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To Benedictines: keep the oases of the spirit alive

This morning in the Clementine Hall the Pope received the 250 participants in the congress of Benedictine abbots and abbesses gathered in Rome to reflect on the monastic charism received from St. Benedict and their faithfulness to it in a changing world. This theme acquires special meaning in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy since, as Francis affirmed, “if it is only in the contemplation of Jesus Christ that we perceive the merciful face of the Father, monastic life constitutes a privileged route to achieve this contemplative experience and to translate it into personal and community witness”.

Today’s world clearly demonstrates the need for a mercy that is the heart of Christian life and “which definitively manifests the authenticity and credibility of the message of which the Church is the depository, and which she proclaims. And in this time and in this Church, called to focus increasingly on the essential, monks and nuns safeguard by vocation a peculiar gift and a special responsibility: that of keeping alive the oases of the spirit, where pastors and faithful can draw from the wellsprings of divine mercy”

With the grace of God and seeking to live mercifully in their communities, monks and nuns “announce evangelical fraternity from all their monasteries spread out in every corner of the globe, and they do so with that purposeful and eloquent silence that lets God speak out in the deafening and distracted life of the world”.

Therefore, although they live separated from the world, their cloistered life “is not barren: on the contrary, an enrichment and not an obstacle to communion”. Their work, in harmony with prayer, enables them to participate in God’s creative work and shows their “solidarity with the poor who cannot live without work”. Their hospitality allows them to encounter the hearts of the “most lost and distant, of those who are in a condition of grave human and spiritual poverty”, and their commitment to the formation of the young is highly appreciated. “Students in your schools, through study and your witness of life, can too become experts in that humanity that emanates from the Benedictine Rule. Your contemplative life is also a privileged channel for nurturing communion with the brothers of the Oriental Churches”.

“Your service to the Church is very valuable”, he concluded, expressing his hope that the Congress may strengthen the Federation so that it is increasingly at the service of communion and cooperation between monasteries and urging the Benedictines not to be discouraged if their members age or diminish in number. “On the contrary”, he emphasised, “conserve the zeal of your witness, even in those countries that are most difficult

today, with faithfulness to your charism and the courage to found new communities”.
