

A Sermon on the Rule of Saint Francis  
The Feast of Saint Francis and Saint Clare (transferred)  
1 October 2023  
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California

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On this day on which we celebrate the ministry of Saint Francis, and his ministry with his sister in Christ, Saint Clare, I'd like to quote a few chapters from the Rule of Saint Francis, and offer a brief commentary on how they might be lived out in our own context and lives.

**Chapter I: "To observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience without anything of our own, and in chastity."**

Commentary: The touchstone of the rule is that everything is bound and informed by the Good News of Jesus Christ. Obedience is primarily to this message, rather than to another brother, sister, prior, or any other official. First it is to obey the Gospel. How might this be summed up for us who live in the Gospel and outside of the order? Jesus summed it up pleasantly in his speech to the young lawyer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. There it is in its simplicity. Although at the clergy retreat this past week, one of the speakers had an interesting comment – If we treat our neighbor as we treat ourselves, we may do them a dis-service, for many of us do not treat ourselves well, and with self-respect. Something, to think about.

**Chapter III: "I counsel, admonish and beg my brothers that, when they travel about the world, they should not be quarrelsome, dispute with words, or criticize others....."**

In our working and living in the world we need to do so with respect. That is something that has been forgotten or unlearned in our own time when everyone who has an opinion different than ours receives a great deal of criticism. As we have learned in the past few Sundays it is incumbent upon us to look and to listen, not only to God who has a word for us, but also to those who seek to follow him in this world. We are asked to look, listen, and discern. We are called to greet them in love and respect.

**Chapter V: Those brothers whom the Lord favors with the gift of working should do so faithfully and devotedly, so that idleness, the enemy of the soul, is excluded...**

This is where Francis anticipated the teaching of Martin Luther who called on the church to respect every man and every woman's vocation – his or her calling in this world, seeing the work of their hands and minds as a gift to the whole community. So in our prayers we ought to remember all those who work for our benefit, often unknown to us. They ought to be named in our prayers, in our thanksgivings, and in our petitions directed for their good.

**Chapter VII: They should be careful not to become angry and upset over someone's sin.**

Observing and focusing on the sin of others is a human proclivity that offers nothing good in return. God has forgiven us all; we all live in the forgiveness that Christ offers. Looking only at the weakness of others becomes the stuff of gossip, and hatred. I have a sin I need to confess to you. I regularly watch the Real housewives of New Jersey, Orange County, and Beverly Hills. I do so because they make me feel better about myself. I find myself criticizing them for their choices in life, and for the troubles in their lives. So at the confession of sins, I hope you will forgive me. It will be a difficult habit to give up, but it will make me think of what I am doing with other people and my life with them.

**Chapter IX: I admonish and exhort the brothers that in their preaching... they ought to be brief, because the Lord kept his words brief when he was on earth.**

Enough said, just a couple more comments and then an Amen.

**Chapter X: I admonish and exhort the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, worldly care and concern, criticism and complaint.**

Again we each ought to examine our graciousness to one another, especially to those who have harmed us, or who disappoint us, or who have spoken ill of us. The behaviors we have with others need to be informed by the first principal of this rule – the Gospel, the Good News.

**Chapter XII: Whoever should, by divine inspiration, wish to go among the Saracens and other infidels must ask permission from their provincial ministers. so that we servants and subjects at the feet of holy church, firm in faith, will always observe the poverty, humility and holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which we firmly promised.**

Humility, I am reminded here of the prophet Micah who had good words for us who wish to follow in the rule of Francis, and of Clare, and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The words are simple, but the living out of this prophetic prayer will be difficult. He said, “Humankind, God has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.

May we like Francis and Clare learn to live such lives and to journey with God.

**SDG**