

THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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

Chapter One

1. Here are the rules we lay down for your observance, once you have been admitted to the monastery.
2. The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.
3. Do not call anything your own; possess everything in common. Your superior ought to provide each of you with food and clothing, not on an equal basis to all, because all do not enjoy the same health, but to each one in proportion to her need. For you read in the Acts of the Apostles: 'They possessed everything in common', and 'Distribution was made to each in proportion to each one's need.'
4. Those who owned anything in the world should freely consent to possess everything in common in the monastery.
5. Those who had nothing should not seek in the monastery possessions which were beyond their reach outside. Allowance should be made for their frailty, however, on the basis of individual need, even if previous poverty never permitted them to satisfy those needs. But they should not consider their present good fortune to consist in the possession of food and clothing which were beyond their means elsewhere.
6. Nor should they put their nose in the air because they associate with people they did not dare approach in the world. Instead they should lift up their heart, and not pursue hollow worldly concerns. Monasteries should not provide advantages for the rich to the disadvantage of the poor. Such would be the case if the rich become humble and the poor become proud.
7. But on the other hand, those who enjoyed some measure of worldly success ought not to belittle their sisters who come to this holy society from a condition of poverty. They should endeavor to boast about the fellowship of poor sisters, rather than the social standing of rich relations. They are not to think well of themselves if they have contributed to the common life from their wealth. Sharing their possessions with the monastery ought not to become a greater source of pride than if they enjoyed these goods in the world. As a matter of fact, every other vice produces evil deeds with a view to doing evil, but pride sets a trap for good deeds as well with a view to destroying them. What benefit is there in giving generously to the poor and becoming poor oneself, if the pitiful soul is more inclined to pride by rejecting riches than by possessing them?

8. Live then, all of you, in harmony and concord; honor God mutually in each other; you have become His temples.

Chapter Two

1. Be assiduous in prayer at the scheduled hours and times.
2. No one has any business in the prayer-room apart from the particular purpose which it serves; that is why it is called the oratory. Consequently, if some wish to pray even outside the scheduled periods, during their free time, they should not be deterred by people who think they have some other task there.
3. When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, the words you speak should be alive in your hearts.
4. Keep to the prescribed text when you sing; avoid texts which are not suited for singing.

Chapter Three

1. To the extent that your health allows, subdue your flesh by fasting and abstinence from food and drink. If anyone is unable to fast, let her at least take no food between meals, unless she is sick.
2. Listen to the customary reading from the beginning to the end of the meal without commotion or arguments. Food is not for the mouth alone; your ears also should hunger for the Word of God.
3. No one is to be annoyed, nor should it seem to be unjust, when a special diet is provided for sisters whose health has been adversely affected by their former status in life. A different background endows some people with greater physical strength. These should not consider others fortunate because they see concessions granted to their sisters and not to themselves. Let them be thankful rather that they have the strength to endure what others cannot.
4. If food, clothes, a mattress, or blankets are given to those who come to the monastery from a more comfortable manner of life, the more robust individuals, to whom such things are not given and who are on this account more fortunate, ought to recall how much affluent people have altered their lifestyle in order to embrace the present one, even though the frugality practiced by the stronger sisters continues to elude them. No one should desire the extras given to a few, more out of tolerance than out of deference. Deplorable disorder would occur, if the monastery provided a setting, to the extent that it is possible, where the wealthy become workers, while the poor become pampered.
5. Sick people necessarily take less food so as not to aggravate their condition. During convalescence they are to receive such care as will quickly restore their health, even if they come

from the lowest level of poverty in the world. Recent illness has afflicted them with the same frailty which the wealthy possess from their previous manner of life. When sick people have fully recovered, they should return to their happier ways, which are all the more fitting for God's servants to the extent that they have fewer needs. Food formerly necessary to remedy their illness should not become a pleasure which enslaves them. They should consider themselves richer, since they are now more robust in putting up with privations. For it is better to need less than to have more.

