



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS
IN THE INTERNATIONAL BENEDICTINE ABBOTS' CONFERENCE**

Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 20 September 2008

*Dear Father Abbots,
Dear Sister Abbesses,*

I receive you with great joy on the occasion of the International Congress for which all the Abbots of your Confederation and the Superiors of independent Pories meet in Rome every four years to reflect on and discuss ways to embody the Benedictine charism in the present social and cultural context and respond to its ever new challenges to Gospel witness. I first greet the Abbot Primate, Dom Notker Wolf and thank him for what he has said on behalf of all. I likewise greet the group of Abbesses who have come representing the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*, as well as the Orthodox Representatives.

In a secularized world and an epoch marked by a disturbing culture of emptiness and meaninglessness, you are called to proclaim the primacy of God without compromise and to advance proposals for possible new forms of evangelization. The commitment to personal and communitarian sanctification that you pursue and the liturgical prayer that you encourage equip you for a particularly effective witness. In your monasteries, you are the first to renew and to deepen daily the encounter with the Person of Christ, whom you always have with you as guest, companion and friend. For this reason your convents are places where in our time too men and women hasten to seek God and learn to recognize the signs of Christ's presence, charity and mercy. With humble trust, you never tire of sharing with those who turn to your spiritual care the riches of the Gospel message, which are summed up in the proclamation of the love of the merciful Father who is ready to embrace every person in Christ. Thus you will continue to make your precious contribution to the vitality and sanctification of the People of God, in accordance with the special charism of Benedict of Norcia.

Dear Abbots and Abbesses, you are custodians of the patrimony of a spirituality anchored radically to the Gospel, "per ducatum evangelii pergamus itinera eius", as St Benedict says in the Prologue to the Rule. It is precisely this that engages you to communicate and give to others the fruits of your inner experience. I know and deeply appreciate the generous and competent cultural and formative work carried out by so many of your monasteries, especially for the young generations, creating an atmosphere of brotherly acceptance that favours a unique experience of Church. In fact, it is of primary importance to prepare young people to face their future and measure up to the many demands of society, having as a constant reference the Gospel message, which is ever timely, inexhaustible and life-giving. Devote yourselves, therefore, with fresh apostolic zeal to youth who are the future of the Church and of humanity. Indeed to build a "new" Europe it is necessary to start with the new generations, offering them the possibility of coming into close contact with the spiritual treasure of the liturgy, of meditation and of *lectio divina*.

This pastoral and formative action is in fact more necessary than ever for the whole human family. In many parts of the world, especially Asia and Africa, there is a pressing need for vibrant places of encounter with the Lord, in which, through prayer and contemplation, the individual may recover peace with himself and peace with others. Therefore, do not fail to meet with an open heart the expectations of all those, outside of Europe too, who express a keen desire for your presence and your apostolate in order to draw from the riches of Benedictine spirituality. Let yourselves be guided by the deep desire to serve every person charitably, irrespective of their race or religion. With prophetic freedom and wise discernment, may your presence be meaningful wherever Providence calls you to settle, always distinguishing yourselves for the harmonious balance of prayer and work that is a feature of your way of life.

And what should be said of the famous Benedictine hospitality? It is a special vocation of yours, an experience that is fully spiritual, human and cultural. May balance exist here too: may the heart of the community be wide open but in proportion to the times and forms of hospitality. You will thus give the men and women of our day a possibility of deepening the meaning of life within the infinite horizon of Christian hope, cultivating inner silence in communion with the Word of salvation. A community capable of authentic fraternal life, fervent in liturgical prayer, in study, in work, in cordial availability to your neighbour who is thirsting for God, is the best impetus for inspiring in hearts, especially those of young men, the vocation to monastic life and in general a fruitful journey of faith.

I would like to address a special word to the representatives of the Benedictine nuns and sisters. Dear sisters, like other religious families you too are suffering from the lack of new religious vocations. Do not let yourselves be disheartened but face these painful situations of crisis calmly, aware that it is not so much success that is asked of each one as faithful commitment. What should be absolutely avoided is a weakening of spiritual attachment to the Lord and to one's vocation and mission. On the contrary, by persevering in it faithfully we profess most effectively, also to the world, our firm trust in the Lord of history, in whose hands are all the times and

destinies of individuals, institutions and peoples; and let us also entrust ourselves to him with regard to the actuation in history of his gifts. Make your own the spiritual attitude of the Virgin Mary, happy to be the "*ancilla Domini*", totally available to do the will of the heavenly Father.

Dear monks, nuns and sisters, thank you for this pleasant visit! I accompany you with my prayers so that at your meetings during these days of your Congress you may discern the most appropriate ways to witness visibly and clearly in your life-style, work and prayer, to your commitment to a radical imitation of the Lord. May Mary Most Holy sustain your every project of good, help you above all to keep God before your eyes and accompany you maternally on your journey. As I invoke an abundance of heavenly gifts to support all of your generous resolutions, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to the entire Benedictine Family.

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