

# THE RULE



# THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT

Edited by J. Conor Gallagher  
Introduction by Abbot Placid Solari, OSB

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Peace and mercy be to all who  
follow this rule (Gal 6:16).

## INTRODUCTION

In the early part of the sixth century, St. Benedict wrote his monastic Rule. Since then, it has served as a guide for countless monks and nuns seeking holiness in their daily life. A myriad of others have drawn precepts for the spiritual life from its pages.

St. Benedict's intention was not to sketch out a new and innovative approach to religious life. Rather, he took the monastic tradition he had himself received, and distilled it into a way of life accessible to ordinary people, and made it flexible enough to be adapted to very different times and places.

St. Benedict's principal concern for one coming to the monastery is that "he truly seek God." He describes the monastic community as "a school for the Lord's service." Although he does not wish to establish a harsh or burdensome way of life, he knows that most of us benefit from a certain measure of discipline. He does not hesitate, therefore, to prescribe "a little strictness in order to amend faults and safeguard love." It is love, in fact, which forms

the guiding theme of Benedict's entire Rule. To this end, he counsels great prudence and instructs the Abbot to allow "the strong to have something to strive for, and the weak nothing to run from."

In order to foster growth in love throughout an entire life spent in the monastery, St. Benedict sets up a structured and balanced lifestyle which has given rise to that motto characteristic of Benedictine life: "Work and pray." His prayer is drawn from the very wellsprings of Christian life, namely, the liturgy and the Bible. Thus, the monk is immersed in the Liturgy of the Hours and the daily meditative reading of the Scriptures. The rhythms of monastic life vary with the changing seasons and are centered liturgically around the great feast of Easter.

The tenor of the life found in St. Benedict's Rule can be summed up in the three virtues of obedience, patience, and humility. Obedience is perhaps the central virtue. Each monk vows obedience to God by accepting the demands of monastic life and God's will as mediated to him through the Abbot and his confreres. Patience is the fruit of charity, as the monks are exhorted "to bear most patiently one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character." Finally monastic life brings one to humility, that is, a truthful knowledge of one's self which allows one to be open to the grace and mercy of God.

This Rule was brought to North Carolina on April 21, 1876, as monks from Saint Vincent Abbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, arrived to receive donated land which would become Belmont Abbey. It continues to inform the life and labors of the monks of Belmont Abbey, and provides the foundation for the education offered by Belmont Abbey College. We are happy to pass it along to you now, in the hope that this Rule, which has provided a way of life for so many through the ages, may also show you a way of return to the Creator.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The purpose of this edition is to make the Rule of Saint Benedict more accessible to the modern reader. While the public domain English translation used is beautifully written, it can also be cumbersome to the modern ear. Removing the “these” and “thous” was insufficient. Words, phrases, and sentences had to be rephrased or restructured to temper the archaic tone that turns away too many readers. This, however, is not the challenge in editing a beautiful writing. The challenge is to retain that richness, that elegance that permeated the written English of educated men a hundred or even fifty years ago. Thus, translators and editors have the task of bringing the glory of a given work to the eye and the ear and especially the open mind of a contemporary.

The Editor prays that he has achieved, at least in part, three objectives: first, that he has remained faithful to Saint Benedict's intent; second, that he has retained some of the elegance of the Baker Edition upon which he relied; and third, that the

simplicity and applicability of the Rule to our daily lives might be more accessible to the modern reader, particularly those of a younger generation.

And now, for the particularities of this edition's sources. In 1898, Thomas Baker printed in London an English edition of "The Life of Our most Holy Father S. Benedict" by Pope Saint Gregory the Great. The Baker Edition contained both the Life and Rule of Saint Benedict. In regards to the Rule, Baker included the following dedication in part:

The text used for the Holy Rule is that of an ancient manuscript existing at Monte Cassino, first published in 1659 by Dom. Paul de Ferrariis, a monk of that Abbey. The English is, as far as is consistent with the original, from the time honoured translation of 1638, as edited in 1875 by "one of the Benedictine Fathers of Saint Michael's, near Hereford."