Chapter Four

1. Do not allow your clothing to attract attention; seek to please not by the clothes you wear, but by the life you live.
2. Whenever you leave the house, go together; wherever you are going, stay together.
3. In your walk, posture, all external comportment, do nothing to offend anyone who sees you. Act in a manner worthy of your holy profession.
4. When you see a man, do not fix your eyes on him or any man. You are not forbidden to see men when you are out of the house. It is wrong, however, to desire men or to wish them to desire you. Lust for men is mutually stimulated not only by tender touches but by sight as well. Make no claim to a pure mind when your eyes are impure; an impure eye is the herald of an impure heart. Unchaste hearts reveal themselves by exchanging glances even without any words; people yield to lust as they delight in their passion for each other. Chastity takes to its heels, even though their bodies remain unsullied by unchaste actions.
5. The woman who directs her attention towards a man and enjoys his similar token of affection should not think others fail to notice this mutual exchange. She is certainly observed even by persons she thinks do not see her. But if her actions escape the notice of men and women, what will she do about the One who keeps watch on high, from whom nothing can be hidden? Is God therefore blind, because he looks on with patience proportionate to his wisdom? The holy woman should fear to displease God, lest she desire to please a man sinfully. So as not to look upon a man in a sinful manner, let her bear in mind that God sees everything. Fear of the Lord is recommended in this matter too where we read in the Scriptures: 'The Lord abhors a covetous eye.'
6. Mutually safeguard your purity, when you are together in church and wherever men are present. God, who dwells in you, will protect you in this way too by your mutual vigilance.
7. If you notice in any of your number this roving eye referred to above, immediately admonish the individual and correct the matter as soon as possible, in order to curb its progress.

8. If, after this warning, you observe her doing the same thing again or at any other time, whoever happens to discover this must report the offender, as if she were now a wounded person in need of healing. But first, one or two others should be told so that the witness of two or three may lend greater weight, and the delinquent thus be convicted and punished with appropriate severity. Do not consider yourselves unkind when you point out such faults. Quite the contrary, you are not without fault yourselves when you permit your sisters to perish because of your silence. Were you to point out their misdeeds, correction would at least be possible. If your sister had a bodily wound which she wished to conceal for fear of surgery, would not your silence be cruel and your disclosure merciful? Your obligation to reveal the matter is, therefore, all the greater in order to stem the more harmful infection in the heart.

9. If she neglects to mend her ways after such admonition, she should first be reported to the superior, before her behavior is revealed to others whose task it is to expose her failing in the event of her denial, so that, if possible, with a private correction, the others may not become aware of her misconduct. But if she denies the charge, then the others are to be summoned without her knowledge so that she can be accused in the presence of all, not by a single witness but by two or three. When convicted, she must submit to the salutary punishment determined by the judgment of the superior, or even that of the priest whose authority embraces such matters. If she refuses to submit to punishment even if she is determined not to leave, expel her from your society. Even this is not an act of cruelty but of mercy: to prevent the contagion of her life from infecting more people.

10. Diligently and faithfully, then, attend to my words about suggestive glances at men. Such advice holds also for detection, prevention, disclosure, proof, and punishment of other offences, with love for the person and hatred for the sin.

11. Whenever anyone has gone so far in misconduct as to receive secretly from any man letters or small gifts of any kind, if she confesses the matter freely, pardon her and pray for her. If, however, she is detected and proved guilty, she is to be rather severely corrected according to the judgment of the priest or the superior.

Chapter Five

1. Keep your clothes in one place under the care of one or two, or as many people as may be needed to air them out and prevent damage from moths. Just as a single storeroom furnishes your food, so a single wardrobe should supply your clothing. Pay as little attention as possible to the clothes you receive as the season requires. Whether each of you receives what she had turned in or what was worn by someone else is of little concern, so long as no one is denied what she needs. If arguments and grumbling occur among you, and someone complains that she has received worse clothing than previously and that it is beneath her dignity to be dressed in clothes which another

sister was wearing, you thereby demonstrate to yourselves how deficient you are in the holy and interior clothing of the heart, arguing as you do about clothes for the body. Even though one caters to your weakness and you receive the same clothing, you are to keep clothes you are not wearing at the present time in one place under common supervision.

2. In this way, let no one work for herself alone, but all your work shall be for the common purpose, done with greater zeal and more concentrated effort than if each one worked for her private purpose. The Scriptures tell us: 'Love is not self-seeking.' We understand this to mean: the common good takes precedence over the individual good, the individual good yields to the common good. Here again, you will know the extent of your progress as you enlarge your concern for the common interest instead of your own private interest; enduring love will govern all matters pertaining to the fleeting necessities of life.

