



The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis

Approved December 8, 1982/Revision, 1997

WORDS OF ST. FRANCIS TO HIS FOLLOWERS

(Letter to the Faithful I: 1-19)

All who love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, and with their strength (cf. Mt 12:30), and love their neighbor as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39), and who despise the tendency in their humanity to sin, receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring forth from within themselves fruits worthy of true penance.

How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things, and persevere in doing them because "the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them" (cf. Is 11:12) and God will make his home and "dwelling place (cf. Jn 14:23) with them." They are the children of the Father whose works they do. They are the spouses, brothers and sisters, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

We are his spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ. We are his brothers and sisters when we do the "will of the Father who is in heaven" (cf. Mt 12:50). We are mothers when we bear him in our hearts and bodies (cf. 1 Co 6:20) with divine love and with pure and sincere consciences, and when we give birth to him through a holy life which should enlighten others because of our example (Mt 5:16).

How glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! How holy, consoling, beautiful and wonderful it is to have such a Spouse! How holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable over all things it is to have such a Brother and Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:15) and prayed to God, saying: "Holy Father, keep in your name (Jn 17:11) those whom you gave me in the world; they are yours and you gave them to me" (Jn 17:6). And "the word which you gave me I gave to them, and they accepted it and truly believed that it came forth from you. And they have accepted that you sent me" (Jn 17:8). I pray for them and "not for the world" (Jn 17:9). Bless them and "sanctify them" (Jn 17:17). I "sanctify myself for their sakes" (Jn 17:19). "I do not pray only for these but also for those who, through their word, will believe in me" (Jn 17:20); may they be holy "in oneness as we are" (Jn 17:11). God, I wish that "where I am they too may be so that they may see my glory (Jn 17:24) in your kingdom" (Mt 20:21).

In the Name of the Lord! Here Begins the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis

Chapter I

Our Identity

1. The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity (cf. RegB 1:1; cf. RegCl 1:2). Following Jesus Christ after the example of Blessed Francis (cf. RegCl 6:1), let them recognize that they are called to make greater efforts in their observance of the precepts and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let them deny themselves (cf. Mt 16:24) as each has promised God (cf. EpFid II 36-40).

2. With all in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church who wish to serve God, the brothers and sisters of this Order are to persevere in true faith and penance (RegNB23:7). They wish to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility. Therefore, let them abstain from all evil and persevere to the end in doing good (RegNB 21:9) because God's Son himself will come again in glory and will say to all who acknowledged, adored and served him in sincere repentance: "Come blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world" (Mt 25:34; RegNB 23).

3. The sisters and brothers promise obedience and reverence to the Pope and the Catholic Church (RegB 1:2; cf. RegCl 1:3). In this same spirit they are to obey those called to be ministers and servants of their own community (cf. RegB 1:3). And wherever they are, or in whatever situation they are in, they should diligently and fervently show reverence and honor to one another (RegNB 7:15). They should also foster unity and communion with all the members of the Franciscan family (cf. RegCl 1:5).

Chapter II

Acceptance into this Life

4. Those who through God's inspiration come to us desiring to accept this way of life are to be received kindly (cf. RegNB 2:1; cf. Test 1). At the appropriate time, they are to be presented to the ministers of the community who hold responsibility to admit them (cf. RegB 2:1-3).

5. The ministers shall ascertain that the aspirants truly adhere to the Catholic faith and the Church's sacramental life (cf. RegB 2:2). If the aspirants are found fitting, they are to be initiated into the life of the community. Let everything pertaining to this gospel way of life be explained to them (cf. RegCl 2:2-4), especially these words of the Lord: "If you want to be perfect (Mt 19:21), go and sell all your possessions (cf. Lk 18:2), and give to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." And "if you want to come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24; cf. RegNB 1:2-3).

6. Led by God, let them begin a life of penance, conscious that all of us must be continuously and totally converted. As a sign of their conversion and consecration to gospel life, they are to clothe themselves plainly and to live in simplicity (cf. RegNB 2:14).

7. When their initial formation is completed, they are to be received into obedience promising to observe this life and rule always (RegB 2:11; cf. RegCl 2:8). Let them put aside all attachment as well as every care and worry. Let them only be concerned to serve, love, adore, and honor God, as best they can, with a single heart and a pure mind (RegNB 22:26; cf. Adm 16).

8. Within themselves let them always make a dwelling place and home for the one who is Lord God almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit (RegNB 22:27), so that, with undivided hearts, they may increase in universal love by continually turning to God and to neighbor (Jn 14:23; cf. EpFid I 1:5-10; cf. EpFid II 48-53).

Chapter III

The Spirit of Prayer

9. Everywhere and in each place, and in every season and each day, the brothers and sisters are to have a true and humble faith. From the depths of their inner life let them love, honor, adore, serve, praise, bless and glorify our most high and eternal God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit (RegNB 23:8, 11). With all that they are, let them adore God because "we should pray always and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1) : this is what God desires (RegNB 22:29-30). In this same spirit let them also celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours in union with the whole Church.

