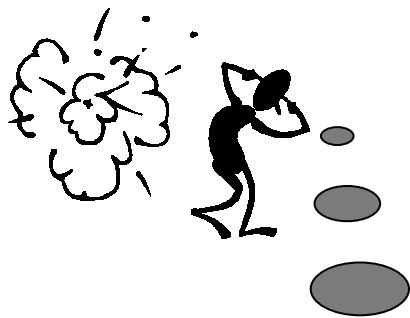


ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS  
- Initial Formation for Enquirers -

Chapter 3: Rule of the OFS

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: To observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people.

Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to the careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to Life, and Life to the Gospel. [Rule, 4]



I think I'd like to be a part of this—following St Francis, enjoying friendship and meeting with other Franciscans. But 'rules'.....I'm not sure I like the sound of that!

I know just what you're thinking!

You do?  
How's that?



I think I might lie down!



Because it's pretty common! Most people tend to get a bit worried when they hear this for the first time. I know I did. But remember, I said 'Rule' - not rules! So, let me take just a little time to explain what this means for us.  
Are you sitting comfortably?

When we think of 'rules' we tend to think of things like:

School **Rules** [& punishments for breaking them]

'**Rules** are made to be broken' [restricting creativity/individuality or not taken seriously]

'**Rules** that must be obeyed!' [*Fawlty Towers* 'Don't mention the War!']



Therefore, in the OFS we don't use the term in the plural ['rules'] but only in the singular—the Rule (of the OFS) - it is a 'whole', and it is there for *discipline* [to make of us disciples—those who are 'learning' — just as Jesus himself called disciples and taught them]; not to punish us but to perfect us, transforming us into Christ-like people following in the footprints of St Francis. And Rule [Gk 'canon'] - basically a 'straight rod' - here signifies *measurement*: I measure how I am doing.

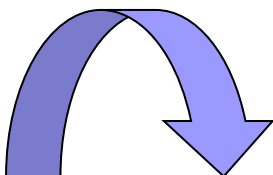
Our

- 'rule is a return to the original simplicity of Francis' primitive rule, avoiding as it does a multiplicity of regulations and presenting instead **ideals of Gospel living** to be pursued.
- 'It is a great **spiritual challenge to the Christians of our time**, just as Francis was to the Christians of the 13th century,
- 'and as the Holy Spirit and the Church desire him to be for Christians of every generation.
- 'It offers the **pure milk of the Gospel** in a manner such that it may be assimilated by everyone into their **own personal life**, provided they really will to **be conformed to Christ**.' \*1

Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration, began to come to St Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of these, the holy one of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly grace, watered with showers of gifts and he adorned the field of their hearts with the flowers of perfection. He is without question an outstanding craftsman, for through his spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching,



and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved. Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way to salvation. \*2



SO, BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION, LET US TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT PART OF THIS RULE. ON THE NEXT PAGE YOU WILL FIND A SECTION OF THE RULE WHICH DESCRIBES THE "WAY OF LIFE" WE ARE SPEAKING ABOUT AS MEMBERS OF AN ORDER; BECAUSE AN ESSENTIAL THING FOR AN ORDER IS THAT IT HAS ITS OWN RULE! [not rules!]

**Exercise:** Consider the parts of the text overleaf that are in **blue**.

\*1 *Handbook of the OFS*, p 12

\*2 Thomas of Celano *First Life of St Francis*, XV

## 3 Chapter Two: THE WAY OF LIFE , 4-9

4. The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: To observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people.

Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to the careful reading of the Gospel, and going from **Gospel to Life, and Life to the Gospel**.

5. Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, the Church, and Liturgical activity.



The faith of St Francis, who often said 'I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood', should be the inspiration and pattern of their **Eucharistic** life.

6. They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by **profession**. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

Called like St Francis to **rebuild the Church** and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full

communion with the Pope, bishops and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

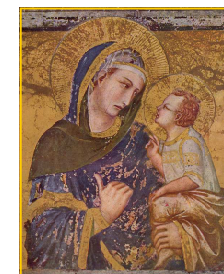
7. United by their vocation as 'brothers and sisters of penance', and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls '**conversion**'. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

8. As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let **prayer and contemplation** be the soul of all that they are and do.

Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in Liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

9. The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by **imitating her complete self-giving** and by praying earnestly and confidently.



**Q. So, what does living the Rule as a Secular Franciscan mean?**

**It's not**

slavish obedience to a set of 'rules'  
but

**it is**

a loving, willing, fraternal embracing  
of a Way of Life described, empowered  
and embodied in a Rule, a way  
of life that St Francis first gave to  
those who had responded to the  
call of God to live as Franciscans in  
the world.