

THE RULE OF SAINT CLARE

Chapter One, In the Name of the Lord Begins the Form of Life of the Poor Sisters

The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters that Blessed Francis established is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.

Clare, the unworthy servant of Christ and the little plant of the most Blessed Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his canonically elected successors, and to the Roman Church. And, just as at the beginning of her conversion, together with her sisters she promised obedience to the Blessed Francis, so now she promises his successors to observe the same obedience inviolably. And the other sisters shall always be obliged to obey the successors of Blessed Francis and Sister Clare and the other canonically elected Abbesses who succeed her.

Chapter Two, Those Who Wish to Accept this Life and How They Are to Be Received

If, by divine inspiration, anyone should come to us desiring to accept this life, the Abbess is required to seek the consent of all the sisters; and if the majority have agreed, she may receive her, after having obtained the permission of the Lord Cardinal Protector. If she judges the candidate acceptable, the Abbess should carefully examine her, or have her examined, concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. And if she believes all these things and is willing to profess them faithfully and to observe them steadfastly to the end; and if she has no husband, or if she has [a husband] who has already entered religious life with the authority of the Bishop of the diocese and has already made a vow of continence, and if there is no impediment to her observance of this life, such as advanced age or ill-health or mental weakness, let the tenor of our life be thoroughly explained to her.

If she is suitable, let the words of the holy Gospel be addressed to her that she should go and sell all that she has and take care to distribute the proceeds to the poor (cf. Matthew 19:21). If she cannot do this, her good will suffices. Let the Abbess and the sisters take care not to be concerned about her temporal affairs, so that she may freely dispose of her possessions as the Lord may inspire her. However, if some counsel is required, let them send her to some discerning and God-fearing persons, according to whose advice her goods may be distributed to the poor.

Afterwards, once her hair has been cut off round her head and her secular clothes set aside, she may be permitted three tunics and a mantle. Thereafter, she may not go outside the monastery except for a useful, reasonable, evident, and approved purpose.

When the year of probation is ended, let her be received into obedience, promising to observe perpetually our life and form of poverty.

No one is to receive the veil during the period of probation. The sisters may also have little mantles for convenience and propriety in serving and working. In fact, the Abbess should with discernment provide them with clothing according to the diversity of persons, places, seasons and cold climates, as it shall seem expedient to her by necessity.

Young girls who are received into the monastery before the age established by law should have their hair cut round [their heads]; and, putting aside their secular clothes, they should be clothed in a religious garb, as the Abbess sees fit. However, when they reach the age required by law, they may make their profession clothed in the same way as the others. The Abbess shall carefully provide a Mistress from among the more discerning sisters of the monastery both for these and the other novices. She shall form them diligently in a holy way of life and proper behavior according to the form of our profession.

The same form described above should be observed in the examination and reception of the sisters who serve outside the monastery. These sisters may wear shoes. No one may live with us in the monastery unless she has been received according to the form of our profession.

I admonish, beg, and exhort my sisters to always wear cheap garments out of love of the most holy and beloved Child Who was wrapped in such poor little swaddling clothes and laid in a manger and of His most holy Mother.

Chapter Three, The Divine Office and Fasting, Confession, and Communion

The sisters who can read shall celebrate the Divine Office according to the custom of the Friars Minor. They may have breviaries for this, but they should read it without singing. Those who, for some reasonable cause, occasionally are not able to recite their hours by reading them, may, like the other sisters, say the Our Fathers.

Those who do not know how to read shall say twenty-four Our Fathers for Matins; five for Lauds; seven for each of the hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None; twelve, however, for Vespers; seven for Compline. Let them also say for the dead seven Our Fathers with the Requiem aeternam at Vespers; twelve for Matins, because the sisters who can read are obliged to recite the Office of the Dead. When a sister of our monastery shall have departed this life, however, they should say fifty Our Fathers.

The sisters shall fast at all times. They may eat twice on Christmas, however, no matter on what day it happens to fall. The younger sisters, those who are weak, and those who are serving outside the monastery may be mercifully dispensed as the Abbess

sees fit. But the sisters are not bound to corporal fasting in time of manifest necessity.

They shall go to confession, with the permission of the Abbess, at least twelve times a year. They shall take care not to introduce other talk unless it pertains to the confession and the salvation of souls. They should receive Communion seven times [a year], that is, on Christmas, Thursday of Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of Saint Francis, and the Feast of All Saints. The Chaplain may celebrate inside [the enclosure] in order to give Communion to the sisters who are in good health or to those who are ill.

