

The Rule of St Benedict:

selections from *The Rule of St Benedict*,
edited and translated by J. McCann (1989)

que ex parenti
bus suis neque
aliquo quod ho
minum nec su
um uiuice mli
te et aseulo qis
uel quaelibet
munusculac
is pro re aut o
res sine pncep
to debatis qd
si et t m l p r a
ti p u s u i s e i s
q u o q u a m o i
rectum fuerit
non p r a s u m
suscipere ite
lio nisi p r i u
ino i c a t u m p r i

si p o t e s t a t e
c u m l l u d i u b e
a t o a r e e t n o i
c o n t r i s t e t u
p r i u t e r c u p o r
t e o i r e c t u a m
f u e i n t u t n o i
o e t u r o c c a s s i
o o i a b u l o q u i
a u t e m a l i t e r
p r a s u m p s e
i n t o d i s c i p l i n e
r e g u l a r i s u b i a
e x d e u o s t i c e a t
e n d o e t e x l i c i t a r o p r a t i o n e

Uestimen
ta p r i u a
secundu
loco r u m q u a

S C A E T R I N I
T A T I S I N C I P I
R E G V L A S P
L O G V S M O
N A C H O R V M
E X I M I I P A T R S
B E A T I S S I N I
B E N E D I C T I
A B B A T I S



SECVTA
OFILPEPTA
MAGISTRI
ETINCLNA
AVRE LORDE
TVIEMMINIF
ONER PATRS

4. The Hatton Rule of St Benedict, chapter liv
and beginning of chapter lv.

5. Rule of St Benedict, beginning of prologue.

God that he be pleased, where our nature is powerless, to give us the help of his grace. And if we would escape the pains of hell and reach eternal life, then must we—while there is still time, while we are in this body and can fulfil all these things by the light of this life—hasten to do now what may profit us for eternity.

Jan. 7
May 8
Sept. 7

Therefore must we establish a school of the Lord's service; in founding which we hope to ordain nothing that is harsh or burdensome. But if, for good reason, for the amendment of evil habit or the preservation of charity, there be some strictness of discipline, do not be at once dismayed and run away from the way of salvation, of which the entrance must needs be narrow. But, as we progress in our monastic life and in faith, our hearts shall be enlarged, and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness of love in the way of God's commandments; so that, never abandoning his rule but persevering in his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall share by patience in the sufferings of Christ, that we may deserve to be partakers also of his kingdom. Amen.

END OF THE PROLOGUE

THE RULE

CHAPTER

I THE KINDS OF MONKS

Jan. 8
May 9
Sept. 8

THERE are evidently four kinds of monks. The first are the Cenobites, that is those who live in monasteries, serving under a rule and an abbot.

The second are the Anchorites or Hermits, that is those who not in the first fervour of their conversion, but after long probation in a monastery, having learnt in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well-armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert. They are able now to live without the help of others, and by their own strength and God's assistance to fight against the temptations of mind and body.

Jan. 9
May 10
Sept. 9

The third kind of monks is that detestable one of the Sarabaites, who not having been tested, as gold in the furnace, by any rule or by the lessons of experience, are as soft and yielding as lead. In their actions they still conform to the standards of the world, so that their tonsure marks them as liars before God. They live in twos or threes, or even singly, without a shepherd, in their own sheepfolds and not in the Lord's. Their law is their own good pleasure: whatever they think of or choose to do, that they call holy; what they like not, that they regard as unlawful.

The fourth kind of monks are those called Gyrovagues. These spend their whole lives wandering from province to province, staying three days in one monastery and four in another, ever roaming and never stable, given up to their

Mar. 16
July 16
Nov. 15

ALTHOUGH human nature itself is drawn to pity towards these times of life, that is, towards old men and children, yet let them be provided for also by the authority of the Rule. Let there be constant consideration for their weakness, and on no account let the rigour of the Rule in regard to food be applied to them. Let them, on the contrary, receive compassionate consideration and take their meals before the regular hours.

