

RULE OF THE COMPANY OF SAINT URSULA

Prologue

1 In the name of the blessed and undivided Trinity.

2 Prologue about the newly begun life of virgins who are called by the name Company of Saint Ursula.

3 To the beloved daughters and sisters of the Company of Saint Ursula. 4 Since, most beloved daughters and sisters, God has granted you the grace of separating you from the darkness of this poor world and joining you together to serve his divine Majesty, 5 you must give him infinite thanks for having granted such a singular gift especially to you, 6 for how many great persons, and others of every condition, do not have, nor will be able to have, such a grace!



7 For this reason, my very own sisters, I call upon you, actually I beg and entreat you all: having been thus chosen to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God, 8 first, be willing to recognize what such a thing means and what a new and wondrous dignity this is.

9 Then strive with all your might to keep yourselves as you have been called by God 10 and seek out, and desire all those means and ways that are necessary to persevere and prosper till the end. 11 Because merely beginning is not enough if not carried through. Therefore Truth says, "Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit"; that is, "He who perseveres till the end will be saved."

12 And once again he says: "Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei et custodiunt illud"; that is, blessed are those into whose hearts God has infused the light of Truth, giving them the desire to long for their heavenly homeland, and then they will try to preserve within themselves this voice of truth and noble yearning.

13 This sort of person will undoubtedly be able to take care of herself: one who will want to embrace the means and ways necessary to such an end, 14 since there is little or no difference between freely saying: "I no longer want to serve God" and not wanting the ways and the rules necessary to be able to keep oneself in this.

15 My very own sisters, it is necessary that we be vigilant, and so much more so, as the undertaking is of such importance that there could be no greater, 16 in which lie our life and well-being, 17 and in which we are called to a life of such glory that we are spouses of the Son of God, and will become queens in heaven. 18 But one needs to be careful and prudent here, for greater labours and dangers may be involved when the undertaking is of greater value. 19 There is no type of evil which is not here to be resisted, considering that we are placed here in the midst of snares and dangers.

20 Indeed, armed against us are water, air, and earth with all of hell, because the flesh and our sensuality are not yet dead. 21 Our adversary, the devil, never even sleeps; he who never rests, but always (as Saint Peter says), like a roaring lion looks and searches for how he can devour any of us with his cunning ways, so many that no one could count them. 22 However, my very own sisters, you must not be afraid of this:

23 because if you strive with all your might for a future of living as indeed is required of true spouses of the Most High, 24 and to observe this Rule which has been composed to be useful to you, indeed as the road for you to walk by, 25 I have this undaunted and firm faith and hope in the infinite divine goodness, that not only will we easily overcome all dangers and adversities, but we will conquer them, and with great glory and jubilation.

26 Actually, we will cross through this momentary life with consolation, 27 and our every pain

and sadness will turn into joy and gladness, and thorny and rocky roads we will find flower-strewn for us, paved with finest gold, 28 because the angels of eternal life will be with us insofar as we will partake of the angelic life. 29 Now to the task, with courage! Therefore let us all embrace this holy Rule that God through his grace has offered to us. 30 And, armed with his sacred precepts, let us conduct ourselves courageously, like holy Judith after she boldly lopped off the head of Holophernes, that is the devil, so that we may be able to return gloriously to our homeland, 31 where from all those in Heaven and on earth great glory and triumph will arise. 32 So now, all of you kindly be attentive, with great and longing heart.

ABOUT THE MANNER OF RECEIVING

1 First of all, remember how each one who will be entering or be admitted into this Company ought to be a virgin 2 and should have the firm intention of serving God in this sort of life. 3 Then, she should enter it happily 4 and of her own will.

5 Third, she should not have made a promise to any monasteries nor to earthly men. 6 Fourth, if she has father or mother or other superiors, she should first ask their permission 7 so that the governors of the Company, [women and men] may talk with them so that [they may verify that] they do not have any legitimate cause, if by chance they should afterwards want to prevent her from entering into this holy obedience. 8 Fifth, she should be at least twelve years of age. 9 Remember, however, that those of a younger age can be received into the group so that they may be taught the truth of this unique way of life.

HOW THEY SHOULD BE ATTIRED

1 Once more remember, indeed, how the apparel and the garb ought to be modest and simple as truly demanded of virginal integrity.