The text of the Baker Edition was located on the Order of Saint Benedict web site, which in turn links the reader to the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

On occasion the Editor found it necessary to refer to a Latin text for clarification. The Latin translation used was "Regula Sancti Benedicti" (Pannonhalma, Hungary, 1995), and was also found on the Order of Saint Benedict web site.

J. Conor Gallagher  
Editor



## THE PROLOGUE OF OUR MOST HOLY FATHER SAINT BENEDICT TO HIS RULE

**L**isten carefully, my son, to your master's precepts, and turn the ear of your heart to the advice of your loving father. Willingly accept this advice, and put it into practice, so that by the labor of obedience you may return to Him from Whom you departed by the sloth of disobedience. I am, here now, speaking to you who have replaced his own will with the strong and bright armor of obedience, to fight for our true King, the Lord Christ.

First of all, beg Him, with passion filled prayer, to perfect whatever good work you begin, so that He Who has chosen to count us as one of his own children, will not be saddened by our evil deeds. We must, therefore, at all times serve Him with the goods He has given us. If we do this, He will not be an angry Father and disown us, nor will He be infuriated by our sins, consider us wicked servants, and then turn us over to eternal punishment because of

our refusal to follow Him to glory.

Let us, therefore, arise, for the Scripture stirs us up and says: "it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep" (Rom 13:11). With our eyes open to the Divine Light, and with our wondering ears, listen to the advice of the Divine Voice that speaks to us every day, saying: "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Do not harden your hearts" (Ps 95:8). And again, It says: "Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rv 2:7). And what else does he say?" Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Ps 34:12). "Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you" (Jn 12:35).

And our Lord, Who is seeking His laborer among the many listening here, says again: "Who among you loves life, takes delight in prosperous days?" (Ps 34: 13). After hearing this, if you answer Him by saying, "I am he," then God will say, "Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 24:14-15). And when you have done this: "Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!" (Is 58:9). What else, my dear brothers, could be sweeter than the voice of the Lord inviting us to be with Him? Behold how in His loving kindness

He shows us the way of life! With our loins covered with faith and good works, and our feet protected by the guidance of the Gospel of peace, let us walk in His ways, so that we may deserve to see in His kingdom Him Who has called us (Eph 6:14-15).

If we desire to dwell in the tabernacle of this kingdom, we can only reach it by running the way of good works. But let us ask our Lord as the Prophet did, “A psalm of David. LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain?” (Ps 15:1). After this question, my brothers, let us hear our Lord answering and showing us the way to His tabernacle, saying, “Whoever walks without blame, doing what is right, speaking truth from the heart; who does not slander a neighbor, does no harm to another, never defames a friend” (Ps 15:2-3). Thus, he who pushes the malignant devil and his suggestions out of his mind has destroyed them, particularly by taking the evil thoughts while they are still young and shattering them against the rock of Christ (Ps 137:9). Those who fear the Lord do not take pride in their own good works. On the contrary, they know that all the good they do, or even can do, does not come from themselves, but from the Lord. Therefore, they give glory to the Lord through their good works, which come from Him. They then say with the Prophet, “Not to us,

LORD, not to us but to your name give glory” (Ps 115:1). Thus the Apostle Paul never gives himself credit for his preaching, saying: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor 15:10). And again he says: “Whoever boasts should boast in the Lord” (2 Cor 10:17).

This is why our Lord says in the Gospel: “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock” (Mt 7:24-25). Our Lord, fulfilling these things, waits daily for us to act upon His Holy teachings. Therefore, the days of our life are prolonged so that we can amend our evil ways, just as the Apostle says: “[Are you] unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4), for our loving Lord says: “Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live” (Ez 18:23).

My brothers, we have questioned our Lord, Who dwells in this tabernacle, and we have heard His precepts. If we fulfill the duties of this community, we will become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore our hearts and bodies must be prepared to fight under the holy obedience of His

commands. We must beg our Lord to provide by His grace that which our nature is unable to perform. And if we wish to attain everlasting life, to avoid the pains of hell, we must, while we still have time living in this flesh, perform by the light of faith all these things mentioned, and hastily do that which will benefit us forever.