Mar. 17
July 17
Nov. 16

AT the meals of the brethren there should not fail to be reading; nor should the reader be anyone who may chance to take up the book; but let there be a reader for the whole week who shall enter upon his office on Sunday. Let this incoming reader, after Mass and Communion, ask all to pray for him that God may preserve him from the spirit of pride. He shall intone three times in the oratory the versicle: *Domine, labia mea aperies, et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam*,¹ which shall each time be repeated after him by the choir. And so, having received his blessing, let him enter upon his reading. And let there be the greatest silence, so that no whisper, and no voice but the reader's, may be heard there. But for the things that they need as they eat and drink, let the brethren so supply them to one another

¹ Ps. l. 17.

that no one shall need to ask for anything. If, however, there be any need, then let the thing be asked for by means of some sign rather than by speech. Nor let anyone venture there to ask questions about the reading or anything else, lest it give occasion for disorder. However, the superior, if he thinks fit, may say a few words for the edification of the brethren. Let the weekly reader be given a little bread and wine before he begins to read, on account of the Holy Communion and lest the fast might be hard for him to bear. Let him have his meal afterwards with the kitcheners and servers of the week. The brethren are not to read or sing each in his turn, but those only who give edification to the hearers.

Mar. 18
July 18
Nov. 17

WE believe it to be sufficient for the daily meal, whether that be at the sixth or the ninth hour, that every table should have two cooked dishes, on account of individual infirmities, so that he who perchance cannot eat of the one, may make his meal of the other. Therefore, let two cooked dishes suffice for all the brethren; and if any fruit or young vegetables are available, let a third be added. Let a good pound weight of bread suffice for the day, whether there be one meal only, or both dinner and supper. If they are to have supper, let a third part of the pound be reserved by the cellarer, to be given to them for their supper. But if their work chance to be heavier, the abbot shall have the choice and power, should it be expedient, to increase this allowance. Above all things, however,

gluttony must be avoided, so that a monk never be surprised by a surfeit; for there is nothing so unfitting for a christian as surfeiting, according to our Lord's words: *Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting.*¹ Young boys shall not receive the same amount of food as their elders, but less; and frugality shall be observed in all circumstances. Except the sick who are very weak, let all abstain entirely from the flesh of four-footed animals.

CHAPTER

40

THE MEASURE
OF DRINK

Mar. 19
July 19
Nov. 18

EVERY man hath his proper gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that.² It is therefore with some misgiving that we determine how much others should eat or drink. Nevertheless, keeping in view the needs of weaker brethren, we believe that a hemina of wine a day is sufficient for each. But those upon whom God bestows the gift of abstinence, should know that they shall have a special reward.

But if the circumstances of the place, or their work, or the heat of summer require more, let the superior be free to grant it. Yet let him always take care that neither surfeit nor drunkenness supervene. We do, indeed, read that wine is no drink for monks; but since nowadays monks cannot be persuaded of this, let us at least agree upon this, to drink temperately and not to satiety: for *wine maketh even the wise to fall away.*³ But when the circumstances of the place are such that the aforesaid measure cannot be had, but much less or even none at all, then let the monks who dwell there bless

¹ Luke xxi. 34. ² 1 Cor. vii. 7. ³ Eccclus. xix. 2.

Chap.

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God and not murmur. Above all things do we give this admonition, that they abstain from murmuring.

CHAPTER

41

THE HOURS
OF MEALS

Mar. 20
July 20
Nov. 19

FROM the feast of Easter until Pentecost let the brethren dine at the sixth hour and sup in the evening. From Pentecost throughout the summer, unless the monks have work in the fields or the heat of the summer oppress them, let them fast on Wednesdays and Fridays until the ninth hour; on the other days let them dine at the sixth hour. If they have field work or the summer heat be extreme, this dinner at the sixth hour shall be the daily practice, according to the abbot's discretion. And let him so arrange and ordain all things that souls may be saved and that the brethren may do their work without justifiable murmuring. From September the 14th¹ until the beginning of Lent let them always have their meal at the ninth hour. In Lent until Easter let them have it in the evening. Vespers, however, should be so timed that the brethren may not need lamplight at the meal, but that all may be accomplished by daylight. And at all times let the hour of the late meal or supper be so arranged that everything may be done by daylight.

¹ Which actually is the day after the Ides. See *Kalendar Octobris* (p. 110) and Note 72.

