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(Letter n° 65)

“Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.”

(Ps 85:7)

On 8-18 November, Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Bro. Thierry attend the General Chapter of our Benedictine Congregation of Our Lady of Monte Oliveto (Italy). The Chapter was to have taken place at the end of August but, as the community at Monte Oliveto was badly affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, the Chapter was postponed.

Every 6 years Superiors and delegates of each community meet at Monte Oliveto to elect the Abbot General and his counsellors, and to address issues affecting the life of our communities. On 10 November, Dom Diego M. Rosa was re-elected for a third term as Abbot General of our monastic family; on 11 November, Abbot Mark-Ephrem was re-elected a member of the Definitory (one of the 6 counsellors of the Abbot General).

Our Congregation is composed of 17 communities in Brazil, Korea, United States, France, Guatemala, Italy, Israel and United Kingdom, and 228 monks; it is one of 19 congregations that make up the Order of St Benedict.

Three external persons should be mentioned: on 8 November, Dom Bernardus Peeters, Abbot General of the Cistercian (Trappist) Order opened the chapter with a lecture and discussion with the capitulants; on 14 November, Mrs Angela Rinaldi, a professor at the Institute of Anthropology - Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) at the Gregorian University (Rome), addressed the chapter on the issue of abuse in the Church; on 15 November, Archbishop José Carballo, a Spanish Franciscan, secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life, spoke on synodality and the consecrated life.

In addition, Fr Christoforo (from the Abbey of Rodengo in Italy) spoke on the history and significance of canonical visitation in our communities; Bro. Thierry (Rostrevor) addressed the relationship between crisis, communion, and conversion.



Ayodeji Malcolm Guite (born 12 November 1957) is an English poet, singer-songwriter, Anglican priest, and academic. We invite you to read an extract from him in a book entitled *Beholding the Glory (Incarnation Through the Arts)* (Baker Academy, 2001, p. 33-36)

The Word was made flesh, and not simply words, and yet the particular flesh in which the fullness of God was pleased to dwell was the flesh of our humanity. The oldest term in English for a human being is 'reord-berend' or 'word-bearer' and we are, of all the

creatures of the flesh, especially the word-bearers. It is to human beings that the mystery and the gift of language has been entrusted. Our language is bound up not only with our knowledge of the world and ourselves but with our very being. If our being and our knowledge are corrupted and fallen, then by the same token so is our language, and if there is redemption for us in the depth of our being, then language too must be redeemed. What is not assumed is not redeemed, and therefore a part of the whole meaning of the incarnation is the story of the Word coming into his world as one who will learn and use, and in taking it up, *redeem language*. The concern of literature to use language well, to cleanse and purify it, to redeem its words from the captivity and abuse to which the powers of this world continuously subject them, is bound up with the redemptive purposes of God who chose that his Word should be born as one who had to learn to use words. As we shall see, the literature of the twentieth century, from the poetry of Eliot through the novels of Orwell, to the critical theories of Steiner and others, has been, in an age of tyranny and propaganda, especially concerned with the problems of the degradation and redemption of words.

The story of how the Word of God came to redeem humanity begins not with speech but with silence. The first and deepest paradox of the incarnation is the self-emptying of Christ, the power of his powerlessness, the strength of his weakness. The seventeenth-century preacher Lancelot Andrewes seized upon the strange contradiction in terms with which the Word could be an infant: *verbum infant* for, of course, the Latin term *infans* means 'without speech'. And he exclaims with astonishment: 'the Word without a word. The eternal word not able to speak a word'. Just as our wounds are healed by his stripes, so our empty wordiness, hollow at the centre, is met and redeemed by Christ himself, becoming in his *infancy* a centre in which is hidden the Word that maintains the world, and yet a centre which has still to learn speech. In 'Ash Wednesday', a poem especially concerned with the redemption of what is lost, T.S. Eliot quotes and develops Andrewes' phrase 'the Word without a word'.

*If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word, the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.*

As Jesus grows and learns speech and takes up the great task of redeeming all things, language included, as he begins to express in the language of time, in the syllables of events that begin and end, what he eternally is, we have a sense that the still Word remains a source and centre within him, giving form and meaning to the individual words he uses in the particular language he has learned. We sense this very strongly in the little glimpse Luke gives us of the child in the Temple.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:46-47)

The people who witnessed these events were 'amazed at his understanding and his answers', already sensing the authority of the Author, the latent power of the 'Word' which underpins all words in his speech. But we should be equally amazed that he was 'sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions'. For Luke is showing us both sides of the paradox of the incarnation - Jesus speaks as one with authority, but he comes also as a child who needs to learn. There is a development throughout Luke's narrative of Christ's appearances in the Temple, each giving us a glimpse of who Christ is. He comes first to the Temple as the wordless infant and yet fully manifesting what he is, the light in darkness, to those who are prepared by the Spirit to see. So Simeon takes the infant into his arms and praises him as the light that lightens the Gentiles. Then he comes this second time to the Temple as a boy in the midst of the first quickening thrill of the learning of language and reason, and manifests himself to his hearers as the Word, the one to whom ultimately every question is addressed, and from whom every answer comes. Finally, he comes to the Temple a third time as a grown man and manifests himself as the light that shines in darkness, the Word who is a teacher, but also as the true owner of the House which is the Temple and the one who has the authority to cleanse, renew and redeem it.



