



First World Congress of Benedictines Oblates

taken from the closing speech

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St Benedict is called the Patron Saint of Europe, yet I hope that one day he will be called the Patron Saint of the whole world. If we read St Gregory the Great we find that one day St Benedict had a vision – in the light of the sun he saw the whole world, not only Montecassino or Italy, or merely the Western world, but he whole world in globe and in the light of God. I think that this is the way to be united with God and through Him “unified” in his light.

The source of our strength is prayer, not only individual prayer, but always in solidarity within the Church and within the Benedictine world. I believe that you also, over the past days, have experienced what it means to live in this spiritual world, among brothers and sisters from all over the world, understanding and living in this way the meaning of Benedictine life.

In the joy of living together as brothers and sisters the exchange of experiences has been especially good and this morning we listened to the splendid presentation from the Philippines. I also believe that, as well as the importance of the exchange, since we are all people who work, the experience of these days represents an opportunity for a spiritual retreat to allow us to return to our roots and to understand more clearly our lives as Oblates and religious in their deepest sense.

Communion with monasteries and the whole world. Communion with God is very important for us Westerners, we need however to understand that there are other approaches to God. In the Western world we have an approach to God which tends to be critical and hesitant. In Africa, it is different, there is a type of very natural approach to God – God is simply there and is lived and experienced much more than in our society. This



happens also in other civilisations, as witnessed by the Philippine experience. We must be more open to God and allow God to enter in us.

The family dimension is also important, and differs greatly from culture to culture, and diverse also in our way of life with small or extended families. In Latin America there are countries where true families do not exist, many have disintegrated, with the man going away and the woman left alone to care for many children. When I arrived the other evening, I saw a woman, I think Vietnamese, waiting for clients, probably in order to scrape together some money in order to feed her children.

I think it is very important to feel solidarity with all those in need, whether they are family groups, prisoners, street children, all those who really live in poverty. By means of the Lectio Divina we are united with God yet often we feel incapable of giving aid. Our forces are limited, we understand different aspects of life and then our help is that of being united in prayer and in hope that God will do what we cannot do.

Sometimes we talk of leadership and thinking of myself, I do not consider myself a leader or a minor king, rather a Moses who accompanies his people into the desert. We cannot do great things but we must seek together the way of the Lord and our path through the desert knowing that the Promised Land awaits us. We know we are still in the desert but if we open our eyes wide we can see a wonderful view of the sky. It is good to be united and to share life together, even in sorrow, helping each other when we are tired or have any other needs. I really love the image of Moses who accompanies his people into the desert and this is a very old image of the Church – the people of God in pilgrimage across the desert. This is also the experience of Benedictine life, where not only we talk of praying but we pray, in community, giving great importance to the liturgy, “chewing over” the Word of God and celebrating together. I hope these are the fruits of our congress which has enriched us greatly.

For me also it has been a great joy to spend this days with you, meeting you and talking to you.

We look to the future. We have seen and understood that the Oblates are a movement, not however a movement of power or a great organisation.



Benedictine monks and monasteries are a movement – on the contrary to modern movements we have no power or money nor do we ostentate what we do. It is this humility which unites us to many people in the world, especially the poor. We are however laden with precious gifts like the three Magi, we can offer people and God great gifts, prayers and true communion. We must leave behind a sense of protagonism because this would mean being too self-focussed, keeping everything in our own hands, seeking to be important. As ours is a spiritual movement everything belongs to God, everything is in his hands. .

Naturally we need to be linked, to share and to communicate. Speaking practically with the organising secretariat about the future, one of the important issues is to decide how often to hold this congress and one idea is to hold it very four years in order to give a sense of continuity and also an efficient management. I have also been asked to find another venue, however it is not easy to find a place large enough to hold 300 people.

I would once again like to express my joy in meeting representatives from so many countries and I think this is the greatest opportunity given us by the congress. Rome is always a privileged place, rich in welcoming structures and also the centre of the Catholic world. Furthermore here we are near the places of our origins, Norcia, Subiaco and Montecassino, and this location provides the chance to visit those places for those who can stay a little longer.

Now we will review the situation with the secretariat and gather experiences, and in preparation for the next congress, I hope to have at least one meeting with national representatives in order to decide the issues to be discussed. I hope that next time I will be able to welcome you to St Anselmo. Its position in an archaeological site does not allow us to build anything nearby, however we could enlarge the library and the hall. This is a big project we are working on. Unfortunately we have to rebuild the roofs among other things. The other day it was raining outside as I was praying and water was dripping on my neck through the holes in the roof.

I would like to thank you again and underline the fact that we are indeed a movement, but a spiritual one, not a great organisation. Our



founding principle is daily experience lived with other people. Let me give you a last example – last year there was a meeting in Rome of Fathers Superior on inter-religious dialogue and, as Benedictines, we were amazed how, despite our chaotic organisation, we are much more advanced than many other religious orders. What is the reason for this? For us the most essential aspect is hospitality, when people come to us they feel at home and really live the meaning of being a Christian. I hope that you also have felt this. Living and praying to God in community in the light of the Benedictine Rule and receiving the freedom which Jesus Christ has given us is a small contribution to peace in the world and mutual understanding between nations and civilisations.

May God bless us all.