Mar. 28
July 28
Nov. 27

IDLENNESS is the enemy of the soul. The brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours in manual labour, and again at other hours in sacred reading. To this end we think that the times for each may be determined in the following manner. From Easter until September the 14th, the brethren shall start work in the morning and from the first hour until about the fourth do the tasks that have to be done. From the fourth hour until about the sixth let them apply themselves to reading. After the sixth hour, having left the table, let them rest on their beds in perfect silence; or if anyone wishes to read by himself, let him read so as not to disturb the others. Let None be said early, at the middle of the eighth hour; and let them again do what work has to be done until Vespers. But if the circumstances of the place or their poverty require them to gather the harvest themselves, let them not be discontented; for then are they truly monks when they live by the labour of their hands, like our fathers and the apostles. Yet let all things be done in moderation on account of the faint-hearted.

Mar. 29
July 29
Nov. 28

From September the 14th to the beginning of Lent, let them apply themselves to reading up to the end of the second hour. Let Terce be said at that point, and from then until None let them all work at the tasks appointed to them. As soon as the first signal for None has been given, let them all abandon their work and hold themselves ready for the sounding of the second signal. After the meal let them apply themselves to their reading or to the study of the psalms.

In the days of Lent let them apply themselves to their

THE SIGNAL FOR
THE WORK
OF GOD

THE indicating of the hour for the Work of God by day and by night shall be the business of the abbot. Let him either do it himself or entrust the duty to such a careful brother that everything may be fulfilled at its proper time. The intoning of psalms and antiphons shall be done by those who are appointed for it, in their order after the abbot. But let no one presume to sing or read, unless he can fulfil the office to the edification of his hearers. Let it be done with humility, gravity, and reverence, and by him whom the abbot has appointed.

Mar. 27
July 27
Nov. 26

reading from the morning until the end of the third hour, and from then until the end of the tenth hour let them perform the work that is assigned to them. In these days of Lent let them each receive a book from the library,¹ which they shall read through consecutively; let these books be given out at the beginning of Lent. But one or two senior monks should certainly be deputed to go round the monastery at the times when the brethren are occupied in reading, to see that there be no slothful brother who spends his time in idleness or gossip and neglects the reading, so that he not only does himself harm but also disturbs others. If there be such a one (which God forbid), let him be corrected once and a second time; if he do not amend, let him undergo the punishment of the Rule, so that the rest may be afraid. And the brethren should not associate with one another at unreasonable hours.

Mar. 30
July 30
Nov. 29

On Sundays likewise all shall apply themselves to reading, except those who are assigned to various duties. But if there be anyone so careless and slothful that he will not or cannot study or read, let him be given some work to perform, so that he may not be idle. Sick or delicate brethren should be assigned a task or craft of such a kind that on the one hand they be not idle, and on the other be not overborne by excessive toil or² driven away from the monastery. The abbot should have consideration for their weakness.

¹ Note 108. ² The *aur* of the Latin text may be equivalent to *et*, so that we could put "and" here. Note 38.

Chapter 49: The Observance of Lent

Apr. 7
Aug. 7
Dec. 7

LET clothing be given to the brethren according to the nature of the locality in which they dwell and its climate; for in cold districts they will need more clothing, and in warm districts less. It is the abbot's business to take thought for this matter. But we believe that in ordinary places the following dress is sufficient for each monk: a tunic, a cowl (thick and woolly in winter, but thin or worn in summer), a belt for work, and for the feet shoes and stockings. And let not the monks complain of the colour or coarseness of any of these things, but be content with what is to be found in the district where they live and can be purchased cheaply.

Let the abbot see to the size of the garments, that they be not too short for their wearers, but of the proper fit. When the brethren receive new clothes, let them always return the old ones at once, that they may be stored in the clothes-room for the poor. For it is sufficient if a monk have two tunics and two cowls, to allow for a change at night and for the washing of these garments; more than that is superfluity and should be curtailed. And let them return their stockings, and anything else that is old, when they receive new ones. Those who are sent on a journey shall receive drawers from the clothes-room, which they shall wash and restore when they return. And let their cowls and tunics be somewhat better than the ones they wear usually. They shall receive them from the clothes-room when they are starting on their journey and restore them when they return.

