

## THE RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE <sup>1</sup>

Let us love God above all things, dearest brothers, then our neighbor, for these are the chief commandments given to us.

### **Chapter 1: On the purpose and foundation of the common life**

1. These are the precepts which we order you who live in the monastery to observe.

2. The first purpose for which you have come together is to live in unity in the house <sup>2</sup> and to be of one mind and one heart in God.<sup>3</sup>

#### **On the sharing of property**

3. Do not call anything your own, but hold all that you have in common. And let distribution of food and clothing be made by your superior<sup>4</sup> – not to all alike, because all have not the same strength, but to each one according to his needs. For thus you read in the Acts of the Apostles: “But they had all things in common ... and distribution was made to each, according as anyone had need.”<sup>5</sup>

4. When those who owned something in the world come to the monastery, let them place it willingly in common.

5. But those who had nothing may not seek in the monastery what they could not have in the world. However, if their health demands it, they shall be given whatever they need, even though in the world their poverty was so great that they lacked even necessities. Let them not, however, consider themselves happy because they have found food and clothing which they could not find elsewhere.

#### **On the humility necessary for fraternal community**

6. Let them not become proud because they associate with those they did not dare to approach in the world. But let them raise their hearts to heavenly things,<sup>6</sup> not seeking the vanities of the world. Otherwise our monasteries will prove an advantage to the rich but a hindrance to the poor if the rich are humbled there, and the poor become proud.

7. Furthermore, those who held some position of honor<sup>7</sup> in the world shall not look down upon the confreres who have come into this holy institute from a life of

---

<sup>1</sup> The text of the rule is taken from the original edition edited by L. Verheijen, *La Regle de Saint Augustin, I Tradition manuscrite*. Paris, 1967, 417- 437. To this critical edition have been added scriptural references taken from A. Sage, *La Regle de Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1969. For the sake of the reader, titles have been given to the divisions of the Rule taken from the critical edition. The sentence “Ante omnia” has been placed before the text of the rule. This sentence constituted the opening line of the *Ordo Monasterii* but is not thought to belong to the critical edition of the Rule of Saint Augustine. Since the *Ordo Monasterii* and its opening line does not lack importance in the history of the canonical order its place and use in the *Rule of Saint Augustine* is retained by the Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 67:7

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:32

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. 6:8

<sup>5</sup> Acts 4:32-35

<sup>6</sup> Col. 3:1-2

<sup>7</sup> Gal. 2:2

poverty. Let them glory in their brotherhood with the poor, rather than in the dignity of their rich parents. And let them not become proud because they have given the community some of their wealth, lest their pride in sharing it with the monastery be greater than if they had enjoyed it in the world. For every other kind of sin is concerned with the commission of evil deeds; but pride infects even good works in order to destroy them. And what use is there in giving generously to the poor, even becoming poor oneself,<sup>8</sup> if the miserable soul is made prouder in despising riches than it was in possessing them?

8. Therefore, let all live together in harmony and love. And, in each other,<sup>9</sup> honor God, whose temples you have become.<sup>10</sup>

## **Chapter II. On Prayer:**

1. Be zealous in prayer at the hours and times appointed.<sup>11</sup>

2. In the oratory, let no one do anything except that for which it was set apart, from which also it has its name. Therefore, if any of the confreres, even outside the hours appointed for prayer, wish to pray there during their free time, they should not be disturbed by others, who think they have something else to do there.

3. When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, ponder in your hearts what your lips are saying.

4. Sing only what is appointed to be sung. Moreover, do not sing what is not prescribed to be sung.

## **Chapter III. On simplicity and mortification:**

1. Subdue the flesh by fasting and abstinence from food and drink as much as your health permits. However, if someone cannot fast, let him take no food outside the hours for meals unless he is sick.

2. From the time you come to the table, until you leave, listen to the customary reading without noise or strife. Nor let your mouth only take in food, but let your ears also hunger for the word of God.<sup>12</sup>

3. If those who are weak because of their former mode of life are given different food from the others, this should not offend the others, nor should this appear unjust to those whom a different upbringing has made stronger. Neither should they consider those others more fortunate because they receive something which they themselves do not receive. But rather, let them consider themselves fortunate in bearing privations which the others cannot bear.

