



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with the Monastic Community of the Abbey of Montevergine

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Monastic Community of the Abbey of Montevergine.

The following is the Pope's greeting to those present at the audience:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you all, the Father Abbot, the monks and collaborators. You desired this meeting on the occasion of the Jubilee for the ninth centenary of the founding of the Abbey of Montevergine in 1124 which took place in 1124 by Saint William of Vercelli.

At the origin of your story there are no miracles or extraordinary events, but the solicitude of a pastor, the bishop of Avellino, who wanted to build a church in that elevated place and gather a small number of people in the service of God, to make it a centre of prayer, evangelization and charity. I would therefore like to emphasize, in this meeting of ours, the importance of these two dimensions in your lives and in your apostolate, and I do so with some words attributed to Saint Augustine: "*Esto donum Deo ut sis donum Dei*", make yourself a gift for God, in order to be a gift of God.

To make oneself a "gift for God". It is the meaning of the monastic vocation, which puts at the root of every action the *work of God*, and therefore prayer, which Saint Benedict recommends putting before all else (cf. *Rule* 43.3). The Shrine of Our Lady of Montevergine, located high up, like a lookout, is visible from all over Irpinia, and the faithful flock there, often on foot, to find consolation and hope, to receive new strength during their pilgrimage, as many traditional songs that accompany the pilgrimages, even in dialect, still remind us. Welcoming them is the beautiful icon of the Mother of God, with her large almond-shaped eyes, ready to gather tears and prayers, showing everyone, on her knees, the Child Jesus, the Son of God made man. Well, to make

yourself a “gift for God” means to pray to have those large, good eyes too, and to show everyone you meet, like Mary, the Lord, present in your hearts.

During the second world war, your community had the grace of welcoming the *Holy Shroud*, brought secretly to your Shrine so that it could be protected and venerated, safe from the risk of bombing. This too is a beautiful image of your primary vocation: to safeguard the image of Christ in you, so as to be able to show it to your brothers and sisters.

Then, the second point: *being a “gift of God”*. Namely, giving oneself generously to those who ascend to the Shrine, so that, by approaching the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation, they may feel, in attention and prayer, welcomed and brought under the mantle of the Mother of God. And being monks, physically far from the world, but spiritually very close to its problems and its anguish, silent guardians of communion with the Lord, and at the same time generous hosts in welcoming others (cf. *Rule* 53,1), and this can make you, for those who meet you, a living and eloquent sign of God’s presence. Therefore, dear brothers, I urge you not to give in to the temptation of conforming to the mentality and styles of the world, and to let yourselves be transformed constantly by God, renewing your heart and growing in Him (cf. *Rm* 12, 2), so that those who come to you in search of light are not disappointed.

Dear friends, at Montevergine you have the fortune of being hosts of the House of Mary, of living beneath her merciful gaze, protected by “*Mamma Schiavona*”, as she is affectionately called. Cherish this gift and cultivate it within you, in order to be able to share it with others. Thank you for coming. I bless you from my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
