

The Capuchin Constitutions of 1536

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Collegio San Lorenzo da Brindisi

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In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ begin the Constitutions of the Friars Minor called Capuchins



So that our Congregation, as the vineyard of the Son of God, persevere in the spiritual observance of the evangelical and seraphic Rule, our General Chapter celebrated in the City of Rome at our place in Saint Euphemia in the year of the Lord 1536 believed it should set down some statutes as a hedge for that Rule. Like the impregnable Tower of David it should have its fortifications with which we may defend ourselves from all the enemies of the living spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from all the compromises against the most fervent and seraphic zeal of our Father Saint Francis. The statutes are these.

- 10 First of all, regarding the first chapter of the Rule where it is set forth that the most fair Son of God brought us the totally pure, heavenly, supremely perfect and divine Evangelical teaching and He promulgated and taught it by both deed and word. Moreover His eternal Father approved and authenticated it in the river Jordan and on Mount Tabor when He said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased,
15 listen to Him.” Therefore we proclaim that it alone teaches and shows us the straight way to go to God. Hence all men are obliged to observe this teaching, especially Christians who have promised it in sacred Baptism. And we friars have an even greater obligation because Saint Francis was explicit at the beginning and end of this Rule about the observance of the holy Gospel. In fact his Rule is
20 nothing other than the marrow of the Gospel. Hence he says in his Testament that it had been revealed to him that he should live according to the form of the holy Gospel. Therefore, so that the Friars may always keep before their mind’s eye the teaching and life of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and after the example of the virgin Cecilia always carry the sacred Gospel in their heart of hearts, we direct that in
25 each place the four Evangelists, in reverence to the Most High Trinity, be read three times a year, that is, one each month.

- Since the Rule of Saint Francis is like a little mirror reflecting evangelical perfection, we order that every Friday in each place the Rule be read clearly and with due reverence and devotion. So that the Rule, impressed upon our mind, may
30 be better observed, let some devout reading be also read to the friars, exhorting them to follow Christ crucified. The friars should also always try to speak about God as this may truly help them to be kindled in His love and so that the Gospel teaching may bear fruit in our hearts. To uproot any Darnel that might suffocate this, we direct that none of our places should have, for any reason at all, fatuous or
35 vain books, so harmful to the spirit of Christ our Lord and God.

Because the flames of divine love originate from the light of divine things, we order that there be some reading of the Sacred Scriptures, explaining them with the holy and devout Doctors. Even though Divine Wisdom may be unfathomable and lofty, nonetheless it has lowered itself so much in Christ Our Saviour that without

any other means the simple and unlearned can grasp it with the pure, dovelike and fresh gaze of faith. Therefore all the friars are forbidden to dare to teach or study unfitting and irrelevant sciences, but only the Sacred Scriptures, indeed the most holy Jesus Christ himself, in whom according to Paul are all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

It was not only the will of our Father Saint Francis but also that of Christ our redeemer for the Rule to be observed simply, to the letter and without gloss just as our first seraphic Fathers observed it. Since our Rule is very clear, and so that it may be observed more purely, spiritually and in a holy manner, all glosses and fleshly, useless and compromising explanations are rejected. These uproot the Rule from the pious, just and holy mind of our Lord Christ who spoke in Saint Francis. We accept the declarations by the supreme pontiffs as well as the most holy life, teaching and example of our Father Saint Francis as the only valid commentary on our Rule.

As true and legitimate sons of Christ, our Father and Lord, born again by Him in Saint Francis, we share in his inheritance. We instruct all (the friars) to observe the Testament our Father Saint Francis himself set down when close to death, marked with the sacred stigmata. Full of fervour and holy spirit he longed for our salvation. And we accept this (the Testament) as a spiritual gloss and exposition of our Rule since it was written so that the promised Rule be observed in a better and more catholic way. We are sons of the Seraphic Father and imitate his life and teaching. And our saviour said to the Hebrews, "If you are sons of Abraham, do the works of Abraham." If we are sons of Saint Francis then let us do the works of Saint Francis. Therefore we direct that each friar strive to imitate our Father given us as rule, norm and example, or rather, our Lord Jesus Christ in him, not only in the Rule and Testament but in all his ardent words and loving deeds. Therefore let his life and that of his companions be read often.

Our completely saintly Father contemplated God in every creature, especially in man and particularly in the Christian, but above all in priests, most especially in the supreme Pontiff. On earth he is the Vicar of Christ our Lord and the head of the whole Church militant. Therefore, according to the apostolic teaching, and for the sake of the love of Him who emptied himself for love of us, Francis wanted all his friars to be subject to God in every creature. Because of this he called them lesser brothers and see themselves to be profoundly inferior to everyone in the church militant invited to the marriage feast of the most holy spouse, Jesus Christ. Let them seek to be in the last place according to his counsel and example, while considering that the freedom had in privileges and exemptions so as not to be subject to the Ordinaries, is not only close to pride, but also the enemy of that humble and minoritic subjection. This (kind of freedom) often disturbs the peace and gives birth to scandal in the Church of God. The humble Christ crucified came to serve us and became obedient even to the bitter death of the cross. Although He was not subject to the law He wanted to submit to it and pay the tax and tribute while being free. Hence to better conform ourselves to Him and to avoid scandal, the General Chapter renounces the privileges of being free and exempt from

Ordinaries. With the Seraphic Father we accept being subject to everyone as the highest privilege.

We direct all the Vicars in their provinces to go to their Diocesan and ordinary prelates, who are members humbly subject to the supreme Roman pontiff and who is head and superior of all. For themselves and for all their friars they are to humbly offer them obedience and reverence in all things divine and canonical, foregoing every Privilege that would go to the contrary. Furthermore, just as it was our Father's will, we exhort every friar to always bear due reverence for all priests. We also exhort the friars to always obey, with all possible reverence, the supreme pontiff, the Father of all Christians, and (to obey) all prelates – indeed every creature who would show us the way of God; knowing that the lowlier the person may be whom they obey for the love of Lord Jesus Christ, the more glorious and pleasing to God that obedience is.

We also instruct the friars to be subject not only to their Vicars, custodes and guardians; but we also determine that when our Father Vicar General is elected, he is to humbly present himself or notify the Reverend Father General of the Conventuals by whom he must be confirmed. To avoid similar privileges our Father Saint Francis commands the friars in his Testament not to ask for any letter from the Roman court because of persecution to their bodies. Therefore the General Chapter renounces all privileges which relax the Rule and conform with sensuality and thus slacken the way of the spirit.

Regarding the Second Chapter



We desire that our congregation grow much more in virtue, perfection and spirit rather than in numbers and we know that as the infallible truth said, "Many are called but few are chosen." And the Seraphic Father said when close to death, "Nothing harms the pure observance of the Rule as much as a multitude of useless, carnal and brutish friars." Hence we instruct the Vicars to diligently examine their circumstances and quality and not receive those who do not demonstrate that they have the best intention and a most fervent will. Furthermore, so as to not attract attention and to avoid all scandal we forbid the reception of those who have not completed their sixteenth year, or who still have a child-like face if they have passed the sixteenth year, so that they know from experience what they are promising.

We also direct that no one be received as a cleric unless he be suitably proficient in letters so that he not offend when carrying out the divine praises. Instead, understanding what he is saying, he may be nourished by it.

We also direct that those to be received to this life, before they are clothed, are to experience for some days in our places all those things that the friars must observe. In this way their good will may be observed and they can assume such an undertaking with greater light, maturity and deliberation. This is also intended for

Religious who wish to come to our life. To better observe these things, we direct the Vicars not to receive (anyone) without the counsel and consent of the majority of the friars who are in that place where he is. Christ, the most wise master, imposed on the young man who demonstrated his wish to be saved, that if he wished to be His Disciple, he should first sell all he had and give to the poor and then follow Him. And Francis, the imitator of Christ, not only observed this but also taught it with his own example and with those he received. Consequently he also imposed it in the Rule. To conform ourselves to Christ our Saviour and to the will of the Seraphic Father, we therefore direct that no one be clothed unless first (if he can) he has distributed everything of his to the poor, as if fitting for one who willingly chooses the mendicant life. In doing this his fervent or tepid spirit can be partially evident, and then he will be able to serve God steadfastly and with greater serenity. Since they have no occasion to involve themselves in his affairs, the friars will remain impartial in their holy peace. We also direct that the clothes of the novices who come from the world are to be kept until the day of profession and those of Religious for some days. As for seculars who persevere, let them give their clothes to the poor. The clothes of Religious should be distributed by the Vicars Provincial directly or via some spiritual person.

