



## THE DIDACHE: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles

Institute of Catholic Culture

### PART 1. THE TWO WAYS

#### THE WAY OF LIFE

1. There are two Ways: a Way of Life and a Way of Death, and the difference between these two Ways is great.

The Way of Life is this: "Thou shalt love first the Lord thy Creator, and secondly thy neighbour as thyself; and thou shalt do nothing to any man that thou wouldst not wish to be done to thyself."

What you may learn from these words is to bless them that curse you, to pray for your enemies, and to fast for your persecutors. For where is the merit in loving only those who return your love? Even the heathens do as much as that. But if you love those who hate you, you will have nobody to be your enemy.

Beware of the carnal appetites of the body. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other one to him as well, and perfection will be yours. Should anyone compel you to go a mile, go another one with him. If someone takes away your coat, let him have your shirt too. If someone seizes anything belonging to you, do not ask for it back again (you could not get it, anyway). Give to everyone that asks, without looking for any repayment, for it is the Father's pleasure that we should share His gracious bounty with all men. A giver who gives freely, as the commandment directs, is blessed; no fault can be found with him.

But woe to the taker; for though he cannot be blamed for taking if he was in need, yet if he was not, an account will be required of him as to why he took it, and for what purpose, and he will be taken into custody and examined about his action, and he will not get out until he has paid the last penny. The old saying is in point here: "Let your alms grow damp with sweat in your hand, until you know who it is you are giving them to."

2. The second commandment in the Teaching means: Commit no murder, adultery, sodomy, fornication, or theft. Practise no magic, sorcery, abortion, or infanticide. See that you do not covet anything your neighbour possesses, and never be guilty of perjury, false witness, slander, or malice. Do not equivocate in thought or speech, for a double tongue is a deadly snare; the words you speak should not be false or empty phrases, but fraught with purposeful action. You are not to be avaricious or extortionate, and you must resist any temptation to hypocrisy, spitefulness, or superiority. You are to have no malicious designs on a neighbour. You are to cherish no feelings of hatred for anybody; some you are to reprove, some to pray for, and some again to love more than your own life.

3. Keep away from every bad man, my son, and from all his kind. Never give way to anger, for anger leads to homicide. Likewise refrain from

fanaticism, quarrelling, and hot-temperedness, for these too can breed homicide.

Beware of lust, my son, for lust leads to fornication. Likewise refrain from unclean talk and the roving eye, for these too can breed adultery.

Do not be always looking for omens, my son, for this leads to idolatry. Likewise have nothing to do with witchcraft, astrology, or magic; do not even consent to be a witness of such practices, for they too can all breed idolatry.

Tell no lies, my son, for lying leads to theft. Likewise do not be over-anxious to be rich or to be admired, for these too can breed thievishness.

Do not be a grumbler, my son, for this leads to blasphemy. Likewise do not be too opinionated, and do not harbour thoughts of wickedness, for these too can breed blasphemy.

Learn to be meek, for the meek are to inherit the earth. School yourself to forbearance, compassion, guilelessness, calmness, and goodness; and never forget to respect the teaching you have had.

Do not parade your own merits, or allow yourself to behave presumptuously, and do not make a point of associating with persons of eminence, but choose the companionship of honest and humble folk.

Accept as good whatever experience comes your way, in the knowledge that nothing can happen without God.

4. By day and by night, my son, remember him who speaks the word of God to you. Give him the honour you would give the Lord; for wherever the Lord's attributes are the subject of discourse, there

the Lord is present. Frequent the company of the saints daily, so as to be edified by their conversation. Never encourage dissensions, but try to make peace between those who are at variance. Judge with justice, reprove without fear or favour, and never be in two minds about your decisions.

Do not be like those who reach out to take, but draw back when the time comes for giving. If the labour of your hands has been productive, your giving will be a ransom for sins. Give without hesitating and without grumbling, and you will see Whose generosity will requite you. Never turn away the needy; share all your possessions with your brother, and do not claim that anything is your own. If you and he are joint participators in things immortal, how much more so in things that are mortal?

You are not to withhold your hand from your son or daughter, but to bring them up in the fear of God from their childhood.