2 Indeed, each one should go about with her bodice suitably laced up, and on top shawls or scarves of cloth such as linen or cotton, not too thin and certainly not transparent; and so should the shawls be. 3 Now, their clothes ought to be of simple cloth or serge, dark in colour or dark tan or grayish or a dark blackish colour as is convenient for each according to what she can do. 4 But the sisters can wear those same clothes which they are wearing when they enter this rule, but only for as long as these clothes last. However, of course, any type with flounces or braid on the sleeves or of any special cut or with any embroidery or other similar handiwork is never called for.

*5 They ought to wear a cincture cord as a sign of exterior mortification and perfect interior chastity.¹ 6 Silk is not acceptable, and not velvet and silver and gold; no slippers and shoes if they are not black and of a modest style. 7 No coloured scarves and kerchiefs, none of silk or any other kind that is too thin and transparent; no gathers on the camisoles. 8 Finally, no styles or varieties or anything at all transparent or other signs of vanity that could mar one's own conscience or that of others 9 and may be contrary to virginal integrity.

¹ Verse 5 has been identified as an insertion made after Angela's death.

ABOUT THE MANNER OF INTERACTING IN THE WORLD

1. In addition to this, remember: first not to deal with a bad sort of woman. 2 Then, not in any way to listen to the private messages of men or of women, especially in secret 3 Third, not to attend weddings, and even less dances and jousts and other similar displays of worldly pleasures. 4 Fourth, to avoid standing on balconies, even less at doors or in the streets, neither alone nor in the company of others, for many reasons.

5 Fifth, when walking on the roads or streets, to go about with eyes lowered, and wrapped modestly in shawls, 6 and walk quickly, without dallying or stopping here and there, nor

standing about to look curiously at anything 7 because from everywhere come dangers and various traps and diabolic snares. 8 Sixth, that if mothers or other worldly superiors should want to pressure them into such things or similar dangers 9 or should want to hinder them from fasting or prayer or confession or other kinds of good things, 10 be quick to refer this to the lady governors of the Company so that they may take care of it.

ABOUT FASTING

1 Yet again remember that each one should want to embrace bodily fasting too as something indeed necessary 2 and as a means and way to the true spiritual fasting through which all vices and errors are lopped off from the mind. 3 To this we are invited very clearly by the example of all saintly persons, 4 and above all the life of Jesus Christ, the only way to Heaven.

5 So holy mother Church clearly sings this in the hearing of all the faithful, speaking to God thus, “Qui corporali ieiunio vitia comprimis, mentem elevas, virtutem largiris et praemia”; that is to say, God, you who rein in vices through bodily fasting, [who] exalt the mind [and] give virtue and rewards; 6 since gluttony was indeed the origin of all our evils, so may fasting and abstinence appropriately be the beginning and the means of our spiritual goods and benefits. 7 But the sacred canonists, too, say: “Indictum est ieiunium abstinentiae, lex a Domino Deo, prevaricatio legis a diabolo”; which is, by the Lord God are fasting and the laws of abstinence commanded, and the transgression of laws is provoked by the devil. 8 For this reason we call upon each one to fast, especially on these days of the year: First, all those days which holy mother Church commands, which are all the days of Lent, the four seasons [i.e., Ember Days], and all the obligatory vigils. 9 In addition, all of Advent.

10 Thirdly, fast the forty days immediately after the Epiphany to keep in check the senses and appetites and lustful desires which lord it over the world at this time especially.

11 Also, to ask for mercy before the throne of the Most High for so many debaucheries which are committed by Christians during times spent this way, as is more than apparent to everyone.

12 Fourth, after the octave of Easter fast three days out of the week, on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

13 Fifth, fast the three days of Rogation, or litanies, that the Church celebrates before the Ascension to implore divine help for the Christian people.

14 Sixth, fast every day after the Ascension

15 and together remain in prayer with as much strength of spirit as possible till the day of the sending of the Holy Spirit, that is till the Easter of May,

16 beseeching that great promise made by Jesus Christ to his chosen and well-disposed people.

17 Seventh, after the Easter of May, return to the aforementioned three days of the week till Advent. 18 However, because one does not want anything unreasonable, you are admonished that no one ought to fast without advice, especially that of her spiritual father 19 and of the lady governors of this Company, who may have to relax and diminish these fasts as seems necessary, 20 because he who indiscreetly hurts his body, “Esset offerre holocaustum de rapina”; that is, would be sacrificing stolen goods, so say the sacred canons.