Apr. 8
Aug. 8
Dec. 8

For bedding, let this suffice: a mattress, a blanket, a coverlet, and a pillow. The beds should be examined frequently by the abbot, lest any private property be concealed in them. If any brother be found to have anything that he has not received from the abbot, let him undergo the strictest punishment. And in order that this evil of private ownership may be rooted out utterly, let the abbot provide all things that are necessary: that is, cowl, tunic, stockings, shoes, belt, knife, pen, needle, handkerchief, and tablets; so that all pretext of need may be taken away. Yet let the abbot always consider those words of the Acts of the Apostles: *Distribution was made to everyone according as he had need.*¹ So too let the abbot consider the weaknesses of the needy, and not the ill-will of the jealous. But in all his decisions let him think upon the retribution of God.

Apr. 9
Aug. 9
Dec. 9

LET the abbot always eat with the guests and pilgrims. But when there are no guests, let him have the power to invite whom he will of the brethren. Yet, for discipline's sake, let one or two seniors always be left with the brethren.

¹ Acts iv. 35.

THE CRAFTSMEN OF
THE MONASTERY

IF there be craftsmen in the monastery, let them practise their crafts with all humility, provided the abbot give permission. But if one of them be puffed up because of his skill in his craft, supposing that he is conferring a benefit on the monastery, let him be removed from his work and not return to it, unless he have humbled himself and the abbot entrust it to him again. If any of the work of the craftsmen is to be sold, let those who have to manage the business take care that they be not guilty of any dishonesty. Let them always remember Ananias and Saphira, and take care lest they, or any others who deal dishonestly with the property of the monastery, should suffer in their souls the death which they endured in their bodies. And, as regards the price, let not the sin of avarice creep in; but let the goods always be sold a little cheaper than they are sold by people of the world, that in all things God may be glorified.¹

Apr. 10
Aug. 10
Dec. 10

THE ORDER FOR
THE RECEPTION
OF BRETHREN

WHEN anyone newly cometh to be a monk, let him not be granted an easy admittance; but, as the apostle saith: *Test the spirits, to see whether they come from God.*¹ If such a one, therefore, persevere in his knocking, and if it be seen after four or five days that he bears patiently his harsh treatment and the difficulty of admission

Apr. 11
Aug. 11
Dec. 11

¹ 1 Peter iv. 11. ² 1 John iv. 1.

and persists in his petition, then let admittance be granted to him, and let him stay in the guest-house for a few days. After that let him dwell in the noviciate, where the novices work, eat, and sleep. And let a senior be assigned to them who is skilled in winning souls, that he may watch over them with the utmost care. Let him examine whether the novice truly seeks God, and whether he is zealous for the Work of God, for obedience, and for humiliations. Let him be told all the hardships and trials through which we travel to God.

If he promise to persevere in his purpose, then at the end of two months let this Rule be read through to him, and let him be addressed thus: "Behold the law under which you wish to serve; if you can observe it, enter; if you cannot, freely depart." If he still abide, then let him be led back into the aforesaid noviciate and again tested in all patience. After the lapse of six months let the Rule be read to him, so that he may know on what he is entering. And, if he still abide, after four months let the Rule be read to him again. And if, upon mature deliberation, he promise to observe all things and to obey all the commands that are given him, then let him be received into the community. But let him understand that according to the law of the Rule he is no longer free to leave the monastery, or to withdraw his neck from under the yoke of the Rule, which it was open to him, during that prolonged deliberation, either to refuse or to accept.

Apr. 12
Aug. 12
Dec. 12

Now this shall be the manner of his reception. In the oratory, in the presence of all, he shall promise stability, conversion of his life, and obedience; and this before God and his Saints, so that he may know that should he ever do otherwise he will be condemned by him whom he mocks.

