

PROLOGUE OF THE LONG RULES OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

1. Since by God's grace, we have gathered together in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ – we who have set before ourselves one and the same goal: the devout life. And since you have plainly manifested your eagerness to hear something of the matters pertaining to salvation. I, for my part, am under obligation to proclaim the justifications of God, mindful as I am night and day of the Apostle's words, 'for three years I ceased not with tears to admonish every one of you night and day'.

2. Since, moreover, the present is the most opportune time and this place provides quiet and complete freedom from external disturbances, let us pray together that we may provide for our fellow servants their measure of wheat in due season, and that you, on your part, may, like fertile soil, receive the word and produce in turn the fruit of justice, perfect and manifold, as it is written.

3. I implore you, then, by the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, let us at length apply our minds to the affairs of our souls and grieve for the vanity of our past life. Let us, on behalf of the rewards which are to come, take up the combat for the glory of God and of His Christ and of the adorable Holy Spirit.

4. Let us not remain in our present state of negligence and passivity and, by ever postponing to the morrow and the future the beginning of the work, fritter away the time at hand by our continued sloth. Then, being taken unprepared, with our hands empty of good works, by Him who demands our souls from us, we shall not be admitted to the joy of the nuptial chamber and we shall then bewail and lament the time of our life wasted in evil doing, when penance is no longer possible.

5. 'Now is the acceptable time', says the Apostle, 'now is the day of salvation'. This is the time for repentance; the next life, for recompense. Now is the time to endure; then will be the day of consolation.

6. Now, God is the Helper of such as turn aside from the evil way; then, He will be the dread and unerring Inquisitor of the thoughts and words and deeds of men. Now, we enjoy His longanimity; then, we shall know His just judgment, when we have risen, some unto never-ending punishment, others unto life everlasting, and everyone shall receive according to his works.

7. How long shall we defer our obedience to Christ, who has called us to His heavenly Kingdom? Shall we not rouse ourselves unto sobriety? Why will we not recall ourselves from our accustomed way of life to the strict observance of the Gospel?

8. Why will we not place before our eyes that fearsome and manifest day of the Lord, when the kingdom of heaven will receive those who, because of their works, take their place on the right hand of the Lord, but the gehenna of fire and eternal darkness

will envelop those who, because of their lack of good works, have been rejected and placed at the left hand. 'There,' He says, 'shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

9. We say, indeed, that we desire the kingdom of heaven, yet we are not solicitous for the means whereby it is attained. Although we suffer no hardship on behalf of the Lord's command, we, in the vanity of our minds, expect to achieve equal honor with those who have resisted sin even unto death.

10. What man who sits at home or slumbers during the sowing ever filled the fold of his garment with sheaves at the harvest? Who has gathered grapes from a vine which he has not planted and tended? They who labor possess the fruits. Rewards and crowns belong to the victors. Who would ever crown one who did not even strip himself for the combat with his adversary? According to the Apostle, indeed, it is necessary not only to conquer but to strive lawfully.

11. That is, not to neglect a small part even of what has been enjoined, but to carry out each detail as we have been commanded; for 'blessed is that servant whom when his Lord shall come, he shall find' – not doing anything whatever, but 'so doing' and again, 'If thou didst make thy offering well but didst not rightly divide it, thou didst sin'.

12. But, if we think that we have fulfilled some one of the commandments (I should not presume to say we actually had done so; for all the commandments form an interconnected whole, according to the valid sense of the Scripture, so that in breaking one commandment we necessarily violate the others also), we do not expect to be visited with wrath on the score of the commandments which we have transgressed, but we anticipate rewards for our alleged observance.

13. The man who withholds one or two, perhaps, of the ten talents entrusted to him, but restores the rest, is not looked upon as generous for paying back the major part of the sum; by his withholding the lesser part he is shown to be unjust and avaricious.

14. Withholding, do I say? When he who was entrusted with one talent subsequently gave back this same talent whole and entire as he had received it, he was condemned for not having added to what had been given him".

15. He who has honored his father for ten years, and later on strikes him once only, is not esteemed as dutiful but is condemned as a parricide. 'Going,' says the Lord, 'teach ye all nations, teaching them' not to observe some things and neglect others, but 'to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you".

16. And the Apostle writes in a similar vein: 'Giving no offence to any man, that our ministry be not blamed; but in all things let us exhibit ourselves as ministers of God". Unless all were necessary to attain the goal of salvation, all the commandments would not have been written down, nor would it have been declared that all must be kept.

17. What do all other righteous actions avail me if I am to be liable to hell-fire because I called my brother 'fool'? What profit is there in being free from many masters if I am held in bondage by one? 'Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin,' says the Scripture'. And what gain is there in not being afflicted with many maladies, if my body is being wasted by one?