ABOUT PRAYER

1 Remember again that each one be solicitous about prayer, mental as well as vocal, 2 which is coupled with fasting; but Scripture says, “Bona est oratio cum ieiunio”; that is, prayer with fasting is good. 3 And one reads in the Gospel about Anna, daughter of Phanuel, who in the temple day and night continually served God in ieiuniis et orationibus [fasts and prayers]. 4 Since indeed through fasting one mortifies the appetites of the flesh and one's own feelings, just so, through prayer one beseeches from God the grace of the spiritual life.

5 Although one needs to pray always with spirit and mind on account of the constant need for God's help, and for this reason does Truth say, "Oportet semper orare"; that is, it is necessary to pray always, 6 yet again let us advise frequent vocal prayer 7 through which corporeal sentiments are stirred up 8 and one is disposed for mental prayer.

9 That is why each one should want to say devoutly and attentively at least the Office of the Madonna and the seven penitential psalms every day. 10 Because by saying the Office one talks with God, as the blessed martyr Alexander used to say.

11 Those who do not know how to say it will arrange to be taught by the sisters who do know. 12 Now, as for those who do not know how to read, let them want to say every day at Matins thirty-three Our Fathers and thirty-three Hail Marys in memory of the thirty three years that Jesus Christ lived on this earth because he loved us.

13 Then at Prime say seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. 14 Similarly, say as many at each of the Canonical Hours, that is at Terce, at Sext, at Nones, at Vespers, and at Compline.

15 And to give substance and even some direction to mental prayer, we call upon each one to raise her mind to God, and to practice daily and in the recesses of her heart to say, in this way, or another, or a similar fashion: 16 "My Lord, light up the darkness of my heart,

17 and give me grace to die rather than offend your divine Majesty at all today. 18 Keep my affections and my senses safe so that they may not lead me astray, neither to the right nor to the left, 19 nor turn me away from your brilliant face which soothes every afflicted heart. 20 Alas! How sorrowful I am that while entering the recesses of my heart, from shame I do not dare raise my eyes heavenward 21 because I am worthy to be devoured alive in hell, seeing in myself so many errors, so much ugliness and blame, so many monstrous and frightening beasts and shapes! 22 So am I forced, day and night, walking, standing, working, thinking, to cry out and shout to Heaven and to beg mercy and time for penitence.

23 O most benign Lord, deign to pardon me so many offenses and each of my omissions that I have ever committed from the day of my holy baptism till now. 24 Deign to forgive my sins, alas, even those of my father and mother and of my relatives and friends, and those of the entire world. 25 I beg this of you through your most sacred passion and your precious blood shed for love of us, 26 through your holy name—may it be blessed beyond the ocean's grains of sand, beyond the drops of the waters, beyond the multitude of stars.

27 I lament the fact that I have been so late to begin serving your divine Majesty. 28 Alas, till now I have not shed even a little drop of blood for love of you, 29 nor have I ever been obedient to your divine precepts, 30 and every adversity has been harsh for me because of my little love for you. 31 Lord, on behalf of those miserable wretches who do not know you, 32 nor wish to be participants in your most sacred passion, 33 my heart is wrenched, 34 and willingly would I shed my own blood (if I could), in order to open up the blindness of their minds. 35 However, my Lord, my only life and hope, 36 I beg you to deign to receive this my most vile and unclean heart 37 and to burn its every affection and passion in the blazing furnace of your divine love. 38 I beg you to accept my free will, 39 all of my own will, which of itself, because it is infected by sin, does not know how to discern good from evil. 40 Receive my every thought, word and deed, 41 finally, everything of mine, interior as well as exterior, 42 all of which I offer before the feet of your divine Majesty. 43 And I pray that you deign to receive them, although they be unworthy.

44 Amen."

ABOUT GOING TO MASS EVERY DAY

1 Again, let each one go to Mass every day, and see at least one entire [Mass] 2 and attend it with modesty and devoutly, 3 since in the sacred Mass are found all the merits of the passion of our Lord. 4 And the more one attends with great attention,

faith and contrition, the more one participates in those blessed merits and the greater consolation one receives. 5 Actually, it will be a communion of the spirit. 6 But remember not to linger too much in churches; 7 rather (if they want to pray longer), let them go into their rooms, and enclosed there, pray in the way and as much as the Spirit and conscience will dictate.