Chapter Four, The Election and Office of the Abbess; The Chapter and the Officials and the Discreets

The sisters are bound to observe the canonical form in the election of the Abbess. They should quickly arrange to have the Minister General or the Minister Provincial of the Order of Friars Minor present. Let him dispose them, through the Word of God, to perfect harmony and the common good in the election that is to be held. No one should be elected who is not professed. And if a non-professed is elected or somehow given them, she should not be obeyed unless she first professes our form of poverty.

At her death the election of another Abbess shall take place. If at any time it should appear to the entire body of sisters that she is not competent for their service and common welfare, the sisters are bound as quickly as possible to elect another as Abbess and mother according to the form described above.

Whoever is elected should reflect upon the kind of burden she has undertaken and to Whom she must render an account of the flock committed to her (cf. Matthew 12:36). She should strive as well to preside over the others more by her virtues and holy behavior than by her office, so that, moved by her example, the sisters may obey her more out of love than out of fear. Let her avoid particular friendships, lest by loving some more than others she cause scandal among all. Let her console those who are afflicted. Let her also be the last refuge for those who are troubled, lest the sickness of despair overcome the weak should they fail to find in her the remedies for health.

Let her preserve common life in everything, especially in whatever pertains to the church, the dormitory, the refectory, infirmary, and clothing. Let her Vicarress be bound to serve in the same way.

The Abbess is bound to call her sisters together at least once a week in the Chapter, where both she and her sisters should humbly confess their common and public offenses and negligences. Let her consult with all her sisters there concerning whatever pertains to the welfare and good of the monastery, for the Lord frequently reveals what is best to the least [among us].

Let no heavy debt be incurred except with the common consent of the sisters and by reason of manifest necessity, and let this be done by the procurator. Let the Abbess and her sisters, however, be careful that nothing is deposited in the monastery for safekeeping; for such practices often give rise to troubles and scandals.

Let all who hold offices in the monastery be chosen by the common consent of all the sisters to preserve the unity of mutual love and peace. Let at least eight sisters be elected from the more discerning ones in the same way, whose counsel the Abbess should be always bound to use in those matters which our form of life requires. Moreover, the sisters can and should, if it seems useful and expedient, remove the officials and discreets and elect others in their place.

Chapter Five, Silence, the Parlor, and the Grille

Let the sisters keep silence from the hour of Compline until Terce, except those who are serving outside the monastery. Let them also continually keep silence in the church, the dormitory, and the refectory, only while they are eating. They may speak discreetly at all times, however, in the infirmary for the recreation and service of the sick. Nevertheless, they can communicate always and everywhere, briefly and in a low tone of voice, whatever is necessary.

The sisters may not speak in the parlor or at the grille without the permission of the Abbess or her Vicaress. Let those who have permission not dare to speak in the parlor unless they are in the presence and hearing of two sisters. Let them not presume to go to the grille, moreover, unless there are at least three sisters present [who have been] appointed by the Abbess or her Vicaress from the eight discreets who were elected by all the sisters for the council of the Abbess. Let the Abbess and her Vicaress be themselves bound to observe this form of speaking. [Let the sisters speak] very rarely at the grille and, by all means, never at the door.

Let a curtain be hung inside the grille which may not be removed except when the Word of God is preached or when a sister is speaking with someone. Let the grille have a wooden door which is well provided with two distinct iron locks, bolts, and bars, so that it can be locked, especially at night, by two keys, one of which the Abbess should keep and the other the sacristan. Let it always be locked except when the Divine Office is being celebrated and for the reasons given above. Under no circumstance whatever, may a sister speak to anyone at the grille before sunrise or after sunset. Let there always be a curtain on the inside of the parlor, which may not be removed.

No one may speak in the parlor during the Lent of Saint Martin and the Greater Lent, except to a priest for Confession or for some other manifest necessity, which is left to the prudence of the Abbess or her Vicaress.

Chapter Six, The Lack of Possessions

After the Most High Heavenly Father saw fit by His grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed Father Saint Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience.

When the Blessed Father saw we had no fear of poverty, hard work, trial, shame, or contempt of the world, but, instead, regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion he wrote a form of life for us as follows: "Because by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the Most High King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers to always have that same loving care and solicitude for you as [I have] for them."

