

THE CALL TO MONASTIC LIFE

What, dear brothers, is sweeter to us than this voice of the Lord inviting us? See, the Lord in his fidelity shows us the way of life.

THE PROLOGUE OF ST. BENEDICT'S RULE



LISTEN, my son, to the master's instructions, and turn the ear of your heart, and gladly welcome this advice from a faithful father and put it thoroughly into practice, so that by the labor of obedience you may return to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. My message is addressed to you, then, whoever you may be, if, renouncing your own wills and aims, and ready to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord, you are taking up the strong and noble weapons of obedience.

First of all, when you begin anything good, you must beg most urgently that he bring it to completion, since he who has already thought it fitting to count us among his sons should never have to grieve over our evil deeds. With his good gifts that are in us, we must obey him at all times, so that he may never, as an angry father, disinherit his sons, nor, as a dread lord enraged by our evils, hand us over as most wicked servants to eternal punishment for having refused to follow him to glory.

Let us arise then at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us and say: *The hour has come for us to wake from sleep, and with eyes open to the divinizing light, let us listen with thunderstruck ears to the divine voice that every day*

cries out its charge to us: *If only today you would listen to his voice, and harden not your hearts!* And again: *Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* And what does he say? *Come, my sons, and hear me, and I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you.*

And searching in the crowd of people for the workman to whom he cries out these things, the Lord says again: *Who is it that desires life and longs to see prosperous days?* If you hear this and respond "**I do,**" God then says to you: If you desire true and eternal life, *guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit; turn aside from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it.* Once you have done these things, *my eyes will be upon you and my ears toward your prayers, and even before you call upon me, I will say to you: Here I am.* What, dear brothers, is sweeter to us than this voice of the Lord inviting us? See, the Lord in his fidelity shows us the way of life.

So with our loins girded in faith and in tending to good works, let us set out on this quest under the Gospel's guidance, that we may merit to see him who has *called us into his kingdom.*

If we wish to dwell in the tent of this kingdom, you will hardly get there unless you run there with good deeds. But let us question the Lord with the prophet, saying to him: *LORD, who may abide in your tent, and dwell on your holy mountain?* After this question, brothers, let us listen to the Lord responding and showing us the way to his tent, as he says: *Whoever walks without fault and does what is just; whoever speaks the truth from his heart, who does not slander with his tongue; who does no wrong to a neighbor, who casts no slur on his fellow; who, when the wicked devil tried to persuade him, spat those very promptings out from the sight of his heart, and reduced him to nothing, and grabbed those thoughts while they were still young and dashed them against Christ; who, fearing the Lord, do not become elated over their good observance, but reckoning that these goods are in them not from their being able to do them but from the Lord's making them happen, honor the Lord who works in them, saying with the prophet: Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give the glory; just as the Apostle Paul refused to take credit for his preaching, saying: By the grace of God*

I am what I am; and again he says: Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Hence the Lord too says in the Gospel: Whoever hears these words of mine and does them I will liken to a wise man who built his house on the rock; the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, for it had been founded on rock.

Completing these things, the Lord waits for us each day to know the duty to respond to his holy teachings with deeds. Hence, for the emendation of our ills, the days of our life are let to run on by way of a truce. As the Apostle says: *Do you not know that God's patience is leading you to repentance?* For indeed the faithful Lord says: *I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but that he turn from his way and live.*

Brothers, since we have asked the Lord about the dwellers in his tent, we have heard the instruction for being one, if only we fulfill the office of one. *Our hearts and bodies, then, must be readied for the battle* of holy obedience to his instructions, and what we have less possible in us by nature, let us ask the Lord to command that the help of his grace supply it. And if, fleeing the pains of hell, we wish to reach eter-

nal life, then – while there is still time, while we are in this body and there is still time to accomplish all these things by this life in the daylight – we must run and do now what will be good for us forever.

Therefore we must establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing it up, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing heavy; but if on account of what is equitable something a bit more strict should come up, for the emending of vices and safeguarding of charity, do not thereby be daunted immediately by fear and run from the way of salvation, which is not to be begun but at a narrow entrance. Yet in this journey of conversion and faith, it is with a heart widening by the inexpressible sweetness of love that one runs the path of God's commandments, such that, never swerving from his guidance, but persevering in his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall share in the sufferings of Christ through patience, that in his kingdom too we may merit a part. Amen.