ABOUT CONFESSION

1 Again you are called upon to make a practice of confession, a necessary medicine for the wounds of our souls.

2 Since never will anyone be absolved of sin, if he does not first confess aloud his failings to the priest, as Scripture says: “Dic tu prius iniquitates tuas, ut justificeris”; that is, first say your sins, so that you may be absolved. 3 And Truth says to St. Peter: “Tibi dabo claves regni caelorum, et quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in caelis, et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in caelis”; that is, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will also be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loosen on earth will also be loosened in Heaven, 4 which clearly shows that a sin cannot be taken away except through the priest and through confession. 5 Because in what way will the priest be able to loosen the sin, if he does not know it? 6 And how will he be able to know what has been committed if it is not revealed by one’s own lips? In that case, the hidden sin would stay within one’s breast. 7 Therefore, each one should want to present herself before the priest, as if before God, the eternal judge, 8 and there, sorrowing, 9 totally sincere, and in truth of conscience, she should confess her sin 10 and ask forgiveness for it, 11 and she should always with fear and reverence stay before the confessor till she has received absolution. 12 About this, let it be made known if a place or a certain church has been designated, where a common spiritual father has been chosen, one who is prudent and of mature age, to whom each one may want to confess at least once a month. 13 And then, on each first Friday of the month to gather at this church, and there all together receive communion from this father previously mentioned. 14 In addition to this, we call upon each one to confess and receive communion at her own parish on solemn feastdays.

ABOUT OBEDIENCE

1 Again, we call upon each one to observe holy obedience, 2 the only true self-denial of one’s own will, which is within us like murky hell. 3 But Jesus Christ says: “Non veni facere voluntatem meam, sed eius qui misit me Pater”; that is, I have not come to do my will, but that of the Father who has sent me. 4 Because obedience is in man like a great light which makes every work good and acceptable, 5 and so one reads: “Melius est obedire, quam sacrificare”; that is, obedience is better than sacrifice. 6 And the sacred canons say: “Nullum bonum est extra obedientiam”; that is, it is necessary for everything of ours, if it is supposed to be good, to be done in obedience. 7 For this reason let each one want to obey: first, the commandments of God, since Scripture says: “Maledictus qui declinat a mandatis tuis;” that is, accursed is he who does not observe your commandments; 8 then, that which Holy Mother Church commands, because Truth says: “Qui vos audit me audit, et qui vos spernit me spernit”; that is, “who listens to you, listens to me; who scorns you, scorns me.”

9 Third, to obey one’s own bishop and pastor, and one’s own spiritual father, 10 and the governors [men and women] of the Company. 11 Furthermore, to obey their fathers and mothers, and other household superiors, 12 of whom we advise them to ask pardon once a week as a sign of deference and of preserving charity; 13 again, to obey the laws and statutes of the Lords and the governors of the republics. 14 And above all, to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit continually

sends into the heart, 15 whose voice we will hear all the more clearly the more purified and clean our conscience, 16 since the Holy Spirit is he who (as Jesus Christ says): “docet nos omnem veritatem”; that is, teaches us every truth. 17 Now, in conclusion, obey God and each creature for love of God, as the Apostle says, 18 as long as nothing is commanded against the honour of God and of one’s own integrity.

ABOUT VIRGINITY

1 Again, let each one want to preserve sacred virginity 2 not on account of making a vow through any human urging, but voluntarily making a sacrifice to God of her own heart, 3 since virginity (as, again, the canonists say) is the sister of all the angels, 4 victory over the appetites, queen of the virtues, 5 possessing all good things. 6 However, in every situation each one ought to conduct herself in such a manner that she not commit either against herself or in the sight of others anything at all that may be unworthy of spouses of the Most High. 7 Indeed, above all let her keep her heart pure and her conscience clean of every evil thought, 8 of every shadow of envy and ill will, 9 of every discord and evil suspicion, 10 and of every other bad appetite and wish. 11 Instead, be happy, and always full of charity and faith and hope in God. 12 And let interaction with one’s neighbor be reasonable and modest as St. Paul says: “Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus”; that is, let your manners and prudence be evident to all, and let every action and speech be honest and polite. 13 Not naming God in vain. 14 Not swearing, but only saying with modesty “yes, yes” or “no, no,” as Jesus Christ teaches. 15 Not answering arrogantly. 16 Not doing things unwillingly. 17 Not staying angry. 18 Not grumbling. 19 Not spreading gossip. 20 Finally, not doing any act, any deed unworthy especially of one who has the name of a servant of Jesus Christ. 21 Instead, let all our words, acts, and conduct always be to teach and edify those who deal with us, 22 having charity always burning in our hearts. 23 Furthermore, let each one be willing to be ready to die sooner than ever consent to stain and profane such a sacred jewel.