After 3 years when travelling was very limited, this past summer and autumn enabled us to visit our families. From 12 till 19 July, Bro. Benoit was in Provence and Bro. David-Joseph in Alsace; from 1 till 5 August, Bro. Eric was in Haute-Savoie; from 18 August till 6 September, Bro. Laurent was in the Philippines; from 15 till 24 September, Bro. Thierry was in Corsica; from 27 September till 7 October, Bro. Gregory was in the United States; from 9 October till 3 November, Bro. Joshua was in Mexico.



- ✠ 11 July, the solemnity of St Benedict, our former Bishop, Dr John McAreavey, concelebrated Mass with us and remained for lunch.
- ✠ 16 July, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Jo Mercer made her secular oblation.
- ✠ 18 July-14 August, we welcomed Bro. Antoine from the Abbaye of Maylis (France).
- ✠ 24 July, our Sunday Eucharist was broadcast by BBC, Northern Ireland.
- ✠ 29 July-1 August, Bro. Eric and Bro. Joshua visited the Sisters in Grandchamp for the profession of Sisters Embla and Sonja.
- ✠ 3 August, V. Rev. Jeremy Lepine, former dean of the Anglican cathedral of Bradford (England) begins his novitiate as a secular oblate.
- ✠ 4 August, Dr Harold Miller, former Anglican bishop of the diocese of Down and Dromore (Northern Ireland), came to visit, along with two German Lutheran seminarians.
- ✠ 7-12 August, Bishop Fintan Gavin, of Cork and Ross (Ireland) made his retreat with us.
- ✠ 8 August, Christy Quinn made his secular oblation with us.
- ✠ 10 August, Dr Kevin McDonald, former archbishop of Southwark (England) concelebrated the Eucharist with us and spent some time with the community.
- ✠ 23-31 August, Abbot Mark-Ephrem took time of rest and retreat in the west of Ireland.
- ✠ 8 September, we learnt of the death of our friend, Rev. Dr Winston Graham, former president of the Methodist Church in Ireland; on 14 September Abbot Mark-Ephrem took part in his funeral liturgy.
- ✠ 13 September, we had a visit from Fr Anthony Manoj Prabu, a priest in a parish in the

North of India close to the border with Tibet. He spoke to us about his ministry and the difficult situation of Christians in his country. Our community has supported the mission of Fr Anthony for several years.

✠ 14 September, the solemnity of Holy Cross, the patronal feast of our Abbey, the preacher at our Eucharist was V. Rev. Gregory Dunstan, former dean of the Anglican cathedral in Armagh.

✠ 15 September, our two ecumenical canons took part in ceremonies to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth in their respective cathedrals, Abbot Mark-Ephrem in Armagh and Bro. Eric in Downpatrick.

✠ 27 September, we had a visit from Bishop Erik Varden, formerly abbot of the Trappist Abbey of Mount St Bernard (England), now Bishop of the prelature of Trondheim (in his native Norway).

✠ 1 October, we learnt of the death of Bro. Herbert Kaden at the age of 101 at the monastery of Turvey (England), a monastery that is dependent on the Abbey of Rostrevor. Bro. Herbert was born to a Jewish family in Germany that emigrated to England before the Second World War. He was received into the Catholic Church in 1950 and began his monastic journey in 1972 at Prinknash Abbey (England). On 2 November, Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Bro. Eric travelled to Turvey and took part in the funeral rites on the following day.

✠ 7-19 October, we were happy to welcome Sr Anne-Emmanuelle, Prioress of the Grandchamp community (Switzerland).

✠ 21-27 October, Fr Richard Ffield, a Benedictine monk from Ampleforth (England), made a retreat with us.

✠ 5 November, Peter McDowell begins his novitiate as a secular oblate.

✠ 13 November, we welcomed our friends, Rev. Dr Richard and his wife, Rev. Diane Clutterbuck, for lunch and some time with the community.

✠ 27 November, we open the Advent season in the Anglican church, Rostrevor.



We are the objects of undying love on the part of God.

We know: he has always his eyes open on us, even when it seems to be dark.

He is our father; even more he is our mother.

If children are ill, they have additional claim to be loved by their mother.

And we too, if by chance we are sick with badness, on the wrong track,
have yet another claim to be loved by the Lord.

Bl. John Paul I (10.09.1978)

*We wish all of you a very Happy Christmas
and a Blessed New Year*