

COUNSELS

THAT WILL ASSIST THE NOVICE AFTER PROFESSION
TOWARD TRANQUILLITY OF LIFE
AND THE SPIRITUAL PROFIT OF HIS SOUL.

Having treated already of prayer and of the practices, spiritual and corporal, in which the novices are to be exercised, it remains to give them certain counsels as to how they must conduct themselves toward Prelates, toward the Community, and with regard to what they are to profess: points which afterwards, when they have made their profession, they will find profitable for tranquillity of life and the spiritual well-being of their souls; and the Master shall instruct them in these things, expounding what is here said in brief; for since one must treat with divers conditions of men it will be important to have some light on such matters.

1. First, try to keep always before the eyes of your soul that for which you came hither, which is to dedicate yourself to the service of God in the state and pursuit of Religion; and that you chose the condition of penance, humility, obedience etc., so that you might progress thereby toward perfection; and banish from your soul every thought and desire that does not accord with this, be it sinful or no, for the Religious came not to the Order only that he might not sin, but to serve the Lord and to walk in the way of perfection.

2. What is commanded by the Constitutions and Superiors hear as God's voice, and in man obey God, for you will find much light in this observance, and all will be for your contentment.

3. With the Superiors and Chapters of the Order conduct yourself with great simplicity; and when you are obliged to it, or it befits your office, or you are asked in due form what you have to say concerning yourself, or others, or the Order, speak for the service of God, and make known what you think and what you know of the course of events, and whatever reasons you may have, and so be at peace, bowing your-

self to whatever they shall decide, though it be not according to your will and judgement; for this is the duty of a Religious, and to such submission are you obliged by your profession and obedience and all right reason, and for this you came hither, to follow the will and judgement of others; the which you must establish as a first principle in your soul, for it is of great importance for your peace; and the contrary, beside the arrogance and the unmindfulness of your profession and state that it brings with it, may well cause you much disquiet and affliction.

4. Toward the Prior of the convent in which you dwell and the Religious thereof, with whom it is that you have most to do, endeavour to bear the love of a son for the Prior and of a brother for the Religious, for this will give you much light and peace as to the way you must behave toward them. Obey the Prior as God's voice for you, and, if you can do so without difficulty, manifest your soul and your desires to him and take him as your confessor, for this will put the Prior under great obligation to interest himself on your behalf, and the Lord will give him, as Prelate and as confessor, greater light for your guidance. Help him in every way you can without blame; lament his shortcomings in prudence and in knowledge — for he is, when all is said, but man — and excuse him as far as you can in God's sight, for all this is the duty of sons and very pleasing to God; and see that you do not go about murmuring against him, displaying his faults in public, for the Lord is displeased by such behaviour. Toward the Religious perform a like office as their brother, helping and enduring them in Godly wise as brothers, and when aught must be reported to the Superiors, do so according to the Constitutions with charity.

5. As to what you see done by the Superiors of the house, not knowing the reason thereof nor being informed as to the state of affairs, approve it, or at least judge it not nor think ill of it; for, just as he who is neither Judge nor has heard trial would be rash in passing sentence, so is the Religious who does likewise; and if you have knowledge of the matter bow yourself to the judgement of your Superiors, for it was for this that you came hither and thus will you curb the wretchedness of our corrupt nature which delights to condemn the doings of Superiors, and in this way you will find great tranquillity.

6. Look upon yourself as part of your Order for the sake of which you must live and be guided by your Superiors, as the part is ordered

to the whole, and adapt yourself to the good of your Community; and from this conviction you will reap great tranquillity when you are not allowed what you wish for and think you need: for either you are deceived, or the Superior, to whom you are bound to defer, is of another mind and will, or the matter is not in accord with the common good; (for often something could be granted to an individual which, when it comes to a reconciliation with the common good, is found to be inadmissible, and the chief consideration of the Superior must be for the common good, for the sake of which he must guide the individual by way of regular observance and monastic correction, and in the conduct of his life, permitting or denying him things as is needful for its attainment). By this means will you check your desires to change from one house or Province to another, or from one practice to another, and you will not be afflicted at any other thing you desire not being granted you.

7. Do not cherish particular friendships, but love all in the Lord, and the Superior more than the rest; and never lose this greater love and obedience toward the Superior, or do aught in his despite, for particular persons or ends.

8. Outwardly, follow the common life like the rest, and inwardly, distinguish yourself in the virtues with all your might.

9. Do not marvel at seeing that there are in Religious Orders some who are observant and others who are partial to latitude and a life of ease; for it is in heaven that all are good, and in hell that all are evil. This life is a net where good fish and ill go mingled together, and the same diversity must also be looked for in the Religious Orders; attach yourself to the better part, and let yourself be led Godward.

