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Contemporary Monasticism

It is always interesting to discover the different ways Benedictine monastic life is lived in the different places in the world. I was in South Korea last April for the meeting of the Benedictines of East Asia and Oceania. I was impressed and fascinated by the way monastic life is being lived among the Benedictine sisters and the brothers there. I felt at home and at the same time I felt I was seeing something new and different. I think, we, as Benedictines, all live the same monastic life, but we emphasize one or two particular aspects of the life depending on the place where we find ourselves. We also find ourselves today with new realities that influence the way we see the world. Today the world lives with the reality of terrorism, the exodus of great numbers of refugees, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender movement), concern about conservation of the planet and global warming. Communication and the social media aided by new technology, has also advanced by leaps and bounds, changing the way we relate to one another.

I think that by sharing about the way we live monastic life in our various locations and cultures and in the midst of these new realities we can find new support and stimulus to move forward and grow.

As I read in the internet about how the world sees monastic life, there are some ideas that I would like to mention that the people in the world see in our lifestyle. This might help us to look at ourselves so that we can improve what we are doing well and discover what we may have forgotten.

INTERCESSORS

In the Philippines, people see the monk in his habit as a “holy man” who is instrumental in seeking intercession with God. This is specially so if the monk is a priest, endowed with the power of ritual. This challenges us to be a symbol of consecration to God, and an ideal for the Filipino Catholic. Usually people will ask us to intercede with special prayers for their intention. They do not always see us as a community but more as individuals. I wonder how other cultures will have a different experience of the monk.

RHYTHMS OF MONASTIC LIFE

An article I read in the web says that some people, are attracted to the rhythm of monastic life, specially in countries where life is fast paced. Here they are attracted to the monastic life marked by pauses for prayer and reflection in the midst of the daily grind. Ian Adams, an Anglican priest, has written a book entitled: “Cave, Refectory, Road: Monastic Rhythms for Contemporary Living” (Canterbury Press 2010). The book points out three paths in traditional monastic life which ordinary people can imitate. 1. The Cave; a place of stillness, prayer and simplicity. 2. The Refectory; as the point of reconnection with community, work colleagues and neighbors. 3. The Road; as the engagement with a wider world (including our planet).

A RETREAT

Some people see monastic lifestyle as a form of retreat from an alienated and fragmented world; a reaction to the self-absorbed life of accumulating material things, obsession with one’s career and absorption with entertainment that is being promoted in the world as the modern way to live.

SOME QUESTIONS

Monastic life is a search for God, fueled by our encounter with the Word of God. This sustains us and moves us to dialogue with the world. In what ways have we been successful (in your own country and culture), and where do we fail to make a witness of our “Search for God”?

RB gives legislation about receiving guests and the function of the Guest Master. In what way are we effectively receiving the world and how open are we to the new ideas, realities and problems that we face today? (poverty, violence, terrorism, refugees, LGBT, care for the earth)

Monastic life is characterized by asceticism and renunciations that allow us to be free for God. What are the modern ways and community structures we have adapted today?

How has technology influenced the way we live today in the monastery; in our work, apostolate and recreation? Has technology helped community life?

Pope Francis has attracted the attention of the world with his simplicity and compassion. In what way do we reflect these in our communities?