

The Rule of Life

of

The Community of Saint John Cassian



In the Name of our most holy Mother Wisdom: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Vowed religious in *The Community of Saint John Cassian*—who will be known as Cassianites—having committed themselves, in total consecration to God, to the vows of Simplicity, Obedience, and Conversion of Life, shall live by the following precepts:

1. They shall pray the Divine Office each day without fail, unless for a time some extreme circumstance should prevent them. The Divine Office, or *Opus Dei* ('Work of God'), in the context of *The Community of Saint John Cassian*, consists of the following Hours: Vigils (Nocturns or Midnight Prayer), Matins (Morning Prayer), Terce (Mid-Morning Prayer or Prayer of the Third Hour), Sext (Noonday Prayer or Prayer of the Sixth Hour), None (Afternoon Prayer or Prayer of the Ninth Hour), Vespers (Evening Prayer), and Compline (Night Prayer). For as the psalmist has written, "Seven times a day I praise you." Of these seven ancient Hours of prayer, at least three shall be observed each day by every member of this order, whether in solitude or gathered together in community. On occasions when the whole of the Community is gathered together, let them pray all seven Hours of the Office, as the Prior or Prioress sees fit.
2. In addition to the Divine Office, each Hour of which should include a time of silent prayer or meditation, let each member of this community commit an additional hour each day to contemplative prayer, to the prayer of the heart, and to the practice of *lectio divina* ('sacred reading'), knowing that it is only in true interior silence, in perfect listening, that they shall come to dwell in the Divine Presence.
3. Either before or after Compline each night, members should read from the Sayings of the Fathers and Mothers, the works of St. John Cassian, the *Philokalia*, or some other enriching spiritual text of the Tradition, and, whenever possible, they should keep silence for the remainder of each night following Compline.
4. Further, let them participate in communal worship and partake of the Holy Eucharist a minimum of one time in each week. For this purpose, and for the purpose of ongoing connection to the broader life of the Church, even if the Brother or Sister is not engaged in formal ministry in a parochial setting, they shall be connected to a parish community of the Episcopal Church, or of some other canonical jurisdiction of the Anglican Communion.

5. Cassianites may be Brothers, Fathers, Mothers, or Sisters, according to their call and vocation within the larger Church. For the purposes of this Rule, male and female members shall simply be called Brothers and Sisters, respectively. If, however, a Brother or Sister of this order should also be called to holy orders within the Church and is ordained a priest, then they shall be referred to as Mother or Father, as proper honor and custom dictate.

6. All vowed religious of this community, whether lay or ordained—shall dwell apart in solitude, each working out his or her own salvation with diligence, relying on the support of the larger Community from afar. But let the Community gather together as a whole at least two times in each year for Chapter, retreat, worship, and fellowship. And if individual members should live near to one another, let them gather as often as may seem fitting and fruitful, for prayer, fellowship, and ongoing formation.

7. Though they shall keep the aforementioned times set aside for prayer, the prayer life of vowed religious in this community shall not be limited to these times. Indeed, let no Brother or Sister of this community ever cease from the practice of interior prayer—whether calling on the Name of Christ, of Holy Wisdom, or resting in the ineffable silence of contemplation. Let them be assured that the holy Name of Christ is the rock upon which all distracting images, memories, thoughts, and self-serving desires should be dashed. And let them gather strength and inspiration from our holy Fathers and Mothers, who, from the earliest times, committed themselves wholeheartedly, day and night, to the discipline of unceasing prayer, crying out unceasingly from the depths of the heart until, having entered at last into that great stillness, the Divine Word being born in them, they were brought by grace of the Holy Spirit into that most blessed state of divine union.

The profound stillness or *hesychia* arising from the art and discipline of unceasing prayer is the pearl of great price, the life-raft and refuge of every seeker along the Way, which all should strive to find and keep hold of at any cost, understanding it as the gateway to *theoria*: true contemplation, true stillness, and union in the Mystery of God. Let the Brothers and Sisters of this community support one another always in holding fast to this practice, by any good and appropriate means, even to their very last breath. And let them be sure that there is nothing more needful, nothing more central to the Christian life than this practice of standing perpetually before the Presence of Almighty God, grounded in the depths of the heart, praying to Him without ceasing, in the Mystery of perfect silence. As St. Theophan the Recluse reminds us, “The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly, day and night, until the end of life.” Thus, upon being admitted as Postulants, let each Brother and Sister of this order receive all necessary training related to the practices of interior prayer from the Prior or Prioress, or from a qualified teacher appointed thereby. And thereafter let each one strive, both in solitude and community, to be continually formed in this art, ever deepening their knowledge and practice thereof.