He shall embody this promise of his in a petition, drawn up in the names of the Saints whose relics are there and of the abbot who is present. Let him write this document with his own hand; or, if he cannot write, let another do it at his request, and let the novice put his mark to it and place it on the altar with his own hand. When he has placed it there, let the novice himself at once intone this verse: *Suscipe me, Domine, secundum eloquium tuum, et vivam: et ne confundas me ab expectatione mea.*¹ Let the whole community repeat this after him three times, adding at the end of all the *Gloria Patri*. Then let the novice prostrate himself before the feet of each monk, asking them to pray for him; and from that day let him be counted as one of the community. If he possess any property, let him either give it beforehand to the poor, or make a formal donation bestowing it on the monastery. Let him keep back nothing at all for himself, as knowing that thenceforward he will not have the disposition even of his own body. So let him, there and then in the oratory, be stripped of his own clothes which he is wearing and dressed in the clothes of the monastery. But let those clothes, which have been taken off him, be put aside in the clothes-room and kept there. Then, should he ever listen to the persuasions of the devil and decide to leave the monastery (which God forbid), let them take off him the clothes of the monastery and so dismiss him. But his petition, which the abbot took from off the altar, shall not be returned to him, but shall be preserved in the monastery.

¹ Ps. cxviii. 116.

CHAPTER 59
RULE OF ST BENEDICT
THE OFFERING OF THE SONS
OF THE RICH AND
OF THE POOR

IF any man of good station offer his son to God in the monastery and the boy himself be still very young, let his parents draw up the petition which we mentioned above. And then at the Offertory let them wrap the petition and the boy's hand in the altar cloth and so offer him. As regards his property, let them promise in the same document under oath that they will never of themselves, or through an intermediary, or in any way whatever, give him anything or provide him with the opportunity of possessing anything. But if they prefer not to do this and desire to give an alms to the monastery for their advantage, let them draw up a deed of gift of the property which they desire to give to the monastery, reserving the income to themselves if they wish. And in this way let every opening be stopped, so that the boy may have no expectations whereby (which God forbid) he might be deceived and ruined, as we have learnt by experience. And let poorer folk do in like manner. But those who possess nothing at all, shall simply draw up the petition and offer their son at the Offertory in the presence of witnesses.

Apr. 13
Aug. 13
Dec. 13

and love of Christ. Let the abbot himself be mindful of this, and behave so that he may be worthy of such honour. Whenever the brethren meet one another, let the junior ask the senior for his blessing. When a senior passes by, let a junior rise and make room for him to seat himself; nor let the junior presume to sit down, unless his senior bid him, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled: *Be eager to give one another precedence.*¹ Boys and youths shall keep strictly to their order in the oratory and at table. Everywhere else let them have supervision and discipline, until they come to the age of discretion.

CHAPTER

64

THE APPOINTMENT
OF THE ABBOT

Apr. 20
Aug. 20
Dec. 20

IN the appointment of the abbot let this rule always be observed, that he be made abbot who is chosen unanimously in the fear of God by the whole community, or even by a minority, however small, if its counsel be more wholesome. Let him who is to be appointed be chosen for the merit of his life and his enlightened wisdom, even though he be the last in order of the community. But if (which God forbid) the whole community should agree to choose a person who acquiesces in its vices, and if these somehow come to the knowledge of the local bishop and neighbouring abbots or Christians, let them foil this conspiracy of the wicked and set a worthy steward over God's house. Let

¹ Rom. xli. 10.

RULE OF ST BENEDICT

them be sure that they will receive a good reward, if they do this with a pure intention and out of zeal for God, just as, on the contrary, they will incur sin, if they neglect to intervene.

Apr. 21
Aug. 21
Dec. 21

Let the abbot when appointed consider always what an office he has undertaken and to whom he must render an account of his stewardship; and let him know that it is his duty rather to profit his brethren than to preside over them. It behoves him, therefore, to be learned in the divine law, so that he may have a treasure of knowledge whence he may bring forth things new and old; and to be chaste, sober, and merciful. Let him always *set mercy above judgement*¹ so that he himself may obtain mercy. Let him hate ill-doing but love the brethren. In administering correction, let him act with prudent moderation, lest being too zealous in removing the rust he break the vessel. Let him always distrust his own frailty and remember that the bruised reed is not to be broken. By this we do not mean that he should allow evils to grow, but that, as we have said above, he should eradicate them prudently and with charity, in the way which may seem best in each case. And let him study rather to be loved than feared. Let him not be turbulent or anxious, overbearing or obstinate, jealous or too suspicious, for otherwise he will never be at rest. Let him be prudent and considerate in all his commands; and whether the work which he enjoins concern God or the world, let him always be discreet and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, who said: *If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all perish in one day.*² So, imitating these and other examples of discretion, the mother of the virtues, let him so temper all things that the strong may still have something to long after, and

