



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BENEDICTINE ABBOTS, PRIORS ABBESSES AND ADMINISTRATORS OF THE ORDER OF SAINT BENEDICT

Friday, 8 September 2000

1. I welcome and greet you all with great joy dear abbots, conventual priors and administrators of the Order of St Benedict, on the occasion of your Congress which you are holding here in Rome this Jubilee Year. In expressing my gratitude to Abbot Marcel Rooney for his work in these years, I offer my congratulations to the new Abbot Primate, Dom Notker Wolf, whom I thank for his words to me on everyone's behalf. I also greet the group of abbesses, representing their sisters of every part of the world. This meeting with the Bishop of Rome is part of your rich and intense Jubilee pilgrimage, and sheds a clear light on its spiritual and ecclesial significance. I am thinking at this time of my glorious Predecessor, St Gregory the Great, on whose anniversary your assembly began, and I thank God with you for the great gift which the sons and daughters of St Benedict were and are in the Church and for the Church. You have passed through the Holy Door of the major basilicas, bringing your communities with you in spirit. This is, above all, a praiseworthy witness of faith on your part. At the same time it becomes a symbol of the profound meaning of your meeting: in the Holy Year 2000, the Benedictine Order throughout the world wants to pass through Christ, to enter with him and in him into the new millennium, holding tightly to the Gospel, the Word of salvation for people of every epoch and culture.

2. In East and West, monastic life is a patrimony of priceless value for the Church. In the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, I wrote: "In the heart of the Church ... monasteries have been and continue to be eloquent signs of communion, welcoming abodes for those seeking God and the things of the spirit, schools of faith and true places of study, dialogue and culture for the building up of the life of the Church and of the earthly city itself, in expectation of the heavenly city" (n. 6). Western monasticism was inspired above all by St Benedict and his Rule, which has formed generations of men and women, called to leave the world to dedicate themselves entirely to God, putting the love of Christ at the centre and above all things (cf. *Rule*, 4, 21 and 72, 11). With the power of this mission, the Benedictine Order has not ceased to contribute to the Church's apostolic activity. With this same power, it works for the new evangelization. This is witnessed by those young people and adults, Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers, who find in you and in your monasteries reference-points like wells from which to draw the "living water" of Christ, which alone can quench men's thirst. And how can I not stress that it is characteristic of many of your houses today to be on the "frontier of Christianity", in places where the Christian religion is a minority? Sometimes the testimony

of certain members of the Benedictine Order has been crowned with martyrdom. In spite of this, you stay on in those lands, fearing neither dangers nor difficulties. In carrying out an important ecumenical activity and patient interreligious dialogue, you offer a precious service to the Gospel. Witness that God alone is enough.³ Yes, God alone, Christ alone is "the life of the soul". These words recall the title of a well known book by your venerable confrère, Columba Marmion, whom I had the joy of adding to the list of blessed last Sunday. The life and deeds of the great Abbot of Maredsous left a deep mark on 20th-century spirituality, in perfect harmony with the path of authentic ecclesial renewal, crowned by the Second Vatican Council. You have chosen to set out on this path, following the shining examples of Bl. Columba Marmion, as well as of Bl. Dusmet of Catania and Bl. Schuster of Milan, faithful sons of St Benedict.

As well as being a Jubilee pilgrimage, your congress, in this regard, is an important moment for reflection and confrontation on the threshold of the new millennium. As superiors of the Order, you propose to consider the abbot's role in the community. You further intend to examine the monastery's mission in the contemporary world, through listening and in an exchange of rich and varied experiences.⁴ In this respect, as Pastor of the Church in a world in which dispersive activities are increasing and there is sometimes a risk of losing the sense of living and dying, I would like to recall - knowing full well that you are masters of this - the primacy of interiority. To avoid losing his way, contemporary man needs more than ever to rediscover God and to rediscover himself in God. This is possible only when the heart listens to the Lord in silence and in prolonged contemplation, in the encounter, that is, with the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2: 5). This prompts my wishes for you, which I accompany with the assurance of my special remembrance at the altar. Dear friends, be eloquent signs of the validity of monastic life for our contemporaries. This is the first form of consecrated life that appeared in the Church, and that, down the centuries, continues to remain a gift for everyone. Tirelessly contemplate the mystery of God and offer your lives "*ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*". I entrust these wishes to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, whose Nativity we are celebrating today. As our good Mother, may she protect you at your every step. I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, asking you to convey it to your communities.

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