

# *The Rule of Saint Augustine*

## *Rule of Our Father St. Augustine*

Before all else, beloved brothers, let us love God and then our neighbor, because these are the principal commandments given to us.

### *Chapter One: The Basis and End of Common Life*

1. - These are the precepts, which we order you who live in the monastery to observe.
- 2.- The main purpose for which you have come together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one soul and one heart intent upon God.
- 3.- And you should not call anything your own, but let everything be yours in common. Food and clothing should be distributed to each of you by your superior, not equally to all, for all do not enjoy equal health, but rather according to each one's need. For thus you read in the **Acts of the Apostles**, that "*they had all things in common and distribution was made to each one according to each one's need*" (4:32,35).
- 4.- Those who possessed something in the world at the time they entered the monastery should hand it over willingly so that it becomes common property.
- 5.- Those who owned nothing in the world should not seek to have in the monastery those things that they could not have had outside. Nevertheless, they are to be given all that their health requires even if, during their time in the world, poverty made it impossible for them to find the necessities of life. However, they should not consider themselves fortunate for having found the kind of food and clothing which they were unable to find in the world.
- 6.- And let them not hold their heads high because they associate with people whom they would not dare to approach in the world, but rather let them lift up their hearts and not seek after what is vain and earthly. Otherwise, monasteries would become profitable to the rich and not to the poor, if there the rich become humble and the poor are puffed up.
7. - On the other hand, those who seemed important in the world should not look down upon their brothers who have come into this holy brotherhood from the condition of poverty. They should try to glory in the fellowship of their less privileged brothers rather than in the rank of their own wealthy parents. They should neither be conceited if they have contributed a part of their wealth to the common life, nor take more pride in sharing their riches with the monastery than if they were enjoying them in the world. For every other vice prompts people to do evil deeds, whereas pride lurks even in good works in order to destroy them. What advantage is it to scatter one's wealth abroad by giving to the poor, even to become poor oneself, if the mind in its misery becomes prouder in despising riches than it was in possessing them?
8. - Let all of you then live united in mind and heart, and mutually honor God in yourselves, whose temples you have become.

### *Chapter Two: Prayer*

1. - Dedicate yourselves to prayer at the appointed hours and times.
- 2.- In the oratory no one should do anything other than that for which it was intended and from which it also takes its name. Consequently, if there are some who might wish to pray there during their free time, even outside the hours appointed, they should not be hindered by those who think of doing something else there.

3. - When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, meditate in your heart the words that come from your lips.

4. - And do not sing except what is meant to be sung, that which has not been written for singing should not be sung.

### *Chapter Three: Frugality and Mortification*

1. - Subdue your flesh by fasting and abstinence as far as your health allows. When anyone is unable to remain fasting until the mid-afternoon meal, he should nevertheless not have any food outside of the noon meal unless he is ill.

2. - From the time you sit down at table until you rise, listen without interruption or discussion to what is usually read for you; not only should your mouths partake of food, but your ears also should hunger for the Word of God.

3.- If special treatment in the way of diet is given to those who are not strong as a result of their former way of life, others who are stronger because they have had a different manner of life must not be aggrieved or think it unfair. Nor should they think the former happier in getting something that they themselves do not get. Rather they should be thankful for their own good health, which the others do not possess.

4.- And if those who have entered the monastery from a more comfortable manner of life should be given any food, clothing, bedding or covering that is not given to others who are stronger and so more fortunate, these latter, not receiving them, should consider how far the former have come down from their previous way of life in the world even though they cannot live so frugally as those of a more vigorous constitution. Nor should that which a few receive beyond the ordinary be desired by the rest, for it is not given them as an honor; it is only a tolerance. Otherwise a detestable disorder would arise in the monastery if the rich mortify themselves as far as they are able, while the poor are converted into fastidious weaklings.

5. - As the sick must eat less in order not to aggravate their illness, so, once cured, they are to receive all care during convalescence in order to return quickly to good health, even if they came from extreme poverty in the world. In fact, recent illness has made necessary for them what a former way of life has made necessary for the rich. But, once restored to health, let them return to that happy norm of life, which is the more fitting to the servants of God according as they need fewer things. For, being well, pleasure must not be allowed to detain them on that threshold where, being sick, necessity put them. Let them believe themselves richer who are better able to bear frugality; for it is better to need little than to have much.

### *Chapter four: The custody of Chastity and Fraternal Correction*

1. - Do not call attention to yourselves by your manners nor try to please by the way you dress, but rather by your conduct.

2. - Whenever you leave the house, go together; when you arrive at your destination, remain together.