8. And let them maintain a regular practice of some meditative physical discipline, which will allow them to fully embody this art of unceasing prayer, and will keep them healthy in body,

mind, and spirit, readied for the hard labor of ascending to God by the divine ladder planted firmly in their hearts, and for the building up of God's Kingdom in the world.

9. Let them keep each week a sabbath, a holy day of rest, which shall be devoted to meditation and contemplative prayer, and to any other activity that is rejuvenating and centers their life in the Presence of the Holy Spirit; but, above all, let this day be devoted singularly to the practice of unceasing prayer. This should be a day not of frivolity and worldly activities, but rather a day entirely set apart from such things, that they may rest from their active ministries and draw nearer in silence to the Presence of God. For, as Wisdom has spoken through our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Apostle Thomas: "If you do not fast from the world, you will not find the Kingdom. If you do not keep the sabbath a sabbath, you will not see the Father."

Let them also be sure that, if not in where they daily dwell, then at very least in where they frequently take respite, they are obeying the Lord's command to "go apart to a desert place and find rest," seeking and communing with the Presence of God in the supernal beauty of the natural world. And further, given the Incarnational charism of this order, let them be sure that the peace, beauty, and sanctity of Nature—as well as Her hidden or arcane dimensions—hold a precious key to illumination and union with God.

10. Before every meal, let them sing or say the Lord's Prayer, including the *preces* ("Through the prayers of our most holy Mothers and Fathers: Holy Wisdom, our true God and our true hope, have mercy on us and save us; and as you have taught us, Mother, make us worthy now to pray") and the doxology, with all due devotion, as if it were the very last time they would pray it. And let them give thanks always, as is fitting, for the things which God has given them, knowing there is nothing they can experience—including trials and tribulations—in which God's eternal and salvific love is not present.

11. And as part of their vow to ongoing Conversion of Life, let them maintain a spirit of chastity, humility, and truth in all their relations. Chastity, in this context, means they shall commit themselves to a sexually and emotionally restrained life, exhibiting balance and integrity, striving for equanimity in all things, in order that they might devote themselves entirely to the Way of Christ.

It is right and good for the solitary, who has given his or her life to God in prayer and self-sacrificing service, to remain as free as possible from the encumbrances and entanglements of worldly relationships; for it is needful that a religious should be completely unfettered, in order that the Way of unceasing prayer may be truly cultivated. The solitary is one who has given his or her life completely to God in Christ, and crucified with Him her own will and desire. If Christ has truly called her to the religious life, then let her answer by emptying herself, by sacrificing her own will and desire, committing herself wholly and without reservation to being a follower of the Way. As the Master has said, "Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it." So let the vowed members of this

community remember always that they are solitaries with God, called to a life of interior prayer, repentance, and selfless service, in Christ our Lord and Mother.

Yet because some are given by God the grace of spiritual partnership, rather than the grace of single celibacy, let those who discern a call to religious life within the Community but have also been called to marriage or partnership be eligible to be formed as religious, under certain strict conditions, at the discretion of the Prior or Prioress; and, in such a case, let each one “have his own wife [or husband],” or “her own husband [or wife],” if this be what God has willed for them. But, as the Apostle instructs, “I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God—one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am.” Therefore, let all religious of this community be single if possible, and strive in this way; and otherwise, let them be committed in self-sacrificing partnership, according to their vocation from God. But those who are married or partnered must, even as their single Brothers and Sisters, have regular solitude and the discipline of unceasing prayer as their primary watchwords and guiding lights.

Indeed, if any religious of this order is to marry, or if any married or partnered person is to presume to take upon themselves the commitments of the vowed religious life, let them be aware that such a one as they might be joined to in the manner of marriage or committed partnership must in all ways, and to all fullness of dedication, support and accompany them in living out their commitment to Christ. And, as St. Benedict has instructed, “Let none be granted an easy entry to the religious life, but, as the Apostle says, ‘Test their spirits to see if they are from God.’” Let every such individual know the nature of the struggle they freely take upon themselves in pursuing the consecrated life.

