

Memorial of St. Scholastica

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

February 10, 2021

On Sunday, May 24, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Benedictine Archabbey of Monte Cassino. During Vespers, the Pope knelt in prayer at the tombs of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica situated behind the main altar.

In his Address to Benedictine men and women around the world, he mentioned how the Abbey at Monte Cassino had been destroyed four times and rebuilt for the last time after the bombing of Monte Cassino during the Second World War.

Pope Benedict's Address captures the Monastic Mission and Charism of St. Scholastica and St. Benedict so powerfully and how it impacts the mission of the Church and the World that I would like to quote a substantial portion of it this morning.

Pope Benedict writes:

"Rightly, therefore, the Church venerates St. Benedict as an "eminent teacher of monastic life" and a "doctor of spiritual wisdom in his love of prayer and work"; a luminous "guide of the peoples to the light of the Gospel" who, "lifted up to Heaven on a shining path", teaches men and women of all the epochs to seek God and the eternal riches prepared by him (cf. *Preface of the Saint* in the monastic supplement to MR, 1980, 153).

Yes, Benedict was a shining example of holiness and pointed Christ out to the monks as the one great ideal; he was a teacher of civilization who, in suggesting a balanced and adequate vision of the divine requirements and ultimate destiny of the human being, always also kept clearly in mind the needs and reasons of the heart, to teach and inspire authentic and constant brotherhood so that in the complex social relations people would not lose sight of a spiritual unity that would always be capable of building and fostering peace.

It is not by chance that the word *PAX* is used to greet pilgrims and visitors at the entrance of this Abbey, rebuilt after the dreadful disaster of the Second World War;

it rises like a silent warning to reject every form of violence in order to build peace: in families, in communities, among peoples and throughout humanity. St Benedict invites every person who climbs this hill to seek peace and to follow him: "*inquire pacem et sequere eam* (Ps 33:14-15)" (*Rule*, Prologue, 17).

At his school monasteries down the centuries became fervent centres of dialogue, encounter and a beneficial blending of different peoples, unified by the evangelical culture of peace. Monks have been able to teach the art of peace by word and example, putting into practice the three "bonds" that Benedict mentions as necessary to preserve the unity of the Spirit among human beings: the Cross, that is the very law of Christ; the book, or in other words culture; and the plough that implies work, the domination of matter and of time.

Thanks to the activity of monasteries that is structured in accordance with the threefold daily commitment of prayer, study and work, entire peoples on the European continent have experienced authentic redemption and a beneficial moral, spiritual and cultural development, learning the meaning of continuity with the past, practical action for the common good, openness to God and the transcendent dimension. Let us pray that Europe may always be able to make the most of this patrimony of Christian principles and ideals that constitutes an immense cultural and spiritual wealth.

This is possible but only if one accepts the constant teaching of St Benedict, that is the "*quaerere Deum*", the quest for God, as man's fundamental commitment. Human beings cannot completely fulfil themselves, they cannot be truly happy without God. It is your task in particular, dear monks, to be living examples of this inner and profound relationship with him, implementing without compromise the programme that your Founder summed up in the "*nihil amori Christi praeponere*", "prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (*Rule* 4:21). Holiness consists of this, a valid proposal for every Christian, especially in our time, in which people feel the need to anchor life and history to sound spiritual references.

For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, your vocation is more up to date than ever and your mission as monks and nuns is indispensable.

From this place, where his mortal remains rest, the holy Patron of Europe continues to invite everyone to pursue his work of evangelization and human promotion.

In the first place he encourages you, dear monks, to stay faithful to the spirit of your origins and to be authentic interpreters of his programme of spiritual and social rebirth. May the Lord grant you this gift through the intercession of your Holy

Founder, of St Scholastica, his sister, and of the Order's Saints. And may the heavenly Mother of the Lord, whom we invoke today as "Help of Christians," watch over you and protect this Abbey and all your monasteries as well as the diocesan community that has grown up around Monte Cassino. Amen!"

Today, we ask St. Scholastica and St. Benedict's intercession for vocations to the Monastic Life and we thank God for how Monastic Life in its various forms and its unique charisms and gifts enriches the mission of the Church and the World.