

Address to the Holy Father - 16 September 2022

Most Holy Father,

We, the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, and all those who give their services to this General Chapter, are very grateful to you for wanting to receive us this morning and spend time with us. We are very aware that this is not obvious after your trip to Kazakhstan over the past few days. Your tireless commitment to peace, in this time of war and violence, deeply impresses us. Your predecessor Saint Paul the Sixth entrusted the interreligious dialogue to the monks and nuns who live according to the Rule of St. Benedict. Our interreligious dialogue is not a dialogue of words but simply the dialogue of shared life, the culture of encounter, the spirituality of the Visitation. Our Blessed Brothers of Tibherine and St. Charles de Foucauld, once a Trappist, recently canonized by you, are lasting and inspiring examples of this for us.

Our Order normally celebrates its General Chapter every three years but because of the covid-19 situation, it has not been possible since 2017. The pandemic has often hit our communities hard, both in numbers and in our livelihood. However, an experience that has strengthened our connection to each other and to the world. We were fortunate to be able to hold an election chapter in February of this year so that I may now be the one to greet you here, as the new General Abbot, on behalf of our Order. For all of us it is a joy that my predecessor, Dom Eamon Fitzgerald, is here with us. Our gratitude for his example, commitment and closeness over all these years is great.

February's election chapter gave our Order a deep experience of synodality. From that experience, we began to dream to listen to what the Lord has to say to us at this time. Superiors, from their dealings with the Word of God, have listened to each other's dreams and discovered that God is calling us to deepen communion with God and each other in our vulnerability, to promote a more balanced participation of everyone in the Order, to strengthen our mission especially in the areas of ecology and universal brotherhood. Finally, we will have to find more creative ways to promote and support formation in our communities so that we will truly all reach together the final goal of our vocation. By daring to dream, we rediscovered our contemplative charism and its prophetic value.

Holy Father, we are here to also receive a word from you. A word that can help and encourage us in our prayerful vocation at the heart of the Church. We are aware of our responsibility for church and world and know ourselves sustained by your word and especially by your prayer. This visit is also a concrete expression of our constant prayer for you. May God, through the intercession of Mary, Queen of Citeaux, give you all the strength needed for your universal pastoral ministry.

Thank you again for this special opportunity.