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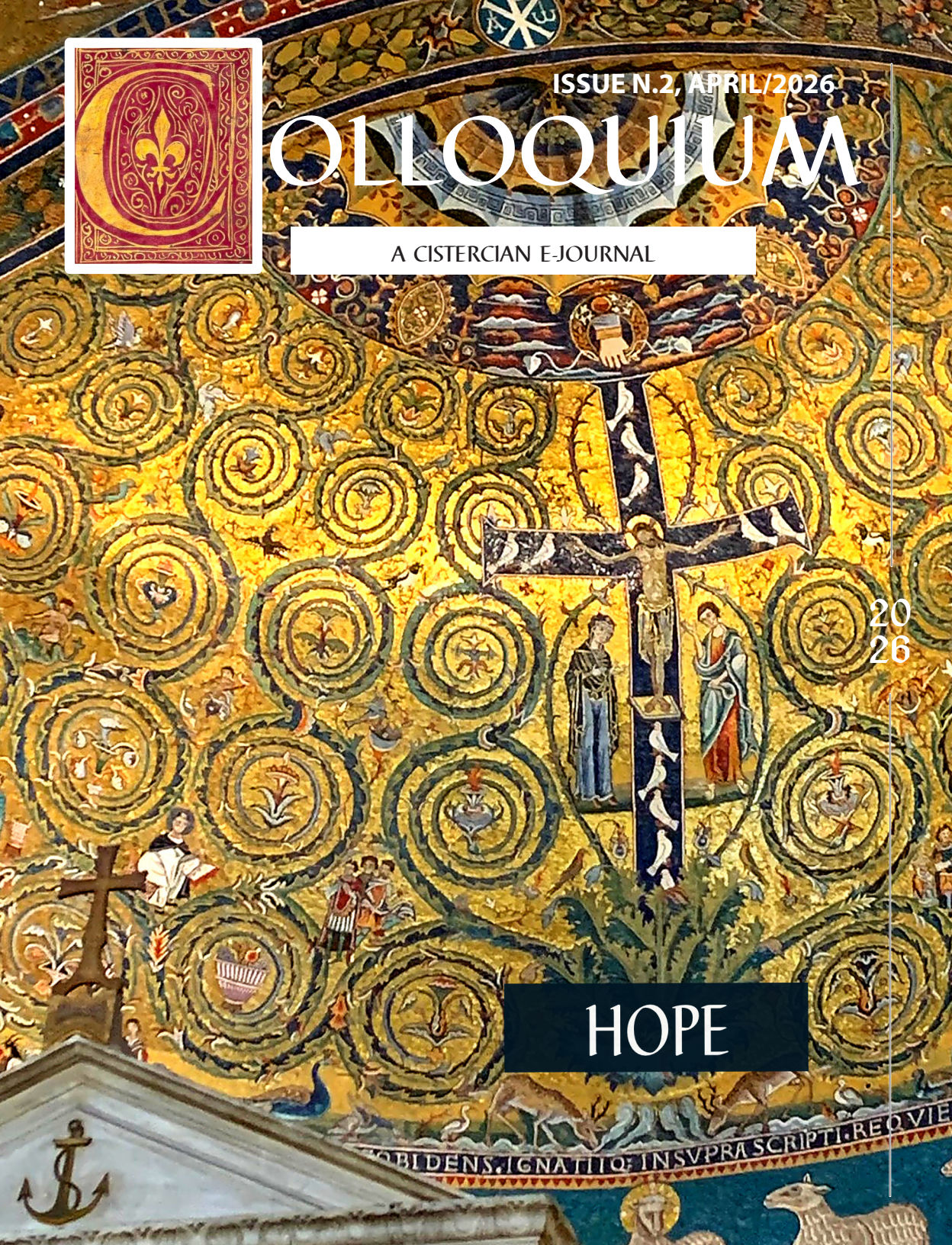
# OLLOQUIUM

A CISTERCIAN E-JOURNAL

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HOPE

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ISSUE 2



2026

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COLLOQUIUM

**EDITORIAL**

**AN ELEGY**

For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943: Thomas Merton

**EXPERIENCE**

THE PAIN OF WHY? | Bishop Erik Varden  
HOPE SWIFTLY GLIDES | Sr. Roxanne Acaylar  
THE 26 MARTYRS | Mo. Agnes Yoshioka

