

STATUTES  
OF ALBACINA  
1529

1. First of all, we beg and exhort in the Lord all the friars of our congregation, and especially the superiors, who hold the position of Vicar of God, that with all earnestness they attend to the observance of these Constitutions and guard the beautiful concord instituted by the Lord for this Order. For if those things which lack sense and reason observe the order set up for them by God, certainly those who are endowed with reason ought to do so much more; and more especially they ought to be known for this, who like the angels stand before God and serve Him, who like a most clear mirror and like the flashing luminaries of the world are to lead others to God, the ultimate aim and end of all, by the holy words and the more holy example of their lives, and by whose example the other friars shall strive carefully to observe with uniformity those things which are contained in these Constitutions. We do not change the ancient manner of life, nor even to lay the snare of mortal sin for any friars, if at times it should happen that they act contrary to these statutes: but kissing the feet of all, we exhort in the Lord first of all the superiors, and then the other friars, that they take care to observe these Constitutions purely and simply and without gloss, until the Lord designs to set up something else through other servants of His, more enlightened than we are. Although we publish these Constitutions at this time when this small and as yet tender Congregation does not need many statutes in which to contain the norms for the perfect observance of the Rule, with the passage of time many things will be added, when the Order has branched out into more Provinces and subordinates friaries; nevertheless, we desire that these Constitutions, which common prayer, the Spirit of God, and religious simplicity have brought forth, shall always remain fixed and unchanged; which however we submit to the judgment and decision of the Holy Roman Church. These are the things therefore, that, it seems opportune to us to set up now for the good of the whole Congregation.

2. First of all in regard to the Canonical Hours: we exhort all and we decree that they shall be said by all in choir devoutly, with proper pauses, without any modulation of the voice, or variation or chant. According to the ancient custom of the Order, Matins shall always be said at night; the rest of the hours at the proper times, Sext and None excepted, which may be recited according to established custom.

3. Moreover, we decree: No other Office shall be added in choir, except the Office of the Blessed Virgin. However, if any of the friars out of special devotion desires to recite the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Office of the Dead or any other vocal prayers, he may do so alone or with a companion outside of choir, so long as the Office is not being said in choir; but not in choir or in the church, lest their voices should disturb those who are occupied in mental prayer. This is decreed first, in order that the friars gathering together, with greater devotion, shall duly recite the Canonical Hours, prescribed by the Rule and the Church; then also that they may find more leisure to give to private and mental prayers, which are often more useful and excellent than mere vocal prayers.

4. We also decree that in towns and cities where there are several churches, seculars may join the friars to hear the Divine Office. During the Sacred Triduum in Holy Week, Matins shall be said, not in the evening hours, but at midnight according to our custom, for this was the custom of our oldest fathers.

5. Again we decree that the friars shall by no means attend the funerals of the dead, nor carry out the obsequies, except in case of necessity. Nor shall they join processions, except those which are held on Corpus Christi and the Rogation days, and in public necessities. From all others, however, they shall abstain as far as they can, so long as they avoid scandal, in order that they may apply themselves the more to peace and solitude.

6. Again we decree moreover that only one Mass shall be celebrated in the friary each day, at which all the other priests shall assist, according to the ancient custom of the Order, especially since this was the mind and admonition of our holy Father Francis. Wherefore the superior shall not force any of the other priests to celebrate, except on great feast days or in time of necessity. And they shall take care with great diligence not to accept Gregorian Masses or any other number of Masses, lest they impose the necessity of celebrating on the priests. Moreover, the superiors shall by all means take care lest, led on by base cupidity, they induce the people to come to our hermitages or monasteries for the celebration of Mass, that they may receive alms from them. Finally we decree and ordain that they shall by no means bind themselves to celebrate Masses for seculars. However, if anyone asks us to celebrate Mass for him, they can prudently answer that we will pray for him in our Masses: then in the Mass a collect shall be added for him, in order to satisfy his devotion. But if it happens that a Mass is celebrated for anyone out of charity, we absolutely forbid the friars to receive a stipend or alms for it, or for any prayers said by them for anyone at all. But if anyone brings them bread or wine or something else necessary for food, they shall not be received unless it is done as though no prayer had been said for him. For the Mass and prayer ought to be offered to God purely and simply from charity.

