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(Letter n° 69)

“Declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it,
send it forth to the end of the earth;
say, ‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob’.”
(Is 48:20)

On 24 December, Pope Francis will inaugurate the Jubilee Year 2025. We invite you to read excerpts from the Bull of Indiction (nos. 1-4 and 25).

“Hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome. Hope is also the central message of the coming Jubilee that, in accordance with an ancient tradition, the Pope proclaims every twenty-five years. My thoughts turn to all those pilgrims of hope who will travel to Rome in order to experience the Holy Year and to all those others who, though unable to visit the City of the Apostles Peter and Paul, will celebrate it in their local Churches. For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the “door” (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as “our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).

Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness. For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope. Taking it as our guide, let us return to the message that the Apostle Paul wished to communicate to the Christians of Rome.

“Since we are justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God... Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:1-2.5). In this passage, Saint Paul gives us much to reflect upon. We know that the Letter to the Romans marked a decisive turning point in his work of evangelization. Until then, he had carried out his activity in the eastern part of the Empire, but now he turns to Rome and all that Rome meant in the eyes of the world. Before him lay a great challenge, which he took up for the sake of preaching the Gospel, which knows no barriers or confines. The Church of Rome was not founded by Paul, yet he felt impelled to hasten there in order to bring to everyone the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, a message of hope that fulfils the ancient promises, leads to glory and, grounded in love, does

not disappoint.

Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:19). That life becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God's grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit.

By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35-39). Here we see the reason why this hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life. As Saint Augustine observes: "Whatever our state of life, we cannot live without these three dispositions of the soul, namely, to believe, to hope and to love".

Saint Paul is a realist. He knows that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Even so, he can write: "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom 5:3-4). For the Apostle, trials and tribulations mark the lives of those who preach the Gospel amid incomprehension and persecution (cf. 2 Cor 6:3-10). Yet in those very contexts, beyond the darkness we glimpse a light: we come to realize that evangelization is sustained by the power flowing from Christ's cross and resurrection. In this way, we learn to practise a virtue closely linked to hope, namely patience. In our fast-paced world, we are used to wanting everything now. We no longer have time simply to be with others; even families find it hard to get together and enjoy one another's company. Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness. (...)

A renewed appreciation of the value of patience could only prove beneficial for ourselves and for others. Saint Paul often speaks of patience in the context of our need for perseverance and confident trust in God's promises. Yet, before all else, he testifies to God's own patience, as "the God of all patience and encouragement" (Rom 15:5). Patience, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, sustains our hope and strengthens it as a virtue and a way of life. May we learn to pray frequently for the grace of patience, which is both the daughter of hope and at the same time its firm foundation.

In our journey towards the Jubilee, let us return to Scripture and realize that it speaks to us in these words: "May we who have taken refuge in him be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered" (Heb 6:18-20). Those words are a forceful encouragement for us never to lose the hope we have been given, to hold fast to that hope and to find in God our refuge and our strength.

The image of the anchor is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. This hope, which transcends life's fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials

and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called.

The coming Jubilee will thus be a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society, in our interpersonal relationships, in international relations, and in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation. May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pet 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises.

Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: "Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!" (Ps 27:14). May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever.



From 6 to 19 September, alongside approximately 215 Abbots, Priors, and Superiors of the Benedictine Confederation, Abbot Mark-Ephrem participated in the OSB Congress 2024. Twenty-two representatives from women's Benedictine monasteries and institutes were also present.

On 14 September, Abbot Jeremias Schröder, from the Abbey of St Ottilien (Germany), was elected the 11th Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation. The Abbot Primate's mission is to ensure the unity of the 6,000 Benedictine monks present across the world. He also became Abbot of the Abbey of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, where he will reside.

Born in Bavaria in 1964, Abbot Jeremias became a monk at St Ottilien in 1984. He studied philosophy, theology, and history at Sant'Anselmo and St Benet's Hall in Oxford. Upon returning to St. Ottilien in 1994, he held various roles, including assistant novice master and secretary to the Abbot. In 2000, he was elected Abbot and President of the Congregation of St Ottilien.

