**Prologue**

January 6, May 7, September 6

*Brother [and sisters], that we have asked the Lord who will dwell in his tent, we have heard the instruction for dwelling in it, but only if we fulfil the obligations of those who live there. We must, then, prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions. What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace. If we wish to reach eternal life, even as we avoid the torments of hell, then – while there is still time, while we are in this body and have time to accomplish all these things by the light of life – we must run and do now what will profit us forever.*

The rule is a guide for living more and more deeply into the God-life. Christianity at its best is a witness to this God-life as communal love. The holy tent is communal love. If we want our human lives, here and now, to be an expression of this love then we need to listen and respond to this communion of Love within and among us. To listen and to respond is to obey. Obedience to this Love is not coercive; it is the consoling attraction of our hearts to the ultimate meaning of living together and loving truly. True love is always and somehow communal.

Listening and responding to this God-life has become a battle. The rule accepts this and helps us to engage the battle well. Struggle has become a part of the journey of life. For many struggle *is* life. We are running a marathon. And like a marathon runner we can become attentive to the experience of running. What made today’s running a challenge? What made it invigorating? While there is still time in this part of life our senses can be developing, helping us to grow in the self-knowledge needed so that we might be better prepared to let go into the grace of Love. Grace helps us to hear what we cannot hear by ourselves.

But as we live we can get stuck running alone, becoming isolated. Life could be about growing into our aloneness as blessing, but we can forget to ask for help. We forget that grace is ready, active, and waiting in our hearts and our relationships. Being stuck in aloneness can turn into loneliness, and this can be a ‘living hell’. Isolation is a torment, a pattern of life fashioned by our circumstance and decisions.

The forgetting of grace, and isolation: these are attention caught in ego and self-consciousness. This is a hard thing to hear and to learn. The learning requires healing. Learning then becomes a foundation on which gentleness, compassion, and gratitude grow.

For all its struggle, Christian community, in all its forms, is about allowing Love to be known on earth. It’s about community being, to the extent that we can be, an image of heaven on earth. This is, of course, the ideal. However, we run, follow, listen, are attentive, and we wake up. We move, bit by bit, in the practicalities of each day and with each other, further into grace, further into the tent, deeper into communal love.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you should love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:9-12, RNJB).