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### **St Benedict 2026**

(Letter n° 72)

“Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.”

(1 Co 10:24)

On March 30, 2026, Pope Leo received monks and nuns from three different Italian Benedictine communities (Subiaco, Sesena, and Bari) in Rome. Here is the speech he delivered in the Consistory Hall.

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am glad of this meeting, which also gives us the opportunity to reflect together on the value of the Benedictine charism in your lives, in the life of the Church and in the world.

In identifying “the instruments of good works”, Saint Benedict, in Chapter IV of the Rule, urges us to “keep guard over one’s every act” (48). You, contemplative Benedictine nuns, Benedictine monks, know well how much prayer and prayerful reading of the Word of God, especially in the *Lectio divina*, assist in this vigilance, enabling those who practise them to understand the truth about themselves, in the recognition of their own weaknesses and sins and in the celebration of the Lord’s graces and blessings. This is how the desire to belong to Him is renewed within us and the vow of our consecration is confirmed. Scripture, therefore, should always be “nourishment of our life and of your contemplation and daily life, so that you can then share this transforming experience” (FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*, 19).

The path of sanctification of a consecrated person, of a nun, however, no matter how rich in fervour and inspiration, cannot be reduced to a merely personal journey. It has a necessary community dimension, in which the proclamation of Paschal liberation takes tangible form in fraternal service, a reflection of Christ’s universal love for the Church and for humanity.

In this regard, synodality, promoted by Pope Francis as fundamental for the life of the Church, is translated in the monastery into the daily practice of “walking together”, reciprocal listening, community discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and communion with the local Church and with the Benedictine family. This is manifested in the fraternal assembly, in common prayer and in shared decisions, where authority and obedience come together in dialogue, to seek God’s will together. Monastic life cannot be understood simply as withdrawal from the outside world. It is a means by which a love similar to that of the Master may grow

in the hearts of the disciples, ready to share and to help, even amongst monasteries. Monastic life will thus increasingly become, in a world often marked by self-absorption and individualism, a model for the whole of God's People, reminding us that being missionaries, before doing things, requires a way of being and of conducting relationships.

Here we might mention a particular aspect specific to cloistered missionary life: that of intercession, in which the Word made prayer unites us to Christ the Mediator, who intercedes for us (cf. Heb 7:25). Intercession is the prerogative of hearts that beat in harmony with God's mercy (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2635), ready to gather up and present to the Lord the joys and sorrows, the hopes and anxieties of people today and of every age (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 1), and this is a primary and fundamental aspect of the work entrusted to you.

A model of this is the prophetess Anna, who "did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day" (Lk 2:37). Having been widowed and now advanced in years, she had made the house of God her home. Prayer and asceticism led her to recognize the Messiah in the poor and anonymous child presented by Mary and Joseph: they enabled her to discern, within the fabric of history, God's intervention and to make of it a prophetic proclamation of joy and hope for the entire people of Israel.

Prophecy and discernment lead us to a final theme I would like to speak to you about: ongoing formation, particularly necessary in an age like ours. It consists first and foremost in "knowing the love of Christ which goes beyond all knowledge" (Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *Instruction Cor Orans*, 223) and is fundamental so that consecrated life "may carry out [its] service to the monastery, to the Church and to the world in an ever more appropriate manner" (*ibid.* 236). The entire community is the active agent in this, through prayer, the Word, moments of celebration and decision-making, of discussion and renewal, lived and shared in the primacy of charity. This implies a commitment, for all of you, with wisdom and prudence, to encourage every good intention and to direct every effort towards common growth in the capacity for giving, so that every monastery may become, as Saint Benedict desired, ever more a "school of the Lord's service" (cf. Prologue to the Rule, 45).

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for the immense and hidden good you do for the Church, through your offering, your unceasing prayer, your service, and the witness of your life. Continue this work, which is "the work of God" (cf. Saint Benedict, Rule, 43, 3). I entrust you to Mary Most Holy, Mother of Silence, Woman of Listening, to Saint Benedict, to Saint Scholastica, and to the many Benedictine saints, and I bless you from my heart.