Never speak sharply when giving orders to male or female domestics whose trust is in the same God as yours; otherwise they may cease to fear Him who is over you both. He has not come to call men according to their rank, but those for whom He has prepared the Spirit. And you, servants, obey your masters with respectfulness and fear, as the representatives of God. Hate all impiety and everything that does not please the Lord. See that you do not neglect the commandments of the Lord, but keep them just as you received them, without any additions or subtractions of your own.

In church, make confession of your faults, and do not come to your prayers with a bad conscience.

That is the Way of Life.

## The Way of Death

5. The Way of Death is this. To begin with, it is evil, and in every way fraught with damnation. In it are murders, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, witchcraft, sorceries, robberies, perjuries, hypocrisies, duplicities, deceit, pride, malice, self-will, avarice, foul language, jealousy, insolence, arrogance, and boastfulness. Here are those who persecute good men, hold truth in abhorrence, and love falsehood; who do not know of the rewards of righteousness, nor adhere to what is good, nor to just judgement; who lie awake planning wickedness rather than well-doing. Gentleness and patience are beyond their conception; they care for nothing good or useful, and are bent only on their own advantage, without pity for the poor or feeling for the distressed. Knowledge of their Creator is not in them; they make away with their infants and deface

God's image; they turn away the needy and oppress the afflicted; they aid and abet the rich but arbitrarily condemn the poor; they are utterly and altogether sunk in iniquity. Flee, my children, from all this!

## Conclusion

6. Take care that nobody tempts you away from the path of this Teaching, for such a man's tuition can have nothing to do with God. If you can shoulder the Lord's yoke in its entirety, then you will be perfect; but if that is too much for you, do as much as you can.

As regards diet, keep the rules so far as you are able; only be careful to refuse anything that has been offered to an idol, for that is the worship of dead gods.

## PART 2. A CHURCH MANUAL

### Of Baptism

7. The procedure for baptizing is as follows. After repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". Both baptizer and baptized ought to fast before the baptism, as well as any others who can do so; but the candidate himself should be told to keep a fast for a day or two beforehand.

### Of Fast-Days and Prayer

8. Do not keep the same fast-days as the hypocrites. Mondays and Thursdays are their days for fasting, so yours should be Wednesdays and Fridays.

Your prayers, too, should be different from theirs. Pray as the Lord enjoined in His Gospel, thus: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, As in heaven, so on earth; Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from the Evil One, For thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.

Say this prayer three times every day.

## Of the Eucharist

9. At the Eucharist, offer the eucharistic prayer in this way. Begin with the chalice: "We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy Vine of thy servant David, which thou hast made known to us through thy servant Jesus.

"Glory be to thee, world without end."

Then over the broken bread: "We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge thou hast made known to us through thy servant Jesus."

"Glory be to thee, world without end."

"As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together and became one loaf, so may thy Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom."

"Thine is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever."

No one is to eat or drink of your Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the Name of the Lord; for the Lord's own saying applies here, "Give not that which is holy unto dogs."

10. When all have partaken sufficiently, give thanks in these words:

"Thanks be to thee, holy Father, for thy sacred Name which thou hast caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which thou hast revealed to us through thy servant Jesus."

"Glory be to thee for ever and ever."

"Thou, O Almighty Lord, hast created all things for thine own Name's sake; to all men thou hast given meat and drink to enjoy, that they may give thanks to thee, but to us thou hast graciously given spiritual meat and drink, together with life eternal, through thy Servant. Especially, and above all, do we give thanks to thee for the mightiness of thy power."

"Glory be to thee for ever and ever."

"Be mindful of thy Church, O Lord; deliver it from all evil, perfect it in thy love, sanctify it, and gather it from the four winds into the kingdom which thou hast prepared for it."

"Thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever."

"Let Grace come, and this present world pass away."

"Hosanna to the God of David."

"Whosoever is holy, let him approach. Whoso is not, let him repent."

"Maranatha. Amen."

(Prophets, however, should be free to give thanks as they please.)

