**Prologue**

January 4, May 5, September 4

*If we wish to dwell in the tent of this kingdom, we will never arrive there unless we run there by doing good deeds. But let us ask the Lord with the prophet: “Who will dwell in your tent, Lord; who will find rest upon your holy mountain?” (Ps. 14[15]:1). After this question, [sisters and] brothers, let us listen well to what the Lord says in reply, for he shows us the way to his tent. “One who walks without blemish, he says, and is just in all their dealings; who speak truth from their heart and have not practiced deceit with their tongue; who has not wronged a fellow in any way, nor listened to slanders against their neighbour” (Ps. 14[15]:2,3). They have foiled the evil one, the devil, at every turn, flinging both him and his promptings far from the sight of their heart. While these temptations were still “young, they caught hold of them and dashed them against Christ” (Ps. 14[15]:4, 136[137]:9). These people fear the Lord, and do not become elated over their good deeds; they judge it as the Lord’s power, not their own, that brings about the good in them. “They praise” (Ps. 14[15]:4) the Lord working in them, and say with the Prophet: “Not to us, Lord, not to us give the glory, but to your name alone” (Ps. 114[115]:1).*

The rule here speaks of doing good deeds in God’s strength, not our own. Trying to live life by my strength alone is living with attention caught in a ‘closed system of self-consciousness’[[1]](#footnote-1). In this system we are separated from the fullness of who we are, and who God is, at our depths. Life can then become a forceful and stubborn struggle. We need others around us who love us enough to help us see when we fall into this trap. And we fall in it often. This is why human life needs community.

Being caught in this closed system is the product of a lack in the experience of real love. This is part of the human journey. To counter this, the rule asks us to be courageous and embrace the setting aside of our own isolated agenda of ego security and identity maintenance. We do this together, stumbling along in the practical ways of love. The Rule is a guide and a framework for our stumbling. As we stumble, we learn to walk.

In time we come to appreciate more and more that we cannot make ourselves good with our deeds; nor can we force our deeds to be a consistent reflection of the goodness in us. The good in us has its source in the divine life. Only God is good (Mark 10:18). Within us is the goodness that we already are as a divine creation. Closed off from this we forget it.

The rule sets out a way in which we, together, can practice participating in divine goodness. As we learn to live from this goodness and be more attentive to it life becomes more about the revelation of this goodness (God’s glory) in our lives and less about attention on me. Someone grounded enough in the love that is in all of us is secure enough in their psyche to allow the attention of others to pass them by. Community can then grow in being an expression of divine glory as we embrace the spiritual reality of Love.

Benedict teaches us here that human goodness is a just and pure heart, honesty, and integrity. As we practice loving in community it is grace that loves us into a wholeness that sees us more and more living from this goodness, centred in God. Our participation in God’s goodness shows us our goodness in God. Divinity is the good that opens the closed system of self-consciousness to the goodness at our depths.

The antithesis of goodness is temptation. These tendencies of attitude and desire, grow in us from an early age. As we develop, we learn to lie as a way of self-protection. Our fear of rejection compromises our human growth in goodness. The world around us seems to confirm the lie that we are unlovable. Self-consciousness coalesces into self-defence.

But with us is Christ – a consciousness both human and divine, living both within and among us. Benedict maintains that if we can see these promptings in us early enough, while they are “still young” we can, with practice, allow Christ to melt them away. The agenda of egoism is then dashed, thwarted. This is the influence of the name of Christ.

Living in a meditating community can help us grow in this early seeing. We can become aware of our inner tendencies to turn from the good, and how we act and react accordingly. Meditation trains attention on the good of Christ deep in us, allowing grace to develop space between our actions and our distorted promptings as they melt away. This is our release from self-consciousness. This is the work of a meditating community, the work of finding rest on God’s “holy mountain”. To rest there, we must do some climbing. We climb together, growing in divine strength and goodness.

Besides you know the time has come; now is the moment for you to stop sleeping and wake up, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first began to believe. The night is far gone, day is near; so let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light…Rather put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its desires.[[2]](#footnote-2) (Romans 13:11-12,14, RNJB).

1. John Main, *Heart of Creation*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘…and stop worrying about how your disordered natural inclinations may be fulfilled.’ (NJB) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)