7. We decree, besides, that the customary discipline shall be taken every day after Matins except in winter in colder places: then it can be transferred to the evening hours.

8. We also decree that the established hours and times of mental prayer shall be observed every day. The times set aside for prayer are: a full hour before Tierce in the morning and another after Vespers, which may never be omitted for any reason whatsoever, except by those who are sick for whom one hour suffices, or those who on account of some grave necessity are excused by the superior, whom they must obey by all means. Let them remember, however, that these hours are set aside for right order and the common good of the Order, especially for those friars who are of a colder and more negligent spirit: that by the positive prescription of these hours, they may be compelled to pray, which is so necessary for religious men. For the fervent and devout friars will not be satisfied with these two hours at all, but they will spend in prayer and meditation all the time that is left to them after their works of obedience, and like real men of prayer, they

shall pray everywhere and adore the Father in spirit and in truth. To this earnestness for prayer we urgently exhort all the friars, especially because this is the end and aim of all: that we should adhere to God in perfect charity.

9. We decree, moreover, that silence shall be observed inviolably by all from the first signal for Compline until the Conventual Mass has been celebrated, which law we wish to be perpetual. And besides, from Easter until the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the signal for silence shall be given every day after the morning reflection and the washing of the cooking utensils, and silence shall be observed by all until the hour of Vespers. But if any friar shall violate the time of silence, he shall accuse himself of it publicly and shall take the discipline for a penance.

10. We also decree that if, during these times of silence, any seculars or anyone else come to the monastery, the porter, for which office only a prudent, devout and obedient man can be chosen, shall inform the superior or another friar appointed to this office, who shall take care of him and edify him by spiritual conversation. But the others to whom that office has not been confided, shall abstain from talking and conversing with seculars, except for a gravely urgent cause.

11. We decree that Guardians and local superiors shall take care that some spiritual book always be read in the refectory while the friars take their meals, which all shall listen to devoutly, as is the ancient custom of the Order and is laid down in the Decretals: that reading shall take place at the table of religious. No seculars shall be admitted to the common table of the friars unless a most grave cause demands it. When they are admitted, the table shall not be covered with a table cloth, but the customary napkin shall be given both to the seculars and to the friars.

12. We decree that at table only one kind of food or soup shall be served. But at the time of fasts, a salad, cooked or raw, can be added. But if fish, meat or some other food unbecoming to the friars shall be given them as alms, they may eat it, at the proper time, with the blessing of God, so long as only two kinds of food are served at table, from those things which are available to the cook.

13. We decree that if any of the friars wishes to abstain from meat and wine, which we exhort all to do in the Lord, the superior shall not stop them, unless he sees that such friars are acting indiscreetly, or that such abstinence will obviously lead to their ruin. Wherefore the superiors shall exhort their subjects to this abstinence only with prudence and discretion. And the subjects shall not act obstinately or stubbornly in these things, but obey their prelates. At table only wine well diluted with water shall be used.

14. In the same way if any of the friars wishes to fast more than usual, or to keep some lent not mentioned in the Rule he shall not be hindered by the superior as long as he will suffer no harm by it, as said above, and uses the common food at the common table with others.

15. The furniture of our houses shall be cheap and simple, as becomes the poor, and as we were taught by our holy fathers, that in all things which pertain to the use of the house, scarcity, cheapness and poverty shall shine forth most of all.

16. We decree that meat, eggs and cheese shall not be begged for purposely. But if they are offered freely as alms by the faithful, they may be accepted so long as the virtue of holy poverty is observed and shines forth in all things. And if it happens that these things are sent to the friary by the benefactors, the superior and the other friars shall take great care that they do not abundantly supply for the needs of the monastery, nor allow themselves to be overcome by any avarice or cupidity, by relying less on Divine Providence, so that to increase their means of subsistence, they receive more abundant alms, and keep for the future a provision of sumptuous food; but instead, considering their state of most high poverty which they have promised to God, they shall refuse them. This is that poverty which, as our Seraphic Father Saint Francis teaches, makes us dearest brothers, heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven; which makes us poor in earthly things, but exalts us in virtues. Let this be your portion which will lead you into the land of the living. But when they do receive such alms, let them attend both to the quantity and to the quality, so that they do not violate the poverty of our Rule.