**CHARISM**

HOPE IN ST. BERNARD | Mo. Giovanna Garbelli  
HOPE IN THE BROTHERS OF TIBHIRINE | Mo. Benedicte dela Croix Avon  
ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE | Dom Antonius Anjar

**Cistercian Personalities**

DOM ANSELM LE BAIL | Dom Mark Scott  
PIA GULLINI AND NORBERT SAUVAGE | Dom Mark Scott  
WHO IS BLESSED GABRIELLA? | Mo. Cristiana Piccardo

**Places of Hope**

VITORCHIANO: 150TH | Homily of Dom Bernardus Peeters  
TRE FONTANE & ACQUE SALVIE | Mo. Gabriella Masturzo  
HOW GEDONO IS A SIGN OF HOPE | Sr. Martina Surjoseputro  
SUJONG: TOWARD HOPE | Sr. Josepha Chang  
STAR OF HOPE | Sr. Anna Marie Budi

**SACRED MUSIC**

O QUANTUM IN CRUCE  
Mo. Giovanna Garbelli

**VISIO DIVINA**

Cima da Conegliano's  
The Incredulity of St. Thomas  
Mo. Giovanna Garbelli

**VERSE**

O CROSS | Sr. Julie Ann Pesongco  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST | Sr. Leah Socorro Ponteras  
HOPE | Sr. Roxanne Acaylar

**COLLOQUIUM**

A CISTERCIAN E-JOURNAL

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Cover Photo: *Apse Mosaic, Cathedral of San Clemente, Rome*

*Sr. Anna Marie Ando, OCSO*

# Editorial

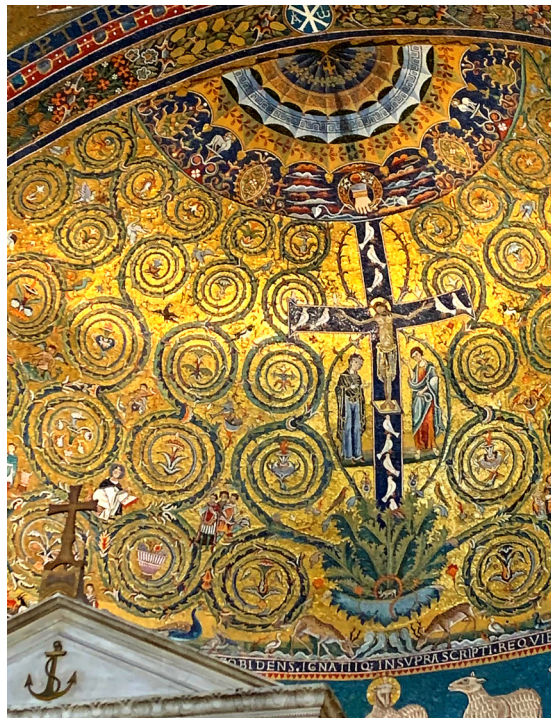


Photo: Apse Mosaic, Cathedral of San Clemente  
Sr. Anna Marie Ando

*It also happens to show St. Clement's cross,  
an anchored cross.*

*We are glad to bring you this Easter issue of Colloquium which centers on the reality of hope: places of hope, persons of hope, the experience of hope. What is hope? Or must we rather ask, who is hope?*

**A**midst the rubble of our ruined cities, hope seems to be playing its last discordant strings, as the stirring Dvorak sonata heard over the wreckage of Southern Lebanon. Yet, hope does play, undeterred, still utterly compelling for all its plaintiveness. A plaintive cry of hope, of a humanity that surges unconquered – for it has been purchased at the price of Christ's Pasch.

