

**RULE AND LIFE OF THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS**  
**OF**  
**THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF ST FRANCIS.**

**WORDS OF ST. FRANCIS**  
**ADDRESSED TO HIS FOLLOWERS**  
**(Letter to the Faithful 1, 1)**

All men and women who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind' and with their whole strength, and love their neighbour as themselves; who hate the source of evil in themselves and the vices and sins which come from it; who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring forth worthy fruits of penance: how happy and blessed these men and women are for doing these things and persevering in them. For the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon them and he will make his home and dwelling place with them. They are children of the Father in heaven whose works they do. They are the spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are his spouses when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We are his brothers when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers to him when we carry him in our heart and body through divine love and by a pure and sincere conscience. We give birth to him by our good works which should shine out as an example for others.

How glorious, holy and great it is to have a Father in heaven! How holy, comforting, beautiful and wonderful it is to have such a Spouse! How holy and delightful, well pleasing, humble and peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable above everything it is to have such a Brother and Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who laid down his life for his sheep! He prayed to the Father, saying:

*Holy Father, keep them in your name whom you have given to me out of the world. They were yours and you have given them to me. I have given them the words which you gave to me, and they have received them and believe in truth that I came from you; and they have known that you did send me. I am praying for them not for the world. Bless and sanctify them, and for their sake I consecrate myself. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may be consecrated in unity even as we are. And I wish, Father, that where I am, they may be with me to behold my glory in your kingdom. Amen.*

## **CHAPTER 1**

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.

1. This is the form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St Francis: to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity. As followers of Jesus Christ after the example of St Francis, they are obliged to make more and greater efforts to observe the precepts and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are bound to deny themselves as each has promised to God.

2. The Brothers and Sisters of this Order, like everyone who desires to serve the Lord in the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, resolve to persevere in true faith and penance, because there is no other way to be saved. They desire to live this evangelical conversion in a spirit of prayer, poverty and humility. For this reason they must keep away from all evil and go on doing good to the end. For the Son of God will come again in glory, and he will say to all who have acknowledged and worshipped him, and served him in penance: Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.

3. The Brothers and Sisters promise obedience to the Pope and to the Catholic Church. In the same spirit they are to obey those who have been entrusted with the service of authority in the fraternity. Wherever they are and in whatever place they meet, the Brothers and Sisters should greet and honour one another fervently and from the heart. They should foster unity and fellowship with all the members of the Franciscan Family.

## **CHAPTER 2 RECEPTION INTO THIS WAY OF LIFE**

4. Those who come to us, under the Lord's inspiration, wishing to take up this way of life, are to be received with kindness. At the appropriate time they are to be presented to the ministers who have the authority to admit them.

5. The ministers must make sure that aspirants truly adhere to the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they have the qualities, they are to be introduced to the life of the fraternity. Then everything about this gospel way of life is to be carefully explained to them, especially these words of the Lord: If you wish to be perfect, go sell all that you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me; and: If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.

6. So, under the Lord's guidance, let them set out on a life of penance, knowing that we are all obliged to constant conversion of heart. As a sign of their conversion and consecration to the gospel life, they are to wear poor clothes and lead a simple life.

7. At the end of the period of formation they are to be received into obedience, promising to observe this rule and life always. They should cast away all cares and anxiety and be concerned how best to serve, love, reverence and adore the Lord God, with an honest heart and a devout mind.

8. Let them always make a home and dwelling place in themselves for him who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, with undivided hearts, they may grow in all-embracing love, as they turn without ceasing towards God and their neighbour.

### **CHAPTER 3 THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER**

9. All over the world, in every place, at every hour and every moment, the Brothers and Sisters should believe truly and humbly. In their heart they should cherish, love, reverence, adore, serve, praise, bless and glorify the most high and supreme, eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They should adore him with all their heart because we ought always to pray and not lose heart. The Father seeks such worshippers. In this spirit, in union with the whole Church, the Brothers and Sisters should celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours.