The sisters and brothers whom God has called to the life of contemplation (Mt 6:31), with a daily renewed joy should manifest their special dedication and celebrate the divine love for the world. It was God who created us, who redeemed us, and who shall save us by mercy alone (RegNB 23:8).

10. With all creatures the brothers and sisters should praise the Ruler of heaven and earth (cf. Mt 11:25; cf. CantSol 3), and give thanks because, by the holy will and through the only Son with the Holy Spirit, God created all things spiritual and material, and made us in the divine image and likeness (RegNB 23:1).

11. Since the sisters and brothers are to be totally conformed to the Gospel, they should reflect upon and keep in their hearts the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the word of God, as well as the words of the Holy Spirit which "are spirit and life" (Jn 6:63; cf. EpFid II 3).

12. Let them participate in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive his Body and Blood with great humility and reverence remembering the words of the Lord: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life" (Jn 6:54; RegNB 20:5). Moreover, they are to show the greatest possible reverence and honor for the most sacred name, written words (Test 12) and most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things in heaven and on earth have been brought to peace and reconciliation with Almighty God (Col 1:2; EpCl 1; EpOrd 12-13).

13. Whenever they commit sin the brothers and sisters, without delay, are to do penance interiorly by sincere sorrow and exteriorly by confessing their sins to a priest (Adm 23:3). They should also do worthy deeds that manifest their repentance (cf. EpFid II 25). They should fast and always strive to be simple and humble (cf. EpFid II 45; cf. Adm 19:2). They should desire nothing else but our Savior, who offered himself in his own Blood as a sacrifice on the altar of the Cross for our sins (cf. RegNB 23:9), giving us example so that we might follow in his footsteps (cf. EpFid II 11-14).

Chapter IV

The Life of Chastity For the Sake of the Kingdom

14. Let the sisters and the brothers keep in mind how great a dignity God has given them "because God created them and formed them in the image of the beloved Son according to the flesh and God's own likeness according to the Spirit" (Col 1:16; Adm 5:1). Since they are created through Christ and in Christ, they have chosen this form of life which is founded on the words and deeds of our Redeemer.

15. Professing chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12), they are to care for the things of the Lord and "they seek nothing else except to follow the will of God and to please God" (1Co 7:32; cf. RegNB 23:9). In all of their works the love of God and all people should shine forth.

-1. They are to remember that they have been called by a special gift of grace to live the lives that wonderful mystery by which the Church is joined to Christ her spouse (cf. Ep 5:23-26).

17. Let the brothers and sisters keep the example of the most blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, ever before their eyes. Let them do this according to the exhortation of Blessed Francis who held Holy Mary, Lady and Queen, in highest veneration since she is "the virgin made church" (SalBVM 1). Let them also remember that the Immaculate Virgin Mary, whose example they are to follow, called herself "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38).

Chapter V

The Way to Serve and Work (cf. RegNB 7:1-16)

18. As poor people, the sisters and brothers to whom God has given the grace of serving or working should serve and work faithfully and devoutly. Let them avoid that idleness which is the enemy of the soul. They should not be so busy, however, that they would extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, which all earthly goods should serve (RegB 5:1-2; cf. RegCl 7:1-2).

19. In exchange for their service or work, they may accept anything necessary for their own temporal needs and for that of their sisters or brothers (cf. RegNB 2:4; 9:8). Let them accept it humbly as is expected of those who are servants of God and followers of the most holy poverty (RegB 5:3-4). Whatever they may have over and above their needs, they are to give to the poor. Let them never want to be over others. Instead they should be servants and subjects to every human creature for God's sake (1 Pt 2:13; EpFid II 47).

20. Let the brothers and sisters be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with their vocation. Wherever they are, or wherever they go throughout the world they should not be quarrelsome, contentious, or judgmental towards others (cf. RegB 2:17; 3:10). Rather, it should be obvious that they are "joyful, good-humored," and happy in the Lord as they ought to be (cf. Ph 4:4; RegNB 7:16). And in greeting others, let them say, "God give you peace" (Test 23).

Chapter VI

The Life of Poverty

21. Let all the sisters and brothers zealously follow the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ (RegNB 9:1). Though rich beyond measure (2 Co 8:9), he emptied himself for our sake (Phil 2:7) and with the most blessed Virgin, his mother, he chose poverty in this world (EpFid II 5; RegB 6:3-4; cf. RegCl 6:3). Let them be mindful that they should have only those goods of this world which, as the Apostle says, "having something to eat and something to wear, with these we are content" (1 Tim 6:8; RegNB 9:1). Let them particularly beware of money (RegNB 8:11). And let them be happy to live among the outcast and despised, among the poor, the weak, the sick, the lepers and those who beg on the street (RegNB 9:2).