¹ Cf. James ii. 13. ² Gen. xxxlii. 13.

the weak may not draw back in alarm. And, especially, let him keep this present Rule in all things; so that having ministered faithfully he may hear from the Lord what the good servant heard who gave his fellow-servants wheat in due season: *Amen, I say unto you, he will set him over all his goods.*¹

CHAPTER

65

THE PRIOR OF THE
MONASTERY

Apr. 22
Aug. 22
Dec. 22

IT frequently happens that the appointment of a prior gives rise to serious scandals in monasteries. For there are men puffed up by an evil spirit of pride who regard themselves as equal to the abbot, and arrogating to themselves tyrannical power foster troubles and dissensions in the community. This happens especially in those places where the prior is appointed by the same bishop and the same abbots as the abbot himself. But it is very clear that this is a foolish procedure. For it gives the prior matter for pride from the very beginning of his appointment, since his thoughts will suggest to him that he is not subject to the abbot: "For," he will say to himself, "you were appointed by the same people that appointed the abbot." Hence arise envies, quarrels, detractions, rivalries, dissensions, and disorders. For, while the abbot and prior are at variance, it must needs be that their souls are endangered by this dissension. And their subjects also, currying favour with this side or that, run headlong to perdition. The responsibility for this dangerous state of affairs rests ultimately on those whose action caused such disorder.

¹ Mat. xxiv. 47.

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Apr. 23
Aug. 23
Dec. 23

Therefore, we have judged it expedient, for the preservation of peace and of charity, that the abbot should have the appointment to all offices in his monastery. If it be possible, let all the affairs of the monastery be administered by deans under the control of the abbot, as we have already arranged. The business being thus shared by many, no individual will become proud. But if the circumstances of the place require it, or the community reasonably and humbly ask for it, and the abbot judge that it is expedient, let him himself appoint as his prior whomsoever he may choose, with the advice of God-fearing brethren. Let the prior respectfully perform what is enjoined him by his abbot, and do nothing contrary to the abbot's will or regulations; for the more he is set above the rest, the more scrupulously should he observe the precepts of the Rule. If it should be found that the prior has serious faults, or that he is deceived by pride and behaves arrogantly, or if he should be proved to be a despiser of the holy Rule, he shall be verbally admonished up to four times; if he do not amend, let the punishment of the Rule be applied to him. But if he do not amend even then, let him be deposed from the office of prior and another who is worthy be appointed in his place. But if afterwards he be not quiet and obedient in the community, let him even be expelled from the monastery. Yet let the abbot bear in mind that he must give God an account of all his judgements, lest perchance his mind be inflamed by the fire of envy or jealousy.

dence.¹ Let them bear with the greatest patience one another's infirmities, whether of body or character. Let them vie in paying obedience one to another. Let none follow what seems good for himself, but rather what is good for another. Let them practise fraternal charity with a pure love. Let them fear God. Let them love their abbot with a sincere and humble affection. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And may he bring us all alike to life everlasting.

May 1
Aug. 31
Dec. 31

THIS Rule has been written in order that, by practising it in monasteries, we may show that we have attained some degree of virtue and the rudiments of monastic observance. But, for him who would hasten to the perfection of the monastic life, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers, by observing which a man is led to the summit of perfection. For what page or what utterance of the divinely-inspired books of the Old and the New Testament is not a most unerring rule of human life? Or what book of the holy Catholic Fathers is not manifestly devoted to teaching us the straight road to our Creator? Then the Conferences of Cassian and his Institutes, and the Lives of the Fathers, as also the Rule of our holy father Basil: what else are they but tools of virtue for good-living and obedient monks? But we slothful, ill-living, and negligent people must blush for shame. Whoever, therefore, thou art that hastenest to thy

¹ Rom. xii. 10.

heavenly country, fulfil first of all by the help of Christ this little Rule for beginners. And then at length, under God's protection, shalt thou attain those aforesaid loftier heights of wisdom and virtue.