

The Rule of St. Benedict

St. Benedict of Nursia (~480-547)

PROLOGUE

Listen carefully in your heart, my son, and pay close attention to your master's teachings. Accept with a willing mind and actively follow your holy father's guidance, so that through the hard work of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had withdrawn through the laziness of disobedience. I now speak these words of encouragement to you, whoever you are, who are giving up your own will and taking up the powerful and victorious weapons of obedience to serve your true king, Christ the Lord.

First, whenever you begin any good work, pray earnestly that He will bring it to completion, so that He who already considers us among His children will never be grieved by our evil actions. We owe Him such obedience at all times because of the good things He does in us, so that He will never, like an angry father, disinherit us as His children, or like a fearsome master angered by our wrongdoing, hand us over to eternal punishment as wicked servants who refused to follow Him to glory.

Let us therefore finally rise up, as Scripture urges us: "Now is the time for us to wake up from sleep." With our eyes open to God's light, let us listen with amazed ears to God's voice crying out to us daily: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." And again: "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches." And what does the Spirit say? "Come, children, listen to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Run while you have the light of life, so that the darkness of death does not overtake you."

Looking for His worker among the crowd of people to whom He proclaims these things, the Lord says again: "Who is the person who wants life and desires to see good days?" If you hear this and answer "I do," God then says to you: "If you want true and eternal life, keep your tongue from evil and do not let your lips speak deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. When you have done this, My eyes will be on you and My ears will be open to your prayers. Before you call out, I will say, 'Here I am.'"

What could be sweeter to us, dear brothers, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? See how the Lord lovingly shows us the way of life through His fatherly care.

Let us prepare ourselves with faith and good works, and following the Gospel, let us walk in His paths so that we may be worthy to see Him who has called us to His kingdom. But if we

want to live in His kingdom, we must remember that we can only reach it by running there through good deeds.

Let us ask the Lord with the prophet: "Lord, who may live in Your sanctuary? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?" After asking this question, brothers, let us listen to the Lord showing us the way to that sanctuary: "The one who lives with integrity and does what is right; who speaks truth from their heart; who does not slander with their tongue; who does no wrong to a neighbor and casts no slur on others." This is the person who has defeated the devil, the evil slanderer, by rejecting him and his tempting thoughts from their heart, and who has taken hold of these temptations while they were still weak and smashed them against Christ, who is the Rock.

Those who fear the Lord do not become proud of their good behavior, but recognize that the good in them comes not from themselves but from God. They praise the Lord working in them and say with the prophet: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory." Just as the apostle Paul took no credit for his preaching, saying: "By the grace of God I am what I am." And again Paul said: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Therefore, the Lord also says in the Gospel: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

Because of this, our Lord daily expects us to respond to His holy teachings with our actions. The days of this life are extended for us as a kind of truce to correct our faults, as the apostle says: "Don't you realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" For the Lord in His kindness says: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

Since we have asked the Lord about who may dwell in His sanctuary, we have heard the requirements for living there. Therefore, our hearts and bodies must be prepared to serve like soldiers under holy obedience to these commands. Whatever our human nature cannot accomplish, let us ask the Lord to supply through His grace. And if we wish to escape the pains of hell and reach eternal life, we must hurry to do only those things that will benefit us for eternity, while we still have time and are in this body and have the opportunity to fulfill all these commands in this life.

We must therefore establish a school for the Lord's service. In setting this up, we hope to establish nothing harsh or burdensome. But if anything is set down somewhat strictly for correcting faults or preserving love, do not immediately run away in fear from the path of salvation, which can only begin through a narrow entrance. For as we progress in the life of

faith and conversion, our hearts expand, and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love. By never leaving His teaching but persevering in His instruction in the monastery until death, we may through patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to be heirs of His kingdom. Amen.

CHAPTER 5: CONCERNING OBEDIENCE

The first level of humility is immediate obedience. This is fitting for those who consider nothing more precious than Christ, because of the holy commitment they have made, whether from fear of hell or desire for eternal life. As soon as any command is given by a superior, as if it were given by God Himself, they cannot tolerate any delay in carrying it out. The Lord speaks of these people: "As soon as they heard, they obeyed me." And again He says to teachers: "Whoever listens to you listens to me."

