

# The Rule of St. Benedict: Chapter 7: Humility

## 1 Chapter 7: Humility

2 1 Brothers, Divine Scripture calls to us saying: Whoever exalts himself shall be  
3 humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:11; 18:14). 2 In  
4 saying this, therefore, it shows us that every exaltation is a kind of pride, 3 which  
5 the Prophet indicates he has shunned, saying: Lord, my heart is not exalted; my  
6 eyes are not lifted up and I have not walked in the ways of the great nor gone after  
7 marvels beyond me (Ps 130[131]:1). 4 And why? If I had not a humble spirit, but  
8 were exalted instead, then you would treat me like a weaned child on its mother's  
9 lap (Ps 130[131]:2).

10 5 Accordingly, brothers, if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, if we  
11 desire to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the  
12 humility of this present life, 6 then by our ascending actions we must set up that  
13 ladder on which Jacob in a dream saw angels descending and ascending (Gen 28:  
14 12). 7 Without doubt, this descent and ascent can signify only that we descend by  
15 exaltation and ascend by humility. 8 Now the ladder erected is our life on earth,  
16 and if we humble our hearts the Lord will raise it to heaven. 9 We may call our  
17 body and soul the sides of this ladder, into which our divine vocation has fitted the  
18 various steps of humility and discipline as we ascend.

## 19 The First Step of Humility

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20 10 The first step of humility, then, is that a man keeps the fear of God always  
21 before his eyes (Ps 35[36]:2) and never forgets it. 11 He must constantly remember  
22 everything God has commanded, keeping in mind that all who despise God will  
23 burn in hell for their sins, and all who fear God have everlasting life awaiting them.  
24 12 While he guards himself at every moment from sins and vices of thought or  
25 tongue, of hand or foot, of self-will or bodily desire, 13 let him recall that he is  
26 always seen by God in heaven, that his actions everywhere are in God's sight and  
27 are reported by angels at every hour.

28 14 The Prophet indicates this to us when he shows that our thoughts are always  
29 present to God, saying: God searches hearts and minds (Ps 7:10); 15 again he says:  
30 The Lord knows the thoughts of men (Ps 93[94]:11); 16 likewise, From afar you  
31 know my thoughts (Ps 138[139]:3); 17 and, The thought of man shall give you  
32 praise (Ps 75[76]:11). 18 That he may take care to avoid sinful thoughts, the  
33 virtuous brother must always say to himself: I shall be blameless in his sight if I  
34 guard myself from my own wickedness (Ps 17[18]:24).

35 19 Truly, we are forbidden to do our own will, for Scripture tells us: Turn away  
36 from your desires (Sir 18:30). 20 And in the Prayer too we ask God that his will be  
37 done done in us (Matt 6:10). 21 We are rightly taught not to do our own will, since  
38 we dread what Scripture says: There are ways which men call right that in the end  
39 plunge into the depths of hell (Prov 16:25). 22 Moreover, we fear what is said of

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40 those who ignore this: They are corrupt and have become depraved in their desires  
41 (Ps 13[14]:1).

42 23 As for the desires of the body, we must believe that God is always with us, for  
43 All my desires are known to you (Ps 37[38]:10), as the Prophet tells the Lord. 24  
44 We must then be on guard against any base desire, because death is stationed near  
45 the gateway of pleasure. 25 For this reason Scripture warns us, Pursue not your  
46 lusts (Sir 18:30).

47 26 Accordingly, if the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked (Prov  
48 15:3), 27 if at all times the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see  
49 whether any understand and seek God (Ps 13[14]:2); 28 and if every day the angels  
50 assigned to us report our deeds to the Lord day and night, 29 then, brothers, we  
51 must be vigilant every hour or, as the Prophet says in the psalm, God may observe  
52 us falling at some time into evil and so made worthless (Ps 13[14]:3). 30 After  
53 sparing us for a while because he is a loving father who waits for us to improve, he  
54 may tell us later, This you did, and I said nothing (Ps 49[50]:21).  
55 community.

### 56 The Second Step of Humility

57 31 The second step of humility is that a man loves not his own will nor takes  
58 pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires; 32 rather he shall imitate by his actions

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59 that saying of the Lord: I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him  
60 who sent me (John 6:38). 33 Similarly we read, “Consent merits punishment;  
61 constraint wins a crown.”

### **62 The Third Step of Humility**

63 34 The third step of humility is that a man submits to his superior in all obedience  
64 for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: He became  
65 obedient even to death (Phil 2:8).

