

**THE FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF BENEDICTINE OBLATES****ROME 19 – 25 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Welcome address from the Italian Coordinator, Professor Angelamaria Fiorillo
from the monastery of St. Anthony the Abbot in Salerno

Dear friends,

On behalf of the Italian oblates and of the national executive, I welcome you to Rome, to the first World congress of the large family of the Benedictine oblates. As organiser of the Italian group I welcome you with pleasure and I give special thanks to the spokesmen and women who, during the coming week, will help us to reflect on the themes of Communion, Contemplation and Mission and to members of the organising committee who, by means of their hard work, have made possible the realisation of such a complex and important event. I would also like to thank the Abbot Primate who has urged us on and supported us since the beginning. Finally, I thank all the oblates from the 1,203 monasteries around the world who empathise with this initiative, helping realise its success, through prayer and solidarity.

To all of you I repeat my welcome, and I hope your work here will be fruitful. I hope that you will enjoy your stay in Rome. To those oblates who have been unable to come to the Congress I send my affectionate greetings; we shall feel their closeness during these conference days.

In the programme, you will find data relating to the census which has been carried out in the various monasteries and the respective number of oblates associated with each one. We can tell you, from the information gleaned from 1,203 monasteries, that there are 11,500 oblates working with them.

I would like to welcome delegates from the following countries:

Australia, South Africa, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Croatia, The Czech Republic, France, Ghana, The Philippines, Germany, Holland, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Luxemburgh, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, Taiwan, Togo, Trinidad, Tobago, The United States and The United Kingdom

An enormous family which is meeting for the first time, comprising people from various parts of the world, with different languages and cultures, with different ways of expressing Benedictine charisma but one witness of the value and of the validity of the message of our Holy Father, Benedict, in today's world.

Today's world takes on a greater significance if we think about how contemporary society expresses its most urgent needs.

What is there around us? What needs have we? What values?

Ongoing wars, civil wars, murders, violence of every kind with no respect for human life in all of this.

The daily press from all over the world is imbued with the suffering of the human spirit!

Reading at a glance of such a phenomenon could lead to a feeling of mistrust and pessimism with little space for the Christian message.



But no.....

Just when everything seems lost, when bad news is on the increase and man seems overwhelmed, when he doesn't shout loudly to the Lord for help but blaspheming and offence are his daily bread....then, right here and now, his search for God begins.

An example of this is something we learn from Saint Benedict, that at times of crisis he has initiated new ways of searching for God., capable of building a new civilisation.

It is the time we are living in right now which imposes great responsibilities on us, as Christians and oblates; these are concepts which coincide, one is a continuation of the other.

These responsibilities concern not only our own personal lives, our daily commitments, our path towards holiness, the gift made to God but also and above all our mission in the world. It is necessary to reflect, therefore, on what the possible ways are of passing on this gift to others.

The image of the oblate attached to his monastery who sets out on a path of spiritual research, who shares with the monks and nuns certain aspects of spiritual life, whose small flame becomes part of the communal flame and who becomes the jealous and privileged keeper of it.....this is now all changed, or rather it is only one aspect of the duty which awaits us in our daily lives to which we are asked to bring evidence.

The actual time in which we are living shows us a new road to follow, which takes us through the ways of the world, goes through the midst of others, goes across the hearts and feelings of others, opens up interreligious dialogue, which speaks new languages and finally arrives in the midst of our own people, overcoming obstacles, difficulties, and prejudices, thus learning from dialogue and communion with others.

The times in daily life when the oblate testifies his oblation by word and deed thus become occasions for a new evangelisation. We oblates, too, are called to do this: to evangelise and to evangelise ourselves continually, without stopping, not discounting anything, always ready to begin again but without having to persevere, with the serenity of one who has broad shoulders, sustained by living by the Rule, with the kind of conviction which children have who feel strong in belonging to a large family with whom they share sound principles and values.

The oblate and the lay person can, today more than ever, bring a strong contribution to monasticism and Christianity in general. In every moment of the day, the oblate is in touch with others, in the family, in the workplace and in public places; he can give sound and immediate responses to needs expressed; he can make note of these needs because he is there; he lends an ear and keeps a watchful eye on things; he is ready to listen and to see with the senses of his heart.

He has no prejudices and does not stereotype those different from himself.

The reason we have come to Rome is to participate in this Congress, which we can consider to be the start of an important turning point in the Benedictine world. We know each other and our different ways, we accept each other and we are friends.....and because we are friends, we don't want to lose sight of each other.

Following the days spent here, one could imagine that an even greater group of oblates could be kept in touch with representatives of various nations, which might promote twinning between monasteries in different parts of the world, and which would give life to meetings of this kind, a spirit of communion and brotherhood amongst the people.



In this spirit we trust in the Word and it is with this spirit that I repeat my welcome to you all, on behalf of all the Italian oblates and those throughout the world.