*When I entered the monastery, I discovered that as Catholics, we have that curious tradition of 'saying goodbye' to the Alleluia. On the evening before Ash Wednesday, we sing a sustained, double Alleluia at the end of Vespers, as if we do not want to let it go.<sup>1</sup> It remains a poignant moment, for me, even after 20 years in the monastery, a heartfelt farewell, pensive and tinged with melancholy but also with certainty. For 40 days, Alleluias are unuttered. Then comes Easter night, when they seem to erupt from our choir stalls.*

*Perhaps hope is like that; we may "bid farewell" to it when life gets us weary, but it is never truly absent. It rises like the mustard seed of our resurrection, unconquered by life's waning moments. Christ is Hope; he has risen, and hope will never die again. There lies the only reason for hope, and so we dare to sing Alleluia, that new song, a song of hope, this Easter morn.*

*Hope gives the soul 'gravitas', an eternal mooring. Tethered to Christ's cross, we acquire an eternal weight of being. Anchored in His Resurrection, it cannot be overcome. Indeed, the anchor is among the oldest Christian symbols, a cipher for the cross.*

*Yet, hope for all its gravitas is not a dead weight but a buoyant force. Holding on to it, we can safely cross the turbulent waters of space and time. Perhaps this buoyancy and 'gravitas' of hope is what makes it hope.*

*In the irrevocable promise of Christ: 'Behold, I make all things new', our seemingly disparate existence finds its ultimate hope. Is there anyone not needful of this newness? However, the risen Christ, in his wounded glory, shows us that this newness is not a fresh start, a mere reboot. It begins now in the very lives that we try so hard, at times, to live, in the choice for love and kindness that may wound us. Love, in this side of life, is wounding. And hope, the greater it is, may inevitably lead to sacrifice.*

*For Christian hope is not unalloyed with suffering. It is ushered in by 'that long season of sorrow', that we may rejoice ever the more gladly and longer. (Newman)*

*We must commit to hope.*

*In our world, perennially broken and bruised by unremitting death-dealing, may the risen Christ help us carry this hope, intense and unrelenting, forward.*

*Happy Easter!*

*Sr. Anna Marie*

<sup>1</sup> *I have since learned that this is a simplified ritual; in the days of old, it was quite an elaborate and dramatic 'burial' of the Alleluia.*



“I am the Mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope.”

Is he then your Son, O Virgin of virgins? Is your beloved such a one as this, O most beautiful of women:

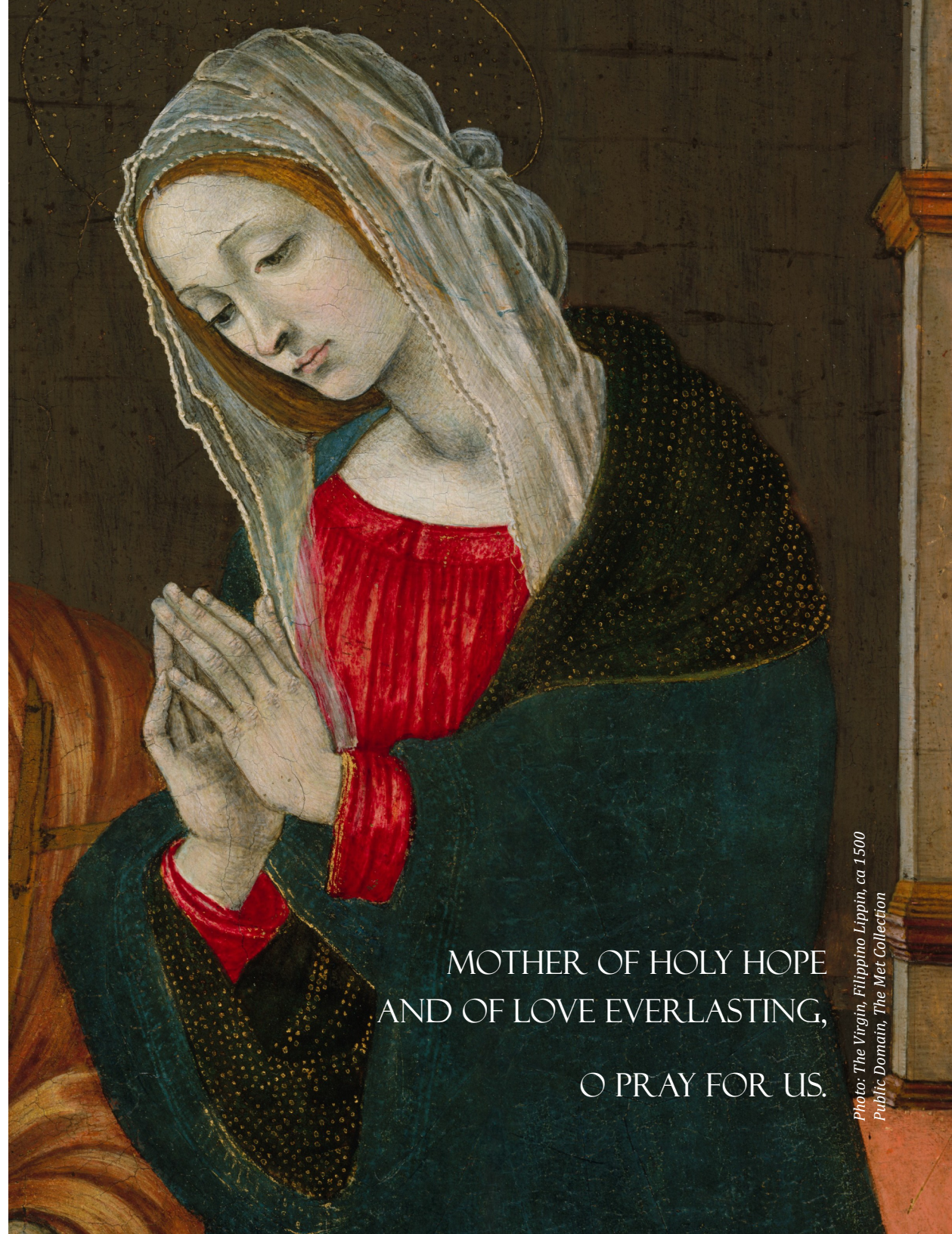
“Clearly so, my beloved is such a one and he is my Son, O daughters of Jerusalem. My beloved is fair love in himself, fear, hope and knowledge in whoever is born of him.”?