We are, therefore, about to establish a school for the Lord's service. We do not intend to prescribe anything rigorous or burdensome, but if we proceed with a little strictness—with sound reason advising us—in order to amend faults and safeguard love, do not run from the way of salvation out of fear, for salvation is always straight and difficult in the beginning (Mt 7:13). But in time and as our faith and our hearts grow, the way of God's commandments will be known to us through the unspeakable sweetness of His love. Therefore, by never departing from His teaching, and in the Monastery by persevering in His doctrine until our death, we patiently participate in the sufferings of Christ so that we may one day deserve to partake in His kingdom (2 Cor 1:7).



## CHAPTER 1

### THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MONKS.

**I**t is well-known that there are several kinds of monks. First, there are Cenobites, that is Monastic, living under a Rule or Abbot. The second are Anchorets or Hermits, who are no longer in the first fervor of conversion, but have withstood the long trials of monastic life, and have learned to fight against the devil. Having been taught by the good guidance of many others, they are now able with God's assistance to struggle hand to hand against the flesh and evil thoughts, and then go forth well-prepared, from the army ranks of the Brotherhood, to solitary combat in the desert.

The third and worst kind of Monks are the Sarabites, who have never been tried under a Rule or by the experience of a master—as gold is tried in the furnace. Because they are soft as lead, and because their actions still hold tight to this world, their tonsure is nothing but a lie to God. They go in twos or threes, or even alone, and shut themselves up without a shepherd in their own sheepfold, as

opposed to the Lord's. Their desires become their laws; if they want it, they call it holy; if they dislike it, they consider it forbidden.

The fourth kind of Monks are called Gyrovagi, or wanderers, who drift about all their lives from one province to another, and stay for two or three days as guests, first in one monastery, then in another; they are always roving, and never settled, giving themselves up altogether to their own pleasures and to the enticements of gluttony, and are in all things worse than the Sarabites. Of their miserable way of life it is better to be silent than to speak.

Therefore, leaving these things, let us, by God's assistance, set down a Rule for Cenobites, or Conventuals, who are the most steadfast class of Monks.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE KIND OF MAN THE ABBOT SHOULD BE.

**A**n Abbot who is worthy of leading a Monastery should always remember what he is called, and in his actions display the character of the Ancients. In the Monastery he is considered to represent the person of Christ, and is thus called by His name, as the Apostle said: "you received a spirit of adoption,



through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15). Therefore, the Abbot must not (God forbid) teach, ordain, or command anything that deviates from our Lord's commands. On the contrary, everything he commands and teaches should be mingled in the minds of his disciples, like the leaven of divine justice.

The Abbot should always be mindful that, in the dreadful judgment of God, he must account for his doctrine and for the obedience of his disciples. The Abbot must, therefore, know that when the sheep do not yield a profit, the Master of the family will hold the shepherd accountable. But if he has been diligent with his unquiet and disobedient flock, and employed the utmost care to cure their corrupt manners, he will then be acquitted in the judgment of the Lord, and may say with the Prophets: "Your deed I did not hide within my heart; your loyal deliverance I have proclaimed" (Ps 40: 11), "but they have disowned me!" (Is 1: 2). And then finally, death shall be inflicted as a just punishment upon the disobedient sheep.

When, therefore, anyone receives the name of Abbot, he should govern his disciples with a twofold doctrine. First, he should show them virtue and sanctity, more by deeds than by words. Thus, to those who are intelligent, he may declare

the commandments of God by words; but to the hard-hearted, and to those of the ruder sort, he must make the divine precepts manifest by his actions. Second, he should show—by his own deeds—that they should not do anything that he has told them is improper, or else, having preached well to others, “I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27), and God would say to him in his sin: “Why do you recite my commandments and profess my covenant with your lips? You hate discipline; you cast my words behind you!” (Ps 50:16-17), and, “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?” (Mt 7:3).

