

# The Rule of the Regular Third Order of St. Francis

**John Paul II**

## **As a Perpetual Memorial**

Much as in past centuries, the Franciscan ideal of life even in our times continually draws many men and women desirous of evangelical perfection and thirsting for the kingdom of God.

Inspired by the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, the members of the Third Order Regular set forth to follow Jesus Christ by living in fraternal communion, professing the observance of the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity in public vows, and by giving themselves to innumerable expressions of apostolic activity.

To actualize in the best way possible their chosen way of life, they dedicate themselves unreservedly to prayer, strive to grow in fraternal love, live true penance and cultivate Christian self-denial. Since these very elements and motives for living the Franciscan ideal are clearly present in "The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis", and since they are clearly in accord with the genuine Franciscan spirit, We, in the fullness of Our apostolic authority, determine, declare and order that the present Rule have the force and importance to illustrate to the Brothers and Sisters this authentic meaning of the Franciscan life, while bearing in mind what Our Predecessors Leo X and Pius X, with the Apostolic Constitutions *Inter cetera* and *Rerum condicio* presented on this matter in their own times.

Since we know how diligently and assiduously this "Rule and Life" has traveled its path of "aggiornamento" and how fortuitously it arrived at the desired convergence of different points of view through collegial discussion and consultation, proposals and studied amendments, for this very reason with well-founded hope We trust that the longed for fruits of renewal will be brought to full realization.

We decide, moreover, that this Our decision have force from this moment on and be effectively binding both in the present and the future, everything to the contrary notwithstanding. Given at Rome, at Saint Peter's under the ring of the Fisherman, on the 8th day of December, 1982, the fifth year of Our Pontificate.

**Augustinus Card. Casaroli**

*Prefect for Public Affairs of the Church*

## **WORDS OF ST. FRANCIS TO HIS FOLLOWERS**

*(Volterra Document 1:1-19)*

All who love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, and with their whole strength (Mk 12:30), and love their neighbor as themselves (Mt 22:39), and who despise their tendency to vice and sin, receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring forth from within themselves fruits worthy of true penance;

How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things, and persevere in doing them because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (Is 11:2) and God will make a home and dwelling place (Jn 14:23) with them. They are the children of the heavenly Father (Mt 5:45) whose works they do. They are the spouses, brothers and sisters, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 12:50).

We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ. We are for him brothers and sisters when we do the will of Father who is in heaven (Mt 12:50). We are mothers when we bear him in our hearts and bodies (1 Co 6:20) with divine love and with

pure and sincere consciences, and when we give birth to him through our holy actions which must shine in example to others (Mt 5:16).

How glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! How holy, consoling, beautiful and wonderful it is to have such a Spouse! How holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and over all things desirable it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who gave up his life for his sheep (Jn 10:15) and prayed to the Father, saying: Holy Father, keep in your name (Jn 17:11) those whom You gave me in the world; they are Yours and You gave them to me (Jn 17:6). And the words which you gave me I gave to them, and they accepted them it and truly believed that I came from You. And they know that You have sent me (Jn 17:8). I pray for them and not for the world (Jn 17:9). Bless them and sanctify them (Jn 17:17). I sanctify myself for their sakes (Jn 17:19). I do not pray only for these but also for those who, through their word, will believe in me (Jn 17:20), may they be holy in oneness as we are (Jn 17:11). Father, I want that where I am they too may be with me so that they may see my glory (Jn 17:24) in Your reign (Mt 20:21).

Amen.

## **Chapter I · Our Identity**

**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. The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity. (LR 1:1; ER 1:1; RegCl 1:2) Following Jesus Christ at the example of Saint Francis, RegCl 6:1) they are held to do more and greater things in observing the precepts and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ. They must deny themselves (cf. Mt 16:24) as each has promised God. (2LtF, 36-40)
2. With all in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church who want to serve God, the brothers and sisters of this Order are to persevere in true faith and penance (ER 23:7). They want to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility. Let them abstain from all evil and persevere to the end in doing good (ER 21:9) because God's Son himself will come again in glory and will say to all who acknowledged, adored and served him in penance: Come blessed of my Father, receive the reign that has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world (Mt 25:34; ER 23:4).
3. The brothers and sisters promise obedience and reverence to the Pope and the Catholic Church. In this same spirit they are to obey those who have been placed in the service of the fraternity (LR 1: 2-3; ER; RegCl 1:3-5). And wherever they are, or in whatever situation they are in, they should spiritually and diligently show respect and honor to one another (ER 7:15; LR 6:7-8). They should also foster unity and communion with all the members of the Franciscan family.

