not be crushed” (Is 42:3).¹⁴ By this we do not mean that you should allow vices to grow up. Rather you should cut them off prudently and with a charity that best fits each person. As we have said: Seek rather to be loved than to be feared.

¹⁶ You must not be stormy or overanxious, pushy or headstrong, jealous or prone to suspicion; otherwise you will never have rest.¹⁷ In your commands be prudent and considerate; in the tasks which you impose, whether they concern God or the world, be perceptive and balanced.¹⁸ Bear in mind the discretion of holy Jacob when he said: “If I drive my flock too hard, they will all die in one day” (Gen 33:13).¹⁹ Taking this as the model along with other examples of discretion, the mother of virtue, you should balance everything so that the strong have something to reach for while the weak need not run away.²⁰ Above all, you yourself must observe this Rule in all things.

Chapter 68: If something impossible is commanded a monk

IF you are commanded to do something hard or impossible, you should nevertheless accept the command from the one in charge with all gentleness and obedience.² Still if you see that the weight of the burden goes quite beyond the measure of your strength, then explain to the one in charge why you cannot carry out the task. Do this at an appropriate time with patience and³ without pride or resistance or argument.⁴ However, if you present your reason, and the one in charge holds to the original command, then, as a disciple, you should realize that this is for your own benefit, and, trusting in the help of God, you should obey out of love.

Chapter 71: That monks should obey one another

All of you must show the blessing of obedience not just to the Abbot but also to one another. So obey one another as in a family,² knowing that this way of obedience shall bring you to God.

Chapter 72: The good zeal which monks ought to have

JUST as there is an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell,² so there is a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and life everlasting.³ Let monks, therefore, practice this good zeal with a great and ardent love.

⁴ Be the first to show honor to another (Rom 12:10).

⁵ With great patience bear the weakness of each other, whether physical or personal.

⁶ Eagerly compete with each other in obeying one another.

⁷ Do not go after what you think best for yourself; rather go after what is better for the other.

⁸ Practice the charity and pure love of brothers and sisters.

⁹ Fear God out of love.

¹⁰ Love your Abbot with a sincere and humble love.

¹¹ Prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ, and may he bring us all alike to life everlasting. Amen.

Chapter 73. That the observance of all justice is not laid down in this Rule

WE have written this Rule so that by observing it in monasteries, we may show that we have attained at least some degree of virtue and have made a beginning in the monastic way of life.

⁸ If you would rush to your heavenly home, then with the help of Christ keep this little Rule which we have drawn up for beginners.⁹ As we have indicated above: With God's protection, you will reach at last even greater heights of wisdom and virtue. Amen.