

Bound in Love

*a paraphrase of the
Principles of the
First Order of the
Society of Saint Francis*

The Object of the Order

1 Jesus the Master says: *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.* (Jn 12:24-26).

These words sum up the example of our Lord's life in the flesh. He has shown that a life of sacrifice will bring much fruit for the kingdom of God. By giving up himself even to death in obedience to the Father, he becomes the source of new life to very many people. Lifted up from the earth in sacrifice on the cross, he draws to himself people of all nations. He shows that the life which is protected selfishly dies; the life which is given up in service is eternal.

2 This law of giving up ourselves in order to serve is the law of the Master's own life and fruit-bearing. He also lays this same law on his servants. He calls us to follow him along the same road. To those who answer this call he promises the wonderful reward of union with him for ever and acceptance by the Father.

The object therefore, of the First Order, is to build up a body of men and women who accept Christ as their Lord and Master. In following him along the road of loving service and sacrifice we show him to all those whom we meet in the world.

The Three Conditions of Life

3 The community recognises that God has always called some of his children to accept the single life in community for the kingdom of heaven's sake. By remaining single we are free to give ourselves to the service of God without the worries of a spouse and family. The community therefore aims to build up a body of women and men, who shall be completely dedicated to him alone both in body and spirit. After quite a long period of testing and training, we, by our own choice, answer the call of God by dedicating ourselves to our Lord under the conditions of poverty, chastity and obedience.

4 These conditions of poverty, chastity and obedience have always been accepted by those who desire to give themselves to our Lord alone, without the responsibilities of marriage and other ways of human life which demand so much attention. These conditions stand for the ideal renunciation of the world, the flesh and the devil, which are the three great enemies of the spiritual life.

Poverty

5 The Master willingly accepted a life of poverty in this world. *Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor* (2 Cor 8:9). He chose to be born in a stable, and to be brought up in the house of a village carpenter. He even left that home when he was a young man, and became a traveller with no place which he could call his own and where he could sleep.

He also calls his servants to poverty. Whoever serves me must follow me, (Jn 12:26). None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions, (Lk 14:33).

We, therefore, want to be poor in spirit. We desire to escape from the love of the world and the things that are in the world. We prefer to be in love with poverty, like our father, Saint Francis. We long to possess only the wonderful riches of Christ. We see that some of our members may be called to follow Saint Francis, who is known as the Poverello (the poor man), as closely as possible, by having nothing and by living in a very simple way. But for most of us this ideal of extreme simplicity will be too hard.

6 All the same; whatever we possess we want to share with those around us. And we want to have only those things which we really need for our life and work. We live as a family sharing all things together. We receive for our personal use the simple needs of life. Yet we see that the

things we receive do not belong to us personally but belong to the community and are lent to us for a period of time.

Although we try to shut out the temptations of this world from our individual lives, we must not allow the same temptations to destroy the corporate life of the community, where greater damage may be done. It would be no good for us to give up our personal possessions if at the same time we were to live in great luxury because the community possessed too much. Therefore the community must aim at simplicity of life and avoid having too much money and too many things. We must put up only simple buildings and adopt a simple life-style of the kind which will enable us to have good health and to work hard and well. If there is money left over when the simple needs of life have been acquired, then it must be spent on works of mercy and service. Or, it may be spent on the house of God, for it is right to make the chapel beautiful in a simple way. Or else, it may be used for buying those books which are needed for the work of study.

7 In all things we must show the simplicity of true religious. We must care little for the world, where we are only strangers and pilgrims, and must set our hearts on that spiritual house where our treasure lies (Lk 6:45).

Chastity

8 Like all Christians, we are bound to resist and overcome the temptations of the flesh, and to live lives of purity and self-control. But we cannot do this in our own strength; it can be done only by God's grace. Through faithful self-discipline and prayer we must try always to be pure both in mind and body.

What is more; we willingly accept the vocation of the single life in order to give our full attention to the Lord and his work, being "married" only to Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that we believe the single life is in itself higher than the married state. No. We stay single only because we believe God has called us to serve God in that way. Therefore we look to God, trusting to be given the grace to live the single life for God alone. For if we try to live it when it is not God's will for us, we will be in far greater danger than if we were married.

9 When we choose to stay single for the kingdom of heaven's sake we live in what is called the state of celibacy. In this state we must always be on our guard against the temptation to think only of ourselves, or to be hard and cold towards others by having no pity for them with their worries and interests. Belonging to Christ alone, in body, mind and spirit, does not mean that we must weaken or spoil our human affections. No! Our union with

Christ must enable us to love more richly with Christ's love all with whom we are brought in contact.