The position of Abbot Primate was established by Pope Leo XIII in 1893 to serve as a link between the Benedictine Order, the Holy See, and civil authorities. Its aim is to promote unity among the diverse Benedictine monasteries and congregations and represent the Order at religious gatherings worldwide. As Primate, Abbot Jeremias also serves as Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Benedictine Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, an institution dedicated to liturgical, theological, and philosophical education.



During the summer, several of us visited our families: Bro. Ildefonso was in Italy from 12 to 23 July; Bro. David-Joseph in Colmar from 16 to 26 July; Bro. Thierry in Corsica from 22 to 31 July; Bro. Benoît in Provence from 6 to 13 August; and Bro. Gregory in the United States from 17 to 29 September.



✠ On 3 July, an ecumenical meeting organized by the Focolare Movement took place at the Abbey. Around twenty bishops, clergy members, and Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant laypeople from across Ireland gathered to pray and reflect together. Abbot Mark-Ephrem participated and gave a teaching.

✠ On 8 August, Sr Maria Cimperman, a Sacred Heart religious, American theologian, and facilitator for group discussions at the Synod on Synodality, spoke about her experience during the 1st session of the Synod and what is to come in the 2nd session.

- ✠ On 11 August, our Sunday Eucharist was broadcast live on BBC Northern Ireland.
- ✠ On 17 August, Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Bro. Éric attended the blessing and inauguration of the new monastery at the Benedictine Abbey in Kylemore (Ireland).
- ✠ From 16 to 31 August, Fr David Sullivan, Superior of the White Fathers community in Jerusalem, led our community retreat.
- ✠ On 8 September, Stephen Sherry, Director of Safeguarding in our diocese, and Joan Aldridge visited the Abbey to work with the community on implementing best practices for youth outreach.
- ✠ On 15 September, Bro. Éric attended a “Harvest Service” at Downpatrick Cathedral, occupying his stall as ecumenical canon.
- ✠ On 19 September, Bishop John McAreavey, former bishop of our diocese, celebrated the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination with the community. He was joined by his friend, Msgr Paddy Hennessy from the Diocese of Leeds, England.
- ✠ From 30 September to 2 October, Abbot Mark-Ephrem visited the Abbey of Bec with Dom Andrea Santus, Bursar General of our Congregation.
- ✠ On 7 October, Abbot Mark-Ephrem and Bro. Thierry visited the Dominican convent (St Catherine’s) in Belfast. Abbot Mark-Ephrem presided and preached at the celebration of Sr. Geraldine Smyth’s 50th anniversary of religious profession.
- ✠ On 20 October, Abbot Mark-Ephrem occupied his stall as ecumenical canon at Armagh Cathedral for the installation of two new canons.
- ✠ on 23 October, Former bishop John McAreavey concelebrated at Mass and shared a meal with the community.
- ✠ On 30 October, Fr Bernard Akoeso, the last monk of the Cockfosters community, left the Congregation and was incardinated into the Archdiocese of Westminster.
- ✠ On 1 November, Abbot Mark-Ephrem was at Glenstal Abbey (Ireland) for the abbatial blessing of Dom Columba McCann.
- ✠ From 3 to 15 November, Bro. Joshua travelled to Mexico to attend his sister Yvette’s wedding.
- ✠ On 8 November, Bro. Guilherme M. Silva das Mercês from Ribeirão Preto Abbey (Brazil) arrived in Rostrevor for a time of spiritual renewal.
- ✠ From 12 to 13 November, Abbot Mark-Ephrem attended a meeting of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting at the Dromantine Conference Centre in Northern Ireland.



Contemplating the newborn child, we know that "the hopes and the fears of all the years" find their answer in him. we need fear no more, but can hope that we are on our way home to God who cherishes us with everlasting love. Christmas is the story of a child who holds out to us the full and final answers in our triple quest for what we can know, what we ought to do, and what we may hope for. We can encounter that child in the university, along the roads of life and in our places of prayer. In him we find the plenitude of truth, the ultimate good and the utterly satisfying beauty of God. It will take all our study, life and worship to know him.

Fr Gerald O' Collins SJ, (1937-2024)



*We wish all of you a very Happy Christmas
and a Blessed New Year 2025.*