17. We further decree that the superiors shall be so cautious and prudent in begging alms that they avoid a long, future provision of things; but they shall beg the necessary things either every day or for a period of three days and at the most they shall set aside enough for the space of one week, having always fixed in their mind, and showing in deed their state of most high poverty, which we have promised God in the Rule.

18. Again we decree that no superior nor any of the other friars shall dare to keep in the friary a large cask or keg of wine for the use of the friars, but they shall use only a flask or flagon to hold their wine. They shall use only as many as are necessary for the family of friars.

19. We decree besides that if any friar wishes to be content with the habit alone, that is permitted to him with the blessing of God and of our Blessed Father Francis; this the Rule grants to him. But those who need more in order to bear the cold shall have a coarse and poor tunic which shall not extend any farther than to the middle of the legs. But if there are some sick or weak or aged friars who on account of necessity ask for more clothing, the superior may grant them a cloak or mantle, which shall reach to the fingertips. The cords, however, with which the friars are girdled, shall be coarse and plain and tied by simple knots, without any singularity. The superiors shall provide for the clothing of the friars according to their present, not their future, needs, placing all their hope and trust in the Lord who clothes the lilies of the field.

20. Let the superiors as well as the friars be careful that the width of the habit does not exceed eleven common palms. For those who are more corpulent one more palm at most may be added. The tunics shall be seven palms long. The sleeves both of the habits and of

the tunics shall be so narrow and poor that they suffice only for passing the arms in and out.

21. We also decree that those who cannot go barefoot, after they have made a few days' trial, may wear sandals, as we read that the Apostles and our first fathers wore. However they shall be poor, sewn with simple thread as becomes the poor, and by no means shall they use shoes.

22. We decree, besides, that preachers of the Word of God, when they make a journey to preach the Divine Word, shall take with them not more than two or three books, which they judge the most necessary for themselves. The superiors shall not allow those preachers to be idle whom they know have been endowed by God with greater preaching ability, but they shall send them into the Lord's vineyard that they may labour in it not only during Lent but also at other times of the year. Those who are deputed to that office must remember that the most important part of preaching is the life and good morals of the preacher himself. Wherefore, caring less for ornate verbiage and subtle speculations, they shall attend more to the utility of the hearers, and preach the holy Gospel of our Lord simply and purely. The other priests and clerics, who are not preachers, shall be granted, besides the Breviary, one spiritual book either manuscript or printed, and with that they shall be content.

23. We decree moreover that none of the friars shall take for himself what has been granted to another friar for his use, without the consent of the friar and permission from the superior. Those who do otherwise shall accuse themselves of it in the refectory before the superior who, having severely admonished him, shall order him to fast once on bread and water, lest he fall into the same vices again. Those to whose use something has been granted shall put some kind of mark on it, so that it can be distinguished from others.

24. We also decree that all the friars shall wear coarse garments as is commanded in the Rule; they shall make them from the coarser and poorer cloth which can be obtained easily in the place where they are. No one shall take a flask, a satchel or hat with him on a journey; but those who need them shall have only two pairs of drawers and a pair of handkerchiefs. They shall be careful that there is no singularity about their breviaries or the markers in them, or the rosaries which they use; nor shall they take anything with them which is more redolent of feminine levity than of religious gravity and contempt of all things.

25. We decree, furthermore, that no one shall presume to engage in literary studies, but the friars shall read only the Sacred Scriptures and some devout authors who will teach them how to love God and embrace the Cross of Christ.

26. Besides, no confessor shall be appointed to hear the confessions of others, who has not reached at least his fortieth year; and he shall be of tried life, devout, and adorned with virtues, and of such learning that he can distinguish between the various sins. No one is allowed to hear the confessions of seculars, unless a most urgent and absolutely

necessary cause demands it, which is left to the judgment of the superior. For ever rule suffers exception.

