

HOMILY OF THE HOLY MASS
125th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
BENEDICTINE CONFEDERATION
Sant'Anselmo, 21 April 2018

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Most Reverend Father Abbot Primate,
Dear Benedictine Monks,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to preside this Holy Eucharist, on occasion of the 125th anniversary of the constitution, in 1893, of the Benedictine Confederation, by the will of Pope Leo XIII, who founded a common house of prayer and study in Rome to promote greater unity and cohesion among the Benedictines of the whole world.

It is particularly significant that this solemn celebration is taking place on the day of the liturgical Solemnity of Saint Anselm, in the Church dedicated to him. By combining clarity of speculation, pastoral care and the art of government, he became one of the personalities who had lasting influence on philosophical and theological thought and showed well how brilliant results can come from the humble following of the monastic *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

We have just heard the words of Saint Paul in the Synagogue of Antioch. He summarizes the salvation history of the people of Israel and, in the passage just proclaimed, focuses his attention on the long-awaited Messiah, on Christ, sent by the Father and not recognized by "*those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers*" (Acts 13.27).

In all the crucial phases of the journey of the people of Israel, however, the fidelity of God to his plan of salvation stands out. The disobediences and sins of the chosen people are contrasted to the holiness and eternal benevolence of God Who, in spite of rebellions and misunderstandings, intervenes with power, reversing the fates of situations that may have seemed to have had no way out. This reaches its peak at the conclusion of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, where the tomb in which his dead body had been laid becomes the birthplace of the glorious Resurrection that we are called to proclaim to the world. God has fulfilled all of his promises, and it is our joyful task to "*bless the Lord at all times*" (cf. Psalm 34), as the monk commits himself to do with his life.

If the time of Benedict of Norcia was characterized by the aftershocks connected to the dissolution of the ancient world, with the chronic social and civil instability that follow continuous wars and invasions, ours is marked by haste and by the pervasiveness of rapid and runaway emotions. Today's socio-cultural context invites us urgently to taste innumerable experiences, passing from one to another without any regrets for those left behind and without too many expectations for those that will be met. In other words, what prevails is what Pope Francis repeatedly has called "*the culture of the temporary*", of the fleeting.

Every aspect of existence – personal and intimate, family and social – comes to be conditioned by it, because it is difficult to carve out adequate space and time to reflect, to savor the beauty of nature or to build solid and good relationships patiently over time.

The result is not a growth of maturity and, even less, of people's happiness. The eternal temporary, the continual fleeing from commitments and responsibilities that involve life in its entirety, the phobia towards any rule that gives to the agitated and wounded heart a little bit of peace, end up exhausting the mind and draining an enormous amount of energy, often leaving people feeling emptied and bored.

Saint Benedict of Norcia, and the Benedictine monasticism to which he gave origin, give us a very distinguished perspective, whose fascination increases all the more as the world is clouded by the fog of the ephemeral.

Many, in fact, after having wandered so vainly in search of a personal little *grail*, after having built their castle upon the sand and seen it collapse – as the Gospel of Matthew has taught us today – feel the need for wisdom, inner peace, and simple and lasting joy, and to return to building on solid rock. In this search, so many rediscover the vitality of Benedictine monasticism.

Saint Benedict, in effect, impresses us by his equilibrium, by the wise balance between *Ora* and *Labora* during the passing of the monk's day, by the modulation between praise to God and fraternal life in community. The place of honor recognized for prayer, contemplation, listening and daily meditation on the Word of God is transformed into spiritual energy to nourish the life of the monk and to spread its fragrance. Respect for the times set for prayer, for manual work and for study makes it easier to internalize the discipline, while the practice of hospitality allows anyone who desires it to put forward a lifestyle distinguished from the common, but truly appealing and worthy of being deepened.

The Church and civilization are grateful to Benedictine monasticism, not only for having contributed preeminently to the salvation of the cultural patrimony of classicism and to have spread new cultivation practices that improved agricultural yields; not only is it grateful to you for the glorious past that made you the builders of Europe – united by a widespread network of monasteries – but also for what you represent in the Church and society of today: a lighthouse lit on the mountain, which makes known a way of life that is ancient yet always new, not fashionable but always current, far from the common life, yet offered to all as a testimony and to many as a concrete opportunity to orient steadily an entire existence toward elevated goals.

Communal fraternity, *stabilitas loci*, observance of a balanced *Rule*, and the paternal, vigilant, authoritative yet never tyrannical action of the Abbot. The characteristic traits that the blessed soul of Benedict has given you are perpetually valid and ask only to be valued and lived with that prudence and wisdom that the experience of the centuries has revealed to you, as the specifics of places and times require.

Therefore, it is no wonder that, rooted in the life of faith and in fidelity to your charism, you have engaged in educational and formative work through your schools, universities and seminaries, while devoting so much energy to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Only by strengthening one's own formation and faith can one open up to the other so as to welcome and listen to him, to dialogue with him and find unprecedented ways of friendship and authentic mutual respect, purifying us from the temptations of syncretism and fundamentalism.

The Church thanks you because, with your presence and work, you act as a sort of "*field hospital*" for all those who, wounded in spirit, desire a little refreshment, desiring to give a little of their time to the Lord, or perhaps – at least at the beginning of their journey – aspire only to the opportunity for an intense conversation with their conscience in a place that allows the person to "*re-enter into oneself*", to abandon for a few hours or a few days that rhythm so often chaotic and without compass in which one is immersed.

The Church also thanks you because you have shown, for fifteen hundred years, that the first and fundamental motivation at the base of your being together, the *quaerere Deum*, the search for God, generates new culture, brings growth to the arts and to the love for knowledge, because the monk knows that it is always necessary to give an account for the hope that is in him (cf. 1 Pt 3.15).

In today's second reading, we have encountered the Apostle Paul, who addresses himself to the Father so that he may grant him "*to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man*" (Eph 3:16). The "*school of the Lord's service*" – as Saint Benedict called monasticism – is a holy gym for this strengthening of the inner man, a valid instrument for learning to discern "*what comes from the Holy Spirit and what comes from the spirit of world or from the spirit of the devil*", as Pope Francis told you the other day, to learn to be docile to the Spirit, to allow yourselves to be surprised by the breath of his grace and to become good evangelizers precisely because you have been evangelized, worthy missionaries precisely because you are humble disciples.

We are all invited to listen to the Word of the Lord and to put it into practice so as to be – as we have just read in the Gospel of Matthew – like wise men who build their houses, and above all their lives, upon the firm rock that is Christ. You monks have received the delivery of this sweet commandment twice: from Our Lord and from the Founder of your Order.

For this reason, it is essential that I now refer to Saint Benedict so that he may be confirmed as an inexhaustible intercessor of graces for each of his monks, and to the Mother of God, to Mary, Our Lady of Listening, to Her who "*meditated in her heart*" (cf. Lk 2:19) upon the words, gestures and events that concerned Her Divine Son, so that for the glory of God and the good of the brothers, she might transform into a testimony of life that divine Word which every day is the sap of your prayers and the food of your contemplation. May it be so.