Over the past few months, the event that has most marked the life of our community has been the solemn profession of our Brother Ildefonso M. Quilao on 21 March, the feast of the passing of our Holy Father St Benedict into eternal life.

Brother Ildefonso's parents are Filipino, but he was born and raised in Como, Italy. He was given the name Ildefonso in honour of Blessed Ildefonso Schuster (1880–1954), the Italian Benedictine abbot of the Abbey of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome and later Cardinal Archbishop of Milan.

For his solemn profession, we had the joy of welcoming our former bishop, Bishop John McAreavey, along with many religious friends of the community – including Passionist

and Dominican Fathers, a Dominican Sister, Sisters of Mercy, the Little Sisters of the Poor – and several of our secular oblates.

In preparation for his profession, from 4 to 11 February, Brother Ildefonso made his retreat with the contemplative Dominican Sisters in Drogheda, Ireland.

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✠ 25 January – Abbot Mark-Ephrem travelled to the cathedral in Letterkenny, Ireland, for the installation of Bishop Niall Coll as the new Bishop of Raphoe. Since 2022, Bishop Coll had served as Bishop of Ossory.

✠ 4 February and 7 July – The editorial editorial of the journal *One in Christ* met online.

✠ 5–9 February – Brother David-Joseph was in Colmar, France, for the baptism of a nephew.

✠ 8–16 February – Brother Thierry was at Westmont College (Santa Barbara, California, USA) for a week of preaching and ecumenical meetings.

✠ 23–26 February – Archbishop John McDowell, Anglican Archbishop of Armagh, made a retreat with us.

✠ 2–6 March – Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Brother Thierry were at the Abbey of Maylis (France), where they met Dom Diego M. Rosa, Abbot General of our Congregation, and Dom Andrea M. Santus, the Bursar General.

✠ 23 March – The community enjoyed a day outing. We began by visiting Glenarm Castle, built in 1636 and the seat of the Earls of Antrim. We then travelled up the Antrim Coast, following the Irish Sea as far as the northernmost point of Northern Ireland.

✠ 2 April – Brother Thierry attended the Chrism Mass at Newry Cathedral as the community's representative. The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Apostolic Administrator of our diocese.

✠ 8 April – Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross (Ireland), spent a day of retreat at the Abbey.

✠ 9–12 April – Bishop Martin Hayes, Bishop of Kilmore (Ireland), came to the Abbey for his annual retreat.

✠ 19–23 April – Dom Diego M. Rosa, Dom Andrea M. Santus, and Abbot Mark-Ephrem visited Notre-Dame du Bec Abbey (France).

✠ 30 April – We went to Crossgar for the evening meal and enjoyed a very fraternal time with the Passionist community.

✠ 5–9 June – Brother Thierry visited his parents in France.

✠ For several years our community has supported the ministry of Fr Anthony Manoj Prabu, an Indian priest serving in northern India in the Diocese of Simla and Chandigarh. On 11 June, his bishop, Bishop Sahaya Thatheus Thomas, visited us. He presided at our Eucharist and spent time with the community.

✠ 12–19 June – Before travelling to Douai Abbey (England), where he was to preach a retreat to the Benedictine community, Abbot Mark-Ephrem stopped in Paris for a meeting concerning Bec Abbey.

✠ 30 June–4 July – Our Abbot General, Dom Diego M. Rosa, accompanied by the Vicar of the Congregation, Abbot James Liprie, conducted the canonical visitation of our community. On 3 July, the feast of St Thomas, the Abbot General blessed the new extension of our Abbey.

✠ 6 July – Abbot Mark-Ephrem took part in a meeting at the Passionist community in Crossgar.

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Benedictine PEACE is not achieved by renouncing machine guns.  
Such tactics create no bonding between people; they create no PEACE.  
The PEACE that Benedict would have us strive for is much more positive.  
Real PEACE involves actively making connections between people  
and learning the art of giving priority to the needs of other people.  
The more we care about other people, the more we care for PEACE.  
For Benedict, PEACE is established in a community  
whose members truly seek God  
to the extent that their mutual service is grounded in God.

Andrew Marr OSB