

St Benedict
(Proverbs 2:1-9 / John 17:20-26)
11.07.2014

On this Solemnity of St Benedict we read an extract from Jesus' Prayer recorded for us in John's gospel.

In this prayer Jesus prays for His disciples *and those who will come to believe through their testimony*.

This means that Jesus offered His prayer for us.

Today we hear Jesus ask the Father that we may be one.

The reading of this gospel passage is an invitation addressed to us to reflect upon our monastic life as a ferment of unity for others.

We are called to be *one in Christ* (a phrase found in the writings of the apostle Paul and in the Rule of St Benedict) and by our oneness in Christ to be a leaven of communion for the wider Church and for the world in which we live.

We find this wonderful phrase in the writings of St John-Paul: *communion begets communion*.

This expression gives us hope and assurance in regard to the value of our testimony as a monastic community. It encourages us to believe that what we live here is relevant and beneficial to the world in which we live.

Our authentic union with Christ will lead to unity not only within our own community, but also the wider community of believers, and even beyond it, society in general, since, as we heard, it is in the nature of communion to beget communion.

Jesus is clear in His prayer for His disciples, His prayer for us, that His hope and longing, His aspiration and desire, is to see our unity lived as a testimony for the benefit of others in the wider world.

He prays: *May they be one so that the world may believe*.

We are evidently called to encourage and stimulate the growth in unity of all Christ's disciples and also all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

It has been said – and quite rightly so: *The Church is the only Institution that does not exist for itself, but for others*.

This is also true for a monastic community; it is true for the community of this monastery, as it is for that of every monastery.

To the extent that a monastic community is a living cell of the Church its mission is to be a ferment of reconciliation in the world.

We are not gathered here for ourselves alone.

Every monastery exists for the wider Church and for the wider world.

This particular monastery of the Holy Cross has a special commitment to the Church (the Churches) in Northern Ireland, but it is also committed to the Churches, far beyond this land.

We have a mission in regard to the wider world.

Our mission is to work towards all being gathered together as one.

We are called to hold God's People – all people – in our hearts and in our prayer *that they may all be one*.

It befalls us to do all we can *to preserve the unity of the Spirit* among ourselves and even more than that to promote this unity all around us.

We read in *Vita Consecrata: The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading a spirituality of communion, first of all by their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries.*

St John-Paul made it clear again and again that he counted upon communities of consecrated life to open and encourage *a continuing dialogue between all people, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred and senseless violence.*

It doesn't take much imagination to see Northern Ireland fall into this category!

And there are many other places in the world where this is also true.

... Just think of the Holy Land and importance of the presence of consecrated men and women there: the presence of our own brothers and sisters at the Abbey of the Resurrection, Abu Gosh, the other Benedictine monasteries and diverse Religious communities in the Holy Land.

Placed wherever they have been over the centuries Benedictine monasteries have been true havens of peace.

They can still do much within the world's different societies – societies frequently marked by heated disputes and passions which spill over into violent conflict.

Just by their existence they witness to peace and reconciliation and can contribute to the growth of these God-given gifts.

Monasteries fulfil this role all the more when they engage themselves consciously to this end.

They have a lot to offer by the quality of their internal life.

It is to the extent that monastic communities really exchange in honest dialogue within their own monasteries that they can all the more credibly call upon and encourage others to do so.

If our communities are truly intentional communities of reconciliation: communities in which persons of different backgrounds, social classes, education, age, language, culture, come together with the desire to be *one in Christ*, then they are really eloquent signs.

They speak to the society in which they are planted.

They send out the signal that dialogue is always possible and that differences can be resolved, dissensions and discord worked through and dissonances brought into harmony.

At this particular time of the year – and this year all the more given the tensions which are visible and the emotions which are raw – as a community, here at Rostrevor, we cannot but feel challenged to bear witness to peace in Northern Ireland.

How can we do this?

To begin with: by striving to be at peace with one another!

Our life in community has this sign value to offer: communion is possible for people from different cultures called to share a common life.

Here we are just six monks from four countries!

Our life in community is thus a visible sign, before the Church and society, of a bond which comes from our response to the same call and a shared desire to love and serve the Lord – notwithstanding the differences of race and origin, language and culture which exist between us.

To be obedient that our common call demands of us that we listen to God and to each other.

The first word of Benedict's Rule is *listen*.

Listening together, in mutual attention, is vital!

Without it, life together is just not possible.

This explains the apostle's exhortations: *Obey one another ... Give way to one another ... Listen to one another*.

It is our listening together, our striving to be in accord with one other, which not only holds at bay, but actually helps us move beyond, the spirit of discord and division which, if we allow ourselves to be bound them, will only tear us apart.

What I am saying here this morning really does remind us of our grave responsibility as a community.

What I am saying here implies that if we are true to our call in this place we can become for those around us, and for the whole world, what we are called to be as Christian witnesses: *bright shining lights* in an often overcast, clouded, darkened world.

Our striving to be truly united to one another, gathered together in communion of mind and heart, can make of this monastery what it is called to be: *a God-enlightened space*.

The very architecture of this building is a reminder to us that this is what this place is called to be: a God-enlightened space.

In saying that I am led to think of an incident recorded for us by St Gregory the Great in his *Second Book of the Dialogues ... The Life of the Man of God, Benedict*.

(This incident is depicted on the icon at the back of this church, the icon which shows St Benedict and St Bernard Tolomei holding up this monastery.)

Gregory tells us how shortly before his death *Benedict was graced to see the whole world englobed in a circle of light*.

Gregory tells the deacon Peter who asks for an explanation of this vision that it bears witness to Benedict's being caught up in, and, being at one with, God ... in communion of mind and heart.

The person who is one with God sees things as God sees them, for that person is already living in God's own light.

That is how we are called to live.

May be strengthened by God's grace to do so!

May St Benedict's prayer and example encourage us in this respect!

May our unity shine brightly and serve a beacon for others! May it encourage them to walk in the light of the Lord and in fellowship with one another!

Amen!