Therefore, such people immediately abandon what they are doing and give up their own will. They quickly drop what they were working on, leaving it unfinished, and with ready obedience hurry to carry out the command given. It is as if, for those who love to attain eternal life, both the master's command and the disciple's completed work happen almost simultaneously, with great speed due to their reverent fear of God. This is how they take the narrow path of which the Lord says: "Narrow is the road that leads to life." By not living according to their own judgment and not obeying their own desires and wishes, but living according to another's judgment and commands, they live in community and are happy to have an abbot over them. Without doubt, such people follow the Lord's saying: "I have come not to do my will but the will of him who sent me."

But this obedience will only be acceptable to God and pleasing to people when what is commanded is carried out without fear, delay, lukewarmness, grumbling, or unwilling back-talk. Obedience given to superiors is an offering made to God, because He said: "Whoever listens to you listens to me." Disciples should give obedience willingly, because God loves a cheerful giver. If a disciple obeys unwillingly, even if they grumble only in their heart and not out loud, though they fulfill the command, they will not be accepted by God as obedient, because He sees the heart of the grumbler. For such behavior they earn no reward, but rather incur the penalty for grumbling, unless they change and make amends.

CHAPTER 6: CONCERNING SILENCE

Let us do what the prophet says: "I said, 'I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked.' I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good." Here the prophet shows that if we should sometimes refrain from speaking good words for the sake of silence, how much more should we avoid evil words because of the punishment for sin.

Therefore, even though it concerns good and holy conversation that builds others up, let fully trained disciples rarely be given permission to speak, because of the importance of silence. For it is written: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking," and elsewhere: "The tongue has the power of life and death." Speaking and teaching is the master's role; being silent and listening is the disciple's role. So, if anything needs to be asked of the superior, let it be asked with all humility and respectful submission.

We judge that all foolishness, idle words, and things said just to provoke laughter should be permanently banned everywhere, and we do not permit the disciple to open their mouth for such talk.

CHAPTER 7: CONCERNING HUMILITY

Brothers, the holy Scriptures call out to us: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

In saying this, Scripture reveals that all self-exaltation is pride, which the prophet shows he guards against by saying: "Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." But why? "Instead, I have kept myself humble and not proud; like a weaned child resting peacefully with its mother, my soul is at peace with You." Therefore, brothers, if we wish to reach the highest point of humility and quickly arrive at that heavenly exaltation which is reached through humility in this present life, we must set up by our actions the ladder that appeared in Jacob's dream, on which angels were shown ascending and descending. We understand this ascending and descending to mean descending by pride and ascending by humility.

That ladder represents our life in this world, which the Lord raises up to heaven when our heart is humbled. We say that the sides of this ladder are our body and soul, and into these sides God has inserted various rungs of humility and discipline by which we may climb.

****The first step of humility**** is to keep the fear of God always before our eyes and never forget it, always remembering everything God has commanded and always thinking about eternal life, which is prepared for those who fear God, and how hell will destroy those who despise God because of their sins. We must keep ourselves at all times from sins and faults of thought, tongue, eyes, hands, feet, and self-will, and also hurry to cut away the desires of the flesh.

Let a person always consider that they are being watched by God from heaven and that whatever they do anywhere is seen by God's watchful eye and is always reported to God by the angels. The prophet makes this clear when he shows God always present in our thoughts, saying: "God searches hearts and minds." And again: "The Lord knows human

thoughts." And again: "You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways." And: "Even before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely." So that he may be careful about wrong thoughts, let the humble brother always say in his heart: "I will be blameless in His sight if I keep myself from my sin."

But we are forbidden to do our own will, as Scripture says: "Turn away from your selfish desires." And again, in prayer we ask God that His will be done in us. We are therefore rightly taught not to do our own will when we heed what Scripture says: "There are ways that appear right to a person, but in the end they lead to death." And again, we should fear what is said about the careless: "They are corrupt and have become vile in their ways."