He should avoid all favoritism in the Monastery. No one should be loved more than another, unless he finds someone to surpass the rest in good works and in obedience. No one of noble parentage, on coming to Religion, should be put before him who was born a slave, except for some other reasonable cause. If, upon just consideration, the Abbot thinks there is such a just cause, let him put him in any rank he pleases, but otherwise, everyone should keep his own place, for “there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; Eph 6:8), and bear an equal burden of servitude under one Lord,

for “with him there is no partiality” (Eph 6:9). Only on one condition are we preferred by Him; and that is, if in good works and in humility we are found to be better than others. Therefore, the Abbot should bear equal love to all, and all should be subject to the same discipline according to their merits.

In his teaching, the Abbot should always observe the procedure set forth by the Apostles: “convince, reprimand, encourage” (2 Tm 4:2). That is to say, he must vary with the circumstances; he should temper useless talk; he should show the severity of a master and the loving affection of a father; he should sternly reprove those who are undisciplined and restless, but he should simply make requests of the obedient, the mild and the patient, exhorting them to go forward in virtue. But we charge him to severely reprove and chastise the stubborn and negligent. He must not shut his eyes to the sins of offenders, but, as soon as they show themselves, use all possible ways to utterly root them out, remembering the fate of Eli, the Priest of Silo (1 Sm 2:11–4:18) With the more virtuous and intelligent, he should for the first or second time use words of admonition; but the stubborn, the hard-hearted, the proud and the disobedient, even when they first start to sin, the Abbot should chastise him with stripes and bodily punishment, knowing that it is

written: “Withhold not chastisement from a boy; if you beat him with the rod, he will not die” (Prv 23:13). And again: “Beat him with the rod, and you will save him from the nether world” (Prv 23:14).

The Abbot should always remember what he is, and what he is called, and to know that much is expected of a man to whom much has been entrusted. And he must consider how difficult and hard a task he has undertaken, to govern souls, and to subject himself to the humors of many, some of whom must be led by encouragement, others by sharp reprehensions, and others by persuasion. Therefore, he must adapt himself to the character and intelligence of each one, so that he not only keeps the entire flock committed to him, but so that he may even rejoice in the increase of his virtuous flock.

Above all things, he must be careful not to take lightly the souls committed to his care, or to have more care for fleeting, worldly things than he has for them. Rather, he must always consider that he has undertaken the government of souls for which he must give an account. And so that he will not complain out for desire for worldly things, he must remember that it is written: “But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt 6:33). And again: “nothing is lacking to those who fear him” (Ps 34:10).

The Abbot must know that the man who undertakes the government of souls must prepare himself to give an account of them. And however great the number of the brothers may be, let him know for certain that on judgment day he will have to give to the Lord an account for all their souls as well as his own. Thus, because he fears the examination he must undergo as their shepherd, the Abbot should be concerned about other's judgment as much as he is for his own; for while he reclaims them by his warnings, he frees himself from all defects.

## CHAPTER 3

### CALLING THE BROTHERS FOR COUNCIL.

**W**henver an important matter needs to be discussed in the monastery, the Abbot should call together all the brothers, and tell them the issue under deliberation. After hearing their counsel, he should prudently think it over, and then do what he judges best. The reason why we say that all be called to Council, is because the Lord often reveals to the younger the wisest course. The brothers should give their advice with all subjection and humility, and should not presume to defend their own opinion

obstinately, but rather leave it to the discretion of the Abbot; and then all should submit to whatever the Abbot thinks is the wisest course. Just as it is proper for the disciples to obey their master, so is it proper for the master to make decisions with forethought and justice.

In all things, therefore, all should follow the Rule as their master, and from it let no man rashly swerve away. No one in the monastery should follow his own will. Neither should anyone presume, within or without the monastery, to argue insolently with his Abbot. If he does so, he should be subjected to regular discipline. The Abbot, however, should do all things with the fear of God, and in observance of the Rule, knowing that he should undoubtedly give an account of all his judgments to God, the most just Judge. If any less important business has to be done for the benefit of the monastery, the Abbot should take counsel from the seniors only, as it is written: "Do nothing without counsel, and then you need have no regrets" (Sir 32:19).