



Benedictine Monks
Holy Cross Abbey
119 Kilbroney Road
Rostrevor Co. Down BT34 3BN
Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 4173 9979
benedictinemonks@btinternet.com
www.benedictinemonks.co.uk
Facebook: Benedictine Monks Rostrevor

St Benedict 2025

(Letter n° 70)

“Would you like to enjoy life? Do you want long life and happiness?
Then keep from speaking evil and from telling lies.
Turn away from evil and do good; strive for peace with all your heart.”
(Ps 34:13-14)

On April 25, 2025, Dom Donato Ogliari, Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Paul outside the Walls in Rome, was invited to give a meditation to the general congregation of cardinals prior to the election of the successor to Pope Francis. We share with you extensive excerpts from his talk:

The centrality of Christ Jesus

At the heart of the wisdom the Church has accumulated through the centuries; at the center of the norms it needs in order to face the trials of history in unity; within her being “an expert in humanity” (*rerum humanarum peritissima*), as Saint Paul VI stated (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 13), there is always the person of Jesus—the Son of God made flesh, who died and rose for our salvation! He is the one whom the Church is called to proclaim and bear witness to in the world.

If Christ were not at the center of the Church’s mission—He who “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8)—then the Church would be nothing more than a cold and sterile institution, lacking the sacred fire that burns, warms, and enlightens, a fire which comes only from her Lord!

What I’m saying may seem obvious and self-evident to you, yet I believe it is not useless to remind ourselves of it. Re-anchoring ourselves each day in this certainty of our faith protects us from the risk of being consumed by the seductions and flattery of the world, by the easy escapes it offers—which inevitably lead to a dilution of the Gospel’s vital and prophetic power.

Yes, we always need to “breathe Christ” (Saint Anthony the Abbot), because He “is everything to us” (Saint Ambrose), and only in His embrace and in the light of His Spirit will the Church find the strength it needs to continue her work of salvation along the paths of time and history.

May Christ, then, be both the guiding star and the compass of your expectations, your encounters, your dialogues, and the choices you will be called to make.

“The Upper Room”

Above all, it becomes clear that the communion built by the Holy Spirit within the community of believers is not the result of flat and rigid uniformity. On the contrary, as Paul describes in his analogy of the body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12ff), the unity and communion to which the Church is called are plural unity and diverse communion. In these, otherness is not the prelude to individualism or polarization, but rather an opportunity for respectful dialogue and shared discernment—a search for creative paths to walk together, “to make the Church,” as Saint John Paul II said, “the home and the

school of communion” (*NMI*, no. 43). Undoubtedly, however, communion remains one of the Church’s great challenges, both today and in the past—a challenge we must confront, both internally and externally, “if we want to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest aspirations” (*ibid.*).

In this light, I feel it is necessary to say a word about the synodal journey undertaken by the universal Church. While some uncertainties and stagnations are undeniable, this process has sparked flames of participation and renewal in every corner of the world. I believe this is a clear sign of the times—a work of the Spirit urging us to promote, first of all, a fruitful integration between the hierarchical-institutional structure and the dimension represented by the *christifideles laici*, so that every baptized person can contribute to building a Koinonia-Church. This Church, far from closing in on itself, is called to be—according to a beautiful expression attributed to Saint John XXIII—the “village fountain,” that is, the place where all people of goodwill can find, if not rootedness in faith, at least a fresh and living word that gives meaning and illuminates their path.

At the same time, we must not ignore the fact that today’s ecclesiology of communion and sense of ecclesial “we” are under great strain. A dominant individualism has infiltrated nearly every sphere of daily life, in which time and activity revolve mostly around the “I,” inevitably impoverishing meaningful interpersonal relationships. This, too, has impacted the life of the Church.

Precisely for this reason, deepening the synodal process—which aims to revitalize communion and participation within the Church’s body—can enhance the Church’s very mission in various areas of society, through the virtuous circle created by communion, participation, and mission.

Ultimately, we might understand the synodal path as a revitalization of Christianity as “the Way”, as it was perceived by the early Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). These communities lived their Christian faith as a journey of following Jesus and witnessing to Him in the world.

At this point, however, we cannot fail to recall that the search for communion and participation, lived in deep connection with the Church’s mission in the world, requires as its foundation a constant and challenging process of conversion—from the “I” to the “we.” This must reach deep into the human and spiritual fabric of our lives. Indeed, it implies walking the difficult path that leads to the “hidden self of the heart” (*kryptòs tēs kardías ánthropos*, 1 P 3:4), where our true “I” resides—the self that, stripped of the idolatry of image and superficiality, we are called to invest for the good of the Church and the world, walking together with our brothers and sisters in the light of the Gospel.

The Church as a “workshop”

Alongside the metaphors of the “house” and the “school” mentioned earlier, I would now like to offer you another metaphor or image from the prophet Jeremiah: that of the potter’s workshop. God is compared by Jeremiah to a potter who holds clay in His hands to shape: “Just as clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:6).

