

Once She Has Been Constituted

by St. Benedict of Nursia

An Abbess should prioritize the well-being of her sisters, lead with mercy and discretion, and strive to be loved rather than feared.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:3, Matthew 5:7, 1 Corinthians 13:4, 1 Peter 4:10

Topics: "Christian Leadership", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

St. Benedict of Nursia emphasizes the importance for an Abbess to remember the weight of her responsibility and to prioritize serving her sisters over ruling them. She is encouraged to be knowledgeable in the divine law, maintain virtues of chastity, sobriety, and mercy, and to show mercy above judgment to receive mercy herself. The Abbess is advised to correct with prudence, avoiding excessive harshness that may cause more harm than good, and to always be mindful of her own weaknesses. St. Benedict stresses the need for the Abbess to lead with love rather than fear, to be calm, considerate, and moderate in her commands, following the example of holy Jacob's discretion in caring for his flock.

Transcript

Once she has been constituted, let the Abbess always bear in mind what a burden she has undertaken and to whom she will have to give an account of her stewardship, and let her know that her duty is rather to profit her sisters than to preside over them. She must therefore be learned in the divine law, that she may have a treasure of knowledge from which to bring forth new things and old. She must be chaste, sober and merciful. Let her exalt mercy above judgment, that she herself may obtain mercy.

She should hate vices; she should love the sisterhood. In administering correction she should act prudently and not go to excess, lest in seeking too eagerly to scrape off the rust she break the vessel. Let her keep her own frailty ever before her eyes and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken. By this we do not mean that she should allow vices to grow; on the contrary, as we have already said, she should eradicate them prudently and with charity, in the way which may seem best in each case.

Let her study rather to be loved than to be feared. Let her not be excitable and worried, nor exacting and headstrong, nor jealous and over-suspicious; for then she is never at rest. In her commands let her be prudent and considerate; and whether the work which she enjoins concerns God or the world, let her be discreet and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, who said, "If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all die in one day." Taking this, then, and other examples of discretion, the mother of

virtues, let her so temper all things that the strong may have something to strive after, and the weak may not fall back in dismay.

And especially let her keep this Rule in all its details, so that after a good ministry she may hear from the Lord what the good servant heard who gave the fellow-servants wheat in due season: "Indeed, I tell you, he will set that one over all his goods" (Matt. 24:27).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-benedict-of-nursia/once-she-has-been-constituted/>

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