### **66 The Fourth Step of Humility**

67 35 The fourth step of humility is that in this obedience under difficult,  
68 unfavourable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering 36  
69 and endures it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: Anyone  
70 who perseveres to the end will be saved (Matt 10:22), 37 and again, Be brave of  
71 heart and rely on the Lord (Ps 26[27]:14). 38 Another passage shows how the  
72 faithful must endure everything, even contradiction, for the Lord’s sake, saying in  
73 the person of those who suffer, For your sake we are put to death continually; we  
74 are regarded as sheep marked for slaughter (Rom 8:36; Ps 43[44]:22). 39 They are  
75 so confident in their expectation of reward from God that they continue joyfully  
76 and say, But in all this we overcome because of him who so greatly loved us (Rom  
77 8:37). 40 Elsewhere Scripture says: God, you have tested us, you have tried us as

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78 silver is tried by fire; you have led us into a snare, you have placed afflictions on  
79 our backs (Ps 65[66]:10-11). 41 Then, to show that we ought to be under a  
80 superior, it adds: You have placed men over our heads (Ps 65[66]:12).

81 42 In truth, those who are patient amid hardships and unjust treatment are fulfilling  
82 the Lord's command: When struck on one cheek, they turn the other; when  
83 deprived of their coat, they offer their cloak also; when pressed into service for one  
84 mile, they go two (Matt 5:39-41). 43 With the Apostle Paul, they bear with false  
85 brothers, endure persecution, and bless those who curse them (2 Cor 11:26; 1 Cor  
86 4:12).

### **87 The Fifth Step of Humility**

88 44 The fifth step of humility is that a man does not conceal from his abbot any  
89 sinful thoughts entering his heart, or any wrongs committed in secret, but rather  
90 confesses them humbly. 45 Concerning this, Scripture exhorts us: Make known  
91 your way to the Lord and hope in him (Ps 36[37]:5). 46 And again: Confess to the  
92 Lord, for he is good; his mercy is forever (Ps 105[106]:1; Ps 117[118]:1). 47 So  
93 too the Prophet: To you I have acknowledged my offence; my faults I have not  
94 concealed. 48 I have said: Against myself I will report my faults to the Lord, and  
95 you have forgiven the wickedness of my heart (Ps 31 [32]:5).

### **96 The Sixth Step of Humility**

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97 49 The sixth step of humility is that a monk is content with the lowest and most  
98 menial treatment, and regards himself as a poor and worthless workman in  
99 whatever task he is given, 50 saying to himself with the Prophet: I am insignificant  
100 and ignorant, no better than a beast before you, yet I am with you always (Ps  
101 72[73]:22-23).

### **102 The Seventh Step of Humility**

103 51 The seventh step of humility is that a man not only admits with his tongue but is  
104 also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value, 52 humbling  
105 himself and saying with the Prophet: I am truly a worm, not a man, scorned by  
106 men and despised by the people (Ps 21[22]:7). 53 I was exalted, then I was  
107 humbled and overwhelmed with confusion (Ps 87[88]:16). 54 And again: It is a  
108 blessing that you have humbled me so that I can learn your commandments (Ps  
109 118[119]:71,73).

### **110 The Eighth Step of Humility**

111 55 The eighth step of humility is that a monk does only what is endorsed by the  
112 common rule of the monastery and the example set by his superiors.

### **113 The Ninth Step of Humility**

114 56 The ninth step of humility is that a monk controls his tongue and remains silent,  
115 not speaking unless asked a question, 57 for Scripture warns, In a flood of words

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116 you will not avoid sinning (Prov 10:19), 58 and, a talkative man goes about  
117 aimlessly on earth (Ps 139[140]:12).

### **118 The Tenth Step of Humility**

119 59 The tenth step of humility is that he is not given to ready laughter, for it is  
120 written: Only a fool raises his voice in laughter (Sir 21:23).

### **121 The Eleventh Step of Humility**

122 60 The eleventh step of humility is that a monk speaks gently and without laughter,  
123 seriously and with becoming modesty, briefly and reasonably, but without raising  
124 his voice, 61 as it is written: “A wise man is known by his few words.”

### **125 The Twelfth Step of Humility**

126 62 The twelfth step of humility is that a monk always manifests humility in his  
127 bearing no less than in his heart, so that it is evident 63 at the Work of God, in the  
128 oratory, the monastery or the garden, on a journey or in the field, or anywhere else.  
129 Whether he sits, walks or stands, his head must be bowed and his eyes cast down.  
130 64 Judging himself always guilty on account of his sins, he should consider that he  
131 is already at the fearful judgment, 65 and constantly say in his heart what the  
132 publican in the Gospel said with downcast eyes: Lord, I am a sinner, not worthy to  
133 look up to heaven (Luke 18:13). 66 And with the Prophet: I am bowed down and  
134 humbled in every way (Ps 37[38]:7-9; Ps 118[119]:107).

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### 135 Conclusion

136 67 Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will  
137 quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear (I John 4:18). 68  
138 Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to  
139 observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, 69 no longer out of fear of  
140 hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. 70 All this the Lord  
141 will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vice  
142 and sins.