

## *The Life of Ælred of Rievaulx, 29: Rievaulx, the Mother of Mercy*

by Walter Daniel of Rievaulx

**Æ**lred made Rievaulx a house exceptionally good for the support of the weak, the nourishing of the strong and the perfect, the preservation of peace and devotion, and the fullest possession of love of God and neighbor. Who, though he were the most abject and contemptible man, did not find there a place of rest? What weak man ever came there and did not find fatherly love in Aelred and due consolation in the brothers? Was anyone fragile in body or character ever expelled from that house for any reason except that his own iniquity had harmed the whole group or had utterly abolished his own salvation? Hence, indeed, monks flocked to Rievaulx from foreign nations and the farthest ends of the earth, in need of brotherly mercy and compassion, and there they truly found peace and the holiness without which no one shall see God. And especially those men wandering in the world to whom no place of religious life would offer entry, when they approached Rievaulx, the mother of mercy, and found her gates open, gladly entered them, giving thanks to the Lord.

If later on one of these men presumed to reprove foolish behavior with his wrathful rumbling, Ælred would say, “Do not, brother, do not kill the soul for which Christ died, do not put our glory to flight from this house, remember that *we too are pilgrims, like all our fathers* (1 Chr 29:15), and this is the supreme and unique glory of the house of Rievaulx, that before all else it teaches us to support the weak and to meet others’ needs with compassion. And this is the *testimony of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12), for this house is holy because it raises for its God sons who are peacemakers. All men,” he would say, “both the weak and the strong, should find a place

Hic ergo domum Rieuallē fortissimam reddidit ad tollerandos infirmos, ad fortes nutriendos et perfectos, ad pacem habendam et pietatem et ad plenissimam possidendam Dei et proximi caritatem. Quis ibi licet abiectissimus et contemptibilis locum quietis non invenit? Quis debilis unquam venit ad eam et in Alredo non reperit paternam dilectionem et in fratribus debitam consolationem? Quis aliquando fragilis corpore vel moribus a domo illa expulsus est nisi eius iniquitas vel uniuersitatem offenderet congregacionis uel propriam omnino salutem extingueret? Unde quidem ex exteris nacionibus et remotis terre finibus conuolabant ad Rieuallē monachi misericordia indigentes fraterna et compassione, qui reuera ibi repperunt pacem et sanctimoniam sine qua nemo videbit Deum. Et utique illi qui vagantes in seculo quibus nullus locus religionis prestabat ingressum, accedentes ad matrem misericordie Rieuallē et portas apertas inuenientes libere introierunt in eas confitentes Domino.

Quorum si quis postea insulos mores cum strepitu iracundie reprehendere presumpsisset, ‘noli,’ Alredus inquit, ‘noli, frater, occidere animam pro qua Christus mortuus est, noli effugare gloriam nostram a domo ista, memento quia et nos *peregrini sumus, sicut omnes patres nostri* (1 Chr 29:15), et hec est suprema et singularis gloria domus Rieuall’ quod pre ceteris didicit tollerare infirmos et necessitatibus compati aliorum. Et hoc est *testimonium consciencie nostre* (2 Cor 1:12), quia sancta est domus hec, quoniam pacificos filios generat Deo suo. Debent,’ inquit, ‘omnes, et infirmi et fortes, locum in Rieualle pacis invenire, ibique, uelut in maris latitudine

of peace in Rievaulx and there, like fish in the breadth of the sea, possess the pleasing, joyful, ample rest of love, so that one may say of it: *Thither go up the tribes, the tribes of the Lord, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord* (Ps 122:4). Indeed, the tribe of the strong and the tribe of the weak. And no house is considered religious if it despises to support the weak. *Your eyes have beheld my imperfect being, and in thy book all is written*” (Ps 139:16).

pisces, gratam et iocundam ac spaciosam caritatis possidere quietem, ut de illa dicatur : *Illuc ascenderunt tribus, tribus Domini, testimonium Israel ad confitendum nomini Domini* (Ps 122:4). Tribus utique forcium et tribus infirmorum. Neque domus illa religiosa creditur que infirmos tolerare contempnit. *Inperfectum meum viderunt oculi tui et in libro tuo omnes scribentur*’ (Ps 139:16).