3. - In walking, in standing and in all your external comportment, let there be nothing that might give offense to anyone who sees you; let all be in conformity with the consecration of your life.

4.- Even if your gaze chances to fall on a woman, you should not stare at her. It is not forbidden you to see women when you leave the house; it is wrong, however, to desire women or to want to be desired by them. It is not only by touch and the heart's movement that desire is provoked, or that we are provoked to desire them, but also by the eyes. Do not say that your soul is pure if your eyes are not pure because an impure gaze betrays an impure

heart. For even though nothing be said, when hearts proclaim their impurity by mutual glance and, giving free reign to fleshly desire, they take pleasure in their passion for each other, then chastity flees from their behaviour even though their bodies remain free from any impure violation.

5. - At the same time, he who fixes his gaze on a woman and takes pleasure in being seen by her ought not to suppose that no one sees him when he does so; he is always seen, and by persons who he does not think have seen him. But even supposing that it all remains hidden and is seen by no human eye, what will he do about Him who observes all from above and from Whom nothing can be hidden? Or are we to think that He does not see because His patience is as great as His wisdom? Let every religious, therefore, refrain from desiring sinfully to please a woman, by cherishing the fear of displeasing God. Let him check the desire of looking sinfully on a woman by remembering that God sees all things. To this end, fear of God is recommended to us where it is written: "Abominable before God is he who fixes his gaze" (*Prov. 27, 20*).

6. - Therefore, when you are in church or in any other place where women are present, mutually safeguard your purity; for in this way God, who dwells within you, will protect you by your mutual vigilance.

7.- And if you should notice in any of you such indiscreet looks as I have spoken of, you should warn him at once so that what has begun may go no further but be immediately corrected.

8.- However, if after this warning or at any other time, you observe him doing the same thing whoever happens to discover this should report him as if he were a wounded person in need of healing. First, however, it should be pointed out to a second or a third person, so that he can be proved wrong by the mouth of two or three witnesses and can be restrained with whatever firmness seems suitable. Do not think that you are being spiteful when you draw attention to this; rather you would no longer be innocent yourselves if by silence you let your brothers be lost when by reporting the matter you could have corrected them. If your brother had a wound in his body that he wished to keep secret for fear of medical treatment, would it not be cruel to keep silence and compassionate to make it known? How much greater, then, is your obligation to manifest his spiritual ailment lest he should become more corrupt at heart!

9. - But before pointing it out to others by whom he could be proved to be wrong, if he denies it, you should report him to the superior if after a warning he has still neglected to reform. This in the hope that he may be corrected more privately without anyone else needing to know about it. But if he denies it, then without his knowledge other witnesses must be brought in; from there on he will not be accused by one witness alone, but will be shown to be culpable by two or three. When convicted he must accept such correction as will help him to amend according to the judgment of the superior or of the priest whose authority embraces such matters. If he refuses to submit to punishment and yet does not withdraw of his own accord, he must be expelled from your society. Nor is this done in a spirit of cruelty but of mercy lest perchance his poisonous example occasion the loss of many.

10.- And what I have said about not staring unbecomingly should be applied carefully and faithfully to the discovery, warning, reporting, proving and punishing in the field of other sins also, with love for the person and hatred for the sin.

11. - However, should one have advanced so far in evil as to have received letters or small gifts from a woman, if he freely confesses it he must be pardoned and prayed for. But if he should be found out and proved guilty, he should be corrected more strictly according to the judgment of the priest or superior.

1. - Keep your clothes in one place under the care of one or two persons, or as many as may be needed to air them out and prevent damage from moths. Just as you are fed from a single storeroom, so you should be clothed from a single wardrobe. As far as possible, you yourselves ought not be the ones who decide what clothing is to be worn according to the season of the year, nor if one is to receive his own clothing again or something already used by another, so long as no one is denied what he needs. But if quarrels and murmurings arise among you on this account, and someone complains that he has received something that is not as good as what he had before, and he considers that it is beneath his dignity to wear what another brother had worn, then judge for yourselves how deficient you are in holy and interior adornment of the heart, arguing as you do about clothes for the body. But even if concession is made to your weakness and you receive the same clothing you put away, what you put aside must still be kept in the common wardrobe and in the care of those appointed.

2. - So then, let no one work at anything for himself. All your work should be for the good of the community with greater zeal and more concentrated effort than if each one were to do his work for himself. Because charity, of which it is written that it does not seek its own (1 *Cor.* 13, 5), is understood thus: it prefers the things of the community to its own, and not its own to what is held in common. As a result, you can measure your advance in perfection by the greater care you render to things held in common than to your own; so that in all things of which transitory necessity makes use, let charity, which abides for ever, shine forth.