The Brothers and Sisters whom the Lord has called to a life of contemplation should show forth their dedication to God with renewed joy each day and celebrate the love which the Father has for the whole world, who created us, redeemed us and who out of his mercy alone will save us.

10. The Brothers and Sisters should praise the Lord, the King of heaven and earth, in union with all his creatures. They should give him thanks because by his own holy will and through his only Son, with the Holy Spirit, he created all things spiritual and material, and he made us in his own image and likeness.

11. The Brothers and Sisters are to conform themselves totally to the holy gospel. Therefore they should keep in mind and meditate on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, and on the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life.

12. They should take part in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive his Body and Blood with great humility and reverence, recalling the words of the Lord: Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

They must show all reverence and honour, as much as they are able, for the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and for his most holy name and written words. In him all things in heaven and on earth have been brought to peace and reconciled with Almighty God.

13. For all their sins the Brothers and Sisters should do penance without delay, inwardly by sorrow and outwardly by confession, and they should bring forth worthy fruits of penance. They should fast, and strive to be always simple and humble. They should desire nothing else except our Saviour who offered himself by his own blood on the altar of the cross, as a sacrifice and victim for our sins. He left us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps.

#### **CHAPTER 4 THE LIFE OF CHASTITY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

14. The Brothers and Sisters should keep in mind the great dignity with which the Lord has endowed them, "for he created and formed them" in "the image of his beloved Son as to the body, and in his own likeness as to the spirit". Created through Christ and in him, they have chosen this form of life which is based on the teaching and example of our Redeemer.

15. Professing chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, they should be solicitous for the things of the Lord and they "have nothing else to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please him". They should conduct themselves in everything, so that love for God and everyone in the world may shine forth in all that they do.

16. They should remember that they have been called by the sublime gift of grace to show forth in their lives the wonderful mystery of the Church, whereby the Church is joined with Christ, her divine Spouse.

17. Above all, they should keep before them the example of the most blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. They are to do this in accordance with the command of St Francis who had a deep reverence for Holy Mary, Lady and Queen, the Virgin who became the Church. And they should remember that they are to follow the example of the Immaculate Virgin Mary who called herself the handmaid of the Lord.

#### **CHAPTER 5 THE WAY TO SERVE AND WORK**

18. The Brothers and Sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace of serving others or working, should serve and work faithfully and devotedly, like the poor. Let them beware of idleness which is the enemy of the soul. In their service and work they should not

extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, which all earthly things are meant to foster.

19. In return for their work they may accept what is necessary for their material needs and those of their Brothers and Sisters. They should accept it humbly as is rightfully expected of God's servants and followers of most high poverty. What they have over they should give to the poor. They should never want to be in charge of others. On the contrary, they should be servants and, for the Lord's sake, be subject to every human creature.

20. The Brothers and Sisters should be meek, peaceful and unassuming, gentle and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is right. Wherever they are and wherever they go in the world, they are not to quarrel, get into arguments or condemn others. Rather they should show that they are joyful in the Lord, good-humoured and gracious, as is right. When they greet others they should say: "The Lord give you peace".

## **CHAPTER 6 THE LIFE OF POVERTY**

21. All the Brothers and Sisters must strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich beyond measure, he chose poverty in this world as did his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary; and he emptied himself. Let them remember that we are to have nothing of this world except food and clothing; let us be content with that, as St Paul says. They should be profoundly suspicious of money. Let them rejoice when they live among the outcast and despised, among the poor and weak, the sick and the lepers and those who beg in the streets.

22. The truly poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, neither possess nor defend anything as their own. They live in this world as pilgrims and strangers. This is the summit of the most exalted poverty which makes us heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven. It has made us poor in earthly goods, but has raised us high in virtue. Let this be our heritage which leads into the land of the living. Holding fast to this, for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we never want to have anything else under heaven.

