



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRIOR OF THE CHARTHUSIAN ORDER
FOR THE NINTH CENTENARY OF ST. BRUNO'S DEATH**

To Reverend Father Marcellin Theeuwes

Prior of Chartreuse

Superior General of the Carthusian Order and to all members of the Carthusian family

1. While the members of the Carthusian family celebrate the ninth centenary of the death of their Founder, with them I give thanks to God who raised up in his Church the eminent and always relevant person, St Bruno. With a fervent prayer, appreciating your witness of fidelity to the See of Peter, I gladly share the joy of the Carthusian Order which has a master of the spiritual life in this "very good and incomparable father". On 6 October 1101, "on fire with divine love", Bruno left "the fleeting shadows of the world" to reach definitively the "eternal delights" (cf. *Letter to Ralph*, n. 13). The brothers of the Hermitage of Santa Maria della Torre in Calabria, to whom he had given much affection, could not doubt that this *dies natalis* would have inaugurated a singular spiritual adventure, which still today produces abundant fruit for the Church and for the world.

Bruno was a witness to the cultural and religious upheaval that shook Europe at its dawn and an architect in the reform that the Church wanted to realize in the face of internal difficulties. After having been an esteemed teacher, Bruno felt the call to consecrate himself to the one good that is God himself. "Is there anything so good as God? Is there any other good except God alone? Thus the holy soul that perceives this good, its incomparable brightness, its splendour, its beauty, burns with the flame of heavenly love and cries out: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God!" (*Letter to Ralph*, n. 15). The radical character of the thirst impelled Bruno, in patient listening to the Spirit, to invent an eremitic lifestyle with his first companions, where everything favours the response to the call of Christ who, in all times, chooses men "to lead them into solitude and unite himself to them in an intimate love" (*Statutes of the Carthusian Order*). With this choice of "life in the desert" Bruno invited the whole ecclesial community "*never to lose sight of the supreme vocation, which is to be always with the Lord*" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 7).

Bruno, who could forget "his" project to answer the requests of the Pope, manifests his lively sense of the Church. Aware that the journey on the way to holiness cannot be conceived without obedience to the Church, he shows us that true life in the following of Christ means putting ourselves in his hands, expressing in self-abandon a surplus of love. He always maintained a similar attitude in joy and constant praise. His brothers noticed that "his face was always radiant with joy and his words modest. With a father's strength, he knew how to show the sensibility of a mother" (Introduction to the *funeral parchment* dedicated to St Bruno). These delicate words of the *funeral parchment* express the fruitfulness of a life dedicated to contemplation of the Face of Christ, the source of apostolic efficacy and of fraternal charity. May the sons and daughters of St Bruno, after their father's example, continue untiringly to contemplate Christ, thus mounting "a holy and persevering guard, awaiting the return of their Teacher to open to him as soon as he knocks" (*Letter to Ralph*, n. 4); this is an encouraging appeal so that all Christians remain vigilant in prayer in order to receive their Lord!

2. After the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation, the celebration of the ninth centenary of the death of St Bruno takes on another significance. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I invited the whole People of God to set out anew from Christ, in order to enable all who are thirsting for life's meaning and for truth to hear the heartbeat of God and of the Church. The Word of Christ, "Io, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20), invites all those who bear the name "disciple" to draw from this certainty a new impetus in their Christian living, making it the force which inspires their journey of faith (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 29). The vocation to prayer and contemplation that characterizes the Carthusian life shows in a particular way that only Christ can give human hope a fullness of meaning and joy.

How can we doubt for even an instant that a similar expression of pure love can give an extraordinary missionary effectiveness to the Carthusian life? In the withdrawal of monasteries and in the solitude of the cells, patiently and silently, the Carthusians weave the nuptial garment of the Church, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Apoc 21,2). They present the world to God daily and invite all humanity to the wedding feast of the Lamb. The celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the life in the desert. It conforms to the very being of Christ those who abandon themselves to love, so that they may make visible the Saviour's presence and action in the world, for the salvation of the world and the joy of the Church.

3. In the heart of the desert, the place of testing and purification of faith, the Father leads men along the journey of self-emptying that is opposed to all the logic of having, of success and of illusory happiness. Guigo the Carthusian encouraged all who wanted to live according to the ideal of St Bruno to "follow the example of Christ poor [to] ... have a share in his riches" (*Sur la vie solitaire*, n. 6). This self-emptying passes through a radical break with the world, which is not contempt for the world, but an orientation given to one's life for the constant seeking of the only Good: "You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced" (Jer 20,7). Blessed is the

Church who can use the Carthusian witness of total availability to the Spirit and a life totally dedicated to Christ!