18. Well, then, someone will say, will the large number of Christians who do not keep all the commandments practice the observance of some of them in vain? In this connection, it is well to recall blessed Peter, who, after he had performed so many good actions and had been the recipient of such great blessings, was told, upon his being guilty of one lapse only: 'If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me'. I shall not point out that his act bore no signs of indifference or contempt but was a demonstration of honor and reverence.

19. But, someone might say, it is written: 'Everyone that shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved', and, therefore, the very invocation of the Name of the Lord is sufficient to save him who invokes it. But let the objector hear also the words of the Apostle: 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?' And, if you believe, hearken to the Lord saying: 'Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven'.

20. Certainly, whenever anyone does the will of the Lord, but not as God wills nor with dispositions of love for God, his zeal is to no purpose, according to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who says: 'They act to be seen by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward'. Wherefore, Paul the Apostle was taught to say: 'And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor and if I should deliver my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing'.

21. To sum up, I note the following three kinds of disposition which necessarily compel our obedience: we avoid evil through fear of punishment and take the attitude of a slave; or, seeking to obtain the reward, we observe the commandments for our own advantage and in this we are like hirelings; or else, for the sake of the virtuous act itself and out of love for Him who gave us the law, we rejoice to be deemed worthy to serve a God so good and so glorious and we are thus in the dispositions of sons.

22. Nor will he who observes the commandments in fear and who is ever wary of incurring the penalty for sloth, keep some of the commandments laid upon him and neglect others, but he will regard the punishment of every act of disobedience as equally to be dreaded.

23. For this reason he who is in all things fearful out of pious timidity is called blessed, and he stands firm in the truth who is able to say: 'I set the Lord always in my sight; for he is at my right hand that I be not moved' — meaning that he would overlook none of the things that he is obliged to do. Again: 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord'. Why? Because 'he shall delight exceedingly in his commandments'.

24. It is not likely, then, that they who fear will overlook any command or execute it carelessly. Yet, neither does the hireling will to disobey orders.

25. How would he receive the pay for his tending of the vine if he did not do all that had been agreed? If by failing to provide one necessary attention he renders the vine profitless to the owner, who would pay a reward, so long as the damage remains, to him who wrought the mischief?

26. The third form of service is that prompted by love. Now, what son, having in view his father's good pleasure and giving joy to his heart in the more important matters, will wish to cause him pain as regards even the most insignificant ones? And this filial devotion he will render even more earnestly when he recalls the words of the Apostle: 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed.'

27. How, therefore, would they who break the greater number of the commandments be classified—they who do not serve God as their Father nor believe that He has promised great rewards, nor submit to Him as Lord? 'If, then, I be a father,' says the Prophet, 'where is my honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear?' — for he that feareth the Lord 'shall delight exceedingly in his commandments'. 'By transgression of the law,' says the Apostle, 'thou dishonourest God'.

28. How, then, if we prefer a life of pleasure to the life of obedience to the commandments, can we expect for ourselves a life of blessedness, fellowship with the saints, and the delights of the angelic company in the presence of Christ? Such expectations are truly the fantasies of a foolish mind.