## **CHAPTER 7 FRATERNAL LIFE**

23. Because of God's love, the Brothers and Sisters should love one another, as the Lord says: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Let them show by their actions that they love one another. With confidence let them make their needs known to one another, so that each may find what is needed and all may serve one another. They are blessed who love their brethren as much when these are

sick and cannot repay them, as when they are well and can repay them. No matter what happens to them, they should give thanks to the Creator. They should desire for themselves whatever the Lord wills for them, be it to be healthy or sick.

24. If disharmony arises among them because of something said or done, they should ask forgiveness of one another at once with humility, before they offer their gift of prayer to the Lord. If any Brothers or Sisters gravely transgress the form of life they have professed, the minister or others who may know about it, should admonish them. In doing so they should cause them no shame, nor speak evil about them, but show them great kindness. They must all be very careful not to be angry or vexed on account of anyone's sin, because anger and vexation hinder love in themselves and in others.

## **CHAPTER 8 THE OBEDIENCE OF LOVE**

25. According to the example of the Lord Jesus, who sacrificed his own will to the will of the Father, the Brothers and Sisters should remember that they have renounced their own wills for God's sake. In all the chapters they hold let them seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and exhort one another to observe with greater dedication the rule they have professed, and to follow faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. No one is to have power or dominate over others. Through love all should serve and obey one another willingly. This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.

26. They are always bound to have one of their members as minister and servant of the fraternity, whom they are strictly obliged to obey in everything they have promised the Lord to observe, and which is not against their conscience and this rule.

27. Those who are ministers and servants of the others, should visit them, and with humility and love advise and encourage them. Wherever there are Brothers and Sisters who know and acknowledge that they cannot observe the rule spiritually, they can and ought to have recourse to their ministers. The ministers, for their part, should receive them with love and kindness, and show them such friendship, that these Brothers and Sisters can speak and treat with them as would masters with their servants. For so it should be, that the ministers be the servants of everyone.

28. No one is to appropriate any ministry. On the contrary, those who hold an office should relinquish it gladly at the appointed time.

## **CHAPTER 9 THE APOSTOLIC LIFE**

29. The Brothers and Sisters shall love the Lord with all their heart, and with all their soul and mind and with all their strength, and they shall love their neighbour as themselves. Let them glorify the Lord in all that they do. He has sent them into the world to bear witness by word and deed to his voice and to proclaim to everyone that he alone is the Almighty Lord.

30. As they proclaim peace with their lips, they must have it overflowing in their hearts. No one should be provoked to anger or offended because of them. On the contrary, everyone should be drawn to peace, kindness and friendship by their gentleness. The Brothers and Sisters have been called to heal the wounded, mend the broken and bring back those who have gone astray. Wherever they are let them remember that they have given themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and pledged their whole life to him. For love of him they must face every enemy, seen and unseen, because the Lord says: Blessed are those who suffer persecution in the cause of right, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

31. In the love which is God, let all the Brothers and Sisters whether at prayer, or serving others, or working, strive to have humility in all things. They are not to boast, not to be self-satisfied, and not to pride themselves in their heart for the good they do by word or deed, not even for the good which God sometimes does or speaks and accomplishes in and through them. No matter where they are, in all circumstances, they must acknowledge that every good belongs to the Lord God Almighty, the Ruler of all things; and they must thank him from whom all good things come.

### **EXHORTATION AND BLESSING**

32. Let all the Brothers and Sisters bear in mind that above everything else they should desire to have the spirit of the Lord and his holy grace. Always obedient to the holy Church, and steadfast in the Catholic faith, let them observe, as they have firmly promised, the poverty and the humility, and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May all who observe these things be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father, and on earth with the blessing of his beloved Son, with the most Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and with all the powers of heaven, and with all that is holy.

And I, Brother Francis, your poor, little servant, as much as I am able, confirm for you, within and without, this most holy blessing.