For he is not only the one whom we love, fear and acknowledge and in whom we hope, but it is he who brings about all those things in us; and as these virtues grow in strength like the limbs and members of our body they bring him to maturity and perfection in us.

We have seen that fear is born of knowledge, that hope comes to sweeten this fear lest it fall into despair, and that love bears hope company lest it be in vain.



GUERRIC OF IGNY\*



MOTHER OF HOLY HOPE  
AND OF LOVE EVERLASTING,  
O PRAY FOR US.

*An elegy for all who have lately perished in war.*

For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943

Sweet brother, if I do not sleep  
My eyes are flowers for your tomb;  
And if I cannot eat my bread,  
My fasts shall live like willows where you died.  
If in the heat I find no water for my thirst,  
My thirst shall turn to springs for you, poor traveller.

Where, in what desolate and smokey country,  
Lies your poor body, lost and dead?  
And in what landscape of disaster  
Has your unhappy spirit lost its road?

Come, in my labor find a resting place  
And in my sorrows lay your head,  
Or rather take my life and blood  
And buy yourself a better bed

Or take my breath and take my death  
And buy yourself a better rest.

When all the men of war are shot  
And flags have fallen into dust,  
Your cross and mine shall tell men still  
Christ died on each, for both of us.

For in the wreckage of your April Christ lies slain,  
And Christ weeps in the ruins of my spring:  
The money of Whose tears shall fall  
Into your weak and friendless hand,  
And buy you back to your own land:

The silence of Whose tears shall fall  
Like bells upon your alien tomb.  
Hear them and come: they call you home.

THOMAS MERTON

*Fr. Louis (Thomas Merton) was a monk of Gethsemani Abbey, USA.  
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YOUR CROSS  
AND MINE  
SHALL TELL  
MEN STILL,  
CHRIST DIED  
ON EACH, FOR  
BOTH OF US.

Photo: Michelle Hayman, unsplash.com

# The Pain of "Why?"

A CONVERSATION WITH BISHOP ERIK VARDEN

This conversation was part of the presentation of *Healing Wounds* in Spanish. Reprinted here with permission from Bishop Erik Varden's website: <https://coramfratribus.com/archive/pain-of-why/>

*How do you believe that contemplating the wounds of Christ can help human beings find comfort and healing in the midst of suffering?*

To contemplate Christ's wounds in the midst of our own pain does not necessarily bring instantaneous comfort or healing. Time may be required for these to happen. Time and patience. Let's never forget that at the heart of the noun 'patience' is the Latin root *pateor*, meaning 'I suffer'.