10. Do not concern yourself as to whether there be some in the Community who have greater ease and comfort than you, nor distress yourself over it, but rather hold them in pity and be anxious on your own behalf, for each one will reap the reward of his own actions, and the more observant you are the better it will be for you.

11. When you practise obedience let it be for obedience's sake, and so will you defend your soul against a thousand ills: for he who seeks to procure that the commands given him be prudent and to his liking seeks not obedience but prudence and his own preference in the way

he is governed, which is also what the pagans desire. Religious obedience sets its aim higher, and God our Lord guides the subject thereby toward his good and perfection, be what is commanded prudent or imprudent, be it gentle or harsh, for, if what it enjoins be free from blame, it is the voice of God for the subject, by which the Lord guides him toward his spiritual good. And so, it is of the highest importance for the Religious to have this habit of obedience for obedience's sake, and makes obedience sweet to him, for always and in all things he finds his desire.

12. As to poverty, take to heart what the Order has established with such deliberation, that its members are to live a life common and equal for all, to avoid the hardships and disadvantages that the liberty to possess things for particular use brings with it; and observe this as a thing of the greatest moment, for thus will you live in great freedom from cares.

13. As to chastity, be on your watch, for you have to do with a merciless enemy within you, who strikes and often mortally wounds, even in solitude, with but the interior act of delectation, and much more so in company and when given occasion; and so vigilance demands fasting, asperity of life, religious enclosure, and the holy exercises practised in our Order. And with this enemy the Religious may use no half-measures, nor any truce, nor make peace in any way: he must conquer or be conquered; therefore love these exercises dearly and do battle by their means, for in truth to be a lover of comfort and to be chaste do not go together. And the soul that has so little strength of spirit that its appetite yields to the temptation of feasting and ease of life — which is the weaker — is less likely to resist the temptation of aroused sensuality — which is the stronger, and is strongest when, in addition to corrupt nature and the promptings of the devil, it is assisted by ample fare and an easy life, and placed in the occasions of sin which, if we break faith with our enclosure, we meet at every step in our going abroad.

14. Since you came to the Order to be obedient, poor and chaste, be mindful of the fact when you are told to do something against your will, or when you lack something, and in your staying at home and in the penances of the Order, which are acts of these same virtues you have professed; and endeavour to rejoice at it, and take care not to seek an obedience to your taste, a comfortable poverty, and a chastity full-bellied and in the midst of sinful occasions, for so will you fall.

15. Remember that you renounced the hankerings of the world after worldly things when you entered Religion, such as liberty, doing your own pleasure, having abundance and ease of life, being thought well of, commanding others and being of consequence etc. And be watchful lest these worldly longings return to take up their abode within you in matters touching the Religious state, for it may well be that they will be worse in themselves and more difficult to cure.

16. Every thought that does not prompt you, and all else that does not quicken you, to fulfill the observance of what you have professed, to be humble, to mortify yourself, not to desire to be known nor esteemed, etc., put to flight as a temptation contrary to the state you have chosen and professed.

17. If you fall, in your frailty, into a fault of some kind, look forward to the monastic correction thereof, and love the person who administers it to you, for both are means disposed by God our Lord and by His Church for your good; they correct the past, and provide a curb for the future to stay you from running to your perdition, as many have done because they were not given this spiritual medicine in the beginning. And if being corrected when you are at fault is a great benefit and remedy, being corrected when you are not is a great mercy and crown from the Lord; therefore, if it should so happen to you, rejoice at it in the Lord.

18. From every occupation that is given you, endeavour to reap spiritual profit, first for yourself, next for the Order, and thirdly for others in so far as it does not prejudice you nor the Order: for this is the order of charity and well-ordered zeal for souls.

19. At times when sadness or aridity or passion invades your soul, make no decision, even if the matter seems evident, for, when the passion has passed away, perhaps you will take the opposite view, and in any case you will be better able to judge.

20. Do not measure the virtue of your soul by your consolations, even though they seem spiritual, for perchance they are not so, and even though they be, such is not the measure, but humility and desire for mortification and the habit of virtuousness.

21. Curb the impulses of fervor and desire in your soul at their outset, for often they disturb the reason and cause trouble, and even if they be directed toward something right and proper, you will accomplish it better later on in another wise, according to reason as God ordained.

22. Accept all that may befall from the Lord, saving your own sins, and let nothing distress you; come what may, do that which the Lord demands of you, and your deeds will always befit the occasion; as to the outcome, bow yourself to the Lord's will, and you will be glad whatever befall; in all things be abandoned to the Lord, and let obedience be the guide of your life, and you will walk this road to heaven with great peace.

(Translation by Fr. BEDE OF THE TRINITY, O.C.D.)