So that what the most holy Christ said to the scribes and Pharisees not be addressed to us, “Woe to you who go around sea and land to make one single proselyte and then you make him into a son of Gehenna, much worse than you,” we determine that the novices in each province be put in one or two places conducive to the spirit and assigned for this by the Chapter. Let them be given masters from among those who are more mature, self-disciplined and enlightened about the way of God. Let these take diligent care to teach them not only the ceremonies but also the things of the spirit, things necessary to perfectly imitate Christ our light, way, truth and life. With example and words they should show the novices what makes up the life of the Christian and of the friar minor. One should not be accepted for profession unless first he does perfectly what he must profess and observe. So that they be strengthened in the spirit in quiet and peace, we direct that no one speak to them at length except the Father Guardian and their master. Also, let no one enter their cells nor the cells of others without special permission.

So that the novices learn better to carry the yoke of the Lord, we direct that they remain under the discipline of their master for at least three years after profession so that they do not easily lose the newly acquired spirit. Instead, while always consolidating this, let them continue to establish and ground themselves more in the love of Christ, our Lord and God. According to some doctors, when novices make their profession in the proper way they are restored to baptismal innocence. We instruct that before their profession the said novices should prepare themselves with great diligence, with confession, communion and much prayer, having made a general confession on entry to the Order so as to clothe themselves in the new man. The practices and ceremonies used and approved in our Order are to be observed when receiving the said novices both into the Order as well as to profession.

It was not without reason that Jesus commended the austerity of Saint John the Baptist's clothing when He said that those who dress in fine clothes are in the houses of Kings. Therefore we instruct the friars, who have chosen to be abject in the house of God, to dress in the poorest, roughest, most abject, austere and
5 worthless cloth readily found in the provinces where they are. Let the friars remember that the sackcloth in which Saint Francis wanted them to be patched and the cords we gird ourselves with should not suit the rich of the world. The General Chapter also exhorts all the friars to be content with just one habit(when possible), just as Saint Francis specified in his Testament for himself and his friars when he
10 said, "And we were content with one tunic, patched inside and out." Nevertheless, if the friars are weak in body or spirit, a second tunic is allowed them according to the Rule. The second tunic and the mantle ought not be granted the friars unless necessary and then not without the permission of a friar's superior, knowing that a healthy friar using three pieces of clothing is an evident sign of an extinguished
15 spirit.

So that poverty – so beloved to the Son of God and given us by the Seraphic Father as our mother – may shine forth in everything we use, we direct that the mantles not reach beyond the extremities of the hands nor have a cowl except on a journey. These should not be worn except when necessary. The habit length should not go
20 below the ankle and be eleven palms wide, twelve for the corpulent. The sleeves should be no wider than is necessary to allow the arm to go in and out. They should be long enough to reach half way down the hand, or a little further. The tunics should be lowly and coarse, eight or nine palms wide and at least half a palm shorter than the habit. The cowl shall be square like that of Saint Francis and his
25 companions as we see in the relics that still remain. This cowl is also obvious in the ancient pictures. In the Conformities too it is written how our habit ought to be in the form of a cross so that we see ourselves crucified to the world and the world to us. Let the friars' cord be of the poorest quality rope, coarse and unrefined, with very simple knots. Then, despised by the world, we have the opportunity to mortify
30 ourselves more. Let the friars not wear birettas, hats or two of anything nor any superfluous things. In each of our places there should also be a small room where the clothing of the community is kept by a friar assigned to this. He shall keep these clean and patched according to the need of the poor friars, who will use these clothes according to their need and return them clean with thanksgiving.

35 So that our beds be similar to the one on which died the One who said, "Foxes have their dens and the birds of the sky have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head;" and to be even more vigilant at the usual prayers and more conformed to our Father Saint Francis, whose bed was the bare earth, and to Christ, the Holy of holies, especially in the desert, we direct the friars, unless
40 already infirm or very weak, not to sleep on anything except bare boards, mats, broom, ferns or on a little straw or hay. Let them not sleep on blankets.

After the example of Christ, we instruct the young friars, and those who can, to go barefoot as a sign of humility and a witness to poverty, and as a mortification of sensuality and a good example to (their) neighbour. If they cannot do this, let them

wear sandals with the permission of the superior, according to gospel teaching and in order to imitate our early fathers. These sandals should be simple or lowly and natural, without any novelty.

5 So that the friars may rise to the epitome of most high Poverty, the queen and mother of all the virtues, the spouse of Christ our Lord and that of our Seraphic Father, and our mother also, we exhort all the friars not to have any earthly affection, but let their love always be in heaven. Almost as if under duress, let them use these lowly things as sparingly as human frailty allows. Considering themselves enriched by their Poverty, let the friars be happy with one small
10 spiritual book, indeed one about Christ crucified, as well as two handkerchiefs and with two drawers. May they always remember that according to the Seraphic Father the friar minor should be none other than a mirror of every virtue, especially poverty.

15 So that we may run more promptly along the way of the divine precepts, we direct that there be no beasts in any of our places. Nor should the friars ride horses. In case of necessity, however, according to the example of Christ and Francis His imitator, one may go on a donkey, so that our life may always preach the humble Christ. Every twenty days or once a month let the tonsure be done with scissors. Let there be no basins and just one razor for blood-letting. After the example of
20 Christ most holy and all our early saints, let the beard be worn because it is something manly and natural, rough, worthless and austere.

About the Third Chapter



ur Seraphic Father, wholly catholic, apostolic and divine, always had a special reverence for the Roman church as judge and mother of all the other churches. In the Rule he directed the clerics to do the office according to the order of the holy Roman church, and in his Testament he prohibited altering this in any way. Therefore we determine that the friars, united in spirit under the same standard and called to one purpose in the divine praises, observe the same rites as much as possible regarding the Missal, the Breviary and the calendar that
30 the holy Roman church observes and uses. Let both cleric and lay friars do the five offices for the dead according to what is in the calendar. The less literate clerics and priests are to prepare what they have to read publicly in the Mass and divine office so as not to disconcert those listening by offending divine things nor provoke against themselves the holy angels who are present at the divine praises.

35 In both the Masses and the divine office nothing is said except what is in the Missals and Breviaries and with the due ceremonies. Furthermore we exhort the priest friars, when they are celebrating, not to have the eye of their intention focus on human favour and glory or anything temporal. With a simple, pure and clean heart let them consider the divine honour, celebrating for the sake of charity alone
40 and with all humble reverence, faith and devotion. Let them prepare themselves as

much as human frailty allows because the one who does the works of God carelessly is cursed. Since that action is divine above all others, it is supremely displeasing if done irreverently. They should not want to receive on earth an earthly reward for celebrating, but follow the example of Christ the high priest
5 who, without any reward of His own, offered himself on the cross for us. Instead they ought to know that because of this their obligation to God is increased. We exhort the other friars, who will be present with the priests celebrating the divine mysteries, to assist with supreme reverence and an angelic mind in the presence of God. Let them celebrate spiritually and receive Communion, offering to God that
10 most pleasing Sacrifice. Celebrating is something of supreme importance. Therefore we determine that no cleric be ordained priest if he has not passed the age of twenty four years, as the canonical sanctions require. The ordained should abstain from celebrating until they have reached that age. We also direct that no cleric be promoted to the priesthood if he, apart from a good spirit, does not have
15 average intelligence to be able to know how to pronounce and understand well the words he says when he celebrates. At all their Masses and prayers let them remember the benefactors, praying God to reward them abundantly in this life and the life to come. We direct the clerics and priests who are not legitimately impeded to assemble as quickly as they can in the choir at the first sound of the bell in order
20 to prepare their hearts for the Lord. There, with devotion, recollection, mortification, quiet and silence, let them bear in mind that they are before God where they should take up the angelic office of rendering the divine praises.

We also instruct that the office be said with due devotion, attention, maturity, uniformity of voice and in harmony with the spirit, without frills or an affected
25 voice, and with the voice neither too high nor too low, but in between. The friars should strive to sing psalms to God more with the heart than with the mouth so that what our fair Saviour said of the Hebrews may not be said of us: "These people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." We direct that the lay friars assemble at the beginning of matins, vespers and compline, and at the *Te*
30 *Deum laudamus*. After making their preparation in common, they may withdraw somewhere according to their devotion as the office is beginning and say the Our Fathers as the Rule imposes on them.

We also direct those the lay friars and clerics not impeded for a just reason to come together for vespers and for all the Masses they can on all the feastdays.