As long as he lived he diligently fulfilled this and wished that it always be fulfilled by his brothers.

Shortly before his death he once more wrote his last will for us that we--or those, as well, who would come after us--would never turn aside from the holy poverty we had embraced. He said: "I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone."

Just as I, together with my sisters, have ever been solicitous to safeguard the holy poverty which we have promised the Lord God and Blessed Francis, so, too, the Abbesses who shall succeed me in office and all the sisters are bound to observe it inviolably to the end: that is to say, by not receiving or having possession or ownership either of themselves or through an intermediary, or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and proper seclusion of the monastery, and this land may not be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters.

Chapter Seven, The Manner of Working

Let the sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace of working work faithfully and devotedly after the Hour of Terce at work that pertains to a virtuous life and the common good. They must do this in such a way that, while they banish idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute.

At the Chapter, in the presence of all, the Abbess or her Vicaress is bound to assign the work of her hands that each should perform. Let the same be done if alms have been sent by someone for the needs of the sisters, so that a prayer may be offered for them in common. Let all such things be distributed for the common good by the Abbess or her Vicaress with the advice of the discreets.

**Chapter Eight,
The Sisters Shall Not Acquire Anything as Their Own;
Begging Alms; The Sick Sisters**

Let the sisters not appropriate anything, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all; instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them confidently send for alms. Nor should they be ashamed, since the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us. This is that summit of the highest poverty which has established you, my dearest sisters, heiresses and queens of the kingdom of heaven; it has made you poor in the things [of this world] but exalted you in virtue. Let this be your portion which leads into the land of the living (cf. Psalm 141:6). Clinging totally to this, my most beloved sisters, do not wish to have anything else forever under heaven for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy Mother.

Let no sister be permitted to send letters or to receive or give away anything outside the monastery without the permission of the Abbess. Let it not be permitted to have anything that the Abbess has not given or allowed. Should anything be sent to a sister by her relatives or others, let the Abbess give it to the sister. If she needs it, the sister may use it; otherwise, let her in all charity give it to a sister who does need it. If, however, money is sent to her, the Abbess, with the advice of the discreets, may provide for the needs of the sister.

Concerning the sick sisters, let the Abbess be strictly bound to inquire diligently, by herself and through other sisters, what their illness requires both by way of counsel as well as food and other necessities. Let her provide for them charitably and kindly according to the resources of the place. [Let this be done] because all are bound to serve and provide for their sisters who are ill just as they would wish to be served themselves if they were suffering from any illness. Let each one confidently manifest her needs to the other. For if a mother loves and nourishes her child according to the flesh, should not a sister love and nourish her sister according to the Spirit even more lovingly?

Those who are ill may lay on sacks filled with straw and may use feather pillows for their heads; those who need woolen stockings and quilts may use them.

When the sick sisters are visited by those who enter the monastery, they may answer them with brevity, each responding with some good words to those who speak to them. But the other sisters who have permission [to speak] may not dare to speak to

those who enter the monastery unless in the presence and hearing of the two sister-discreets assigned by the Abbess or her Vicaress. Let the Abbess and her Vicaress, as well, be bound to observe this manner of speaking.

**Chapter Nine,
The Penance to Be Imposed on the Sisters Who Sin;
The Sisters Who Serve outside the Monastery**

If any sister, at the instigation of the enemy, has sinned mortally against the form of our profession, and, if after having been admonished two or three times by the Abbess or other sisters, she does not amend, let her eat bread and water on the floor before all the sisters in the refectory for as many days as she shall have been obstinate. If it seems advisable to the Abbess, let her be subjected to even greater punishment. Meanwhile, as long as she remains obstinate, let the prayer be that the Lord will enlighten her heart to do penance. The Abbess and her sisters, however, should beware not to become angry or disturbed on account of anyone's sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others.

If it should happen--may it never be so--that an occasion of trouble or scandal should arise between sister and sister through a word or gesture, let she who was the cause of the trouble, before offering her gift of prayer to the Lord, not only prostrate herself humbly at once at the feet of the other and ask pardon, but also beg her simply to intercede for her to the Lord that He might forgive her. Let the other sister, mindful of that word of the Lord--"If you do not forgive from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you" (Matthew 6:15;18:35)--generously pardon her sister every wrong she has done her.