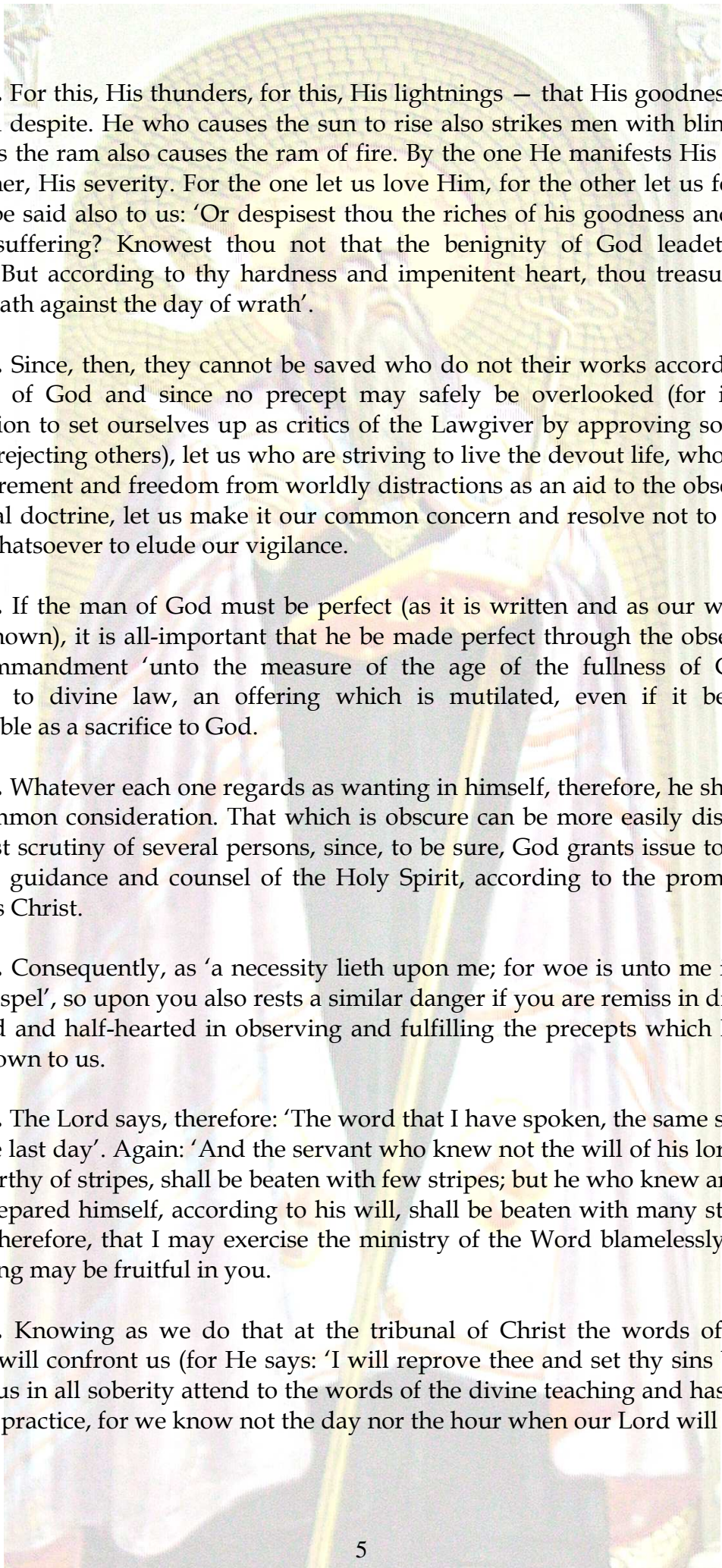
29. How shall I be worthy of the company of Job — I who do not accept even an ordinary mishap with thanksgiving? How shall I who am lacking in magnanimity toward my enemy stand in the presence of David? Or of Daniel, if I do not seek for God in continual continency and earnest supplication? Or of any of the saints, if I have not walked in their footsteps? What judge of a contest is so uninformed as to think that the victor and he who has not taken part in the contest should receive crowns of equal merit? What general ever summoned to an equal share in the spoils with the conquerors those who were not even present at the battle?

30. God is good, but He is also just, and it is the nature of the just to reward in proportion to merit, as it is written: 'Do good, O Lord, to those that are good and to the upright of heart. But such as turn aside into bonds, the Lord shall lead out with the workers of iniquity'.

31. He is merciful, but He is also a judge, for 'the Lord loveth mercy and judgment,' says the psalmist. And he therefore also says: 'Mercy and judgment I will sing to thee, O Lord'.

32. We have been taught who they are upon whom He has mercy: 'Blessed are the merciful', says the Lord, 'for they shall obtain mercy'.

33. You see with what discernment He bestows mercy, neither being merciful without judgment nor judging without mercy; for, the Lord is merciful and just'. Let us not, therefore, know God by halves nor make His loving kindness an excuse for our indolence.



34. For this, His thunders, for this, His lightnings — that His goodness may not be held in despite. He who causes the sun to rise also strikes men with blindness. He who sends the ram also causes the ram of fire. By the one He manifests His goodness; by the other, His severity. For the one let us love Him, for the other let us fear, that it may not be said also to us: 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and longsuffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath'.

35. Since, then, they cannot be saved who do not their works according to the command of God and since no precept may safely be overlooked (for it is great presumption to set ourselves up as critics of the Lawgiver by approving some of His laws and rejecting others), let us who are striving to live the devout life, who value the life of retirement and freedom from worldly distractions as an aid to the observance of evangelical doctrine, let us make it our common concern and resolve not to allow any precept whatsoever to elude our vigilance.

36. If the man of God must be perfect (as it is written and as our words have already shown), it is all-important that he be made perfect through the observance of every commandment 'unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ for, according to divine law, an offering which is mutilated, even if it be pure, is unacceptable as a sacrifice to God.

37. Whatever each one regards as wanting in himself, therefore, he should refer to the common consideration. That which is obscure can be more easily discerned by the earnest scrutiny of several persons, since, to be sure, God grants issue to the quest under the guidance and counsel of the Holy Spirit, according to the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ.

38. Consequently, as 'a necessity lieth upon me; for woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel', so upon you also rests a similar danger if you are remiss in discovering or languid and half-hearted in observing and fulfilling the precepts which have been handed down to us.

39. The Lord says, therefore: 'The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day'. Again: 'And the servant who knew not the will of his lord and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but he who knew and did not do nor prepared himself, according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes'. Let us pray, therefore, that I may exercise the ministry of the Word blamelessly, and that my teaching may be fruitful in you.

40. Knowing as we do that at the tribunal of Christ the words of the Holy Scripture will confront us (for He says: 'I will reprove thee and set thy sins before thy face'), let us in all soberity attend to the words of the divine teaching and hasten to put them into practice, for we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord will come.