35 To avoid those things that may offend most high poverty, spiritual quiet and tranquil humility; and to preserve peace with the other clerics and priests, and to avoid all impurity, which with time could stain our congregation, we also direct that the dead not be received into our places, unless there be someone who, because of his poverty, would have no one to bury him. In such a case the depths
40 of charity should be opened. Furthermore, burials for seculars and even for our friars are prohibited in our places. Indeed we do not want these in our churches, which should be completely spotless because of the presence of the most unsullied Christ. However let the dead be buried in a fitting place near the church, or even in the cloister. When the friars are visiting the sick, they ought to be on guard against

- persuading them to be buried in our places. Should the sick want this, the friars are not to consent in any way at all. Because this is something new, and so that it not be an occasion of scandal to those who do not know the sound reasons for it, the sick should be informed of the reasons and helped to understand. When one of our
- 5 friars dies the others shall strive to commend his soul to God with the pious affection of charity. Each priest in that province where the friar died should say one Mass for him. The clerics are to say the vigil of nine readings, and the lay friars one hundred Our Fathers. Also let each priest say one Mass each week for our deceased friars.
- 10 As prayer is the spiritual teacher of the friars, and so that the spirit of devotion not grow cold in the friars but burn continuously and ever more intensely on the altar of their heart, and indeed just as the Seraphic Father desired that the true spiritual friar to pray always – we no less direct that two special times be assigned for prayer for the sake of the tepid. One is to be after compline throughout the year.
- 15 From Easter until the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the other time is assigned immediately after None except on fast days, or after Matins between the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter. Let the Friars remember that prayer is nothing other than to speak to God with the heart. Therefore the one who speaks to God only with his mouth is not praying. Hence each should strive to do mental prayer and
- 20 according to the teaching of Christ, the best teacher, adore the Father in spirit and in truth. Each friar should take diligent care to enlighten his mind and inflame his affection more than to form words. Prior to the prayer after None or Matins – or on fast days, after Sext – the litanies should be said, invoking all the saints to pray to God with us and for us. No other office may be added in choir except that of Our
- 25 Lady so that the friars have more time to spend at private mental prayers, which are far more fruitful than vocal prayers.

- Since our Father wanted there to be special reverence for the supreme pontiff as the Vicar of Christ our God, and similarly for all prelates and priests, we instruct each friar, apart from the prayers in common but in his private prayer also, to pray to the
- 30 Divine Goodness for the happy state of the church militant so that the grace be given them to know clearly, will effectively and work powerfully all those things which are to the honour and glory of His Divine Majesty, the health of the Christian people, and the conversion of the infidels. Similarly for all the Reverend Cardinals, bishops and prelates subject to that supreme Pontiff, for the Most Serene
- 35 Emperor, for all Christian Kings and Princes, and for all persons, especially for those to whom we are obliged. We also direct that the five offices for Benefactors be said as found in the calendar, as has been said above.

- Silence is the guardian of the acquired spirit. According to Saint James, the religion of one who does not check his tongue is futile. Therefore we order that
- 40 evangelical silence be observed, in as much as our human frailty may bear it, aware that Jesus Christ the infallible truth said that we will have to account for every idle word. Such is the outpouring of divine things that it is no small error for a friar dedicated to divine worship to speak about the things of the world with (his) consecrated mouth.

- As for regular silence, let it be continuous in the church, in the cloister and in the dormitory. In the refectory, however, from the first sign at the table until the thanksgiving, and everywhere else once Compline has been said until the bell for Prime. And from Easter until the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, let the signal be given for silence after Sext until the prayer is finished after None. Let anyone who breaks the silence say five Our Fathers and five Hails Marys in the refectory with his arms extended in the form of the cross. The friars should always and everywhere strive to speak of God with a subdued and humble voice, with modesty and charity.
- 10 Furthermore we direct the friars not to go about alone but with their companion, according to the example of the holy disciples of the most holy Saviour. If one does not amend himself when evangelical correction has been observed, the friars are to report one another's defects to their superiors. Nor may they go about without written obedience from their superior and sealed with the seal of the Father
- 15 Vicar or the seal of the place. Therefore we order that each place have its own seal according to the ancient practice of Religious. Along the journey, the friars should not separate from each other or argue together. With all humility and charity, after the example of blessed Christ, each one is to strive to spiritually obey and serve his companion, regarding each other as brothers in Christ.
- 20 In his Testament Saint Francis says this was revealed to him by the Lord, that when greeting persons we must say, "May the Lord give you peace." Therefore we instruct the friars to use this evangelical greeting always.

Because true friars with living faith should depend upon their kind, supremely good and heavenly Father, we direct them not to carry flasks, meat, eggs, nor delicate or fine foods along the way. In this way they abandon all their cares upon God who feeds not only the animals but even those who always offend Him. Unless there is great need, the friars are not to stop to sleep or eat in the towns or *castelli* near our places.

- 30 Since one who likes the festivities of the world is easily defiled, we instruct the friars not to attend such festivities unless to preach the word of God, after the example of Christ, our one and only Master. When invited to the feast He did not want to accept, but He went there later to preach. Remembering that according to the apostle Paul they have become a spectacle before God, the angels and the men of the world, the friars should strive to give the kind of example whereby God may be glorified and not blasphemed. Because abstinence, austerity and strictness are highly praised in the saints; and since we have chosen to live a harsh life according to the example of Christ our Lord and of Saint Francis, we therefore exhort the friars to make the holy Lents that Saint Francis usually made, although the penitent friar always fasts. The friars should not take either excessive or superfluous, or
- 40 even ordinary meals. Meat is not to be eaten on Wednesdays.

To put an end to the insatiability of the stomach, there should be only one kind of *minestra* served at table. During times of fast a cooked or uncooked dish ought to be added. Let the friars remember that a small amount is enough to satisfy

necessity and that nothing satisfies sensuality. So that our hearts may not be weighed down by gluttony and drunkenness, according to the teaching of our most holy Saviour, and so that our minds be attuned and the senses mortified, we instruct that no wine be put on the table without first being well watered down.

5 Moreover this should be regarded as a sensual delight given that, according to the seraphic Saint Bonaventure, our Father Saint Francis dared not drink sufficient cold water to mitigate the ardour of (his) thirst. Saint Francis was accustomed to say that it is difficult to satisfy necessity without obeying self-indulgence. This will be pleasant for the friars if they remember that Christ was denied water on the

10 Cross and He was given wine with myrrh or vinegar with gall. In his time Saint Jerome writes that it was regarded as depravity even for the infirm monks to drink cold water or eat something cooked. So then we direct that no special dish be made for anyone except for the infirm, for travellers, or for the old or very weak, just as charity requires and demands. If any friar wants to abstain from wine, meat,

15 eggs and other foods, or to fast more often, the superior may not prevent him if he sees that the friar will not be harmed by too much fasting. Rather let the superior encourage him to continue, provided that the friar eats together with the others. As a sign of poverty, tablecloths shall not be used on the tables except a plain serviette per friar. So that not only may the body be fed, but the spirit much more, we

20 direct that a spiritual reading to always be read at table.

We direct the friars to neither ask for nor receive delicacies, things unbecoming our state. Also, spice may not be used except when needed for the infirm. All possible charity should be shown them just as the Rule and every just law command, and according to the example of our Seraphic Father who was not be ashamed to quest

25 meat publicly for the infirm. If some superfluous food has been brought let the friars refuse it while humbly thanking the donors. Or with their consent, let the friars distribute it among the poor. And because some of the ancient patriarchs by their hospitality merited to receive angels, we direct that in each place a friar be assigned to take diligent care in receiving guests with all possible charity. Also,

30 according to the example of the humble Son of God, these friars will wash the feet of the quests while all the friars assemble for that act of charity. During the washing of the feet, the friars will say some devout hymn or psalm. While always regarding ourselves to be useless servants, nevertheless let us do everything that is possible for us.

35 So that our bodies do not defy the spirit but be completely obedient to it, and in memory of the most cruel passion of our most fair Saviour, especially the agony of His scourging, we direct that the customary disciplines, namely those on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, never be omitted, even on great solemnities. They are to be done after Matins. When it is very cold however they are to be done in the

40 evening. During Holy Week let them done every night. While disciplining themselves, with a devout heart let the friars think of their fair Christ, the Son of God, tied to the column. May they strive to feel a small part of His acute pain. After the *Salve Regina* five devout prayers are to be said.

Regarding the fourth Chapter



ur Father Saint Francis knew that, according to the teaching of the apostles, cupidity is the root of all evil. Wanting to eradicate this from the hearts of his sons he commanded the friars in the Rule not receive coin or money in any way, either themselves or through an intermediary. Moreover he repeats this three times in the Rule to better impress upon the minds of the friars that this is something very close to his heart. And Christ our Lord said, “Be on guard against all avarice.” Therefore, wanting to wholly and fully satisfy the pious intention and mind of our Father inspired by the Holy Spirit, we direct the friars not to have any
 10 kind of agent, procurator or any person on earth -whatever title that person may be given – who might keep or receive money or coins for the friars themselves; neither at their insistence, request, or petition, nor in their name, nor because of any deference towards them, not for any reason at all. Rather, may Jesus Christ our God be our procurator and advocate and may His fair Mother be our representative
 15 and advocate. May all the angels and saints be our spiritual friends.