ABOUT POVERTY

1 We call upon each one, finally, to embrace poverty, 2 not only that of temporal things 3 but above all true poverty of spirit through which man strips his heart of every affection 4 and hope for created things, 5 and of himself. 6 And in God, he has all his wealth and outside of God he sees himself impoverished of everything, being a total nothing, and with God possessing everything. 7 But Truth says: “Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum”; that is, blessed are the poor of spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. 8 And just so, let each one strive to be stripped of everything 9 and to put all her wealth and love and delight not in material things, 10 not in food and over-eating, 11 not in relatives and friends, 12 not in herself, nor in any of her own attributes and knowledge, 13 but in God alone, and in the kind and ineffable providence that is his alone. 14 But the Gospel says: “Primum quaerite regnum Dei, et haec omnia apponentur vobis”; that is, Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things of yours will be placed before you. 15 And it says again: “Nolite solliciti esse quod comedatis, neque quod bibatis: scit enim Pater vester quia his omnibus indigetis”; that is, do not be anxious about seeking what to eat, nor what to drink, since your heavenly Father himself knows well that you need all these things, 16 as if he would clearly say: “Do not be anxious about any temporal need, since God—he alone—knows, can, and wants to provide them. 18 He wants only what is for your good and joy.”

ABOUT GOVERNANCE

1 In order to govern said Company it is provided that four of the most capable virgins of the Company ought to be elected, 2 and at least four widowed matrons, prudent and of honorable life, 3 and four mature men who have led upright lives.

4 These virgins should be like teachers and guides in the spiritual life. 5 And the widows should be like mothers, being solicitous about the well-being and usefulness of their spiritual sisters and daughters. 6 And the four men should be like agents, and yet fathers, in the ongoing necessities of the Company.

8a Now, the four virgins should want especially to have this as their undertaking, that is every fifteen days 7 or more or less as seems necessary, to visit 8 all the other sisters, the virgins that are in the city, 9 to comfort and help them if they may be involved in some dissension or in any other trouble, of the body just as of the mind; 10 or to check whether their household superiors may be abusive in any way 11 or may want to hinder them from some sort of good

12 or pressure them into some danger of evil. 13 And if they themselves would not be able to provide for them, they should refer it to the matrons. 14 And if even they cannot take care of things, it may be desirable to call together the four men as well so that all together they may agree to offer a remedy. 15 If it should happen that any one of these sisters, because she is an orphan, would not be able to have what is hers, 16 or, being a housekeeper or a maid or in another station, might not be able to obtain her pay, 17 or some other similar thing should happen so that it would be necessary to go to court, and to seek what is right

18 or arrange an agreement (which is the best that can be done), 19 then these four men, out of charity, like fathers, should want to take hold of this task, and to help according to the need that exists.

20 If one of the positions of the government is vacated either because of death or because of removal from office, then the Company may want to convene and elect some others in order to provide the correct number.

21 Again, if it happened that someone were unable to carry out her [or his] duty or behaved badly, let that person be removed from office. 22 If by God's will and provision it should happen that some money or other material things would be held in common, remember that good management is needed for them, 23 and they should be dispensed prudently, 24 especially to assist the sisters, and according to each need that arises. 25 If there should be just two sisters who are left alone, without father and mother and other superiors, then in charity let a house be rented (if they do not have one), and let them be assisted in their needs. 26 But if only one is left alone, then one of the others should want to take her into her home 27 and offer her the assistance which seems right to those who govern. 28 However, if she would want to go to be a housekeeper or a maid, those that govern ought to take care of this, so that she may be settled where she can live virtuously and well. 29 Should they be so old that they cannot support themselves, they should be graciously willing to be assisted and guided as true spouses of Jesus Christ.

30 Finally remember that if any of the sisters is ill, she should be visited and assisted and guided day and night, if she is in need of this.

31 If she is about to die, let her want to leave some little thing to the Company as a sign of love and charity. 32 When someone dies, then let all the others want to accompany her to the burial place, going two by two in charity and each one with a candle in her hand. 33 And let whoever knows how to read say the Office of the Dead; 34 and let those who do not know how to read say thirty-three Our Fathers and as many Hail Marys 35 so that if that soul should be in the pains of purgatory for any sin, our sweet and kind spouse Jesus Christ may pull her from those punishments 36 and bring her to celestial glory with the other virgins, crowned with that golden and brilliant virginal crown.