*What contemplation of the sacred wounds can do at once, exercised in faith, is to let me find meaning in suffering. The most terrible part of pain can be the overhanging question 'Why?!'*

A secular logic tells us that we ought not to suffer; and that if we do it is unfair. This can make us angry and bitter. We think things ought to be OK. When they're not, we feel we've been cheated.

The Christian narrative is different. It sets out from the conviction that things in this world are not OK. God became man to heal our nature from within. In the early Christian centuries, the image of Christ as Healer was of great importance. The New Testament tells us that Christ healed the world, not by some wonder-remedy, but by suffering through

our wounds, investing them with his grace in love, making them glorious. Even death is relieved of its terror. 'By death he conquered death', we sing during Lent. Experiences that seem to us, humanly speaking, as dead ends and deadlocks reveal themselves to be passages, open doors, ways forward.

When we contemplate Christ's wounds, we remind ourselves that suffering, even when it happens by accident, need not be futile. It can be deeply purposeful. By owning my own suffering consciously as a member of the Church, Christ's mystical Body, I can let my weakness be touched by Christ's power; at the same time, my pain, little or great, can be oriented towards participation in his redemptive work, which continues till the end of time.

This opens a vast perspective of grace and hope. To glimpse that perspective may already be to a comfort, a beginning of healing.

*In your book, you explore the idea that vulnerability can be a gateway to grace. How do you believe we can cultivate this vulnerability in our daily lives?*

I do not think we need to cultivate vulnerability. It is simply there. What we need to do is stop nurturing the illusion that we are invulnerable.

Christianity offers a worldview and a self-understanding that let me accept my wounds with realistic hope — admitting them as they are, but not, so to speak, enclosing me within them. That is a great help in a cultural context in which we like to project constant strength, success, and health at every level, so that experiences of adversity risk knocking us out physically or psychologically. It also helps us negotiate the flipside of that same cultural context, which invites us to wallow in our own pain and to cultivate a strong sense of victimhood, reducing the suffering person's identity to his or her pain.

*What role do you believe faith plays in overcoming pain and suffering, and how can it be a source of strength for those who feel overwhelmed by adversity?*

It plays an essential role, primarily because the woman or man of faith is relieved of thinking that his or her life is an isolated, monadic existence. Life in Christ, mediated through the Church, draws us into a great and palpable communion where, when my strength is limited, I can be carried by the strength of others; where, when my prayer is weak, I can be carried by the prayer of the Church. Such experience transforms a life over time. As one of the Prefaces in the Missal says: it makes the fainthearted courageous.

*How do you believe the wisdom of the monastic tradition and patristics can be relevant to the challenges and questions of contemporary humanity?*

The monastic tradition is relevant not least because it is deeply human. The early monks and nuns were unafraid to call a spade a spade. The sayings of the Desert Fathers are wonderfully specific in dealing with trials and temptations that are timeless because they pertain to the deep hunger of the human heart, and of human flesh.

The early monastics did not make this hunger into an abstraction. They faced it in the full conviction that God, by becoming man, has enabled the illumination and sanctification of every aspect of human life, including the most embodied.

That is a perspective we really need today, in a cultural and intellectual climate that is not only marked by a certain dualism, inclined to see spirit and flesh as two incompatible dimensions of the human condition, but which is faced with the Brave New World of the virtual, the artificial. What an opportunity to restate an intelligent, coherent Christian anthropology based on the theology of incarnation!

*What message do you believe you are trying to convey to readers through*

*Healing Wounds,” and how do you believe it can help human beings find a path towards healing and redemption?*

I wish to introduce readers to the richness and beauty of the Christian patrimony in its approach to the pathos of existence. I wish to show that an engagement with Christ's wounds does not limit itself to sentimental dolorism, but in fact opens a perspective of hopefulness. Along the way I wish to propose practical and spiritual advice on how to deal with situations of pain.