Because most high poverty was the beloved spouse of Christ, the Son of God, and of our Father Saint Francis, His humble servant, the friars should keep in mind that it cannot be violated without displeasing God extremely. One who offends poverty offends the apple of His eye. The Seraphic Father was accustomed to say that his
 20 true friars should not value money and coin more than dust. They should flee from it instead and regard it with terror as they would a venomous snake. When he saw in the spirit how many friars were to become lax by receiving legacies, inheritances and superfluous alms and abandoning this evangelical pearl, that pious and zealous Father often wept because of their damnation. He would say that the friar who had
 25 higher regard for money than for mud was near to perdition. Experience can demonstrate this to anyone. As soon as a friar chases poverty away from himself, he falls into every other kind of enormous vice. Therefore after the example of the Saviour of the world and His beloved Mother the friars should strive to be poor in the things of the world so that they may be rich in divine grace, in the holy virtues
 30 and in heavenly riches. Above all, when visiting someone sick, the friars must be on guard not to encourage the sick directly or indirectly to leave us any temporal thing. Rather, when the infirm want to do this, the friars should not agree, but refuse as justly as they can, keeping in mind that riches and poverty cannot be possessed together. Legacies may not be accepted. Thus to possess the precious
 35 treasure of poverty more securely, we order that there be no recourse to spiritual friends even for necessary things, when it is possible to have them opportunely in an another way permitted in the Rule.

And so that we may be less of a burden to our friends, no friar may have anything of noteworthy price purchased or paid for without the permission of the Father
 40 Vicar Provincial. Recourse to friends is permitted however for things truly necessary and which cannot be had in any other way, but always with the

permission of the superiors, so that in each request there always be real need and permission.

Since we have been called to this life to live in the spirit by mortifying this external man of ours, we exhort the friars to accustom themselves to suffer the lack of
5 worldly things after the example of Christ who, while being Lord of all, chose to be poor and to suffer for us.

Let the friars be on guard against the noonday devil who changes himself into an angel of light. This happens when the world is devoted to us, applauds us, celebrates to honour us and gives us its riches which have often been the cause of
10 many evils in the Religion. The friars should not want to be those false poor about whom Saint Bernard speaks. There are some poor who wish to be poor in such a way that they want for nothing.

Chapter Five



iven that God is our final end to whom everyone should tend and long to see himself transformed in Him, we exhort all the friars to direct all their thoughts to this aim. With every possible impulse of love let us focus all our intentions and longing to unite ourselves to our supremely good Father with all our heart, mind and soul, with our strength and virtue, with actual, continuous, intense and pure love.

20 Since an end is not reached without a means, each should strive therefore to put aside all the harmful and pernicious things that hold us back from God or block the way to Him. While not worrying about extraneous things, let the friars choose those that are useful or necessary to go towards God and choose from them those that are more useful, such as most high poverty, pure chastity and humble
25 obedience, as well as the other gospel virtues taught us by the Son of God by word and example, in Himself and in His saints.

However, it is a difficult thing for man to remain always uplifted in God, and to avoid idleness, the root of all evil, and to give good example to our neighbour and be less of a burden on the world, after the example of the apostle Paul who worked
30 while preaching, as well as other saints. Furthermore, in order to observe the admonition given in the Rule by our Father Saint Francis and to conform ourselves in this with his will expressed in his Testament, it is decided that when the friars are not occupied in spiritual exercises, they should work manually in some fitting activity. They should not fail however, in so far as human frailty permits, to
35 occupy themselves during that time with the mind in some spiritual meditation. Therefore we instruct that while work is being done, the friars always speak of God or some devout book be read. And let the friars be on guard against making work their end, nor to allocate their affection to that work nor be taken up in it so that they extinguish, diminish or retard the spirit, which all things must serve. However,
40 while always their eyes open to God, let them walk along the highest and shortest

- way. Thus the work given to man by God, accepted and commended by the saints in order to maintain the devotion of the spirit, may not be for them the occasion of distraction or of neglect. On the other hand, let each friar keep in mind that Evangelical Poverty consists in not having affection for any earthly thing; in using
- 5 these things of the world sparingly, as if compelled by necessity to do so and for the glory of God, whom must be acknowledged for everything; and in giving to the poor what we have left over for the glory of poverty. Let the friars also remember that we are in an inn and eat the sins of the people. However we will have to give an account of everything.
- 10 As the devout Saint Bernard says, “Nothing is more precious than time, and nothing today is considered so worthless”, the same Saint Bernard also says that God will examine us carefully on how we have spent all the time granted us. Therefore we exhort all our brothers to never be idle nor spend their time in things of little or no use, nor in vain or useless words. Let them always remember the
- 15 terrible judgement of the infallible truth: on the day of judgement we will have to give reason for every idle word. Instead, let them spend the whole time in praiseworthy, fitting, and useful spiritual or physical activities for the honour and glory of the divine majesty and for the good example and edification of our neighbours as well as our brothers, both religious and secular.

Chapter Six



- ur Seraphic Father Saint Francis pondered the most high poverty of Christ, the king of heaven and earth. When He was born He did not have even a small place in the inn for His dwelling, and He lived as a pilgrim, staying in the houses of others. And when He was dying He had no place to rest His head. Ruminating on how He was most poor in everything else and to imitate Him, Saint Francis commanded his friars in the Rule that they not have anything of their own. Thus unencumbered, like pilgrims on the earth and citizens of heaven, with fervent spirit, they might run along the way of God. Therefore we, wanting in such a noble example to truly imitate Christ and really observe the seraphic precept of heavenly
- 30 Poverty, and to show in effect that we do not have any jurisdiction, dominion, ownership, juridical possession, usufruct or juridical use of anything, even those things that we use by necessity, it is determined that an inventory be kept in each place. In the inventory all the things of notable value lent us by their owners for our need and simple use shall written down. And within the octave of the Seraphic
- 35 Father, let each Guardian go first of all to the owner of the place. Thanking him for the place lent to the friars in the previous year, let them humbly ask him that he may deign to lend it to the friars again for another year. When he consents to this, they may dwell there with a secure conscience. However, when the owner might not want this let them leave without any show of sadness but rather with a joyful
- 40 heart. Accompanied by divine poverty, let them recognise themselves indebted and not offended for the time that the place was lent them. If the place is his, he is not

bound to lend it again. Let them do the same with all the other things of notable value, even bringing them to the owners when they can do so opportunely, things such as chalices and the like; or at least let them promise to bring them when the owners non longer wish to lend them. When it is no longer fitting to use things, let
5 them be returned as they are to their owners or let permission be sought to give those things to the poor.

We also direct that when the friars wish to take up some new place, according to the teaching of the humble Francis, let them go first of all to the Bishop or his Vicar and ask permission to be able to take up the place in his Diocese. Once
10 permission is obtained, let them go the Community or lord and ask them that they might to lend them a small place. Let the friars be careful not to take up any place with an obligation to keep it. Instead, if this be imposed on them, let them not accept without the express protest to be able to leave the place any time it seems appropriate for the pure observance of the Rule, so that if may be necessary to
15 leave the place, no scandal may be given.

Like pilgrims, after the example of the ancient Patriarchs, we will have to live in little huts, hovels and hermitages. Therefore we exhort the friars to remember the words of the Seraphic Father in his Testament where he forbids the friars from receiving in any way churches or dwellings built for them if these are not
20 according to the form of most high poverty. Because of this it is understood that it is much less permissible for them to consent to build or have built sumptuous buildings.

The friars must not displease God, violate the Rule, scandalize their neighbour and offend the promised evangelical poverty just to please the lords of this world.
25 There must be a great difference between the grand palaces of the rich and the small huts of the mendicant poor, pilgrims and penitents. Therefore we direct that places may not be received, whether made by us or by others, much less ought they be built, nor may the friars allow such to be built for them, if the places are not in accord with the most holy poverty that we have promised. For this purpose, then, a
30 small model has been made according to which building may be done. The cells, in their length and breath, shall not exceed nine palms, nor the height ten palms. The doors shall be no higher than ten palms and no wider than two and a half. The windows shall be no more than two and a half palms high and one palm wide. The corridor of the dormitory may not exceed six palms in width. Thus let all the rooms
35 be small, humble, poor, abject and low so that everything may preach humility, poverty and contempt for the world. The churches should also be small, poor and fitting. Nor should the friars want these to be big in order to be able preach. As Saint Francis said, better example is given by preaching in the churches of others than in our own, especially if preaching in ours offends holy poverty.

40 To avoid all those things that could offend poverty, we direct that friars in no way get involved in construction except to show and insist on the poor shape of the model to those to whom the task is committed, and to be a manual help to them. As much as possible, let the friars also strive to do what can be done in wicker, and

mud, reeds, unfired bricks and lowly materials, after the example of our Father, as a sign of humility and poverty. And let the friars have as their mirror the little houses of the poor, and not modern dwellings.

To avoid any irregularity it is determined that no place be taken up, abandoned, 5 built or demolished without the permission of the Provincial Chapter and of the Father Vicar General. No guardian may either build or demolish except according to what his Vicar Provincial has ordered who, along with some friars suited for this, shall go to indicate the design of the said construction.

So that seculars may make use of us in spiritual matters, and we of them in 10 temporal things, we order that our places not be taken up too far from the towns or villages, nor be so close so that we suffer detriment from them by too many visits. It is enough that the places normally be a mile and a half away, or thereabouts, always rather nearer solitary deserts rather than city delights, (after the example of the holy fathers and especially our Father.)

