

THE THIRD ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

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FOREWORD

Religious life is the surest and most efficacious road to approach God and thus obtain the salvation of our souls. However, as stated in the 'Following of Christ' not all are in a position to leave the world and enclose themselves in a cloister. Many would be willing to do so but cannot very well sever their connection with the life of the world. Their obligations and commitments in life are of such nature as to bind them to their state in life by the inevitable design of Divine Providence. Should these persons be deprived of the plenitude of life, of the works and merits which religious life would have provided them? Is there a way so that these persons living in the world may participate in and share with the benefits which the religious life provides? If so, would it be compatible with secular life?

There was a man who had this serious problem before him and studied it. He found a solution in the affirmative. Needless to state who that man was: It was St. Francis of Assisi. His attractive personality,

his enchantment and ascendancy were of such immensity as to attract all who had been in contact with him. All desired to share with his mode of life and the insistent demand of these men who became his disciples more than his own will, was the dominant factor which induced St. Francis to establish two religious orders: one for men and another for women or the Order of Friars Minor and the Order of Poor Clares. But yet there were numerous persons who joined by the sacred bond with a spouse, with sons, and those dedicated to the cure of souls or to public office who were likewise eager to embrace and follow his mode of life. Would they be deprived of this renewal of divine life in the church of Christ by her action? St. Francis did not believe so. He believed that these familiar and social obligations being of providential source and hence designed by God, should not contradict to their desire for sanctification. He thought that there should be a way to conciliate these apparent conflicts of divine desire and these two phases of an identical di-

vine will. Thanks to the purity of his faith and his clear mind he conceived that persons living in the world who were desirous of embracing a truly religious life might do so without the necessity of imposing upon them a community life with other religious persons under vows. Hence, the realization of the inspired ideal of our Father St. Francis—the Third Order of Penance or the Third Order Secular of St. Francis.

By way of clarification for those who may not as yet know what the Third Order Secular of St. Francis is, it should be stated that it is a religious order in the true canonical sense of the word, instituted by St. Francis of Assissi for lay people living in the world and occupied with the daily tasks of life, yet aspiring to a more Christian life. The Third Order Secular, thru its Rule of Life, offers an opportunity for the realization of those ideals which prompt them to seek a full Christian life in the midst of the world. As an order, it has been solemnly recognized by Supreme Pontiffs specially by Pope Benedict XIII and more recently by the reformer of its Rule, Leo. XIII who, upon being asked on the matter, replied that he had not modified its intimate and substantial nature as Third Order and that he had left it undisturbed as an Order (July 7, 1883 to the Ministers General of the Order).

THE DRAWING UP OF THE THIRD ORDER RULE

With the spread of the Order of

Friars Minor throughout the subsequent centuries, the Third Order of Penance of St. Francis likewise developed to such a state of life that thousands of people from every age and walk of life flocked and asked to join their ranks. Evidently, there was need to check or lead this movement into proper channels. Hence, the drawing up of the Rule of the Third Order which consisted only in obedience to God and to His church, in avoiding factions and quarrels and in no way defrauding one's neighbor. The members were to take arms only for the defense of religion and country; to be moderate in food and in clothing; to shun luxury; and to abstain from the dangerous seduction of dances and plays. Such was the simple rule of life which St. Francis, counseled by his friend Cardinal Ugolino drew up for his Third Order, and according to which persons living in the world practised his ideals of Christian perfection.

As time passed by, other rules were discovered by research. One of these dates from the year 1221. This rule was discovered by Paul Sabatier in the Franciscan Friary of Capistrano in the Abruzzi, Italy. Hence, it is known as the Capistrano rule. That same year St. Francis came to Poggibonzi, a town near Florence, Italy. There he met one Lucius, or Lucchese, a friend of his boyhood days, then a prosperous merchant. He was a man of singular virtue, and, having heard how St. Francis had founded an order for seculars at Florence, he asked

to be admitted therein. St. Francis gladly granted his request and vested him and his wife, Bonadonna, with the habit of the Third Order. These two are commonly regarded as the first Tertiaries. About the same time, a certain lawyer of the Roman Curia, by the name of Bartholomew, was clothed with the Tertiary habit and granted faculties to vest others thereby becoming the first Third Order director.

During the thirteenth century, the members of the Third Order, which had spread in Europe followed different rules and stood more or less under episcopal jurisdiction. In 1289, however, Pope Nicholas IV desiring to unite these scattered fraternities so as to make them a more powerful force in the Church, gave them a uniform and definite rule and placed them once and for all under the jurisdiction of the Order of Friars Minor.