27. We decree moreover that the care of nuns of any Order whatsoever shall not be accepted by our friars, except with the express permission of the General Chapter.

28. We also decree that all books shall be put in some common room, except those which are granted to the special use of some friar. If another of the friars asks to exchange a book with him, he may never refuse, so long as he is not actually using it. But that shall be done with the consent of the superior lest they commit the crime of proprietorship. This applies to other things also, no matter how valueless they may be.

29. Again, no friar shall give any gift to anyone inside or outside the Order without permission from his superior.

30. No one shall write letters to his relatives or strangers, or send those he has written, or receive any, unless he has obtained permission from his superior.

31. We also decree that those who are to be received into our Order and way of life shall first be tried in some friary for a period of fifteen days, retaining secular clothes. The superiors shall simply observe this point of the Rule: that they go and sell all they have and take care to give it to the poor. Then they shall fulfill what follows: afterwards they shall grant him the clothes of probation, so that they distribute their things to the poor before they receive the habit.

32. No one shall be received into the Order who has not completed his fifteenth year of age, and not even then if he has too boyish a face. For such ought by no means to be received. The major superiors shall take care lest they receive anyone contrary to this decree. The novices during the time of probation shall learn the Rule word for word and commit it to memory; this obligation rests on the master of novices.

33. Besides, we decree that the newly professed clerics and lay-brothers shall be given a master to whom they shall be subject for four years, and be perfectly instructed by him in the way of the spirit and of perfection. None of the professed shall dare to presume to enter the cell of any novice without the permission of the master or the Guardian. And none of the novices shall enter the cell of another friar without the permission of his master or Guardian. Those who do otherwise shall fast a full day on bread and water and publicly accuse themselves of it before the superior.

34. The friars shall not have razors, except perhaps one in case some urgent necessity arises, or, to use in drawing blood from the sick. The tonsure of the friars shall be cut every twenty days with scissors.

35. Moreover, we decree that when the friars wish to erect new hermitages or monasteries, they take for themselves only as much land as seems congruous with our state of poverty.

36. Furthermore, we wish that there be no mention of any procurator or syndic among us. Instead it shall be a perpetual and inviolable rule with us that we shall have no procurator or syndic except Christ our Lord; our procuratrix and protectress shall be the Most Blessed Virgin Mother of God; our substitute the Blessed Father Francis. All other procurators we absolutely reject. We wish this to be observed inviolably.

37. We decree, besides, that no beast of burden, neither ass nor mule nor horse, shall be provided for in our monasteries, but our prelates shall travel on foot. But if on account of sickness or some other legitimate cause, it is necessary for someone to ride, let him use an ass, after the example of Christ who sat upon an ass and of the Blessed Father Francis, who when he suffered extreme need, was borne by an ass; nor do we read of any other kind of beast being used by them. Nevertheless, from the Rule they can learn at what times, for what causes, and to whom it is permitted to ride horseback.

38. We decree, moreover, that the friars shall not in any way wear birettas or hats either inside or outside the monastery.

39. Cases which are reserved in the Order are understood to be reserved to the superiors. From these no-one except the superiors can absolve.

40. Again, on Wednesdays all shall abstain from meat.

41. Again, no one shall lock his cell or anything else with a key, but the cells shall always be kept open so that those who wish may enter.

42. We decree, moreover, that outside the chapter no place shall be received for a dwelling without the authorization and permission of the father Vicar General. The places which are to be built shall be chosen outside the cities or towns. They shall be at least a mile away from the towns. And they shall always be subject to the power of the city or the owners who granted them to the friars. On this condition shall they be accepted by the friars: that they may leave them whenever the Rule cannot be observed there purely, or whenever the owner of the place wishes them to leave. Then without any delay or contradiction the friars shall depart from those places and go to another place, to which they were appointed by their superior, to do penance there with the blessing of God.