4. And if those who have entered the monastery from a more refined way of life are provided with any food, or clothing, or bedding, which the stronger (and therefore the more fortunate) confreres do not receive, these latter must consider how much those others have already given up of their former life in the world, although they have not yet

---

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 111:9; Lk. 18:22; 1 Cor. 13:3

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 15:6

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. 6:16

<sup>11</sup> Col. 4:2

<sup>12</sup> Amos 8:11

attained to the frugality of life practiced by the stronger confreres. Nor should they all desire to have what they see granted to a few - not as a mark of honor, but out of consideration. This would be a sorry reversal if the poor be spoiled in the monastery, where, as far as possible, the rich should learn to bear privations.

5. Again, as those who are sick must take less food, for fear of increasing their illness, so, while recovering, they should receive what will quickly restore their strength, even if they were extremely poor in the world. Their recent illness gives them the same claim that the rich have from their former mode of life. But when they have recovered their former strength, let them return to their happier way of life, which is more befitting the servants of God the more they are able to do without. Nor should they continue to desire the same food when they are well which was necessary when they were sick. They should consider themselves richer who are more able in bearing privations. It is better to lack a little than to have too much.

#### **Chapter IV. On safeguarding chastity and fraternal correction:**

##### **On pleasing God, Who dwells in you, by your conduct**

1. Do not be conspicuous in your manner of dress. Do not seek to please by your apparel but by your conduct.

2. Whenever you leave the monastery, go together; when you reach your destination, remain together.

3. In your walk, in your posture, in your actions, let there be nothing that may appear offensive to others, but only what befits your holy vocation.

4. Although your glance may perhaps fall upon a woman, you should not fix your gaze. It is not forbidden to see women when you go out, but it is wrong to desire them or wish to be desired by them.<sup>13</sup> For concupiscence of the flesh is mutually aroused not only by affectionate touches but also by looks. And do not say that you have a pure soul if you have an impure eye, because the unchaste eye is the sign of the unchaste soul. And when unchaste souls speak in mutual glances without any words being spoken and take delight in their passion for each other, then chastity flees from their souls even though their bodies are not defiled by unclean actions.

5. And when a man fixes his gaze upon a woman and likes to have her gaze rest upon him, let him not think he is unobserved by others – he is certainly seen and by those he does not imagine are watching. And even though his act is secret and not seen by men, what will he do about that Witness from above from Whom nothing can be concealed?<sup>14</sup> Or is it thought that He does not see because He is looking on with a patience befitting His wisdom? Let the religious man fear to displease God, which will prevent him from seeking to please a woman sinfully.<sup>15</sup> Let him remember that God sees all things, lest he desire to look upon a woman sinfully. The fear of the Lord is recommended in this very matter, where it is written: “An abomination to the Lord is he who fixes his gaze.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Mt. 5:28

<sup>14</sup> Prov. 24:12

<sup>15</sup> Prov. 24:18

<sup>16</sup> Prov. 27:20

6. Therefore when you are together in the church, or wherever women are present, mutually safeguard your purity. For God, who dwells in you,<sup>17</sup> will thus protect you by your mutual vigilance.

**On fraternal correction**

7. And <sup>18</sup> if you notice in any confrere this immodesty of the eye of which I speak, admonish him at once, so that his initial fault will not grow worse but rather be corrected without delay.

8. But if, after this warning, you see him repeating the same offense on any other day, then whoever has discovered this must report him as one wounded and in need of healing. But first the offense should be pointed out to two or three so that he may be convicted on the testimony of two or three witnesses and be corrected with due severity. And you must not think that you are uncharitable when you point this out. On the contrary, you are not blameless if by your silence you permit your brothers to be lost when you might have corrected them by pointing out their offenses. For if your brother had a bodily wound which he wanted to hide because he feared the cure, would it not be cruel of you to keep silent, and a kindness to make it known? How much greater then is your obligation to manifest his spiritual wound, lest he become more corrupt in his heart.