In 1883 Pope Leo XIII himself a tertiary infused a new life and vigor into the Third Order by publishing its constitution 'Misericors Dei Filius'. The illustrious Pontiff knowing what the Third Order had meant to the masses in the past centuries and that due to Protestant Reformation with its wars and revolutions, nations were gradually drifting into indifferentism and infidelity in the nineteenth century, believed that the best means to bring the nations to God was the Third Order of St. Francis. Accordingly, he issued the famous constitution in which he revised, and modi-

fied the rule of the Third Order with a special view to the conditions and needs of modern times. He also granted new and richer favors, indulgences and privileges to those who would join the Third Order.

COMPARATIVE STATEMENT ON THE THREE KNOWN RULES OF THE THIRD ORDER

The Capistrano Rule

As already stated above there are three known rules of the Third Order secular of St. Francis: the rule of 1221 otherwise known as the Capistrano Rule, the Nicholas Rule of 1289 and the Leanine Rule of 1883. Other rules may have existed but no records are now available of many of them. For our purpose, however, it is sufficient to know which of the three rules known is in force and how they apply to present circumstances of modern life. In passing, it should be stated that the previous rules were rather strict in nature. For instance, in the Capistrano rule, following are some of its provisions, to wit:

"Let the men of this fraternity wear garments of ordinary colorless cloth, the price of which shall not exceed six soldi of Ravenna money per yard.

"Let the sisters wear cloaks and tunics of ordinary cloth of the same price. Let them not wear silk or colored ribbons. It is unlawful to use other than leather purses. Let them not attend shameful entertainments, theaters or dances and let them give nothing to actors and prohibit

that anything be given by their family."

"Let them all abstain from meat on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays."

Concerning fasts: "Let them fast continually from the feast of St. Martin to Christmas unless dispensed with because of illness."

Our Prayers: "Daily let them all say the seven canonical hours, that is Matinee, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline."

THE NICHOLAS RULE

In the Nicholas rule, however, which was promulgated by Pope Nicholas IV, which consolidated the previous Rule of 1221 and other additional provisions which the different Chapters and Visitors have incorporated therein, some of its provisions are the following:

"All who may happen to take upon themselves the observance of this form of life, before the undertaking or their reception, be subjected to a diligent examination on the Catholic faith and their obedience to the aforesaid Church. Solicitous precautions must be taken, however, lest any heretic or one suspected of heresy or even one of ill-repute be in any way admitted to the observance of this life. And if it happens that such a one was found to have been admitted, he should be turned over to the inquisitors as quickly as possible, to be punished for heretical depravity."

"Let the brothers be clothed alike in cloth of low price of a color neither entirely white nor entirely black unless for a legitimate and apparent reason the visitors should, upon the advice of the ministers, temporarily dispense with regard to price. Let them wear cloaks and furred garments. Let the sisters wear also cloaks and tunics of the same common cloth. Let the brothers and sisters not use ribbons or silk cords."

'Let them abstain from meat on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday unless a condition of sickness or weakness would suggest otherwise.'

"Let the brothers not bear offensive weapons with themselves unless in the defense of the Roman Catholic, the Christian faith, or their country, or with the permission of the ministers."

It is apparent that the rule which Nicholas IV promulgated in 1289 contained no radical changes. In fact it contained no changes in the content matter of the rule. In what it differed from the previous rules was in the legal arrangement of the precepts which was after the manner of other rules of religious orders. It is an adaptation of the primitive rule with some new additions up to his time as may have been required by the Cannon Law in the latter part of the XIII century.

In the course of time, Popes Innocent XI, XII, XIII and Benedict XIII issued new constitutions and statutes of the Third Order with the purpose

in view of adapting the Tertiary mode of life to the needs of the times. The rule, however, which Nicholas IV had approved in 1289 continued to be in force and at most the numerous statutes which the other Popes had issued were regarded as commentaries and adaptations of the Nicholas rule.

The Leonine Rule

With the advent of the Pontificate of Leo XIII he found the existing rule of the Third Order to be rather antiquated and he believed it to be a hindrance to many who wished to join the ranks of Tertiaries. He was not the only one of that opinion. The Capuchin Friar Reschio believed so likewise and stated that the wording of the then existing rule concerning the manner of dress, the divine office, fasts and amusements may create a wrong impression and attitude in the minds of many people. He suggested a reform in the manner the Nicholas rule was presented.

Whether or not the observation of the Capuchin Friar had influenced Leo XIII to revise the rule is immaterial. The fact is, that Pope Leo XIII realized the need of a revision of the antiquated Nicholas rule. Hence, his famous constitution "Misericors Dei Filius" revising the Third Order rule in what is now known as the "Rule of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis" promulgated on May 30, 1883. This Rule consists of three chapters, the first containing four sections, the second fourteen and the third six.