Regarding the desires of the flesh, let us believe that God is always present with us, as the prophet says to the Lord: "All my longings lie open before you, Lord." We must therefore beware of evil desires, because death lies close to the entrance of pleasure. So, Scripture commands: "Do not follow your evil desires." Therefore, since the eyes of the Lord watch over the righteous and the wicked, and the Lord always looks down from heaven on all people to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God; and since the angels assigned to us report our works to the Lord every day and night, we must always be careful, brothers, as the prophet says in the psalm, that God never sees us "become corrupt and turn aside into evil," and that although He spares us now because He lovingly waits for us to change for the better, He will never say to us in the future: "These things you did and I kept silent."

****The second step of humility**** is when someone does not love their own will and does not delight in satisfying their desires, but imitates in their actions the Lord's words: "I have come not to do my will but the will of him who sent me." Scripture also says: "Self-will brings punishment, but necessity earns a crown."

****The third step of humility**** is when a person submits to their superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord, of whom the apostle says: "He became obedient to death."

****The fourth step of humility**** is when in this same obedience, even if hard and contrary things and even injuries of any kind are inflicted, he embraces them patiently with a quiet conscience and does not grow weary or give up, as Scripture says: "The one who stands firm to the end will be saved." And again: "Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." And showing that the faithful person should patiently endure all things for the Lord's sake, no matter how contrary, Scripture says in the voice of the suffering: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." And secure in their hope

of God's reward, they continue joyfully saying: "But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

And again elsewhere Scripture says: "You, God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs." And to show that we ought to be under a superior, it continues: "You let people ride over our heads." Moreover, fulfilling the Lord's command with patience in adversities and injuries, when struck on one cheek they offer the other; when someone takes their coat, they give their shirt as well; when forced to go one mile, they go two; with Paul the apostle they put up with false believers and bless those who curse them.

****The fifth step of humility**** is when a monk does not hide from his abbot any sinful thoughts entering his heart or any wrongs committed in secret, but humbly confesses them. Scripture encourages this, saying: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him." And again: "Confess to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." And the prophet says: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

****The sixth step of humility**** is when a monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment, and regards himself as a poor and worthless workman at whatever task is given him, saying to himself with the prophet: "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you."

****The seventh step of humility**** is when a man not only admits with his tongue that he is inferior and more worthless than others, but also believes it in his heart, humbling himself and saying with the prophet: "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. I was exalted, then humbled and overwhelmed with shame." And again: "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees."

****The eighth step of humility**** is when a monk does nothing except what is encouraged by the common rule of the monastery and the example of his seniors.

****The ninth step of humility**** is when a monk controls his tongue and remains silent, not speaking unless asked a question, as Scripture shows: "Sin is not ended by multiplying words," and "A talkative person cannot be guided on earth."

****The tenth step of humility**** is when he is not given to ready, easy laughter, for it is written: "Only fools raise their voices in laughter."

****The eleventh step of humility**** is when a monk speaks gently and without laughter, seriously and with few words, reasonably, and not with a loud voice, as it is written: "The wise are known by their few words."

****The twelfth step of humility**** is when a monk is not only humble in heart, but also shows humility in his posture to all who see him. Whether at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the field, or anywhere else, whether sitting, walking, or standing, his head should always be bowed and his eyes cast down. Always considering himself guilty of his sins, he should think of himself as already appearing before God's fearful judgment, always saying in his heart what the tax collector in the Gospel said with his eyes fixed on the ground: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And again with the prophet: "I am bowed down and brought very low."

Now when a monk has climbed all these steps of humility, he will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear. Through this love, all that he once performed with dread he will now begin to observe without effort, as if naturally, from habit, no longer because of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit, and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in His workman now cleansed of vices and sins.

CHAPTER 16: HOW THE WORK OF GOD IS TO BE CARRIED OUT DURING THE DAY

As the prophet says: "Seven times a day I praise you." We fulfill this sacred number seven when we perform our service at Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. For the prophet said about these times: "Seven times a day I praise you." And concerning night prayer, the same prophet says: "At midnight I rise to give you thanks." Therefore, at these times—Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline—let us offer praise to our Creator for His righteous judgments, and let us rise at night to praise Him.

CHAPTER 19: CONCERNING THE DISCIPLINE OF SAYING THE DIVINE OFFICE

We believe that God is present everywhere and that the eyes of the Lord see both the good and the bad wherever they may be. But we should believe this especially without any doubt when we participate in the Work of God. Therefore, let us always remember what the prophet says: "Serve the Lord with fear," and again: "Sing praise with understanding," and "In the presence of the angels I will sing to you." So let us consider how we ought to behave in the sight of God and His angels, and let us participate in the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices.