9. However, before his conduct is made known to others by whose testimony he is to be convicted if he denies the charge, let the confrere who fails to amend after due warning be reported to the superior in the hope that being privately corrected his fault need not be made public. But if he denies it, then other witnesses must be employed, so that before the whole community he may not be accused by merely one witness but convicted on the testimony of two or three.<sup>19</sup> When convicted he must submit to the corrective punishment imposed by the judgment of the superior or the priest in whose jurisdiction the matter falls. If he refuses to submit to this punishment, even if he does not leave of his own accord, let him be expelled from your society. For even this is not done out of cruelty but from compassion, to prevent his contagious corruption from ruining many others.

10. And let what I have said about not fixing one's gaze be diligently and faithfully observed in discovering, admonishing, pointing out, proving, and punishing all other sins – with love for men and hatred for sin.

11. When anyone has gone so far in misconduct as to have received letters secretly from anyone or any gifts, whatsoever, if he confesses this of his own accord, pardon him and pray for him. But if he is detected and proven guilty, let him be severely corrected according to the judgment of the priest or superior.

**Chapter V. On the goods needed in this passing life and those charged with their care:**

**On outer garments and the interior garment of charity**

1. Let your clothing be kept in one place under the care of one or two, or as may be needed to keep them aired out and thus prevent injury from moths. And as you have your

---

<sup>17</sup> 2 Cor. 6:16

<sup>18</sup> Mt. 18: 15-17

<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 5:20.

food from one pantry, so you should be clothed from one vestry. If possible, do not be concerned what clothing is to be worn by you at the change of seasons, whether one receives again just what he had put away, or what another had worn, as long as no one is denied what he needs.<sup>20</sup> If, however, contentions and murmuring arise among you because someone complains that he has received worse clothing than he had put away, or that it is beneath his dignity to be dressed as his confrere was dressed, this should prove to you how lacking you are in holy and interior adornment of heart<sup>21</sup> while you quarrel about the dress of the body. But if your weakness be tolerated, and each one receives again just what he had put away, let everything you put away still be kept in one place under common custodians.

2. And thus, no one shall do anything for himself alone, but all your work shall be for the community, done with more constant diligence than if each one worked for his own profit. For, charity (of which it is written that “it is not self-seeking.”)<sup>22</sup> is to be understood thus: It prefers the common good to the interests of the individual, not personal interests to the common good. And therefore, the more you care for the interests of the community before your own interests, the more you may know that you have made progress; thus, every passing need will be topped by love, which lasts forever.<sup>23</sup>

3. It follows therefore, that if anyone brings gifts of clothing or other articles regarded as necessary to his sons, or to others in some way connected to him, who live in the monastery, these gifts must not be received secretly, but shall be under the authority of the superior, so that, placed in the common store, they may be given to those who need them.<sup>24</sup>

4. Let your clothing be washed either by yourselves or by a laundry, according to the arrangement of the superior, lest too great a desire for clean garments become the cause of interior stains on the soul.

#### **On care of the sick**

5. Bathing of the body also, as required by the needs of health, should by no means be denied. Let this be done without grumbling for medical reasons; so that even if a confrere is unwilling, at the command of his superior, he must do what is necessary for his health. However, should a confrere desire to bathe when perhaps it would not be good for him, he should not give in to his desire. Sometimes a thing is actually harmful although it is considered beneficial because it is pleasant.

6. Finally, if a servant of God is afflicted with some hidden ailment, whatever he says about his affliction should be believed without hesitation. But if it is not certain that the remedy he desires would be good for him, let a doctor be consulted.

7. If it is necessary to go to the public baths, or to any other place, not less than two or three should go together. And he who must leave the house must go with those whom the superior shall designate, not with whomever he wishes.

---

<sup>20</sup> Acts. 4:35

<sup>21</sup> Tit. 2:3

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor. 13:5

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13

<sup>24</sup> Acts. 4:35

8. The care of the sick, whether during their convalescence or when suffering from some weakness without any sign of fever, shall be entrusted to someone who can secure from the pantry whatever he sees that each patient needs.

**On the office of administering the common goods**

9. Those who are placed in charge of the pantry, or of clothing, or of books, should serve their confreres without grumbling.