## **Chapter II · Acceptance Into This Life**

4. Those who through the Lord's inspiration come to us wanting to accept this way of life are to be received kindly. At the appropriate time, they will be presented to the ministers who hold power in the fraternity (Test 1; ER 2:1-3; LR 2:1; FLCl 2: 1).
5. The ministers shall ascertain that the aspirants truly adhere to the Catholic faith and the Church's sacramental life. If the aspirants are found fitting, they are to be initiated into the life of the fraternity. Let everything pertaining to this gospel way of life be diligently explained to them, especially these words of the Lord: If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give to the poor (Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22). You will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. And if anyone wants to come after me, one must deny oneself, take up one's cross and follow me (Mt 16:24; LR 2: 2-6; FLCl 2:2-4; ER 1: 1-3).

6. Led by God, let them begin a life of penance, conscious that all of us must be continuously converted. As a sign of their conversion and consecration to gospel life, they are to clothe themselves plainly and to live in simplicity (ER 2:14).
7. When their initial formation is completed, they are to be received into obedience promising to observe this life and rule always (LR 2:11; FLCI 2:8). Let them put aside all preoccupations and worries. Let them only be concerned to serve, love, honor, and adore, God, as best they can, with a single heart and a pure mind (ER 22:26; Adm 16).
8. Within themselves, let them always make a home and dwelling place for the one who is Lord God almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit (ER 22:27; 1LtF 5-10; 2LtF 48-53) so that, with undivided hearts, they may grow in universal love by continually turning to God and to neighbor (Jn 14:23).

## **Chapter III · The Spirit of Prayer**

9. Everywhere and in all places, at all times and in all seasons the brothers and sisters are to have a true and humble faith. From the depths of their inner life let them love, honor, adore, serve, praise, bless and glorify the most high and sovereign God, eternal Father and Son and Holy Spirit (ER 23:11). With all that they are, let them adore God because we should pray always and not lose heart (Lk 18:1): this is what God desire (ER 22:29-30) In this same spirit let them also celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours in union with the universal Church. Those who the Lord has called to the life of contemplation (Mk 6:31), with a daily renewed joy should manifest their dedication to God and celebrate the love that God has for the world, when God created us, redeemed us, and will save us by mercy alone (ER 23:8).
10. With all creation the brothers and sisters should praise God Ruler of heaven and earth (cf. Mt 11:25), and give thanks because, by the holy will and through the only Son with the Holy Spirit, God created all things spiritual and material, and created us in God's image and likeness (ER 23:1; CtC 3; ER 23:1).
11. Since the brothers and sisters are to be totally conformed to the Holy Gospel, they should reflect upon and keep in their mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the word of the Father, as well as the words of the Holy Spirit which are spirit and life (Jn 6:63; 2LtF, 3).
12. Let them participate in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive his Body and Blood with great humility and veneration remembering the words of the Lord: Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life (Jn 6: 54; ER 20:5). Moreover, they are to show the greatest possible reverence and honor for the most sacred name, written words and most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things in heaven and on earth have been brought to peace and reconciliation with Almighty God (Col 1:20; LtOrd 12-13; 1LtCl 1; Test 12).
13. Whenever they commit sin the brothers and sisters, without delay, are to do penance interiorly by sincere sorrow and exteriorly by confession. They should also do worthy deeds that manifest their repentance (Adm 23:3; 2LtF 25). They should fast but always strive to be simple and humble (Adm 19:2; 2LtF 45). They should desire nothing else but our Savior, who offered himself in his own Blood as a sacrifice and victim on the altar of the Cross for our sins, giving us example so that we might follow in his footsteps (ER 23:9; 2LtF 11-14).

