

RB 64 Choosing a Prioress

(Choosing an abbot/prioress vv 1-6)

In **choosing** a prioress, the **guiding principle** should always be that **the one placed in office** be the one **selected** either by **the whole community** acting unanimously **out of reverence for God**, or by some part of the community, **no matter how small, which possesses sounder judgment.** [Chosen by the monastics] 2 **Goodness of life and wisdom** in teaching must be the criteria for choosing the one to be made prioress even if she is the **last in community rank.** [criteria: goodness of life, wisdom of teaching]

3 **May God forbid** that a whole community should conspire to elect a prioress who goes along with **its own evil ways.** But if it does, 4 and if the **bishop of the diocese or any Benedictine leaders or other Christians in the area** come to know of these evil ways to any extent, 5 they must block the success of this wicked conspiracy, and set a **worthy person in charge of God's house.** 6 They may be sure that they will receive a **generous** reward for this, if they do it with **pure motives** and zeal for God's honor. Conversely, they may be equally sure that **to neglect to do so is sinful.** [Intervention by local church]

(Second directory for the abbot/prioress v 7-22)

7 Once in office, the prioress **must keep constantly in mind** the nature of the burden she has **received**, and remember to whom she will have *to give an account of her stewardship* (Lk 16:2). [Nature of the burden & accountability to God] 8 **Let her recognize** that the goal must be profit for the community members, not preeminence for herself. [Profit the monastics] 9 She ought to be **learned in divine law**, so that she has a treasury of knowledge from which she can **bring out what is new and what is old** (Mt 13:52). [to be learned in divine law, to be chaste, temperate, & merciful] 10 The prioress must be **chaste, temperate and merciful**, always **letting mercy triumph over judgment** (Jas 2:13) so that she too may win

mercy. 11 She must hate faults but **love the members**. 12 When she must **punish** them, she should use prudence and **avoid extremes; otherwise, by rubbing too hard to remove the rust**, she may break the vessel. 13 She is to **distrust** her own **frailty** and remember *not to crush the bruised reed* (Isa 42:3). [vv10-13 merciful & prudent treatment of the monastics] 14 By this we do not mean that she should allow faults to **flourish**, but rather she should **prune** them away with prudence and love **as she sees best for each individual**. [concern for individuals] 15 **Let her strive to be loved rather than feared.**

16 **Excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous** or over **suspicious** she must not be. Such a person is **never at rest**. [no extreme qualities] 17 Instead, she must show forethought and consideration in her orders, and whether the task she assigns concerns God or the **world**, she should be discerning and moderate, 18 bearing in mind the **discretion** of holy Jacob, who said: *if I drive my flocks too hard, they will all die in a single day* (Gen 33:13). 19 Therefore, **drawing on this and other examples of discretion**, she must so **arrange** everything that **the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from**. [vv 17-19 discretion]

20 She must, above all, keep this **rule** in every detail, 21 so that when she has **ministered well** she will hear from God **what that good servant heard** who gave the other members of the household grain at the proper time: 22 *I tell you solemnly, God will put this one in charge of greater things* (Mt 24:47). [vv 20-22 keep the Rule above all, for divine reward]

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