3. Consequently, whenever anyone brings anything to daughters or relations who reside in the monastery, an article of clothing, or anything else that is considered necessary, the gift is not to be pocketed on the sly but given to the superior as common property, so that it can be given to whoever needs it.

4. The washing and cleaning of your clothes may be done in the monastery or at the laundry. The superior decides how often your clothes are to be laundered, lest an inordinate desire for clean clothes inwardly stain your soul.

5. Nor shall the body be denied proper hygienic care as standards for good health require. Do this without grumbling, following the advice of a physician. In the event a sister is unwilling to comply and the superior gives strict orders, she shall do what has to be done for her health. If a sister desires something which is harmful, she ought not to satisfy her desire. Desires are sometimes thought to be salubrious when they are really injurious.

6. Whenever a servant of God says she is not feeling well, take her word without hesitation, even though the source of the pain is not apparent. If uncertainty continues whether or not the remedy she desires would really make her better, consult a physician.

7. Whenever necessity requires a visit to the public baths or any other place, no fewer than two or three should go. When someone has to leave the house, she ought to go with companions designated by the superior, not with persons of her own choosing.

8. Care of the sick, whether the convalescent or those currently ill with any ailment, even though they are not running a temperature, shall be assigned to someone who shall personally obtain from the storeroom whatever she regards necessary for each individual.

9. Those responsible for food, clothing, or books are to serve their sisters without grumbling.

10. Books are to be requested at a definite hour each day; requests made at other times will be denied.

11. Those responsible for clothes and shoes shall promptly honor the request for either when anyone expresses the need.

Chapter Six

1. Either have no quarrels or put an end to them as quickly as possible, lest anger grow into hatred, make timber of a splinter, and turn the soul into the soul of a murderer. Thus you read: 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.'
2. Whoever has offended another with insults or harmful words, or even a serious accusation, must remember to right the wrong she has done at the earliest opportunity. The injured must remember to forgive without further bickering. If they have offended each other, they shall mutually forgive their offences for the sake of your prayers. The more frequent your prayers are, the sounder they ought to be. An individual who is prone to anger, yet hastens to beg forgiveness from someone she has consciously harmed, is better than another who is less inclined to anger and less likely to ask pardon. An individual who absolutely refuses to ask pardon, or does so without meaning it, is entirely out of place in the monastery, even if she is not dismissed. Spare yourselves the use of words too harsh. If they have escaped your lips, those same lips should promptly heal the wounds they have caused.
3. Requirements of discipline may compel you to speak harsh words to correct young people. Even if you feel your criticism has been immoderate, you are not obliged to ask their pardon; too much attention to humility in their regard would undermine their ready acceptance of your authority. Instead, ask forgiveness from the Lord of all who knows how generously you love even those you may correct too harshly. Your love for one another ought to be spiritual, not carnal.

Chapter Seven

1. Obey your superior as a mother, always with the respect worthy of her position, so as not to offend God in her. Be especially obedient to the priest who bears responsibility for all of you.
2. The superior has the principal task of seeing to it that all these precepts are observed. She should further provide that infractions are not carelessly overlooked but punished and corrected. She must refer matters which exceed her competence and power to the priest who has greater authority over you.
3. Your superior should regard herself to be fortunate as one who serves you in love, not as one who exercises authority over you. Accord her the first place of honor among you, but in fear before God she shall lie prostrate beneath your feet. Let her be a model of good deeds for everyone: she shall restrain the restless, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak, with patience towards all. She shall willingly embrace discipline and instill fear. While both are necessary, she shall strive,

nevertheless, to be loved by you rather than feared, mindful always that she will be accountable to God for you.

4. By being obedient, you manifest more compassion not only for yourselves, but also for her, because the higher position among you is all the more perilous.

Chapter Eight

1. The Lord grant you the grace to observe these precepts with love as lovers of spiritual beauty, exuding the fragrance of Christ in the goodness of your lives; you are no longer slaves under the law, but a people living in freedom under grace.

2. These precepts should be read to you once a week, so that you will see yourselves in this little book as in a mirror and not neglect anything through forgetfulness. When you find yourselves doing what has been written here, thank the Lord, the giver of all good gifts. However, if anyone of you realizes that she has failed on a specific point, let her be sorry for the past, safeguard the future, and continue to pray for her offences to be forgiven, and that she not be led into temptation.