## **Chapter IV · Life in chastity for the sake of the Reign of God**

14. Let the brothers and sisters keep in mind how great a dignity God has given them because God created them and formed them in the image of the beloved Son according to the flesh and in God's own likeness according to the Spirit (Adm 5:1; Col 1:16). Since they are created through Christ and in Christ, they have chosen this form of life which is founded on the words and example of our Redeemer.

15. Professing chastity for the sake of the reign of God (Mt 19:12), they are to care for the things of the Lord (1 Co 7:32) and they seek nothing else except to follow the will of God and to please God (ER 22:9). In all of their works charity toward God and all people should shine forth.
16. They are to remember that they have been called by a special gift of grace to manifest in their lives that wonderful mystery by which the Church is joined to Christ her divine spouse (cf. Eph 5:23-26).
17. Let them keep the example of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, ever before their eyes. Let them do this according to the mandate of Blessed Francis who held Holy Mary, Lady and Queen, in highest veneration, since she is the virgin made church. (SalBMV1). Let them also remember that the Immaculate Virgin Mary whose example they are to follow called herself the handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1:38).

## **Chapter V · The Way to Serve and Work (ER 7:1)**

18. As poor people, the brothers and sisters to whom God has given the grace of serving or working should serve and work faithfully and devoutly so that once excluded idleness that is the enemy of the soul, they shall not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, that all the other material goods must serve (LR 5: 1-2; FLCl 7:1-2).
19. In exchange for their work, they may accept anything necessary for their own material needs and for that of their brothers or sisters (LR 5: 3-4). Let them accept it humbly as is expected of those who are servants of God and followers of the most holy poverty (ER 2:4; 8-9). Whatever they may have over and above their needs, they are to give to the poor. Let them never want to be over others. Instead they must be servants and subjects to every human creature for God's sake (1 P 2:13; 2LtF 47).
20. Let the brothers and sisters be mild, peaceful and unassuming, gentle and humble, speaking honestly to all in accord with their vocation. Wherever they are, or wherever they go throughout the world they should not be quarrelsome, contentious, or judgmental towards others. Rather, it should be obvious that they are joyful, good-humored, and happy in the Lord (Ph 4:4) as they ought to be. And in greeting others, let them say, God give you peace (LR 2: 17; 3: 10; ER 7: 16; Test 23).

## **Chapter VI · The Life in Poverty**

21. Let all the brothers and sisters zealously follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though rich beyond measure (2 Co 8:9) with the most blessed Virgin, his mother, he wanted to choose poverty in this world and he emptied himself (Ph 2:7; ER 9:1; 2LtF 5; FLCl 6:3). Let them remember that of the whole world we shall have nothing but as the as the Apostle says, having something to eat and something to wear, with these we are content (1 Tim 6:8; LR 6:3-4). Let them particularly beware of money (ER 9:1; LR 6:3-4; ER 8:11). And let them be happy to live among the outcast and despised, among the poor, the weak, the sick, the lepers and those who beg on the street (ER 9:2).
22. The truly be poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, neither appropriate nor defend anything as their own live in this world as pilgrims and strangers (1 P 2:1). So excellent is this most high poverty that it made us heirs and rulers of the reign of God. It made us materially poor, but rich in virtue (cf. Jm 2:5). Let this poverty alone be our portion because it leads to the land of the living (Ps 141:6). Clinging completely to it let us, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, never want anything else under heaven (LR 6: 1-2, 4-6; ER 7:13; Adm 14; Mt 10: 27-29; FLCl 8: 1-2).

## **Chapter VII · Fraternal Life**

23. Because God loves us, the brothers and sisters should love each other, for the Lord says, This is my precept, that you love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12). Let them manifest their love for each other in deeds (cf. Jn 12: 18; 1 Jn 3:18; ER 11: 5-6;

TestCl 18). With confidence let them make known their needs to one another so that each can find and offer to the other that which is necessary (ER 9:10). Blessed are those who love the others when they are sick and unable to serve, as much as when they are healthy and of service to them. Whether in sickness or in health, they should only want what God wishes for them (Adm 24). For all that happens to them let them give thanks to our Creator (ER 10:3).