Obedience

10 Jesus our Master came into the world not to do his own will but the will of God who sent him. He became obedient even to death, and that the death of the cross. And he says to those who follow him, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* (Mt 11:29).

We desire therefore to surrender our wills to the will of God in the spirit of perfect obedience. If we do this we will be set free from self-will and pride and find true freedom and peace. We will also be ready instruments able to be used for God's purposes.

11 Also; when we voluntarily accept the Rule as binding upon us we pledge ourselves to live by this Rule. We also pledge ourselves to accept the decisions of the Chapter, because the common mind of the community is expressed and interpreted by those decisions.

It is the work of the Minister to administer the Rule and to see that the decisions of the Chapter are put into action. The Minister's directions, therefore, must be cheerfully carried out at once, unless the Minister orders something against the Rule or in itself sinful. In the Minister's absence obedience must be given to the Assistant Minister. Each member put in charge of a department of work is also to be obeyed in that department. But none of us may on any authority act against the guiding of our own consciences.

Like the other members of the community the Minister is under obedience to the Rule and Chapter. In exercising authority the Minister must not favour some more than others, or act in a spirit of pride or selfishness. The Minister must, with humble prayer for the divine wisdom, indeed have equal consideration and love for all.

12 The obedience which we are bound gladly to accept within the community is part of the obedience which we owe to God; it is not something different. We firmly believe that if God has called us to a life under Rule we are truly obeying God when we fulfil the duties of that life. If we cheerfully and willingly undertake all that the life under Rule expects of us our pride will be defeated and the quality of our self-giving will be deeper.

When working away from the community we should put ourselves under the discipline of the parish or society in which we are staying.

The Three Ways of Service

- 13 We try to serve our Master in three ways:
1. by the life of devotion,
 2. by sacred study,
 3. by works.

In the life of the community all these three ways must find full and balanced expression.

This does not mean that all of us will give ourselves equally to each of these three tasks. The ways in which we are employed will depend on the gifts which God has given each of us. With the Minister's approval one member may be given more to prayer and contemplation, another to study and the writing of books, and a third mainly to the ministry of active service. Yet all of us must give some of our time to all three tasks of prayer, study and works.

Prayer

14 We must try to live in an atmosphere of praise and prayer. We must try to recollect the presence of God and the unseen world throughout each day. Devotion to Christ, which should be getting deeper and deeper, is the hidden source of all our strength and joy. For us Christ is the One all-loving and adorable, God-with-us, crucified and risen. Christ's love is the inspiration for service and the reward of sacrifice.

15 In order that our union with this Lord and Master may be always renewed and made stronger, we unite in offering daily before God the memorial of Christ's death and passion; and together we feed often on Christ's sacrificial life. It is above all the heart of our prayer life.

Morning prayer is the time when we prepare mind and spirit to enter the sanctuary. The time of personal prayer (sometimes called meditation) which follows later, is the opportunity to be still with Christ who through the sacrament is present inwardly, and for feeding on Christ in the heart by faith with thanksgiving.

The services of intercession and thanksgiving are times when we who have been joined with Christ in communion and personal prayer may plead with God by claiming in faith and hope the promise of Jesus, *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* (Jn 15:7). They are also times when God can be thanked for the fulfilment of this promise.

The evening office is the renewed offering of praise and prayer at the end of the day's work. In its closing silence (when again we can be still with the Lord in

personal prayer) the hearts of all are together refreshed in the peace of God's uncreated and unchanging presence.

Compline is the Master's blessing of protection and peace.

16 We must always try to remember that the work of prayer is the root of everything we do. Without the constant renewal of divine grace the spirit and the will become weak, the conscience grows dull, the mind loses its freshness, and even the powers of the body are spoilt.

We must, therefore, always be faithful in keeping the hours of prayer and not let other work interfere. We must remember that if we try to increase the amount of our activity at the cost of prayer that activity will lose its true quality and value. We must be regular and punctual in our attendance at corporate prayer. We must also bear in mind that it is of little value to be present at the common devotions in a formal or careless spirit. Each office should be an offering of true devotion from the heart. The reverent, ordered and serious offering of the corporate worship is the very heart of the community's life.