15 It is also determined that in our places (when possible) there be a small room with a fireplace to receive pilgrims and visitors when necessary, as charity requires and as our poverty abides.

In each place where this can be done opportunely, in the woods or the site granted 20 the friars, we also order that there be one or two solitary cells remote from the common dwelling of the friars. Then if any friar (judged suitable for this by his superior) may wish to lead the anchoritic life, he can give himself quietly to God with an angelic life in solitude, following the impulse of the holy spirit. During that time, so that he may enjoy God in quiet, we instruct that no one speak with him except his spiritual father, who will be like a mother in providing for him, 25 according to the pious intention of our Seraphic Father, as is found in the Conformities.

We also order that if there are vines or superfluous trees in the places that are 30 taken up, they may not be cut down. With the consent of the owners however, let the fruit be given to the poor, and the vines dug up, if they render fruit, in order to be planted in other places or be given to the poor.

According to the teaching of the gospel, Christians, especially the poor friars of Saint Francis who have undertaken to follow Christ the supreme emperor and spotless mirror along the way of most high poverty, must keep in mind that their heavenly Father knows how to provide for them. He can do so and wants to do so. 35 Hence He takes special care of them. Therefore, unlike the gentiles who do not believe in divine providence, we must not strive after these things of world with worry and unnecessary concern. The most high God grants these things generously even to dumb animals. However as children of the eternal Father, having put aside all carnal concern, we should depend completely on that divine generosity and rest 40 in His infinite goodness. Therefore we order that in our places no storage be made for more than two or three days, or a week at most, according to seasons and places, of any human food, albeit necessary, especially of those things that may be

begged daily. Fruit may not be stored except for a short time, according to the judgement of the Provincial. To close the way to superfluous human supplies we order that there be no casks nor barrels in our places, but only some poor gourds or flasks. Wood can be stored, especially during winter, for two or three months.

5 So that the begging of the friars not be rich and delicate, neediness in name and not in fact, we order that no meat, eggs, cheese nor fish, nor other precious foods be sought, foods unfitting to our poor state, not even during *carnevale*. These foods may be accepted for the infirm, however, but they should be given without the friars asking for them and without offending poverty. Above all, the friars should

10 be careful lest with an abundance of alms due to the support of distinguished persons, the faith of the people and devotion of the world, that they do not abandon their most holy Mother poverty like inauthentic sons of Saint Francis. They should remember those beautiful words of their Father who was accustomed to say with the most ardent affection of love: "I thank God, that through His goodness I have

15 always kept faith with my beloved bride, poverty. I was never a thief of alms since I have always taken less than what I needed so that the other poor would not be cheated of their share; for to do the contrary is theft before God."

We also order that in times of famine questing be done by friars assigned to this by their superiors in order to provide for the needs of the poor, according to the

20 example of our most pious Father who had great compassion for the poor. If he was given something for the love of God, he did not want it without an agreement to be able to give it to the poor when he found someone poorer than himself. As we read in many places, so as not to be without the gospel wedding garment of charity, he stripped off his own clothes and gave them to the poor. Or rather, he was

25 stripped by the violent impulse of divine love. Voluntary poverty has nothing and is rich in everything, and happy. It neither fears nor desires anything; nor can it lose anything, having placed its treasure in a secure place. Therefore, to really and truly remove the occasion of all ownership, we direct that no friar have keys to his cell, chests, foot-lockers or other things, except the officials, in order to keep those

30 things which they have to dispense to the community of friars, as is just and reasonable. And because we possess nothing in this world, it is not permitted for any friar to give anything to seculars without the permission of his guardian. Even the guardians may not dispense the friars or give permission to anyone else without the permission of their Vicars-Provincial, except for trifling or valueless things

35 To satisfy the needs of the infirm, as reason dictates and the Rule commands and fraternal charity requires, we direct the Fr. Guardian, when any friar becomes infirm, to appoint a suitable friar immediately to serve that friar in all his needs. When it is appropriate for the friar to change places, let this be provided for immediately. Each friar should think about what he would want if the same thing

40 happened to him. No mother is as tender and sensitive, so bound to her only child, as much as each friar is, as our kind Father expressed in the Rule.

Since for those who have no love upon the earth it is a sweet, fair and fitting thing to die for the one who died for us on the Cross, we instruct the friars to serve the

sick during the times of plague, according to what their Vicars decide, who will strive in such cases to keep prudent charity in mind.

Chapter Seven



irst of all, to avoid danger to subjects and prelates we direct that no friar hear the confessions of seculars without permission from the Chapter or from the Father Vicar General. Since such an office requires more than a good conscience and ability, but also fitting experience, it may not be exercised by those who are unsuitable. Generally those appointed as confessors should not hear confessions except only when charity obliges in special cases. This is to avoid every danger and distraction of mind, so that unimpeded, focused and recollected in Christ, the friars may run more surely to their heavenly homeland.

We also instruct the friars to go to confession at least twice a week and receive communion every 15 days, or more often when they want, and when their superior judges this to be more advantageous for the friars. In Advent and Lent, however, they are to receive Holy Communion every Sunday. And according to the Apostolic exhortation, the friars should first carefully examine themselves, their nothingness and their unworthiness very well on the one hand, and on the other, the noble gift of God given with such charity, so as not to receive it to the judgement of their souls, but instead to the increase of light, graces and virtue. And this most high and divine sacrament where our most fair Saviour deigns to dwell continuously with us should be kept in all our churches in a very clean place. It should be held in the highest reverence by all those who stay in front it and let them pray as if they were in their heavenly homeland with all the holy angels.

It is granted to the friars to confess to other priests when they are away from our places and in case of need.

Just as our Father exhorts us in the first Rule, in order to nurture charity, the mother of every virtue, we instruct the friars to welcome with all possible Christian humanity those persons who come to our places, especially religious, as persons more specifically deputed for divine service.

In reserved cases we also direct offenders to humbly have recourse, as quickly and opportunely as they can, to their Vicars to whom they can and should entrust themselves, without this being made known. If the superiors see them truly contrite and humbled, with a firm resolve to amend themselves and ready for a fitting penitence, they should receive them with gentleness according to the example of Christ our true Father and shepherd in the same way the prodigal son was received by his very kind Father. With Christ they should strive to joyfully carry on their own shoulders the lost sheep of the angelic sheepfold.

Let them also remember what our Father Saint Francis used to say. If we want to lift up again one who has fallen, it is necessary to bend down in kindness, just as

the most kind saviour Christ did when presented with the adulterous woman, and not to act with rigid justice and cruelty toward the one brought before them. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, descended from heaven to the Cross to save us and showed all possible gentleness to humbled sinners.

- 5 The friars should also keep in mind that if God were to judge us with rigid justice, few or none of us would be saved. And when imposing a penance they always ought to keep an open eye toward saving the soul and not losing it, as well as the reputation of the poor friar. No friar should be scandalized or ashamed of him, nor avoid him or hold him in disdain. Rather, they must be compassionate towards him
10 and love him all the more, something for which he has greater need, knowing what our Father Saint Francis said, “Each of us would be much worse if God did not sustain us with His grace.” Indeed when leaving him as universal shepherd in His place, Christ told Peter that he should even to forgive the sinner who sins seventy times seven. Therefore in one of his letters Saint Francis said he wanted that if a
15 friar has sinned as much as possible, having seen the eyes of his superior, he should not depart without mercy when he seeks it humbly. If the friar does not seek it, Francis wanted the superior to offer it to him. Then if the friar came before him a thousand times, Francis wanted anger never to be shown to the friar nor that his sins be recalled. To draw the friar to Christ our most kind Lord, let the superior
20 love him truly from the heart instead; knowing that while heartfelt repentance with a firm purpose to not sin again and to practise virtuous actions is enough before God, when Christ gave penance however he was accustomed to say, “Go in peace and do not seek to sin again.”

- On the other hand, the superiors should consider that in not punishing the one who sins means to open a door for the wrongdoers to every vice and to invite them to similar errors. Therefore, the superiors should impose a suitable penance, with mercy, according to the Rule. Hence, so that this good possession of the Lord be preserved by means of a sound hedge, we order that subtlety of law and juridical machinations are not to be observed in our matters, especially in the correction
30 and punishment of friars. Instead, according to the concessions of Boniface VIII of happy memory, as well as Innocent and Clement, no friar is permitted to appeal against his superiors outside our congregation under pain of excommunication *latae sententiae* and imprisonment. For we have not come to the religion to dispute but to weep for our sins, to amend our life, to obey, and to carry the cross of
35 penance following Christ. So that future wrongdoers will not be an impediment to the good friars, the superiors should punish wrongdoers mercifully.

- All Christians, especially we friars of Saint Francis, must always keep the integral and pure apostolic faith of the holy Roman church, and firmly hold and sincerely preach that faith. We should be prepared to shed our blood, even unto death, for its
40 defence. Therefore we instruct that if any friar, because of diabolical temptation, find himself (*quod absit*) tainted by some error against the catholic faith, he should be placed in perpetual imprisonment. To punish these or other similar wrongdoers, there ought to be strong but humane jails in some of our places.