12. And if some should come to the Community discerning a call to the religious life who cannot wholeheartedly and in all fullness and authenticity commit themselves to the Way of the solitary—that is, to the vowed religious life according to the charism of this Community—or if the circumstances of their lives will not permit such a totalizing commitment, then let them not be ashamed or made to feel inadequate to the task; rather, let all members of the Community understand that each person has a unique call from God, and that each is good according to the Mystery of God’s will (to establish the whole Body of Christ); and let such inquirers instead be formed as Associates of the Community, as the Prior or Prioress sees fit, that they may cultivate a spiritually fruitful and ongoing fellowship with the order, modeling their lives, as much as circumstances allow, after the life of its vowed members, and praying in solidarity with them.

13. As previously stated, each Cassianite Brother or Sister shall live apart, in their own hermitage—or, if desired, in a small, private dwelling within the context of a *lavra* or *skete* where other religious dwell. But in the case of members living amongst other vowed religious, let them have their own private cell or hermitage, set apart some distance from the others, which they may retire to frequently for solitary work and prayer. Let no one underestimate the significance of the hermitage, which is a place to cultivate true silence and communion with God, and to which one

should frequently retreat for this purpose. As our holy Father among the saints, Moses the Ethiopian, has said: “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.” And St. Ammonas: “Sit in your cell, and eat a little every day, and have always in your heart the words which are read in the Gospel and were said by the Publican, and thus you can be saved.” And again, St. Romuald: “Sit in your cell as in paradise. Put the whole world behind you and forget it.” So each religious of this community should live in their own small dwelling, set apart, which shall be for them a sanctuary of peace, a refuge from the world of clamor and distraction, elegant in its simplicity: a divine house of prayer, a tabernacle of holy communion, a furnace and a fire of sanctification.

14. And they shall commit themselves to a life of true simplicity, submitting to the cross of poverty, acquiring only what is needed to live healthfully and peacefully and to do the work of ministry God has called them to do. Any thing they have care and use of, let them consider that it does not belong to them, but to God alone; and let them hold all things in this earthly existence lightly, with equanimity and healthful detachment. Any thing they might acquire beyond that which is needed to reasonably sustain their life and ministry, let them sell or donate in service to the poor. And let any Brother or Sister who is preparing to enter the order as a Novice be supported by the whole community in liberating themselves from all unnecessary possessions, that they may be free from worldly cares and entrapments, as our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded, and that their hermitages may be established as holy and pure dwelling places of prayer, where they will increase more and more in spiritual freedom and in the love of God.

15. Let each member of this order also be fully committed to the ongoing process of spiritual formation implied in their vows and way of life, and, resultantly, be ongoingly engaged in a relationship of fruitful spiritual direction with a qualified spiritual Father or Mother. This spiritual Father or Mother (or ‘spiritual director’) should be someone with wisdom and experience enough to appropriately guide others in the life of prayer; they should, ideally, be a vowed religious in their own right, and, if at all possible, a priest (in order that the Sacramental aspects of this spiritual relationship might be fulfilled), with more years of experience in the religious life and more wisdom than the one receiving direction from them. This spiritual Father or Mother may be the Prior or Prioress of the Community—and, indeed, it is customary that all Postulants be so directed by the Prior or Prioress, or else by another senior member of the Community which he or she has assigned; but beyond the time of Postulancy, it is desirable that each member have a spiritual Father or Mother other than the Prior or Prioress, who dwells near enough to them that regular face-to-face meetings are possible. This person must, however, be approved by the Prior or Prioress of the Community, and, particularly during the early years of formation, should have ongoing contact with the same.

16. And let all those under vows in this community wear garments befitting the life of the solitary, representing the sacrifice of self they have made in response to the Lord’s call of *kenosis*. These garments should be simple, practical, well tailored, and generally black in color. Vowed religious of this order—that is, Novices or Professed—may, when discerned as bearing of good fruit in their lives and ministries, wear the traditional habit of the order, consisting of a

black tunic, over which is worn a black scapular, and, over the latter, a black leather belt. Those members who have made Final Profession shall also be given a black hooded cowl, which is to be worn in all liturgical settings (except if the Brother or Sister is also a priest, and is serving at the Holy Eucharist, in which case a white hooded cowl of the same design should be worn, over which is placed the vestments of priestly appointment), and in all formal meetings of the religious Chapter. But if in any instance the traditional habit may act as a barrier to their ministry, rather than as a help to it, then let them wear instead at such times clothing that befits their work, the general norm being pants and a black buttoned shirt (a black clerical shirt, if they are also ordained to holy orders within the Church). But let them at no time be found guilty in making an idol of appearances, knowing that what is always most needful is to maintain humility and a spirit of simplicity. And let these practices be a continual reminder of their commitment to Obedience and Simplicity in the Way of Christ, of their fellowship with the Brothers and Sisters of this order, and with our holy Mothers and Fathers gone before us in the Way.