A brief explanation of this revised

rule of our Order now in force seems to be fitting on this occasion.

CHAPTER I

Reception, Novitiate and Profession

1. *Only those may be received as members who have their fourteenth year, and are of good character, peace-loving and above all of tried fidelity in the practice of the Catholic Faith and in loyalty to the Roman Church and the Apostolic See.*

Only good men and women are desirable members of the Third Order of St. Francis. Its purpose is to sanctify the individual and to regenerate society. The Order, however, welcomes saint and repentant sinner alike. Persons who lead a scandalous or not exemplary life should not be admitted into the Order.

The Order requires that candidates must be more than fourteen years of age as the idea is that "it is good for a man, when he hath borne the yoke from his youth." The Director, however, might admit very old and feeble persons who cannot live up to the requirements of the Order as isolated members, but should not affiliate them with any branch.

Members of religious Orders or Congregations that take vows cannot be Tertiaries. If a Tertiary embraces the religious life, all his Tertiary obligations cease as soon as he takes the vows in the religious Order he has chosen.

It is permitted to pass from one Order to another if good reasons are adduced to warrant such change.

Tertiaries cannot be Dominican and Franciscan Tertiaries at the same time without special permission of the Holy See (Canon 705).

Candidates must be of peaceable disposition. Jealous, self-seeking, gossip and quarrelsome persons are undesirable members of the Order. They must also show exactness in the practice of the Catholic religion.

It should be borne in mind that the Third Order is an order of penance but not a reformatory nor a refuge for wayward souls.

2. *Married women must not be received without the husband's knowledge and consent, unless their confessor judges otherwise.*

The purpose of this rule is self-evident. Peace, harmony and mutual understanding are essential requirements for a well ordered home and family life. The Third Order will not disturb this ideal state of life.

3. *The members shall wear the small scapular and the cord as prescribed; if they do not, they deprive themselves of the rights and privileges of the Order.*

The livery of Tertiaries is their garb, which has always distinguished them. Pope Benedict XIII said, "The Third Order is a real Order since it has a noviceship, a profession of vows, rule and a habit of its own". It is not a mere confraternity or pious society.

In the course of time the garb of the Tertiary has undergone numerous changes. When Luchecius and Bonadonna were admitted by our Father St. Francis, he directed them to wear

a plain garment of grey color which was the dress of the poor peasant of Italy — held by a cord of common knotted rope. This garment was worn always and everywhere as the ordinary dress as the Franciscans wear their brown habit and cowl. Later they were worn only in religious celebrations and assemblies or as a shroud. Both men and women wore a long grey garment that reached to the ankles and was held by a knotted cord from which hung a chain of beads. A cloak of the same color as the habit completed the dress of the Tertiary. In addition, for a head covering, a black veil was worn by the ladies.

The long habit was, later on, found impractical for men's attire and was officially shortened to a length just below the knees; the women, however, continued to wear the long garment, but discarded the veil and wore a hat of dark color and modest appearance in its stead.

Still further changes came. In view of the general tendency to shorten the habit and to meet popular demand, Pope Julius II ordered that a small scapular about three inches wide, of a dark brown color and sufficiently long to be held by the cord, be substituted for the garments worn until then; and this change gradually led to the small scapular and cord which are to-day worn by Tertiaries and to which all indulgences and privileges attach.

The long Tertiary habit is no longer worn at public gatherings of any kind without the special permission of proper authorities. Tertiaries

may be buried in the habit and this pious custom is growing and is to be commended.

Both scapular and cord must be worn constantly to entitle Tertiaries to all the privileges of the Order and the indulgences. If it is discarded for a day, Tertiaries do not sin but lose all Tertiary blessings for that day. However, to lay away the scapular and cord for a short time during the day or night would not interfere with the gaining of indulgences. At the time of the clothing a name, usually of some Saint or Blessed of the three Orders, is given to the postulant.

4. *All who enter the Order must*

pass the first year in probation; then they shall duly make their profession upon the Rule of the Order, pledging themselves to observe the commandments of God and of the Church and to render satisfaction if they failed against their profession.

The Third Order not being a mere confraternity or society but a real Order it follows in a great measure, the rules laid down by the Church for Religious Orders, i. e., the Tertiary is clothed with the insignia of the Order and begins his novitiate of one year after which he will make his profession of the Rule or promise to live as a faithful Tertiary.

(To be continued)

THE OBLATE FATHERS OF ST. JOSEPH

The St. Joseph's Missionary Institute is opened to all boys who have vocation to become religious priest in the missionary congregation of the Oblates of St. Joseph. Anyone who has this vocation may ask information or prospectus from the Fr. Rector of St. Joseph's Missionary Institute, San Jose, Batangas.