So that any of our friars, hating our solitude and quiet, not return to the fleshpots of Egypt after having been freed from the furnace of Babylon: those who apostatize from our congregation are to be excommunicated by our Father Vicar General and the whole Chapter and let them be denounced as excommunicated by this
 5 constitution, leaving to the said Vicar General and the Provincials the kind and quantity of punishments they will have to use to punish the said apostates and all the other wrongdoers. The Vicars should punish them according to the nature of the excesses, the humility of the penitents and charitable discretion according the ancient constitutions and praiseworthy customs of our Order in such matters. As
 10 the illustrious doctor Augustine says, either punishment or forgiveness should always be done with the aim of correcting the life of the man. Thus justice ought to be always tempered with mercy and while the rigor of discipline should not be overlooked, it should not be excessive to the point of cruelty. Rather, let the weak person be cured by a punishment in which mercy and truth are encountered
 15 together. Because of this mature and discrete friars of knowledge, understanding and experience should be chosen as our superiors and they should proceed in all matters with the counsel of the elder brothers.

So that the punishments we impose in good zeal not be impeded or misjudged, and so that there be greater freedom in proceeding against transgressors, we forbid the
 20 revelation of the secrets of the Order. Instead we must preserve the reputation of everyone as much as possible, while always pursuing those things which are for the praise and glory of God, the foundation of peace, and for the edification and salvation of all our neighbours.

The Eighth Chapter



According to the teaching of Christ our humble Lord, Christian superiors should not be like the gentile princes who aggrandize themselves with their rank. Instead let them abase themselves according to the greater burden they carry. They should also bear in mind that where the other friars must obey their superiors, the superiors have to obey all the friars. For the Chapter that elected
 30 them imposed on them under obedience to serve and minister to the friars in all their needs, especially their spiritual needs, according to the example of Christ who came to serve and minister to us and to lay down His own life for us. Therefore we exhort all superiors to be ministers and servants of all their friars. They will do this if, according to the teaching of the Seraphic Father, they minister to those subject
 35 to them spirit and life by teaching and example.

Every election should proceed purely, simply, in a holy manner and canonically. According to the teaching of Christ our kind Lord, and as persons invited to His wedding feast, the friars should strive to be in the last place with Him rather than in the first place with Lucifer, knowing that the first will be the last and the last
 40 first. With Christ let the friars shun status and not accept rank unless, like Aaron, God calls them under holy obedience.

Regarding the General Chapter we direct that it be done every three years on the feast of Pentecost, the most suitable time for such an undertaking and stipulated by our Seraphic Father. The Provincial Chapters are to be done on the second or third Friday after Easter each year. As a sign of humility and to demonstrate their sincere intention to be remote from any kind of ambition, the Vicar General in the General Chapter and the Provincials in the Provincial Chapters will freely resign their offices and renounce all authority into the hands of the definitors elected by the Chapter. As testimony to perfect resignation they will put the seals into the hands of the aforesaid definitors. And if it should happen that the Father Vicar General die in his triennium, it is decided in such a case that the first definitor of the previous Chapter be the Commissary General. If he has died, then the second definitor and so on. And he is bound as soon as possible to convoke the Chapter for Pentecost, or thereabouts, or in September, at a place already decided or where, with the counsel of the other definitors, it will seem expedient to him and when it can be held conveniently.

To also provide a certain, sure and easy way to be able to depose the General when he is not suitable, as Saint Francis lays down in his Rule, we direct that the first three Definitors of the previous Chapter can and should convoke the friars to the General Chapter when and where it will seem expedient to them, given probable and sufficient information concerning his incapacity. It must be discussed there whether or not he deserves to be deposed. If the General attempts to block such a convocation of the Chapter, *ipso facto* we want him deprived of office. In the case where the General Chapter judges that he does not deserve to be deposed and that the aforesaid definitors have caused such a commotion in the congregation without grounds, let them be punished severely according to the judgement of the Chapter for having proceeded so carelessly.

It is also determined that all the friars present in the place of the Chapter have passive voice in the election of definitors. In such an election the Vicars have active voice, the General at the General Chapter and the Provincials at the Provincial Chapters. It is also determined that in the General Chapter six definitors be elected, no more than two of whom may be from those elected at the previous Chapter. Similarly in the Provincial Chapters four definitors may be elected, of whom only two at most may be elected from among those of the previous year.

We direct also that the Provincials cease from office for at least one year after their triennium, unless for a reasonable cause it should appear otherwise to the Father Vicar General. During the celebration of the General Chapter all the friars of our congregation should pray continuously and fervently, and at the time of the Provincial Chapter all the friars should beg the divine mercy to deign to dispose all our matters according to His good pleasure, to the praise and glory of His Name and for the good of all His holy Church.

The Ninth Chapter



According to the example of Christ, the teacher of life, the proclamation of the word of God is among the worthiest, most useful, exalted and divine offices in the church of God upon which the salvation of the world mainly depends. Therefore we direct that no one preach unless this be granted him, after being examined first and approved by the General Chapter or by the Father Vicar General as the Rule requires. Nor should such an office be bestowed upon them unless they are seen to lead a holy and exemplary life, to have clear and mature judgement, and to have a strong and ardent will. For knowledge and eloquence without charity do not build up. Often, rather, they destroy. When bestowing such an office the superiors should take diligent care to be impartial, moved neither by friendship nor human favour but simply for the honour of God. The superiors should prefer there to be a few, good preachers rather than many unsuitable ones, following the example of Christ, the supreme wisdom, who from the great throng of Hebrews only chose twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples after having prayed at length.

We direct preachers too not to preach idle chatter, flights of fancy, invented stories or other vain, superfluous, novel, useless or even pernicious notions. Rather, after the example of Paul the apostle, they should preach Christ crucified in whom are all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. This is that divine wisdom that Saint Paul preached among the perfect after he became a Christian man. But when he was a Hebrew and childish, he thought, understood and spoke as a little child about the shadows and figures of the Old Testament. The preachers should quote none other than Christ (whose authority prevails over all persons and the reasoning of the world) and the holy Doctors.

Refined, embroidered and pretentious words do not go with the naked and humble Crucified, as do plain, simple, humble and lowly words instead, which are divine and ardent words full of love after the example of Paul, the vessel of election, who did not preach with sublime expressions and human eloquence, but in the power of the Spirit. Therefore we exhort the preachers to imprint Blessed Christ upon their hearts and to give themselves into His serene possession so that through the superabundance of love He may be the one who speaks in them, not only with words but especially through their deeds after the example of Paul, the teacher of the nations. He did not dare preach anything to others unless Christ had first worked it in him. Christ too, the most perfect teacher, taught us not only with doctrine but with works. Great in the kingdom of heaven are those who do first and then teach and preach to others.

Let the preachers not think they do much if they only preach Lent or Advent. Rather they should strive to preach assiduously at least on all the feastsdays, after the example of Christ, the mirror of all perfection, who went through Judea, Samaria and Galilee preaching in the towns and villages, and sometimes to just one woman like the Samaritan woman we read about. And when they feel the

spirit diminish in them because of their dealings with seculars, let the preachers return to solitude and remain there until filled with God the impulse moves them to spread divine grace in the world. Acting in this way in a mixed life, like both Martha and Mary, they will follow Christ who having prayed on the mountain
5 went down to the temple to preach. Indeed, He came down from heaven to earth to save souls.

Preachers are forbidden to receive meals, but let them live as poor men and beggars just as they have promised for the love of Christ. Above all let them be on guard against any kind of avarice so that in preaching Christ freely and sincerely
10 they may gather fruit in greater abundance. Therefore when preaching they are forbidden to quest either for themselves or for the friars so that, following the teaching of the apostle, everyone may know that the preachers are not seeking their own interests but those of Jesus Christ. Anyone who does not know how to read Christ, the book of life, has no doctrine he can preach. Therefore, so that the
15 preachers study Him, they are forbidden to carry many books, since everything is found in Christ.

This holy office of preaching is excellent and most acceptable to Christ our God. He himself has demonstrated it when, with that great fervour of His divine charity for the salvation of our souls, He wished to practise it, administering to us that
20 most wholesome evangelical teaching. Therefore to be able to better impress upon the hearts of the preachers the norm and method they should observe in order to announce Christ crucified himself more worthily, and to preach the kingdom of God and bring about fervently the conversion and salvation of souls, by replicating it as it were and in a certain way instilling it, we enjoin and stipulate that in their
25 preaching the preachers use the Sacred Scriptures, the New Testament in particular, and most especially the Holy Gospel, so that being evangelical preachers ourselves we may also make the peoples evangelical.

