

Dear Brethren,

I bring greetings from his Beatitude, Daniel, Patriarch of the Rumanian Orthodox Church and from his Excellency Mons. Siluan, Bishop of the Rumanian Orthodox Diocese of Italy, whose humble representative I am. I give heartfelt thanks to the organisers, and especially the Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, for offering us a space in which we can share with you our common spiritual concern for the mystery of the Church and its unity.

The theme of this congress, *Monastic life and Christian unity*, is of great spiritual interest and a serious responsibility, not only for the whole body of the Church but above all for that part of the Church that has made its life a continual service of praise to the Lord. It is certainly in the specific character of the contemplative life that it finds its perfect identity with the meaning of 'one', of which Gregory the Great, the great father of the Church, speaks, in which, in reference to the particular meaning of the Greek term *monos* (monk) he outlines one of its important features, that of being called to unity, with God, Three and One:

"... In this way the perfection of human being consists in the praise of his unity: the one who completely despises the world must not divide his mind; but seek solely for the heavenly goods and sigh only for the eternal joys of the vision of the creator.

"Without doubt, he had the same experience, who, trusting in God, says: 'Who else shall I have for me in heaven? Besides you I long for nothing on earth.' And again, 'It is your face, O Lord, that I seek.' The one who desires nothing on earth is certainly a human being; but the person who in heaven and on earth desires nothing other than the only One, who, having despised everything else, seeks only that face, is not only human, but becomes a single person.

"And in order to obtain this unity, this is what the Truth teaches us: 'without renouncing all one's goods, no one can be my disciple.' All this we are ourselves able to achieve; because we, who have renounced the world, have sought the secret of the most deeply hidden life, and are called monks. Monk is the Greek term; in Latin, we say 'one.'

"So we are registered and called by this name: may the word that defines us bring the loftiness of that dignity to penetrate our hearts and may our hearts strain to raise themselves up in ardour to contemplate the Creator and the sublimity of the light in which we should always be immersed, so as to make it radiant in our faces."
(GREGORY THE GREAT In Reg., 1.61)

This brief extract from one of the writings of St Gregory helps us understand that the first step needed to construct unity is to seek it in the heart of our own vocation. The monk, that is to say, should never reduce his existence to the realm of merely theological speculation, and become an expert in the theory of the things of God. On the contrary, the monk makes God his one and only 'thing', precisely in virtue of his vocation constantly to seek him. This continual leap towards mystery makes us monks, theologians, that is witnesses to the Most High: 'In this way may your light shine before human beings, so that they may see your good works and render glory to your Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 5.16). Is this not the original dynamic that from the first centuries has animated men and women to embrace the contemplative life? We know that the monk is not isolated from the world; he lives in this world, for this world he gives praise, makes offering and sacrifice. He fights for it, so that his combat may bring benefits to the whole of human being, so that in imitation of Christ, the monk may become a mediator of salvation by constant prayer.

The monk is called to be, with Christ and for Christ, light, healing, hope, an instrument of unity between God and humankind. We are in the world but not of the world, as Christ himself says: *"They are not of the world, as I am not of the world."* (John 17.15) The two aspects that must remain dear to us, that must animate our fundamental vocation, must be **Unity** with the Holy Trinity and **Truth**. The more we immerse ourselves in the mystery of our vocation, the more the desire grows in us to be united in Christ and, through Christ, in the Holy Trinity.

We have set out on our journey on the holy mountain; the closer we come to the Holy Trinity, the Burning Bush that cannot be extinguished, the more the desire will mature in us to be, for

God, instruments of liberation from the slavery to Pharaoh, who holds human being fettered to his tyranny. He is the true, Promised Land towards which we must guide our brothers, so that set free by grace, they may taste the true goods of that land in which flows every true good, which is delight in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit in Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God. Let us become that to which we have been called: people of prayer and unwearying labourers for unity with God and among ourselves.

Then our praise will rise up with joy to the Lord and will be full and universal, able to include everything and everyone in our hymn of thanksgiving. We will be able to say with the Psalmist and the prophet David:

I have searched for the Lord and the Lord has answered me; the Lord has freed me from everything that gave me terror. Those who look towards the Lord are illuminated; on their faces there is no disappointment. This person cried in affliction and the Lord heard and brought salvation from wretchedness. The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who fear him and sets them free. Try, and you will see how good the Lord is! Blessed are they who trust in the Lord. Fear the Lord, you who have been consecrated, because they lack nothing, who fear the Lord. The Lord rescues the lives of his servants; no one who trusts in the Lord will be reckoned guilty.

Trusting in the one who has chosen us, not for our merits but by his own infinite mercy, and facing with confidence the harshness of the struggle, within and without, that has been given us so that we may grow strong and give strength to our brothers and sisters, let us run with fervour along the paths traced by our holy Fathers, who have inspired the one monastic tradition we share, as a specific element of unity between us, Let us give support to and share our spiritual experience, that it may grow and become a blessing for the whole Church, and let us realise that unity in charity that is able to prepare the way for a more complete and joyful formal expression of unity.

May the Mother of God help us, the Virgin of prayer, the image so dear to the single monastic tradition both in East and West, so that like her we may be able to say our 'Yes' to God in silence of our Nazareth, and become bearers of Christ, of God (*theophori*). May all the saints illuminate us, those of yesterday and of today, who, by their lives, have become light for the whole world with Christ, so that we may one day be able to share with them in eternal joy, giving praise to the One and Indivisible Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.