22. The truly poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, live in this world as pilgrims and strangers (cf. 1 P 2:1; cf. Adm 14). They neither appropriate nor defend anything as their own (cf. RegNB 7:13). So excellent is this most high poverty that it makes us heirs and rulers of the kingdom of heaven. It makes us materially poor, but rich in virtue (cf. Jn 2:5; RegB 6:1-2,4-6). Let this poverty alone be our portion because it leads to the land of the living (cf. Ps 141:6). Clinging completely to it let us, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, never want anything else under heaven (RegCl 8:1-2).

Chapter VII

Love of Brothers and Sisters

23. Because God loves us, the brothers and sisters should love each other, for the Lord says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). Let them manifest their love for each other in deeds (cf. 1 Jn 3:18; RegNB 11:5-6; cf. TestCl 18). With confidence let them make known their needs to one another so that each can find and offer to the other that which is necessary (RegNB 9:10; RegB 6:7-8). Blessed are those who love the others when they are sick and unable to serve, as much as when they are healthy and of service to them (RegB 6:9; Adm 24). Whether in sickness or in health, they should only want what God wishes for them. For all that happens to them let them give thanks to our Creator (RegNB 10:3).

24. If discord caused by word or deed should occur among them, they should immediately (Mt 18:35) and humbly ask forgiveness of one another even before offering their gift of prayer before God (cf. Mt 5:24). If anyone seriously neglects the form of life all profess, the minister, or others who may know of it, are to admonish that person. Those giving the admonition should neither embarrass nor speak evil of the other, but show great kindness (cf. EpMin 15). Let all be carefully attentive not to become angry or upset because of another's sin (cf. RegCl 9:3-4). For anger and disturbance impede love in themselves and in others (RegB 7:3).

Chapter VIII

The Obedience of Love (Adm 3:6; cf. SalVirt 3)

25. Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who made his own will one with the Father's (cf. EpFid II 10), the sisters and brothers should remember that, for God, they have given up their own wills (RegB 10:2). Therefore, in every Chapter they have let them "seek first God's reign and justice" (Mt 6:33), and exhort one another to better observe with greater dedication the rule they have professed (cf. Test 34; cf. RegCl 10:2) and to follow faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. RegNB 18:1-2). Let them neither dominate nor seek power over one another, but let them willingly serve and obey "one another with the mutual love which comes from the Spirit" (cf. Ga 5:13). This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ (RegNB 5:9,14-15).

26. They are always to have one of their number as minister and servant of the community whom they are strictly obliged to obey in all that they have promised God to observe, and which is not contrary to conscience or this rule (RegB 8:1; 10:1-3; cf. RegCl 10:2).

27. Those who are ministers and servants of the others should visit, admonish and encourage them with humility and love (RegNB 4:2). Should there be brothers or sisters anywhere who know and acknowledge that they cannot observe the rule according to its spirit, it is their right and duty to have recourse to their ministers (cf. RegCl 10:1). The ministers are to receive them with such love, kindness, and sympathy that the sisters or brothers can speak and act towards them just as an employer would with a worker. This is how it should be (cf. TestCl 19). The ministers are to be servants of all (RegB 10:4-6; cf. RegCl 10:3).

28. No one is to appropriate any office or ministry whatsoever as if it were a personal right; rather each should willingly relinquish it when the time comes (cf. RegNB 17:4).

Chapter IX

Apostolic Life

29. The brothers and sisters are to love God with their whole heart, their whole soul and mind and with all their strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves (EpFid I 1:1). Let them glorify God in all they do. Sent into the whole world, they should give witness by word and work to God's voice and make known to all that only God is all-powerful (cf. Mk 12:30; Mt 22:30; EpOrd 8-9).

30. As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account; rather, all should be moved to peace, goodwill and mercy because of their gentleness. The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring (cf. Leg 3 Soc 58). Wherever they are, they should recall that they have given themselves up completely and handed themselves over totally to our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should be prepared to expose themselves to every enemy, visible and invisible, for love of the Lord because he says: "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10; RegNB 16:10-12).

31. In that love which is God (1 Jn 4:16) all the brothers and sisters, whether they are praying or serving or working, should strive to be humble in everything. They should not, because of a good work or word God does or speaks in or through them, seek glory or rejoice or exult interiorly (cf. RegNB 17:5-6). Rather, in every place and circumstance, let them acknowledge that all good belongs to the most high God, Ruler of all things. Let them always give thanks to the one from whom all good proceeds (cf. RegNB 17:17).

Exhortation and Blessing

32. Let the sisters and brothers always be mindful that they should desire one thing alone, namely, the Spirit of God at work within them (RegB 10:8; cf. RegCl 10:7). Always obedient to the Church and firmly established in the Catholic faith, let them live according to the poverty, the humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which they have solemnly promised to observe (RegB 12:4; cf. RegCl 12:11).

"Whoever will observe these things shall be filled with the blessings of the most high Father in heaven, and on earth with the blessing of the beloved Son, with the Holy Spirit, and with all virtues and with all the saints."

And I, Brother Francis, your little servant, in so far as I am able, confirm to you within and without this most holy blessing" (Test 40-41).