24. If discord caused by word or deed should occur among them, they should immediately (Mt 5:24) and humbly ask forgiveness of one another even before offering their gift of prayer before God (cf. Mt 18:35). If anyone seriously neglected the form of life all profess, the ministers, or others who may know of it, are to admonish that person. Those giving the admonition should neither embarrass nor speak evil of the other, but show great mercy (LtMin 15). Let all be carefully attentive not to become angry or disturbed because of another's sin. For anger and disturbance impede charity in themselves and in others (LR 7:3; FLCl 9:3-4)

## **Chapter VIII · The Obedience in Love (Adm 3:6; SalV 3)**

25. Following the example of the Lord Jesus who made his own will one with the Father's (2LtF, 10), the brothers and sisters should remember that, for God, they have given up their own wills (LR 10: 2; FTCl 10: 2). Therefore, in every Chapter they have let them seek first God's reign and God's justice (Mt 6:33), and exhort one another to better observe with greater dedication the rule they have professed and to follow faithfully in the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ (ER 18:1; Test 34). Let them neither dominate nor seek power especially over one another (ER 5:9), but let them willingly serve and obey one another with the charity which comes from the spirit (cf. Gal 5:13). This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ (ER 5: 9, 14-15).
26. They are always to have one of their number as minister and servant of the fraternity (LR 8:1) whom they are strictly obliged to obey in all that they have promised God to observe, and which is not contrary to conscience and this rule (LR 10:3; FLCl 10: 2).
27. Those who are ministers and servants of the others should visit, admonish and encourage them with humility and charity (ER 4:2; FTCl 10: 1). Should there be brothers or sisters anywhere who know and acknowledge that they cannot observe the rule according to its spirit, it is their right and duty to have recourse to their ministers. The ministers are to receive them with charity and kindness they should make them feel so comfortable that the brothers and sisters can speak and act towards them just as an employer would with a worker. This is how it should be because the ministers are to be servants of all (LR 10: 4-6; FTCl 10:3; TestCl 19).
28. No one is to appropriate any office or ministry whatsoever; rather each should willingly relinquish it when the time comes (ER: 17:4).

## **Chapter IX · Apostolic Life**

29. The brothers and sisters are to love God with their whole heart, their whole soul and mind and with all their strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves (Mk 12:30). Let them glorify God in all they do. Sent into the whole world by God, they should give witness by word and work to God's voice and make known to all that only God is all-powerful (Mt 22:39; 1LtF 1:1; Tb 13:6; Tb 13:4; LtOrd 8-9).
30. As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to anger or insult on their account; rather, all should be moved to peace, kindness and harmony because of their gentleness (L3C 58). The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring. Wherever they are, they should recall that they have given themselves up completely and handed themselves over totally to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should be prepared to expose themselves to every enemy, visible

and invisible, for love of the Lord because he says: Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, theirs is the reign of God (Mt 5:10; ER 16: 10-12).

31. In the charity which God is (1 Jn 4:16) all the brothers and sisters, whether they are praying or serving or working, should strive to be humble in everything. They should not, because of good words and works even anything good that God does, speaks and makes in and through them, seek glory or rejoice or exult interiorly. Rather, in every place and circumstance, let them acknowledge that all good belongs to the most high God, Ruler of all things (ER 17: 5-6). Let them always give thanks to the one from Whom all good proceeds (ER 17: 17).

### **Exhortation and Blessing**

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32. Let all the brothers and sisters be mindful above all things that they must desire to have the Spirit of God at work within them (LR 10:8; FLCL 10:7). Always subject to the Holy Church and established in the Catholic faith, let them observe the poverty and humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which they have firmly promised (LR 12:4; FTCL 12:11).

“Whoever will observe these things shall be filled with the blessings of the most high Father in heaven, and on earth with the blessing of his beloved Son, with the most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete and with all virtues of heaven and with all the saints. And I, little Brother Francis, your servant, in so far as I am able, confirm to you within and without this most holy blessing (Test 40-41)

*Translated from the Latin by Jean François Godet-Calogeras*