43. Again we decree that the monasteries which are to be built shall be built as humbly as possible, from mud and twigs, or from rock and clay where twigs cannot be had easily. The churches are excepted, for they must be built decently, but they shall be small because of our state of poverty. The cells shall be so poor, humble and narrow that they seem to be graves of the living and a prison for penitents rather than places where one dwells comfortably.

44. In all our monasteries where it can be done conveniently one or two little cells shall be built in some solitary place, a little distance from the dwelling of the friars, so that if any of the friars, inflamed by the Spirit of God to more perfect things, wishes by divine inspiration to lead an eremitical life in silence, and if that seems good to the superior, he may withdraw to it with the blessing of God and his superior and live a solitary life. Wherefore, we exhort all the superiors that if they find any friars suited for this life, they shall never deny them this solitude. But those who have withdrawn into solitude shall observe silence. Without the permission of their superior they shall speak with no one except their superiors and their spiritual father. Nor shall any friar approach them for the sake of conversation. Everyday the friars shall bring them the food necessary for their sustenance from the monastery in silence and without any noise, so that they may peacefully give themselves to God and to prayer, by which they will be more perfectly united to God.

45. We decree, besides, that if any already constructed monasteries are offered to us, they shall on no account be accepted unless they are humble and most poor, and both the church and the house are so cheaply made that they are in accord with holy poverty, according to the intention and wish of our holy Father Francis, as he himself admonished saying; The friars shall have small and poor churches and dwellings, and they shall on no account accept what is built for them unless they are built according to that holy poverty which we have firmly promised in the Rule. There they shall dwell like strangers and pilgrims. When such places are to be accepted, the superiors shall seek and follow the counsel of the older friars and those who are zealous for poverty.

46. And the friars shall not have vain or precious pictures in their cells; but they shall be content with some small and poor images of Christ our Crucified Lord, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, or wooden crosses decorated with the symbols of the Passion of the Lord, like the lance, the sponge or the reed, and other things like that.

47. Furthermore, we decree that both the Vicars General and Provincial as well as the Guardians may be re-elected to their offices in the chapter, as long as they have conducted themselves well in these offices, and have been conscientious in guarding the observance of regular life. But if the superiors, either major or minor, even the Vicars General and provincial, have not exercised their offices properly, but their administration has been dangerous for the confraternity, we wish that the discreets and vocals depose them in the chapter, and appoint others in their place. But Guardians who show themselves unworthy of their office may be removed by the Vicar Provincial with the consent of the Definitory. The re-election of the other Vicars General shall take place every three years, of Provincials, however, every year, and the same for Guardians. But above all, we admonish them that all elections are to be carried out purely and simply, for the glory of God and the common good of the fraternity, having this alone before the eyes of their mind: that regular discipline flourish more day by day. In the elections all shall avoid as worse than a snake, any striving for honours, campaigning or canvassing for votes. Let

those who do such things know that they are cursed by the Most High God and the Blessed Father Francis.

48. We decree, moreover, that the friars who suffer from no sickness or infirmity of body shall sleep either on bare boards or on boards covered with a rough mat or straw, but without a straw mattress. Those who wish may use a pillow of straw for their head.

49. The friars shall beware lest on any account they allow women to enter our houses or hermitages. They shall prudently forbid them to enter. For they cannot easily overcome the world and women except by fleeing from them.

50. We further decree that no bodies, except those of our deceased friars, shall be buried in our churches, unless by chance it would be that of some poor person who has been denied burial by the pastor on account of his poverty. If such bodies are brought to our hermitages or houses, they shall be received and given burial, for that is a work of piety. Nor shall they accept anything for the burial, but they shall pray God for his soul out of charity.

51. We decree, moreover, that the friars shall not take food outside of the established times for eating; they shall be careful lest while walking through the garden, they take, after the manner of boys, some fruit or anything else to eat without the permission of their superior; for such a thing is very unbecoming in a religious. But when they are on a journey and need food, before they eat, they shall ask the blessing of the major or senior friar; and this they shall do even when they go to another monastery, so that they eat nothing at all without the permission of the superior.

