

POPE FRANCIS: Speech to participants at the Congress of Benedictine Abbots  
8th September 2016

Dear Fathers Abbot, Dear Sisters

With joy I greet you all. I greet the Abbot Primate, Dom Notker Wolf, whom I thank for his courteous words and above all for his precious service carried out in these years. After sixteen years of office, I think: who can stop this man?

Your international Congress, which sees you gathered regularly in Rome in order to reflect on the monastic charism received by St Benedict, and on how to remain faithful to it in a world that is changing, in this situation takes on a particular significance in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy. It is the same Christ who invites us to be 'merciful even as the Father is merciful' (Lk 6.36); and you are privileged witnesses to this 'even as', to this merciful 'way' of God's working. Indeed, if it is only in the contemplation of Jesus Christ that we catch sight of the face of the Father's mercy (cf. Bull, *Misericordiae vultus*, 1), monastic life constitutes an authoritative way to find this contemplative experience and to translate it into a personal and communal testimony.

The world today shows ever more clearly its need for mercy; but this is not a slogan or a formula: it is the heart of Christian life and at the same time its concrete form, the breath that animates interpersonal relations and makes us attentive to the most needy and in solidarity with them. This is what really manifests the authenticity and credibility of the message whose custodian is the Church, and for whose proclamation she is responsible. Indeed, at this time and in this Church, called to focus increasingly on the essential thing, monks and nuns are guardians, by your vocation, of a particular gift and of a special responsibility: that of keeping alive the oases of the Spirit, where pastors and faithful are able to draw from the wells of divine mercy. This is why, in the recent Apostolic Constitution, *Vultum Dei quaerere*, I address myself to nuns, and by extension to all monks, like this: 'May the words of the traditional Benedictine motto, "ora et labora", still, and always, retain their validity for you; they train us to find a balanced rapport between the tension towards the Absolute and commitment to daily responsibilities, between the quiet of contemplation and eagerness for service' (§32).

Seeking, with the grace of God, to live as people of mercy in your communities, you proclaim evangelical fraternity from all your monasteries, scattered in every corner of the planet; and you do so by means of that attentive and eloquent silence, which lets God speak in the deafening and distracted life of the world. May the silence that you observe, and of which you are the custodians, be the necessary 'precondition for a gaze of faith that notices the presence of God in people's personal stories, in the story of the brothers and sisters that the Lord has given you and in the events of the contemporary world' (§33). Even though you live separated from the world, your enclosure is not sterile; on the contrary, it is 'a richness and not a hindrance to communion' (§31). Your work, in harmony with prayer, lets you participate in the creative work of God and 'be united with the poor who cannot live without work' (§32). With your characteristic hospitality, you are able to meet the hearts of those who have most lost their way and are far off, of those who find themselves in conditions of grave human and spiritual poverty. Also your commitment to formation and to the education of the young is greatly appreciated and of a high distinction. Students of your schools, thanks to their study and to your testimony of life, can become themselves experts in that humanism that emanates from the Rule of St Benedict. And your contemplative life is also a privileged channel to nourish communion with the brethren of the Oriental churches.

May the occasion of your international Congress strengthen your [Con]federation, so that it may continually increase and improve its service of communion and co-

operation between your monasteries. Do not let yourselves be discouraged if members of monastic communities are declining in number or are getting old; on the contrary, maintain the zeal of your testimony, even in countries that today are in greater difficulties, with the fidelity to the charism and the courage to found new communities. Your service to the Church is very precious. And in our time there is a need for men and women who put nothing before the love of Christ (RB 4.21; 72.11), who feed daily on the Word of God, who celebrate worthily the sacred liturgy and who work joyfully and attentively in harmony with creation.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your visit. I bless you and I accompany you with my prayers; and you too, please, pray for me. I need it. Thank you.