Let them leave aside all vain and useless questions and opinions, the wanton songs, and the subtleties few understand. Rather, after the example of the most holy
30 precursor John the Baptist, and of the most holy Apostles and the other holy preachers afire with divine love, and even after the example of our most gentle Saviour himself, let them preach: Do penance, the kingdom of God is indeed drawing near. And according to what our Seraphic Father admonishes us in the Rule, they should announce vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity
35 in words. They should neither desire nor seek anything other than the glory of God and the salvation of souls redeemed with the most precious blood of the spotless lamb, Christ Jesus. Their language should be well considered and chaste. They ought not focus their discourse on any particular person, because as the glorious Saint Jerome says: General discourse offends no one, while certainly reproaching
40 vices, but honouring in the creature too the image of its creator. As the Seraphic Father exhorts us in his Testament let them strive to fear, love and honour venerable priests, Reverend Bishops, Reverend Cardinals and above all the holy and supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, the universal head, Father and pastor of all Christians and of the entire Church Militant, and all others in the

ecclesiastical state, who live according to the order of the holy Roman Church and are humbly subject to our head, Father and lord, that is, to the supreme Pontiff.

And just as our Father teaches us in the same Testament, we must honour and love all preachers who minister to us the most holy divine words as those who minister
5 to us spirit and life. So that while preaching to others they do not become condemned, let the preachers sometimes leave behind the crowds of people and go up the mountain of prayer and contemplation with the most gentle Saviour. They should strive to be inflamed with divine love like seraphim so that being rekindled themselves they may enkindle others. As has been said already, they ought not
10 carry many books so that they may read the most excellent book of the Cross more assiduously. Since it was always the intention of our kind Father that the books needed by the friars be held in common and not individually so as to better observe poverty and remove from the friars particularity and all affection for things, we direct that each of our places have a small room where the Sacred
15 Scripture and some of the holy doctors be kept. The useless books of gentiles, however, which sooner make a man pagan rather than Christian, (as has been said in the first chapter) shall not be kept in our places. However if it should happen that there is such a book, let it be given to the poor, according to the disposition of the Vicars General or the Provincials.

20 Apart from a religious and proven life, some knowledge of the sacred scriptures is necessary for one who should preach worthily and with due order. Naturally this knowledge cannot be had except via some understanding of literary study. So that such a noble and fruitful practice as preaching not diminish in our Congregation at great cost to the poor souls of seculars, we direct that there be some devout and
25 holy studies, rich in charity and humility, both in positive grammar and in sacred letters. Those friars who are, according to the judgement of the Vicar Provincial and definitors, of fervent charity, praiseworthy manners and humble and holy conversation, may be promoted to such study. Secondly, let them likewise be suitable for learning so that by their lives and teaching they may then be useful and
30 fruitful in the house of the Lord. Let the students not seek that knowledge which puffs up, but rather the enlightening and enkindling charity of Christ that edifies the soul. Nor must they immerse themselves in literary study to the point where they have to neglect the study done by prayer. In this they would be clearly contrary to the intention of the Seraphic Father who never wanted holy prayer to be
35 set aside for any such literary study. To be better able to have the spirit of Christ both professors and students should strive to give greater emphasis to spiritual rather than literary study. In this way they will find that they make greater progress in study the more they work on the spirit rather than the letter, for without the spirit the true meaning is not acquired and the letter alone blinds and kills. They should
40 strive to never leave the royal path that leads to paradise, holy poverty together with holy humility, and often call to mind the saying of Jacapone that acquired knowledge bestows a mortal blow if it is not clothed in a humble heart. They will also have reason to humble themselves if they recognise that they have an increased obligation before God for having been promoted to study and made

worthy to be introduced to the true and fine understanding of the sacred texts beneath whose meaning lay hidden the one whose spirit is sweeter than honey for anyone who tastes it. Each time they go to a lesson we exhort the friars to remember to raise their minds to God and say in a spirit of humility and with a
 5 contrite heart: “O Lord, your lowly servant, unworthy of any good, wants to enter and see your treasures. May it please you to allow entry to this most unworthy person. In the holy words of this holy lessen grant that he may love you as much as he knows you, since I do not want to know you except in order to love you, Lord God, my creator. Amen.”

The Tenth Chapter



Direct the minister General during his triennium to strive to personally visit all the friaries and friars of our Order, and that the Vicars Provincial always go visiting their brothers. Both they and the Guardians should not cease to charitably exhort their friars to the perfect observance of the divine and evangelical precepts and counsels: of the Rule they have promised, of these constitutions and especially of most high poverty, the solid foundation of all regular observance. With all charity they should correct offenders, always mixing the wine of strict justice with the oil of gentle mercy. The subject friars should humbly obey their superiors in every thing which, without any doubt, they do not see the divine
 20 offended. Let them bear their superiors due reverence as Vicars of Saint Francis and indeed of Christ our God. When they are reprimanded or corrected by their superiors, according to the praiseworthy custom of our humble first fathers and brothers, let them humbly kneel and patiently endure every reprimand and correction. They should not answer proudly. Nor should they in any way dare
 25 answer the superior, especially in the Chapter or even in the refectory, without asking first and receiving permission. On acting to the contrary let them do penance before the friars for the length of one *Miserere*. With all care all the friars should strive to amend their faults and by frequent virtuous acts acquire the heavenly virtues and overcome bad ways with good ones. And the superiors
 30 should watch against entangling the souls of their subjects with precepts binding under obedience unless they are compelled to do so by divine piety or when charity requires it. We also instruct that visiting friars be received with all fraternal charity. As true sons of the eternal Father they should first visit His church and after having done some act of reverence and prayer, let them present themselves to
 35 the superior, showing him their obedience, without which no friar is permitted to go outside our places. Even when friars of the same place go to carry out some service, let them first ask the blessing of their superior, and the same when they return.

So that everything may be done with the merit of holy obedience and due devotion,
 40 no friar may presume to eat either inside or outside our places without the permission and blessing of his superior or of the eldest father or brother.

All the friars should strive to avoid unnecessary and vain talk. They ought not worry about going to other churches for indulgences since the Supreme Pontiffs have granted the greatest abundance of these to our churches.

We also direct that no friar who is a fugitive from his own province be accepted in another without the written permission of the Father Vicar General. To do
5 otherwise will nullify his reception and the one receiving him will be severely punished according to the will of the Father Vicar General.

To avoid possible improprieties we instruct that no young friar send or receive letters without the permission of his superior.

10 Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and of our Seraphic Father, all the friars should always desire to be subjects and to obey, rather than be superiors and command others. However those upon whom prelacy is imposed by obedience should not be obstinate in refusing it. Instead let them fulfil the ministry commissioned to them with all humility and solicitude.

15 According to the admonition of our Father in the tenth chapter of the Rule, we also exhort the friars to watch against all pride and vainglory, envy and avarice, all care and solicitude about this world; and against all detraction and murmuring, especially against church prelates, the clergy and religious, especially those of our Order. Rather let us bear reverence to each according to his rank, regarding them
20 all as our fathers and elders in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

The Eleventh Chapter



According to the view of the holy Doctors, especially St. Jerome, servants of God should avoid and with holy prudence flee from familiarity even with holy women. Therefore with the greatest maturity, counsel and deliberation, the entire General Chapter makes this present ordinance, which the entire congregation must observe inviolably: In no way, either under the pretext of good
virtue or holiness or because of the petitions of either people or princes, shall our friars accept the care of monasteries or confraternities, nor of any congregation of men or of women. Nor shall they be confessors or accept any care over them. In
30 this they should give credence to the life-giving example of Christ our Saviour and the wholesome teachings of the saints rather than to human persuasion.

It pertains to true religious and servants of Christ to flee not only from obvious wrongdoing and sins but also from everything that can be a pretext for any kind of wrongdoing. Therefore we want the friars not to enter any Monastery or any other
35 house where religious women may be in congregation without the permission of the Vicar Provincial, who will be vigilant and most circumspect and not grant this permission except to proven friars and in cases of necessity or great devotion. For our Father St. Francis said that God has taken wives from us and the devil has given us nuns.

So that by being pure of heart we may see God with the eye of sincere faith and become more suited for heavenly things, the friars should not have any suspicious associations with women, nor useless and lengthy conversations or unnecessary talk. When obliged by necessity to speak with women, in order to
 5 give good example to the world, the friars should be in an open place to be seen by their companions. So that they may be an aromatic fragrance to Jesus Christ, when conversing in each place with purity, discretion and appropriateness, the friars should recall that memorable example of the holy friar about whom we read in our chronicles. While burning some straw he said, “What the straw gains
 10 from fire, so does the religious servant of God gain from women.” At his canonization Pope John XX said of our friar, the bishop Saint Louis, that the love of chastity had been so well established in his heart since childhood. As its faithful guardian, Louis fled association with women at all costs to the extent that he never spoke one to one with a woman except his mother or sisters. He
 15 had known woman to be more bitter than death. Saint Bernard says that there are two things that defile and ruin Friars: familiarity with women and fussiness about foods.