Let the sisters who serve outside the monastery not linger outside unless some manifest necessity requires it. Let them conduct themselves virtuously and say little, so that those who see them may always be edified. Let them strictly beware of having suspicious meetings and dealings with others. They may not be godmothers of men or women lest gossip or trouble arise because of this. Let them not presume to repeat the gossip of the world inside the monastery. Let them be strictly bound not to repeat outside the monastery anything that was said or done within which could cause scandal. If anyone should innocently offend in these two matters, let it be left to the prudence of the Abbess to mercifully impose a penance on her. But if a sister does this through a vicious habit, let the Abbess, with the advice of her discreets, impose a penance on her according to the nature of the fault.

**Chapter Ten,
The Admonition and Correction of the Sisters**

Let the Abbess admonish and visit her sisters, and humbly and charitably correct them, not commanding them anything that is against their soul and the form of our

profession. Let the sisters, however, who are subjects, remember that they have renounced their wills for God's sake. Let them, therefore, be firmly bound to obey their Abbess in all the things they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not against their soul and our profession.

Let the Abbess, on her part, be so familiar with them that they can speak and act with her as ladies do with their servant. For this is the way it should be: the Abbess should be the servant of all the sisters.

In fact, I admonish and exhort the sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, care and anxiety about this world, detraction and murmuring, dissension and division. Let them be always eager to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection.

Let those who do not know how to read not be eager to learn. Let them rather devote themselves to what they should desire to have above all else: the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart, and to have humility, patience in difficulty and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, blame, and accuse us, for the Lord says: Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs' is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10). But whoever perseveres to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

Chapter Eleven, The Custody of the Enclosure

Let the portress be mature in her manner of acting, discerning, and of a suitable age. Let her remain in an open cell without a door during the day.

Let a suitable companion be assigned to her who may take her place in everything whenever necessary.

Let the door be well secured by two different iron locks, with bars and bolts, so that, especially at night, it may be locked with two keys, one of which the portress may have, the other the Abbess. Let it never be left without a guard and securely locked with one key.

Let them most diligently take care to see that the door is never left open, except when this can hardly be conveniently avoided. Let it never be opened to anyone who wishes to enter, except to those who have been given permission by the Supreme Pontiff or our Lord Cardinal. The sisters may not allow anyone to enter the monastery before sunrise or to remain within after sunset, unless a manifest, reasonable, and unavoidable cause demands otherwise.

If a bishop has permission to offer Mass within the enclosure, either for the blessing of an Abbess or for the consecration of one of the sisters as a nun or for any other reason,

let him be satisfied with both as few and virtuous companions and assistants as possible.

Whenever it is necessary for other men to enter the monastery to do some work, let the Abbess carefully post a suitable person at the door, who may only open it to those assigned for work and to no one else. Let the sisters be extremely careful at such times not to be seen by those who enter.

Chapter Twelve, The Visitor, the Chaplain, and the Cardinal Protector

Let our Visitor always be taken from the Order of the Friars Minor according to the will and command of our Cardinal. Let him be the kind of person who is well known for his integrity and good manner of living. His duty shall be to correct any excesses against the form of our profession, whether these be in head or in the members. Taking his stand in a public place, that he can be seen by others, let him speak with several and with each one concerning the matters that pertain to the duty of the visitation as he sees best.

We ask as a favor of the same Order a chaplain and a clerical companion of good reputation, of prudent discernment and two lay brothers, lovers of a holy and upright way of life, in support of our poverty, as we have always mercifully had from the aforesaid Order of Friars Minor, in light of the love of God and our Blessed Francis.

Let the chaplain not be permitted to enter the monastery without a companion. When they enter, let them remain in an open place, in such a way that they can always see each other and be seen by others. They may enter the enclosure for the confession of the sick who cannot go to the parlor, for their Communion, for the Last Anointing and the Prayers of the Dying.

Suitable and sufficient outsiders may enter, moreover, according to the prudence of the Abbess, for funeral services and on the solemnity of Masses for the Dead, for digging or opening a grave, or also for making arrangements for it.

Let the sisters be strictly bound to always have that Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who has been delegated by the Lord Pope for the Friars Minor, as Governor, Protector, and Corrector, that always submissive and subject at the feet of that holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic faith, we may always observe the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and the Holy Gospel we have firmly promised. Amen.