17 So, too, we must guard our times of private prayer and not let other interests take their place. We must remember that corporate worship does not take the place of quiet communion of the individual soul with God. We must try to develop our prayer so that we are living in constant remembrance of God's presence and indeed *pray without ceasing* (1 Thes 5:17).

18 The rules of silence have been laid down in order to assist an attitude and practice of recollection. We will welcome and use such silence as an opportunity for growing in the sense of the divine presence. We must not think that silence is just a rule of no talking, but that it has the purpose of assisting recollection. Similarly we will welcome the retreats and days of quiet which the Rule provides. We must see that these are times when the life of the spirit may be renewed and deepened, because we have withdrawn from all external distractions.

In these and other similar ways we will seek to keep fresh and living our devotion to Christ our Lord. When we fail in this high aim we will return again to Christ with true sorrow and an honest desire to do better. We will value particularly the sacrament of penance and absolution whereby we are cleansed from sin and renewed in the life of grace.

Study

19 The true knowledge is the knowledge of God. The highest wisdom is that holy wisdom whereby we are made one with God. The first place, therefore, in our work of study will always be given to the study and

practice of personal communion with God. The devotional study of the scriptures will be seen as one of the chief aids to this personal communion. We will study also the teaching of the saints concerning the spiritual life.

It is the hope of the community that some of its houses may be not only homes of prayer but also homes of learning. It is because of the importance and value of study that some of the hours each day are set apart for this purpose under the Rule. It is mainly to help us to have hours of study that the rule of the lesser silence is laid down whenever possible.

Work

20 Jesus the Master took on himself the form of a servant. He *came not to be served but to serve*, (Mk 10:45). Jesus went about doing good, healing the sick, preaching good news to the poor, binding up the broken hearted. Those of us who would claim to be his servants and follow him must therefore be faithful in ministry to others.

The active works by which we seek to serve our Master begin within the house and in the garden. All the domestic and manual work which we are given to do must be seen as our part in earning our own living. All of us must be capable of taking part in some form of manual work. All must consider the interests of the community in its work for God and must not be wasteful or extravagant. We will do our own work as far as possible. The idle member, St Francis said, has no place in the community.

21 Outside the special works of service to the community itself there are many opportunities of ministry, particularly to those who have no one to care for them, the sick, the suffering and the needy. The community tries especially to undertake those works of mercy to the humblest of the Master's brothers and sisters because he has said that such acts of mercy will be accepted as if they were done to him. By helping in the relief of poverty we may give him food and drink; by welcoming strangers we may take him in; by relieving those who are homeless and naked we may clothe him; by caring for the sick we may relieve him; by visiting the prisoners we may cheer him. We do not expect to have much money to be able to give to others in need, but we will gladly lend our members to work with others who are trying to help them. In all such work we will seek to serve people of whatever race or belief. We will offer our services not in order to force a person to become a Christian but as a reflection of Christ's own love.

22 The most important form of service which we can offer others is the effort to show them Christ who in his beauty and power is the inspiration and joy of our own lives. We will not do this in order to

force ourselves on others or to look down on the beliefs they already hold, but rather to share with them the supreme treasure of our own lives, Christ himself, whom we know has the power to save from sin and to give newness of life. Because of our devoted love we want to give our beloved Master to others.

We must remember that in this task of showing Christ to others the witness of life speaks louder than words. We must, therefore, seek rather to be living lives through which Christ can show himself than to preach much in public. All the same, there will be some among us called more particularly to the ministry of the word. Yet all of us must be ready at all times to give an answer for the faith that is in us, and particularly to guide all who are honestly seeking after truth. We must also be ready by instruction and prayer and spiritual direction to make stronger the faith of Christians and lead them forward in the spiritual life.

23 We must be glad at all times to relieve those who come to us for help or counsel. We must not act as if we have no time for such ministry. Rather we must be ready to lay aside all other work, including even the work of prayer, if such service is immediately required. We do this because we believe that if we give attention to this urgent ministry it will surely be well-pleasing to the Servant of all, even though for the moment we have to forgo the work of prayer.

The Three Notes of the Order

24 The three notes which must specially mark our lives are humility, love and joy. If these are strong in our lives then the object of the community will be fulfilled and its work fruitful. If they are lacking, then the life and work of the community will be weak.

Humility

25 We will always try to keep before us the example of him who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and who on the last night of his life washed his disciples' feet as if he was a slave. We will always seek to cloth ourselves with his humility and to serve one another.

