



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL BENEDICTINE ABBOTS' CONFERENCE

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 8 September 2016*

[Multimedia]

Dear Father Abbots, Dear Sisters,

I joyfully welcome all of you. I greet Abbot Primate Dom Notker Wolf, whom I thank for his kind words and especially for the valuable service he has carried out through these years. After 16 years of service, I think to myself: who can stop this man? Your International Congress — for which you periodically gather in Rome to reflect on the monastic charism received from St Benedict and on how to remain faithful to it in a changing world — on this occasion takes on particular significance in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy. It is Christ himself who invites us to be “merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36); and you are privileged witnesses of this “as”, of this “way” of God’s merciful action. In fact, if it is only in the contemplation of Jesus Christ that we find the face of the Father’s mercy (cf. Bull of Indiction *Misericordiae Vultus*, 1), the monastic life constitutes a royal road for this contemplative experience and translates it into personal and community witness.

The world today demonstrates ever more clearly the need for mercy; but this is neither a slogan nor a recipe: it is the heart of the Christian life and at the same time its practical way, the breath that enlivens interpersonal relationships and makes us attentive to the most needy, in solidarity with them. This is what ultimately manifests the authenticity and credibility of the message of which the Church is the depositary and herald. In this time and in this Church that is called to point more and more to what is essential, monastic men and women maintain by their vocation, a special gift and a special responsibility: that of keeping the oasis of the spirit alive, where pastors and faithful can draw from the springs of divine mercy. For this reason, in the recent Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, I address contemplative women, and by extension all monks: “The ‘*ora et labora*’ of the Benedictine tradition should always be your inspiration and help you to find the right balance between seeking the Absolute and commitment to your daily chores,

between the peace of contemplation and the effort expended in work” (n. 32).

Seeking, with the grace of God, to live mercifully in your communities, you proclaim the fraternity of the Gospel in all of your monasteries, scattered throughout every corner of the planet; and you do so through silent and eloquent work that allows God to speak within the loud and distracted life of the world. The silence that you observe and of which you are custodians is the necessary “prerequisite to that gaze of faith that enables us to welcome God’s presence into our own life, that of the brothers and sisters given us by the Lord, and the events of today’s world” (*ibid.*, 33). Even if you live apart from the world, your enclosure is not barren, but rather, it is “an enrichment and not an obstacle to communion” (*ibid.*, 31). Your work, in harmony with prayer, enables you to participate in the creative work of God and shows “your solidarity with the poor who cannot live without work” (*ibid.*, 32). With your customary hospitality, you are able to encounter the hearts of those who are most lost and distant, of those who are in conditions of severe human and spiritual poverty. Your commitment to the formation and education of the youth is also deeply appreciated and highly qualified. The students of your schools, through study and your life testimony, can also become experts of the humanism that emanates from the Benedictine Rule. Your contemplative life is also a privileged channel for nourishing communion with the brothers and sisters of the Eastern Churches.

May the occasion of the International Congress strengthen your Federation, so that it may, ever more greatly, be at the service of communion and cooperation between monasteries. Do not be discouraged if the members of monastic communities decrease in number or grow old; on the contrary, preserve the zeal of your testimony, even in those countries which today face difficulties, with fidelity to the charism and the courage to establish new communities. Your service to the Church is very precious. Even in our time there is a need for men and women who place nothing before the love of Christ (cf. *The Rule of St Benedict*, 4:21; 72:11), who nourish themselves daily with the Word of God, who worthily celebrate the holy liturgy, and who joyfully and diligently work in harmony with creation.

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