52. Besides, we decree that when the necessity of talking arises during the times of silence or at any other time, either inside or outside the monastery, the friars shall accustom themselves always to speak in a subdued and humble voice; for that is very becoming to a religious. Anticipating one another in showing honour and reverence, like servants of God and humble disciples of the Crucified, they shall abstain from every act of pride or contentious animosity.

53. We decree, moreover, that no friar, under pain of excommunication and privation of all offices, shall transfer from one Province to another without permission of the Father Vicar General, nor wander from one place to another without an obedience from the superior. When an obedience is given to a friar a companion shall be assigned to him when it can be done conveniently.

54. We further decree that the family of each friary shall not exceed the number of seven or eight friars except in the large cities, where about ten or twelve can conveniently dwell. In the rest of the cities or towns not more than seven or eight friars shall dwell, for this purpose especially, that the Rule and holy poverty may be observed more perfectly and without any impediment. For that was the wish of the holy Father Francis as we read in the Chronicle of the Order: that only a few friars shall dwell in our houses.

55. We decree, furthermore, that in our churches many altar cloths or priestly vestments shall not be had; but two or three shall suffice, one for ferial days and another for festivals. Nor shall vestments and altar cloths made of velvet, silk or gold be used, especially not chasubles, albs and palls which have fringes and crosses woven into them. And they shall abstain from all other vanities.

56. We also decree that the altar palls shall be simple, made from cloth alone, without any singularity. Nor shall they have more than two silver chalices, that absolutely all vanity, superfluity and precious things of gold, silver, silk or velvet shall be banished from our churches, considering especially that God does not regard vessels or vestments but the heart, if it is pure and cleansed from every stain of sin, and desirous and zealous for holy poverty, which as our holy Father Francis says, makes us heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven. It makes us poor in earthly things but exalts us in virtue.

57. We further decree that the old and worn habits of the friars shall be placed in a common room. An overseer shall be appointed for the community, who shall take diligent care of these habits, repair them, wash them when necessary, and store them away when they are cleaned. When any friar wishes to have his habit washed, he shall receive another from the overseer of the community, who shall return his own habit to him clean, not after two or three months, but after three or four days.

58. Moreover, we decree that the superiors shall by all means have these Constitutions read publicly once a week, so that the friars may bear them in mind more carefully and observe them more perfectly. Those who are negligent in this shall be punished at the will of the Vicar Provincial. And if he has not amended after being admonished by the Vicar three times, he shall be removed from office. The Vicars themselves, if they show themselves less zealous in promoting the observance of these Constitutions either in their own lives, or in those of others, or do not cause them to be read publicly, or do not inflict due penalties on delinquents, which nevertheless is left to their good judgment, and if they do not amend once they have been admonished, shall incur the penalty of deposition from office.

59. But if it seems difficult to any of the friars to observe all these things, let them remember that our Lord Jesus Christ appeared humble and poor in this world, and proposed his whole life to us as an example and a mirror, that in it we should contemplate and imitate humility and poverty. Let them recall that our most holy Father Francis, and all the servants of God taught the same thing; that from them we may learn that the beginning, the course, and the end of our whole life and conduct is this, that we may embrace the Cross of Christ the Lord and glory in it alone. Those who contemplate the actions and deeds of the saints will easily see that the whole life of religious men ought to be a continuous round of penances. For when the Blessed Martin, Bishop of Tours, was near death, he was urgently begged by his disciples to allow them to lay him on at least a little poor straw, and he answered: It is not becoming, sons, for a Christian to die but in sackcloth and ashes: and if I would leave you any other example, I could not be excused

from fault. We read the same of the Blessed Jerome, that he would scarcely allow his bones to rest on the bare ground. When he spoke of food and drink, he remembered that the ancient monks abstained so much, that even when they were faint, they used only cold water. To eat any cooked food would approach the vice of luxuriousness. Wherefore, dearest brothers, following the customs, example and doctrine of the saints, let us beware of the leaven of those who since they are enemies of the Cross of Christ, strive to draw us from it, in which we ought to glory and to be his disciples even unto death.

Farewell in the Lord for ever.

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