Humility is the virtue which shows us the truth about God and ourselves, it shows us that without God we are weak, and that we have nothing which we have not received from God. It is the mother of all Christian virtues. As St Bernard of Clairvaux has said, *No spiritual house can stand for a moment except on the foundation of humility*. It is the first condition of a happy life within the family. Therefore we must remember that those of us who always think that we are right, and want to push our opinion on others, will ourselves be unhappy because we will find the discipline of receiving orders and correction too hard. We will also make the life of the family unhappy by disturbing the atmosphere of harmony and order which depends on each of us doing our given task with cheerfulness. If we gladly accept the rule of obedience, and loyally carry out orders that are distasteful or difficult, we will indeed grow in the grace of humility.

26 We must also try not to have angry and uncharitable thoughts about one another. We must not seek to make ourselves more important than others. When we see faults in others it is better that we pray for them rather than criticise them - we must try to cast out the beam from our own eye than the speck from anothers. We must be ready, not only gladly to accept the lowest place when it is given to us, but rather of our own choice take it. On the other hand; if we are trusted with a work for which we feel incapable or unworthy, we must not avoid accepting that work because we think that that is the humble thing to do. Rather, we must attempt it trusting in God who will give the power to do it.

In our relations also with those outside, we will try to show our Master's humility. We must welcome gladly all opportunities of humble service that come to us and never desire positions of importance or praise. We must particularly resist the temptation to think ourselves superior to others because we are dedicated to a life of religion. We must remember how much greater often are the sacrifices and difficulties of those engaged in the ordinary professions of life and how much more nobly they face them.

Love

27 The Master says: *Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*(Jn 13:35). Love is the outstanding mark of all true disciples of Christ. It must be specially an outstanding note in the lives of those who are seeking to be specially consecrated to Christ as his servants. God is love, and for those whose lives are *hidden with Christ in God* (Col 3:3) love will be the very atmosphere which surrounds all that they do.

This love we must show towards all to whom we are united by natural ties of relationship or friendship. We will love them not less but more as our love for Christ grows deeper. We will love also with a special affection those to whom we are united within the family of the community. We will pray for each individually, and seek to grow in love for each other. We must be on our guard against all that spoils this love. We must resist the bitter thought, the quick unloving word, and the angry deed. We must never fail to ask forgiveness of any against whom we have sinned. We must seek to love equally with others those to whom we are not naturally drawn. For this love of one another is not simply the expression of natural affection, but a supernatural love which God gives us through our common union in Christ. Such love towards all shows that it can only come from God. Our Lord intended the unity of those who believe in him to be a special witness to the world of his divine mission. We must show that we are a true Christian family whose members are bound into a loving fellowship by this supernatural love, even though we belong to different races and have received varied education and character.

Lastly, in all our relationships with those with whom our work brings us in contact we will seek to show forth the same supernatural Christ-like love. We will do this whether people are Christians or not. And so we must remember that as love is measured by sacrifice, we will seek gladly to spend whatever gifts we may possess of body, mind and spirit, in the service of those to whom God calls us to minister.

Joy

28 Finally, we, rejoicing in the Lord always must show forth in our lives the grace and beauty of divine joy. We must remember that we follow the Son of Man, who came eating and drinking, who loved the birds and the flowers, who blessed little children, who was a friend of publicans and sinners, who sat at the tables alike of the rich and the poor. We will avoid therefore being gloomy and moody. We will have proper concern for the common interests of others and delight in laughter and good fellowship. We will rejoice in God's world and all its beauty and its living creatures, calling nothing common or unclean. We will mix freely with all kinds of people seeking to get rid of sorrow

and to bring good cheer into other lives. We will carry with us an inner secret of happiness and peace which others will feel, if they may not know its source.

29 This joy, likewise, is a divine gift and comes only from union with God in Christ. Because of this it can also be known in days of darkness and difficulty. It can give cheerful courage in times of disappointment and an inner calmness and trust in sickness and suffering. Those who possess it can be content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake. For *whenever we are weak, then we are strong.* (2 Cor 12:10)

30 These three notes of humility, love and joy, which should mark our lives, are all supernatural graces which come only from God. They can never be gained through our own unaided efforts. They are miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it is the purpose of Christ our Master to work miracles through us his servants. If then, we will be emptied of self and utterly surrendered to him, we will become chosen channels of Christ's spirit and powerful instruments of Christ's great work, because he is able to do far more than we ask or think.

AMEN.