CHAPTER 35: CONCERNING THE WEEKLY KITCHEN WORKERS

Let the brothers serve in turn, so that no one is excused from kitchen duty, except for reasons of illness or if someone is occupied with some other matter of special importance; for in this way charity is acquired and greater merit gained. But let help be given to the weak, so that they may fulfill this duty without sadness; and indeed let all have help according to the size of the community and the circumstances of the place. If the community is large, let the cellarer be excused from the kitchen; and also, as we have said, if there are any others who are occupied with important business. But let the rest, in the name of charity, take turns in serving.

On Saturday let the one who is about to finish his week of service clean up everything. Let him wash the towels with which the brothers dry their hands and feet; and let both the one who goes out and the one who is about to enter wash the feet of all. Let him return to the cellarer the vessels of his service, clean and whole; and let the cellarer give them to the one who comes in, so that he may know what he gives and what he receives.

And let the weekly kitchen workers each receive, over and above the appointed portion, something to drink and bread, one hour before the meal, so that they may serve their brothers at mealtime without grumbling or great labor. On feast days, however, let them wait until after Mass. On Sunday let the incoming and the outgoing weekly officials prostrate themselves before all the brothers in the chapel at the end of Lauds and ask for prayers for themselves; and let the one going out from the week's work say this verse: "Blessed are You, O Lord God, because You have helped me and comforted me"; and when this has been said three times let the one going out receive his blessing. Then let the one coming in follow and say: "O God, make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me"; and let this likewise be repeated three times by all, and having received the blessing let him enter upon his office.

CHAPTER 36: CONCERNING THE SICK AND INFIRM BROTHERS

Before all things and above all things care is to be taken of the sick, so that they may be served as if they were truly Christ, because He Himself said: "I have been sick and you have visited Me"; and: "What you have done to one of these My little ones, you have done to Me." But at the same time let the sick themselves keep in mind that it is for God's honor they are served, and so let them not weary their brothers who serve them with unnecessary demands. Yet they must be patiently borne with, because from such service more abundant merit is acquired. Therefore, let the abbot take very great care that they suffer no neglect.

And for these sick brothers let a cell be set apart; and as their attendant, one who fears God and is diligent and careful. Let the sick be allowed the use of baths as often as is helpful; but to those in good health and especially to the young let it be granted less readily. Moreover, let the eating of meat be granted to the sick and especially to those who are weak, for their recovery; but when they have gotten better let them all abstain from meat as usual. And let the abbot take the greatest care that the sick are not neglected by the cellarers and the attendants; for he is responsible for anything his disciples do wrong.

CHAPTER 42: THAT NO ONE TALK AFTER COMPLINE

Monks ought to be zealous to keep silence at all times, but especially through the hours of the night. And so at every season, be it fast or non-fast: and when it is not a fast, soon after rising from supper, let them all go and sit down together and let one of them read the Conferences, or the lives of the fathers, or indeed anything that may be edifying to hear, but not the Heptateuch nor the Books of the Kings, because it would not be profitable for those of weak intelligence to hear this portion of Scripture at that hour of the day, though at other hours let them be read.

On fast days, after Vespers, wait briefly, then gather together for the reading we mentioned earlier. Read four or five pages, or whatever time allows, with everyone coming together in the same place - even those who were busy with assigned tasks should join the group. Once everyone is present, hold the final night prayer. After Compline ends, no one is allowed to speak to anyone else. Anyone who breaks this silence rule will face serious punishment, with only two exceptions: when hospitality requires speaking to guests, or when the abbot gives someone a direct order. Even in these exceptional cases, any talking must be done with complete seriousness and restraint.

CHAPTER 48: CONCERNING THE DAILY MANUAL WORK

Idleness is harmful to the soul; and therefore the brothers ought to be occupied, at fixed times, with manual work and again at fixed times with spiritual reading. And so we think the hours for each should be arranged on this plan: that is to say that from Easter to the first of October they go out in the morning from Prime and work at whatever has to be done until nearly the fourth hour; and from the fourth hour have time for reading until about the sixth hour. And when they rise from table after the sixth hour let them rest upon their beds in complete silence; or if by chance anyone should wish to read, let him so read that he may not disturb anyone else. Let None be said in good time, about the middle of the eighth hour, and then again let them work at whatever has to be done, until Vespers.

