

The Rule, chapter 64, 7-19: The role of the abbot

St. Benedict

Once in office, the abbot must keep constantly in mind the nature of the burden he has received, and remember to whom he will have *to give an account of his stewardship* (Luke 16:2). Let him recognize that his goal must be to profit the monks, not to be preeminent over them. He ought, therefore, to be learned in divine law, so that he may know and himself be a source from *to bring out what is new and what is old* (Matt 13:52). He must be chaste, temperate, and merciful. He should always *let mercy triumph over judgment* (Jas 2:13) so that he too may win mercy. He must hate faults but love the brothers. When he must punish them, he should act prudently and not do what would be too much; otherwise, by rubbing too hard to remove the rust, he may break the vessel. And he is to distrust his own frailty and remember *not to crush the bruised reed* (Isa 42:3). By this we do not mean that he should allow faults to flourish, but rather, as we have already said, he should prune them away with prudence and love as he sees best for each individual. Let him strive to be loved rather than feared.

Let him not be excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous, or overly suspicious, since such a man is never at rest. Instead, he must show forethought and consideration in his orders, and whether the task he assigns concerns God or the world, he should be discerning and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, who said: *If I drive my flocks too hard, they will all die in a single day* (Gen 33:13). Therefore, drawing on this and other examples of discretion, the mother of virtues, he must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to flee.

Ordinatus autem abbas cogitet semper quale onus suscepit et cui *redditurus est rationem vilicationis* suae, sciatque sibi oportere prodesse magis quam praeesse. Oportet ergo eum esse doctum lege divina, ut sciat et sit unde *proferat nova et vetera*, castum, sobrium, misericordem, et semper *superexaltet misericordiam iudicio*, ut idem ipse consequatur. Oderit vitia, diligat fratres. In ipsa autem correptione prudenter agat et ne quid nimis, ne dum nimis eradere cupit aeruginem frangatur vas; suamque fragilitatem semper suspectus sit, meminieritque *calamum quassatum non conterendum*. In quibus non dicimus ut permittat nutriri vitia, sed prudenter et cum caritate ea amputet, ut viderit cuique expedire sicut iam diximus, et studeat plus amari quam timeri.

Non sit turbulentus et anxius, non sit nimius et obstinatus, non sit zelotypus et nimis suspiciosus, quia numquam requiescit; in ipsis imperiis suis providus et consideratus, et sive secundum Deum sive secundum saeculum sit opera quam iniungit, discernat et temperet, cogitans discretionem sancti Iacob dicentis: *Si greges meos plus ambulando fecero laborare, morientur cuncti una die*. haec ergo aliaque testimonia discretionis matris virtutum sumens, sic omnia temperet ut sit et fortes quod cupiant et infirmi non refugiant.