17. When they don the habit each morning, let them pray this version of the Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian: “O Lord and Master of my life: A spirit of idleness, despondency, distraction, ambition, and idle talk give me not. + But rather a spirit of chastity, humility, single-heartedness, patience, and love bestow upon me, Your unworthy servant. + Grant me, O Lord and King, to see my failings and not condemn my brother; for blessed are You to the ages of ages. + Amen.”

18. And let them continually study, in their solitude, the works of the saints, marking and with all fervor applying the wisdom and way of life set out therein, in order that they may be formed and edified by the sanctity of those holy men and women who have gone before us in the Way.

19. Each member of this community shall engage in some work of ministry in the world, supporting those in need, and supporting themselves and their Brothers and Sisters by the work of their own hands, knowing that only in so doing can they be truly counted as Cassianites. And in whatever work they do for God’s Kingdom, let them offer always to Him who formed the heavens and the earth, and to all His creatures in this world, the fruits of their lives of contemplation, being for all an *ikon* of the Divine Mystery, which is met in stillness, holiness, and peace.

20. Vowed members shall give annually of their earnings to the Community, in an amount to be determined by each member through prayerful discernment with the Prior or Prioress. This giving is to be drawn from the income each member earns in their respective ministries in the world, and shall be proportional to the legitimate needs and expenses of each member. Thus, those who earn more will be expected to give more, and those who earn less will be expected to give less. And let no Brother or Sister give thought to this, or, God forbid, quarrel or grumble over such matters. Indeed, let no one’s giving be known or discussed with any except with the Prior or Prioress, so that all proper humility may be maintained. It is the duty and prerogative of the Prior or Prioress to keep watch, as he or she sees fit, over the giving and other financial matters of vowed members, so that it may be clear that they are utilizing the resources God has

granted them to a good and holy end, and that the integrity of their religious commitments are in no way threatened by the possession and use of monetary means. If needed, it is also the duty and prerogative of the Prior or Prioress to censure and correct any Brother or Sister of this order who has lapsed into an unhealthy or spiritually unhelpful use of money. All giving shall go directly into the Community's common fund, which shall be managed by the Prior or Prioress along with the elected board members. This fund shall be used, at the Prior or Prioress's discretion, to aid members of the Community who may find themselves in a time of financial need, to assist Brothers or Sisters with travel expenses to annual retreats of the Community, and to purchase supplies needed for ministry, Liturgy, or formation that is of common concern to the Community as a whole. Associates shall also be asked to give annually to the Community, according as they are able.

Again, let it be certain that all members of this community shall cultivate an approach to monetary matters that exhibits true detachment, equanimity, and surrender to God, knowing that whatever material things may in this transitory life pass through their hands are in truth not their own, but belong entirely to God.

21. The Prior or Prioress of this Community shall be one elected by the Chapter (consisting of all Professed members), who is chosen for their wisdom, holiness of life, and exemplary living of the charism and vows of this order. They shall serve for a term of nine years, unless in some extreme circumstance, by consensus of the Chapter, they are asked to step down before the end of their term of service. The Prior or Prioress shall be devoted to overseeing and facilitating the formation and spiritual well-being of all members of the order, and of maintaining the unity, fellowship, and spiritual efficaciousness of the Community as a whole.

22. Let the Brothers and Sisters of this community go forth always in the world with a spirit of gentleness, integrity, meekness, self-denial, compassion, and humility, ever recalling that they have put on Christ and become representatives of His Way in the world, and that they have set themselves apart for Wisdom alone, on the path of surrender, of self-emptying, in order to become vessels for the love of God, which should pour through them at all times without inhibition. Thus, they shall strive to bring peace, hope, faith, illumination, and love, wherever God may lead them.

23. And let them commend themselves and one another and their whole life to Christ, in this holy Way of solitude and stillness, in the enduring bonds of love and unity, toward peace and unification, to the redemption and sanctification of all, "establishing themselves with the mind in the heart before God," as St. Theophan has written, "transforming everything in themselves, whether great or small, into the service of God the Trinity, consciously and freely offering themselves wholly to God," in wisdom and truth, to the ages of ages. Amen.