## Of Apostles and Prophets

11. If anyone comes and instructs you on the foregoing lines, make him welcome. But should the instructor himself then turn round and introduce teaching of a different and subversive nature, pay no attention to him. If it aims at promoting righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, though, welcome him as you would the Lord.

As regards apostles and prophets, according to the Gospel directions this is how you are to act. Every apostle who comes to you should be welcomed as the Lord, but he is not to stay more than a day, or two days if it is really necessary. If he stays for three days, he is a false prophet. And an apostle at his departure should accept nothing but as much provisions as will last him to his next night's lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

While a prophet is uttering words in the spirit, you are on no account to subject him to any tests or verifications; every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. Nevertheless, not all who speak in the spirit are prophets, unless they also exhibit the manners and conduct of the Lord. It is by their behaviour that you can tell the impostor from the true. Thus, if a prophet should happen to call out for something to eat while he is in the spirit, he will not actually eat of it; if he does, he is a fraud. Also, even supposing a prophet is sound enough in his teaching, yet if his deeds do not correspond with his words he is an impostor. Or again, a prophet, thoroughly accredited and genuine, living the mystery of the Church in the world, may yet fail to teach others to copy his example. In that case, you are not to judge the man yourselves; his judgement lies with God. The prophets of old used to do things of a similar kind.

If any prophet, speaking in the spirit, says, "Give me money (or anything else)", do not listen to him. On the other hand, if he bids you give it to someone else who is in need, nobody should criticize him.

12. Everyone who comes "in the Name of the Lord" is to be made welcome, though later on you must test him and find out about him. You will be able to distinguish the true from the false. If the newcomer is only passing through, give him all the

help you can – though he is not to stay more than a couple of days with you, or three if it is unavoidable. But if he wants to settle down among you, and is a skilled worker, let him find employment and earn his bread. If he knows no trade, use your discretion to make sure that he does not live in idleness simply on the strength of being a Christian. Unless he agrees to this, he is only trying to exploit Christ. You must be on your guard against men of that sort.

13. A genuine prophet, however, who wishes to make his home with you has a right to a livelihood. (Similarly, a genuine teacher is as much entitled to his keep as a manual labourer.) You are therefore to take the first products of your winepress, your threshing-floor, your oxen and your sheep, and give them as first-fruits to the prophets, for nowadays it is they who are your "High Priests". If there is no prophet among you, give them to the poor. And when you bake a batch of loaves, take the first of them and give it away, as the commandment directs. Similarly when you broach a jar of wine or oil, take the first portion to give to the prophets. So, too, with your money, and your clothing, and all your possessions; take a tithe of them in whatever way you think best, and make a gift of it, as the commandment bids you.

### Of Sunday Worship

14. Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until they have been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, "Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations."

## Of Local Officials

15 . You must choose for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord: men who are humble and not eager for money, but sincere and approved; for they are carrying out the ministry of the prophets and the teachers for you. Do not esteem them lightly, for they take an honourable rank among you along with the prophets and teachers.

Reprove one another, but peaceably and not in hot blood, as you are told in the Gospel. But have no converse with anyone who has done his neighbour an injury; let that man not hear a single word from you until he repents.

In your prayers, your almsgiving, and everything you do, be guided by what you read in the Gospel of our Lord.

## Eschatology

16. Be watchful over your life; never let your lamps go out or your loins be ungirt, but keep yourselves

always in readiness, for you can never be sure of the hour when our Lord may be coming. Come often together for spiritual improvement; because all the past years of your faith will be no good to you at the end, unless you have made yourselves perfect. In the last days of the world false prophets and deceivers will abound, sheep will be perverted and turn into wolves, and love will change to hate, for with the growth of lawlessness men will begin to hate their fellows and persecute them and betray them. Then the Deceiver of the World will show himself, pretending to be a Son of God and doing signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning. After that, all humankind will come up for their fiery trial; multitudes of them will stumble and perish, but such as remain steadfast in the faith will be saved by the Curse. And then the signs of the truth will appear: first the sign of the opening heavens, next the sign of the trumpet's voice, and thirdly the rising of the dead - not of all the dead, but, as it says, "the Lord will come, and with him all his holy ones." And then the whole world will see the Lord as He comes riding on the clouds of heaven . . .