3. - From which it follows that, if anyone brings to his sons or relatives who are in the monastery an article of clothing or anything else that is considered necessary, it must not be received secretly, but must be brought to the superior so that, becoming common property, it may be given to whoever needs it.

4. - Your clothes are to be washed at the discretion of the superior, either by yourselves or by people employed for that purpose, so that excessive solicitude for clean clothing may not cause interior uncleanness of the soul.

5. - Nor ought the bath be denied to anyone, when called for by sickness. Let it be done without complaining on the advice of the doctor, in such wise that, even though the sick person be reluctant, he must do, at the command of the superior, what has to be done for his health's sake. On the other hand, if he wants it and it is perhaps not expedient, he should not yield to his craving; for sometimes, even though a thing be harmful, it is believed good because it is pleasant.

6.- Lastly, whenever a servant of God has a hidden pain and reports it, he is to be believed without hesitation. But if there be no certainty that what he wants will cure his pain, a doctor should be consulted.

7.- Do not go to the public baths or to any other place that necessity might dictate except in two or threes. A brother who has to go out should not choose his own companions, but should go with whichever the superior orders.

8.- The care of the sick, whether during their convalescence or when suffering from any weakness, even if there is no fever, should be entrusted to some particular brother, so that he may obtain from the dispensary what he sees each one needs.

9. - Those who have charge of the storeroom, or the clothes, or the library must serve their brothers without grumbling.

10. - Books are to be requested at a definite time each day, and those who ask for them outside the time should not be given them.

11. - Those who have charge of clothes and shoes should give them without delay to those who have need of them.

*Chapter Six: A Prompt Request for Pardon and Offenses Generously  
Forgotten*

1. - Do not have quarrels, or at least bring them to an end as quickly as possible, lest anger develop into hatred - a straw into a beam - and turn the soul into a murderer. For thus you read: “*Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer*” (1 John 3, 15).

2. - Whoever has harmed another by abuse or evil speaking, or by a serious charge, must seek to remedy the damage he has done as soon as possible; and the one offended must pardon him without hesitation. But if they have offended one another, they should forgive each other’s offense, remembering the prayer which, because you repeat it so often, ought to be said with all the more sincerity. The brother who is often prone to anger but prompt to ask pardon of one whom he admits having offended, is better than another who, though slow to anger, is slow also to ask forgiveness. He who is never willing to ask pardon or who does not make the request with sincerity is in the monastery to no purpose even if he is not dismissed. Be sparing, then, in the use of harsh words; but if they have escaped your lips, do not hesitate to apply the balm of healing with those same lips that have inflicted the wounds.

3. - When, however, requirements of discipline oblige you to speak forcibly in correcting your subjects, even if you feel your criticism has been too severe, you are not bound to ask pardon of them, lest the manifestation of excessive humility in their regard should undermine the authority requisite for their government. Instead, you must ask pardon from the Lord of all, who knows the depth of your affection for those whom you may have corrected with unwarranted severity. Your love for one another must be spiritual, not carnal.

### *Chapter Seven: The Manner of Ruling and Governing*

1. - Obey your superior as a father, with respect for his office, so that you do not offend God in him. Be especially obedient to the priest who has responsibility for all of you.

2. - It is chiefly the responsibility of the superior to see that all these precepts are observed. If anything is not complied with, he should not let it lapse through negligence, but should take care that the matter be amended and corrected. He must refer to the priest who has greater authority over you anything that exceeds his own competence and power.

3. - Your superior should not regard himself fortunate in exercising authority over you, but rather in serving you with charity. Before you he is to take precedence with honor, but before God he is to prostrate himself at your feet in fear. Before all he must show himself as a model of good works. He should restrain the restless, support the wavering, comfort the weak, and be patient towards all. He should cheerfully embrace regular discipline and know how to inspire respect. And, although both are necessary, he should strive to be loved by you rather than feared, remembering always that he will have to render an account to God for every one of you.

4. - For this reason, obey him promptly out of consideration not for yourselves only, but for him also; for the higher his position of authority among you, the greater is his danger.

### *Chapter Eight: Observance of the Rule*

1. - May the Lord grant that you observe all these precepts with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty exuding the fragrance of Christ in the goodness of your lives, not as slaves under the law, but as free men under grace.

2.- And so that you may see yourselves in this little book as in a mirror, and not neglect anything through forgetfulness, let it be read once each week. And if you find that you have complied with the things that are written, give thanks to the Lord, the giver of all good things. But when any one of you finds himself wanting in some point of observance, let him be sorry for the past and be on his guard for the future, praying that his offenses be forgiven and that he may not fall into temptation.