



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
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The passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer. 2. *Witnesses: monasticism and the power of intercession. Gregory of Narek*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue our catechesis on the witnesses of apostolic zeal. We started with Saint Paul, and last time we looked at the martyrs, who proclaim Jesus with their lives, to the point of giving their lives for him and for the Gospel. But there is another great witness that runs through the history of faith: that of the *nuns and monks*, sisters and brothers who renounce themselves and who renounce the world to imitate Jesus on the path of poverty, chastity and obedience, and to intercede on behalf of all. Their lives speak for themselves, but we might ask ourselves: how can people living in monasteries help the proclamation of the Gospel? Wouldn't they do better putting their energies into the mission? Coming out of the monastery and preaching the Gospel outside the monastery? In reality, the monks are the beating heart of the proclamation. Their prayer is oxygen for all the members of the Body of Christ, their prayer is the invisible force that sustains the mission. It is no coincidence that the patroness of the missions is a nun, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. Let us listen to how she discovered her vocation — she wrote: “I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was burning with love. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that love comprised all vocations. [...] Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love.... my vocation, at last I

have found it.... my vocation is love! [...] In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love” (*Autobiographical Manuscript “B”*, 8 September 1896). Contemplatives, monks, nuns: people who pray, work, pray in silence, for all the Church. And this is love: it is the love that is expressed by praying for the Church, working for the Church, in the monasteries.

This love for everyone inspires the life of nuns and monks, and is translated into their prayer of intercession. In this regard, I would like to offer you the example of Saint Gregory of Narek, Doctor of the Church. He was an Armenian monk, who lived around the year 1000, who left us a book of prayers, into which the faith of the Armenian people, the first to embrace Christianity, is poured out; a people that, joined to the cross of Christ, has suffered so much throughout history. And Saint Gregory spent almost his entire life in the monastery of Narek. There he learned to peer into the depths of the human soul and, by fusing poetry and prayer together, marked the pinnacle of both Armenian literature and spirituality. What is most striking about him is the *universal solidarity* of which he is an interpreter. And among monks and nuns there is a universal solidarity: whatever happens in the world finds a place in their heart, and they pray. The heart of monks and nuns is a heart that captures like an antenna; it picks up what happens in the world, and prays and intercedes for this. And in this way they live in union with the Lord and with everyone. And Saint Gregory of Narek writes: “I have voluntarily taken upon myself all faults, from those of the first father down to the last of his descendants” (cf. *Book of Lamentations*, 72). And as Jesus did, monks and nuns take upon themselves the problems of the world, the difficulties, the ailments, many things, and they pray for others. And these are the great evangelizers. Why do monasteries live closed up, and evangelize? Because with the word, for example, intercession and daily work, monks and nuns are a bridge of intercession for all people and for sins. They weep, even shedding tears, they weep for their sins — we are all sinners — and they also weep for the sins of the world, and they pray and intercede with their hands and heart raised up. Let us think a little of this — if I may permit myself the use of the word — “reserve” that we have in the Church: they are the true strength, the true force that carries the People of God forward, and this is where the habit comes from that people have — the People of God — of saying, “Pray for me, pray for me”, when they meet a consecrated man or woman, because they know there is a prayer of intercession. It will do us good — to the extent we are able — to visit a monastery, because there one prays and works. Each one has its own rule, but their hands are always occupied: engaged in work, engaged in prayer. May the Lord give us new monasteries, may he give us new monks and nuns to carry the Church forward with their intercession. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, Denmark, Malta, Kenya, Kuwait, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen

Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

Lastly, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Inspired by the apparition of Christ to the two “disciples of Emmaus” (cf. *Lk* 24, 13-35), may you know how to find Jesus in prayer and in reflection, and, as happened to the wayfarers of Emmaus, may your hearts burn for the desires, enthusiasm and certainties that only the divine Master can evoke.

And brothers and sisters, let us not forget to pray for battered Ukraine.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now turn to the example of the saints of every age, beginning with those who embraced the monastic life. Their witness of following Christ in poverty, chastity and obedience was combined with unceasing intercessory prayer for the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church. Today we consider Saint Gregory of Narek, a medieval Armenian monk and Doctor of the Church, whose writings embody the profound Christian tradition of the Armenian people, the first to embrace the Gospel. In the hiddenness of his monastery, Gregory sensed a profound solidarity with the whole Church and her mission of preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to all nations and peoples. Identifying with sinful humanity, he devoted his entire existence to interceding for sinners, the poor and those in need of the Lord’s healing and forgiveness. The example of Saint Gregory of Narek reminds us of our responsibility to cooperate, by our own intercessory prayer, in the Church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel message of reconciliation, redemption and peace for the entire human family.