We do not want women to enter our places except for serious necessity or when, because of extraordinary devotion, this denial may result in scandal. When they
 20 enter they must be in the fitting company of men and women. However, before they are admitted, the consent of the Friars of that place should be had. Two mature and holy Friars should be appointed to accompany them, with appropriateness and devotion, giving the best example, speaking always of edifying matters in Christ our Lord, and about the salvation of one’s soul. Our
 25 conversation with women, but also with secular men, is to be rare since too much familiarity with them is harmful to us.

The Twelfth Chapter



So that the purity of the Rule be better observed with due order in divine matters, along with most high poverty, we order that there be no less than six and no more twelve Friars in our places. Assembled in the fair name of the gentle Jesus, let them be of one heart and one mind, striving always to tend towards greater perfection. To be true disciples of Christ himself let them love
 one another from the heart, bearing one another’s faults always. Exerting themselves in divine love and fraternal charity let them strive to give the best
 35 example to each other and to every person, even by doing continuous violence to their own passions and depraved inclinations. For as our Saviour says, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent plunder it, that is, those who vigorously do violence to themselves.

We order that our Churches have only one small bell of about one hundred and
 40 fifty small pounds. In our places there shall be no other Sacristy than a locked closet or just a trunk. A professed Friar is to carry the key with him always.

Everything necessary for divine worship shall be kept in that cupboard or chest. There should be two small Chalices, one of pewter and the other with just the cup made from silver. Let there be no more than three poor vestments without gold, silver, velvet or silk, or any else precious or unusual. However, these must be very
5 clean. The palls on the Altars are to be of ordinary cloth, the candle-sticks of wood. Missals and Breviaries and all the others books too should be bound simply and without fancy embellishments so that all the things for our poor use may radiate most high poverty and set us on fire for the precious riches of the heaven where are our treasure, delight and glory. It is impossible to put in place laws and
10 statutes for particular cases that may arise, since those things are countless. Therefore in the charity of Christ we exhort all our brothers, in everything they do, to keep before their eyes the Holy Gospel, the Rule we have promised to God, as well as the holy and praiseworthy customs and holy examples of the Saints. As they direct their every thought, word and deed to the honour and glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour, the Holy Spirit will teach them all things. For the
15 sake of ritual uniformity both in the choir as elsewhere, the teaching of Saint Bonaventure and the ordinances of our early fathers should be read. And to better know the mind of our Seraphic Father in everything, his *Fioretti* and the *Conformities* should be read, as well as other books that speak of him. The conversion of the infidels was very close to the heart of our Seraphic Father. Therefore, for the glory of God and their salvation, we direct that if some Friars, who by divine inspiration and who are perfectly enkindled in the love of blessed Christ and in zeal for His Catholic faith, want to go to preach that faith among the
20 infidels, let them have recourse to their Vicar Provincials or the Father Vicar General according to the Rule. On being judged by these as suitable, let them go to such an arduous undertaking with their permission and blessing. However the subjects should not presumptuously judge themselves as suitable for such a difficult and dangerous undertaking. Instead, with all fear and humility let them commit their desire to the judgement of their superiors. A distinction can also be
30 made between those quite meek and malleable infidels, disposed to easily receive the Christian faith, such as those recently discovered by the Spanish and Portuguese in the Indies, and the Turks and Arabs who uphold and defend their cursed sect only with arms and torture. The superiors ought not consider the lack of Friars nor be sad because of the departure of good friars. Instead let them cast all their solicitude and concern upon the One who cares for us continually. Let them do all these things as the Holy Spirit teaches and carry out everything with that charity which does nothing badly.

So that poverty, the holy bride of Christ our Lord and of beloved of our Father, may remain among us always, the Friars must be careful in all things pertinent to
40 divine worship, in our buildings and in the furnishings we use so that there be nothing extraordinary, superfluous or precious, knowing that God wants from us our promised obedience in holy poverty rather than sacrifices. As Clement says in his declaration, God delights more in a pure heart and holy works rather than in precious and very ornate things. Nonetheless our poverty should radiate cleanliness
45 entirely.

Since our Saviour began first by doing and then by teaching others, all our superiors should be the first to observe these constitutions. Then all the subjects should strive with holy and effective courage to observe them inviolably. If at first some things seem to be somewhat difficult, holy custom will make them easy and
5 delightful.

So that these Constitutions be better impressed upon the minds of the Friars and they observe them, all the Guardians should have them read at table once a month. Although we do not intend to oblige the friars with these constitutions with any sin, nonetheless we wish and order transgressors of these constitutions to be
10 severely punished. If the Guardians are negligent in observing and punishing miscreants, let them be severely punished by their Fathers Vicar Provincial and these by the Father Vicar General.

Because the present Constitutions have been composed with the greatest diligence and mature deliberation, and approved by our entire General Chapter and even by
15 the Apostolic See, they may not be changed without the consent of the General Chapter.

Similarly we exhort all our Fathers and Brothers, now and in the future, not to change the present constitutions even in General Chapters. For as we have seen from experience great detriment to the Order comes from such changes to the
20 constitutions. Nor must there be Provincial constitutions. However, if other particular cases arise let provision be made and we direct such matters be tabled at General Chapters. Let these constitutions be left intact, according to which our entire congregation has to live and be regulated with holy uniformity.

At the moment of his death our Seraphic Father left the generous blessing of the
25 most Holy Trinity for the zealous and true observers of the Rule. He even added his own paternal blessing. Therefore we should understand carefully and observe effectively and lovingly the perfection shown and taught us in the Rule itself and in our Order, and avoid all negligence.

Service with no other intention than to avoid punishment belongs only to servile
30 and mercenary spirits. However it pertains to the true sons of God to work for the love of God and to do something pleasing to His Majesty, for divine grace and glory, and to give good example to our neighbour, and for many similar reasons. Therefore the Friars should be supremely careful not to transgress these constitutions as if they were not obligatory without any guilt. However while
35 recognising to whose spirit we belong, the friars must inviolably observe the laws, sanctions and statutes of the Order so that grace be added to their head and they merit divine mercy by means of their compliance in these things and are conformed to the Son of God. He was not obliged by the laws he made but wanted to observe them for the salvation of everyone. Therefore let the Friars maintain the
40 sublime state of the Order and be the cause of much good in their neighbours. Certainly it pertains to good servants not only to fulfil those things their masters or lords command by threatening them, but also in wanting to please their masters in many ways.

Carrying out these things, therefore, let us direct our eyes to our redeemer so that having known his divine good-pleasure let us strive to please Him: not only by not despising these constitutions (although such a contempt would be a grave sin), but not to be negligent in observing them, for the sake of His love. The observance of
5 these constitutions will help to fulfil not only the complete observance of the promised Rule but also the divine law and evangelical counsels. And through Jesus Christ the grace of God will free us from all danger. In all our efforts too, our consolation will abound through Jesus Christ. We will be capable of everything in the Him who comforts us, namely, Christ the Almighty. In everything He will give
10 understanding, He who is the power and wisdom of God and our Saviour, who gives abundantly to each one and does not take back, will give understanding in everything. He will furnish the strength, He who is power and the word that contains all. Beloved fathers and brothers let us often recall that holy and memorable theme upon which our Seraphic Father gave a very solemn sermon to
15 more than five thousand friars: We have promised great things to God, but God has promised greater things to us. Therefore let us observe the things that we have promised. With ardent desire let us long to come to those good things that have been promised us. The pleasures of this world are brief, however the infernal punishment acquired by pursuing those delights is everlasting. The suffering that
20 we endure for the love of Christ and the penance that we do for Him will last a little while. However the glory that God will give through Christ will be infinite. Many are called to the kingdom of eternal life, but few are chosen, because very few persons follow Christ in the truth of their heart. However on the last day God will reward everyone according to their works: glory for the good and Gehenna for
25 the wicked.

Although the things we have promised may be great, nonetheless they are nothing in comparison to that eternal reward that God wants to give us if we will observe these things faithfully. Therefore let us act as men and not trust our strength. The
30 good Father who created us and has given us evangelical perfection to observe and who knows the clay of which were made, will give us the strength with His help. Moreover He will give His heavenly gifts in such profusion and abundance so that once all the obstacles are overcome, we will not only be able to obey His most fair Son but also follow and imitate Him with great joyfulness and simplicity of heart,
35 perfectly despising visible and temporal things and always yearning after those that are heavenly and eternal.

In Christ are our merits, examples of life, helps, favours and rewards. He is God and man, true light, the splendour or glory and radiance of eternal light, the flawless mirror and image of God, whom the eternal Father has made judge,
40 lawgiver and the salvation of men to whom the Holy Spirit has given testimony. Therefore our meditation and imitation should be of Him in whom all things are fair, easy, light, sweet, wise, holy and perfect. He is the light and expectation of the nations, the end point of the law and salvation from God, the Father of the world to come, and finally our hope. He has become for us God's wisdom, justice, holiness and redemption. Consubstantial and coequal with the Father and co-

eternal Holy Spirit, one God who lives and reigns, to whom be eternal praise, honour, majesty and glory for ever and ever. Amen.