10. Books should be requested at a fixed hour each day. Those who demand them outside this hour may not receive them.

11. On the other hand, those in charge of clothing and shoes should give these things out promptly to those who need them.

**Chapter VI. On asking pardon and forgiving offenses:**

1. Either do not have quarrels, or if they begin, put a stop to them at once, lest anger grow into hatred, and make a beam out of a splinter,<sup>25</sup> and make the soul a murderer. For thus you read, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.”<sup>26</sup>

2. If anyone has injured another by insulting, abusive, or even incriminating language, let him remember to make satisfaction as soon as he can for the wrong he has done, and he who has been injured must forgive without further controversy. And if both have injured each other, they must mutually forgive their trespasses for the sake of your prayer<sup>27</sup> which should be the more sincere the more frequently you repeat them. The man who is frequently tempted to anger yet who hastens to beg forgiveness of the one he has injured is better than the man who is more slow to anger but who is too slow to beg forgiveness. The confrere who never wishes to beg forgiveness, or who does not do it from his heart,<sup>28</sup> does not belong in the monastery, even though he is not put out. Be sparing, therefore, in the use of harsh words. If they have escaped your lips, let those same lips be prompt to heal the wounds they have made.

3. When the need of discipline forces you to use harsh words in correcting those who are subject to you, and you feel you have been too harsh, you are not required to beg forgiveness of them, lest the authority of him who must rule be lessened in the eyes of those who must be subject, while too much attention is given to humility. But ask forgiveness from the Lord of all, who knows how much you love even those whom you correct too severely. However, your love for one another must be spiritual, not carnal.

**Chapter VII. On the manner of commanding and obeying:**

1. Obey your superior as a father,<sup>29</sup> with all due reverence, lest in his person God be offended, and especially that priest who is responsible for all of you.

2. It shall be the principal duty of the superior to see that all these precepts are observed. And if any of them are poorly observed, he may not carelessly overlook them, but he must correct and reprove, referring anything extraordinary or beyond his powers to the priest who has the greater authority among you.

---

<sup>25</sup> Mt. 7: 3-5

<sup>26</sup> 1 Jn. 3:5

<sup>27</sup> Mt. 6:12

<sup>28</sup> Mt. 12:35

<sup>29</sup> Hebr. 13:17; Lk. 10:16

3. Let your superior not deem himself happy in using his authority, but in serving you with love.<sup>30</sup> In honor before you let him take the first place, but in fear before God, let him prefer the last place.<sup>31</sup> Let him be for all an example of good works.<sup>32</sup> Let him restrain the restless, comfort the discouraged, support the weak, with patience towards all.<sup>33</sup> Let him willingly embrace regular discipline while imposing a religious fear. And although both are necessary, let him seek to be loved by you more than feared, always remembering that he must account for you to God.<sup>34</sup>

4. Therefore, obey your superior not only for your own sake<sup>35</sup> but for his also; for, the higher his position, the greater his danger.

### **Chapter VIII. On the observance of the Rule:**

1. The Lord grant that you observe all these things with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving forth the good odor of Christ<sup>36</sup> in the holiness of your conduct,<sup>37</sup> not as slaves under the law, but as free men firmly established in grace.<sup>38</sup>

2. So that you may examine yourselves in this little book as in a mirror,<sup>39</sup> and that you may neglect no point through forgetfulness, let it be read to you once a week. And when you find that you have observed what is written here, give thanks to the Lord, the giver of every good gift. But if anyone sees that he has failed in anything, let him be sorry for the past, be on his guard for the future, praying that he may be forgiven his trespasses and not be led into temptation.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Lk. 22: 25-26; Gal. 5:13

<sup>31</sup> Eccles. 3:20

<sup>32</sup> Tit. 2:7

<sup>33</sup> 1 Thess. 5:14

<sup>34</sup> Hebr. 13:17

<sup>35</sup> Eccles. 30:24

<sup>36</sup> Eccles. 44:6; II Cor. 2:15

<sup>37</sup> 1 Peter 3:16

<sup>38</sup> Rom. 6: 14-22

<sup>39</sup> James 1: 23-25

<sup>40</sup> Mt. 6: 12-13