And let them not be distressed if poverty or the needs of the place should require that they busy themselves about gathering in the crops with their own hands; for then are they truly

monks, when they live by the work of their own hands, as did our fathers and the apostles. Let everything be done in moderation however on account of the fainthearted.

And from the first of October until the beginning of Lent let them have reading time until the end of the second hour; and at the second hour let Terce be said and then all go to work until None at whatever is assigned them. But as soon as the first signal for None is made, let each and all break off from their work and be ready by the time the second signal has sounded. And after dinner let them have time for their studies and for learning the psalms.

But in Lent let them have time for their studies from morning until the end of the third hour; and let them go to work at whatever is assigned them until the end of the tenth hour. In Lent moreover let them each have a book from the library and read it straight through; and these books are to be given out at the beginning of Lent. And above all let one or two seniors be appointed to go around the monastery and keep watch during reading hours lest by chance any brother be found idle, or chatting instead of intent upon his reading; and therefore be not only useless to himself but also a distraction to others. And if, which be far from us, such a one be found, let him be corrected once and yet again; and if then he is not amended let him be subjected to correction according to rule in such a way that others be put in fear. And let not brother associate with brother at times not appointed for that purpose.

Furthermore, on the Lord's day let all have time for reading, except those who have been assigned various duties; but if there shall be anyone so uninterested or so lazy that through lack of will power or of ability he can neither study nor read, let there be some work assigned him that he may not be idle. To weak and delicate brothers let there be assigned such suitable occupation and duties that they be neither overcome by idleness nor so oppressed by exhaustion through work that they be driven to flight. Their weakness is to be taken into consideration by the abbot.

CHAPTER 57: CONCERNING CRAFTSMEN IN THE MONASTERY

Let craftsmen, if there are any in the monastery, work at their trades with all humility, if the abbot has given permission. But if any one of their number becomes proud because of his knowledge of his trade, thinking that he confers some favor upon the monastery, let such a one be removed from practicing that trade and not engage in it again unless by chance the abbot again orders him to do so when he has become humble.

And if any of the craftsmen's work is to be sold, let those who are to handle the transaction see to it that they do not commit any fraudulent act. Let them always be mindful of Ananias and Sapphira, lest perhaps the death which they incurred in the body they themselves and indeed all who commit any fraud regarding monastic property should suffer in the soul. And

let not the evil of greed creep in regarding the prices charged for the goods; but let them always be sold somewhat more cheaply than they can be sold by others who are secular, so that in all things God may be glorified.

CHAPTER 71: THAT THE BROTHERS BE OBEDIENT AMONG THEMSELVES

The virtue of obedience should not only be shown by all toward the abbot, but the brothers should also be obedient to one another, keeping in mind that through this path of obedience they are traveling toward God. Therefore, after giving priority to any command from the abbot or from the deans whom he has appointed—and we do not allow private commands to take precedence over these—let all the younger brothers obey their seniors with the most careful love. But if anyone is found to be argumentative, let him be corrected.

If any brother is corrected in any way by the abbot or by any of his seniors, or if he perceives that any senior is angry or upset with him, however slightly, let him immediately and without delay prostrate himself on the ground and lie at his feet, making satisfaction until that hurt feeling is healed by the giving of a blessing. But if anyone should refuse to do this, let him either be subjected to physical punishment, or if he remains stubborn, let him be expelled from the monastery.

CHAPTER 72: CONCERNING 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, so there is a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to eternal life. By most fervent love therefore let monks exercise this zeal, that is, let them see to it that in honor they prefer one another. Let them most patiently tolerate their weaknesses whether physical or of character; let them compete in yielding obedience; let none follow what he judges convenient to himself, but rather what he judges convenient to another; in chaste love let them exercise brotherly charity; let them fear God; let them love their abbot with sincere and humble affection; on no account let them put anything above Christ; and may He bring us all alike to eternal life.