I invite the members of the Carthusian family, through the holiness and simplicity of their life, to remain like a city on a hilltop and like a light on a lampstand (cf. Mt 5,14-15). Rooted in the Word of God, nourished by the sacraments of the Church, sustained by the prayer of St Bruno and his brothers, may they remain for the whole Church and in the centre of the world "places of hope and of the discovery of the Beatitudes, a place where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion, is called to become a pattern of life and source of joy" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 51).

As a visible expression of the offering of one's whole life lived in union with that of Christ, the cloistered life which makes one feel the precariousness of life, invites one to trust in God alone. It sharpens the thirst to receive the graces granted by meditation on Word of God. It is also "the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren, where the limitation of space and contacts works to the advantage of interiorizing Gospel values" (*ibid.*, n. 59). The search for God in contemplation is inseparable from love for the brethren, love that makes us recognize the face of Christ in the poorest among men. The contemplation of Christ lived in fraternal charity is the most sure path to the fruitfulness of every life. St John does not stop recalling it: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God" (I Jn 4,7). St Bruno understood it well, he who never separated the primacy he gave to God, throughout his entire life, from the deep humanity of which he bore witness among his brothers.

4. The ninth centenary of the *dies natalis* of St Bruno gives me the opportunity to renew my strong trust in the Carthusian Order in its mission of gratuitous contemplation and intercession for the Church and for the world. After the example of St Bruno and his successors, the monasteries of Chartreuse keep before the Church the eschatological dimension of her mission, remembering the wonders that God works and vigilantly awaiting the final fulfilment of hope (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 27). Untiring sentinel of the coming kingdom, seeking to "be" before "doing", the Carthusian Order gives the Church strength and courage in its mission, in order to put out into the deep and to let the Good News of Christ inflame all humanity.

In these days of celebration for the Order, I ardently ask the Lord to make resound in the hearts of numerous young men the call to leave everything to follow Christ poor, along the demanding but freeing journey of the Carthusian programme. I also invite the heads of the Carthusian family to respond without fear to the appeals of the young Churches to establish monasteries in their territories.

With this spirit, the discernment and formation of candidates who present themselves must be the object of a renewed attention on the part of formators. Our contemporary culture, marked by a strong hedonistic sentiment, by the desire to possess and by an erroneous idea of liberty, does not

facilitate the expression of the generosity of young people who want to consecrate their lives to Christ, longing to go forward, in his footsteps, on a journey of oblation, of generous and concrete service. The complexity of the personal journey, psychological fragility, the difficulty of living fidelity over time, invite us to make sure that we neglect no means to offer to all who ask to enter the desert of Chartreuse a formation that includes all the dimensions of the person. Moreover, careful attention will be paid to the choice of those in formation so they may be able to direct the candidates along the path of interior freedom and docility to the Holy Spirit. Finally, knowing that the fraternal life is a fundamental element of the journey of consecrated persons, they will invite the communities to live reciprocal love without reserve, developing a spiritual climate and a lifestyle in conformity with the Order's charism.

5. Dear sons and daughters of St Bruno, as I recalled at the end of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (n. 110). At the heart of the world, you make the Church attentive to the voice of the Bridegroom who speaks to her heart: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16,33). I encourage you never to abandon the intuitions of your Founder, even if the shrinking of the community, the drop in those who enter and incomprehension provoked by your radical choice of life could make you doubt the effectiveness of your Order and of your mission whose fruits belong mysteriously to God!

It is up to you, dear sons and daughters of Chartreuse, who are the heirs of St Bruno's charism, to maintain in all its authenticity and depth, the specificity of the spiritual journey he has shown you with his words and example. Your loving knowledge of God, nourished by prayer and meditation of his Word, invites the People of God to extend their gaze to the horizons of a new humanity in search of the fullness of the meaning of life and integration. Your poverty offered for the glory of God and the salvation of the world is an eloquent protest against the logic of profit and efficiency that often close the hearts of men and nations to the real needs of their brothers. Your life hidden with Christ, like the silent Cross planted in the hearts of redeemed humanity, remains, for the Church and for the world, the eloquent sign and permanent reminder that every human being, today as yesterday, can let himself be captivated by him who is only love.

Entrusting all the members of the Carthusian family to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, *Mater singularis Cartusiensium*, Star of Evangelization of the third millennium, I impart to you an affectionate Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the benefactors of the Order.