The potter’s hands, working the clay, aim to form something useful and functional, but at the same time strive to create something beautiful and meaningful. For this reason, to achieve a satisfactory result, the potter’s hands know how to coexist with patience: “If the vessel he was making was spoiled in the potter’s hand, he would remake it into another vessel, as seemed right to him” (Jer 18:4). The Church is in the hands of God, who shapes and reshapes it...

Returning to the journey of the Church—both inwardly and outwardly—embracing patience is what allows us to persevere, to not lose heart, and to not give up in the face of failure and setbacks. On the contrary, it prepares us to learn even from our mistakes, helping us to see them not as dead ends from which nothing can be salvaged, but as points from which we can start again to build something greater and more beautiful.

As Pope Francis reminded us in the Bull of Indiction for the Holy Year, patience has much to do with hope, because in addition to being its daughter, it is also what sustains it (cf. *SN*C, n. 4).

As paradoxical as it may seem, a Church that knows how to be patient is a Church that knows how to hope; a Church that recognizes the times of patience is a Church passionate about the future—the future from which God continues to come to meet us. Yet this future is not only that which becomes present, current, and then passes, but one whose roots are firmly planted in God’s eternity.

The distinctive element of Christians, wrote Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, is precisely “the fact that they have a future: ... they know in general that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does the present also become livable. ... The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; a new life has been given to them” (*SS*, n. 2).

It is this new life that the Church, light and salt of the earth, experiences every time it docilely places itself beneath the healing rays of the Spirit, following its Lord.



Two of our brothers celebrated significant birthdays: on February 22, Bro. Gregory turned 70, and on June 10, Bro. Thierry turned 60. On both occasions, we took the opportunity to watch films: on February 22 (while Pope Francis was still alive), *Conclave* (2024), and on June 10, *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word* (2018).



✠ On December 1, the community began the season of Advent with a service in the Anglican church in Rostrevor.

✠ From January 7 to 10, we welcomed our Benedictine confrère Bro. Colman Ó Clabaigh from Glenstal Abbey (Ireland).

✠ On January 6, the community took part in the service for the installation of Rev. Andrew John Hay as the new minister in charge of the Anglican parishes of Warrenpoint and Rostrevor.

✠ On January 24, we received the news of the passing of our friend Bronagh Crimmins.

✠ On February 1 and May 23, the group of theologians from the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church met at the abbey to continue their reflection on the theme of justification by faith.

✠ From February 16 to 23, Fr. Bruno Giacintov, a Benedictine monk from the Archabbey of St. Adalbert and St. Margaret in Prague, was with us for a retreat with a group of young Czech professionals.

✠ On March 2, Fr. Éric took his canon’s stall at the Anglican cathedral in Downpatrick for the installation of Rev. Henry Blair as the new dean.

✠ From March 3 to May 7, Fr. Columba Jennesson from En-Calcat Abbey (France) was with us for a sabbatical.

✠ On Holy Thursday, April 17, Bro. Thierry took part in the Chrism Mass celebrated at Newry Cathedral and presided over by Archbishop Eamon Martin, the apostolic administrator of our diocese.

✠ On May 7, Bro. Thierry was in Belfast for an evening with a group of Catholic and Protestant university students.

✠ On May 8, we welcomed Bishop Hlib Lonchyna, Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Saint Vladimir the Great of Paris for Ukrainians in France, the Benelux, and Switzerland.

✠ On June 15, Bro. Éric represented the community at the ordination of Rev. Jonny Watson, which took place at the Anglican cathedral in Downpatrick.

✠ On June 18, Archbishop Eamon Martin organized a meeting at the abbey between the Diocesan Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Dromore and the priests of the same diocese to reflect on how the Council could assist priests in their ministry.

✠ From June 25 to July 6, Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Fr. Éric were on the west coast of Ireland for a time of rest and retreat.

⌘ On July 2, an ecumenical gathering organized by the Focolare Movement took place at the abbey. Around thirty bishops, clergy, and laypeople—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—from across Ireland came together to pray and reflect.



As we thank the Lord for the calling that changed Saul's life, let us ask him to enable us to respond in the same way to his grace, and to become, ourselves, witnesses of the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (*Rom 5:5*). Let us ask the Lord for the grace to cultivate and spread his charity, and to become true neighbours to one another (cf. Francis, 25 January 2024). Let us compete in showing the love that, following his encounter with Christ, drove the former persecutor to become "all things to all people" (cf. *1 Cor 9:19-23*), even to the point of martyrdom. In this way, for us as for Paul, the weakness of the flesh will show the power of faith in God that brings *justification* (cf. *Rom 5:1-5*).

For centuries, this Basilica has been entrusted to the care of a Benedictine community. How can we fail to mention, then, as we speak of love as the source and driving force of the preaching of the Gospel, the insistent appeals of Saint Benedict, in his Rule, to fraternal charity in the monastery and hospitality towards all (*Rule*, cc. LIII; LXIII).

Leo XIV (Homily, Visit to the Tomb of St Paul,
Basilica St Paul outside the Walls, 20.05.2025)