To be a Christian is to live in fellowship. We need to extend a helping hand to each other when we can. And we need to reach out and seize the helping Hand Christ extends to us through the Church, through the rich legacy of her theologians and saints, through the sacred liturgy. ■

*Bishop Erik Varden was the Abbot of Mt. St. Bernard Abbey in England when Pope Francis named him Bishop of Trondheim (Norway) in 2019.*

# Hope swiftly glides to the Soul

A reflection on *The Great Divorce* by C. S. Lewis

SR. ROXANNE ACAYLAR, OCSO

"I believe, to be sure, that any man who reaches Heaven will find that what he abandoned (even in plucking out his right eye) has not been lost: that the kernel of what he was really seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectation, waiting for him in 'the High Countries.'"<sup>1</sup>

In his great novel *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis elucidates that condemnation does not happen through circumstances, feelings, or ideas, but rather through the choices one makes on one's journey. From small errors continually chosen follows the gradual loss of vision - the blindness towards the good, true, and

beautiful. Unless one drops his own self-satisfaction, capriciousness, and ego mania, so that ears will be opened, one remains in the grey, in a perpetual rain.

Reading through the ghosts' responses to the spirits is quite exhausting. They are stuck and unable to listen, like houses with

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, Harper One, p. 63

closed doors and windows, so not a single ray of light can penetrate them.

A comparison with a scene in *The Last Battle* in *The Chronicles of Narnia* comes to mind. The dwarves, who are usually trapped in the stable, do not realize that they are now in the new Narnia. They think they are still in the dark stable, but they are actually in an open field bathed in splendid daylight. Old Narnia, darkened by the setting sun, had disappeared, swallowed by the vast ocean. Yet the dwarves see light as darkness and good things as rubbish.

This reflects what is inside them, of what they prefer for themselves - the shadow of death, the grey or hell. They dwell securely in the illusion of their own self-image. Not even Aslan himself can pull them out of this. He explains to Lucy, who took pity on them, why. As for what happens to the dwarfs afterwards, we do not know, for everybody must go onwards and "further up."

In *The Great Divorce*, the wonderful vehicle, blazing with golden light, that suddenly appears to the little crowd at the bus stop in a corner of the hellish city, somehow stands for mercy. It is a "mercy transport." Being transported does not require a great deal of orderly desire or an alteration of ideas and behavior, as the motivations of the crowd waiting to ride are despicable.

They board the bus in search of their unfulfilled worldly desires, seeking to enhance their state according to their own design. They try to put new wine into an old, patched wineskin. We know what will happen. One by one, they either retreat or shrink and vanish. They are ghosts: light and without consistency.

Christ came into the world to make us "solid." For this reason, he was crucified so that man's freedom could be formed in him. The formless, transparent, and hideous appearance of ghosts implies their misshapen condition.

When they land in Paradise, its beauty amazes them, and little by little, the ghost-passengers come out of the bus. The excruciating pain they experience is their possibility to overcome their misery, but engrossed as they are with their own "ego," they are unaware of it.

Even though the solid ground wounds them like a sword, they begin to advance step by step, driven by curiosity. The captivating power of beauty that held them for a moment diminishes rapidly.

They are frightened by suffering, consumed by disappointments and self-pity, and engulfed by the hardness of their hearts and minds. They prefer to dwell in their own wretchedness.

The same experience could be applied to our fallen physical world. Hell, purgatory, and heaven play an intrinsic role in our souls. While grace is

unrecognized, the soul remains distant and despondent. Mercy - the bus - is the threshold through which one can glimpse the joys of eternal life, as described in the story's magnificent scenery. This is the grace that magnanimously affects the soul.

The ghosts do not need to return to the bus to be taken back to Hell. That would be illogical. Mercy accepts everyone, and its banner points upwards.

Once they grow bigger, they only need to see. Seeing in this respect is not obscured, since it is completely given. Denying it is contemptuous, as it is rejected.

The return, then, is the consequence of possession of one's ego (self-love), and its offspring comes marching along. By licking the sores of past wounds and pride, they have chosen their path and have sealed their own fate.

These can be likened to the "wood, straw, and chaff" mentioned in one of St. Bernard's sermons.

The story tells of only one instance of perseverance, and this soul is saved as if by fire. Heaven is indeed a narrow gate, set with conditions and order. Childish whims cannot pass through it.

In his sermon 34 *De Diversis*, St. Bernard says: "God forbid that we believe heaven to be a place of sorrow and sin... How can human weakness understand such affection, where there is mercy without misery? A love which rejoices with those who rejoice but does not weep with those who weep..."

Desire and perseverance are important for climbing the steep road towards the light. The prerequisite is the "combustion" of hearing; faith arises from hearing, and through hearing comes seeing. Until this spark is ignited, the vision remains hidden, leaving one to stand in either hope or despair. Grace works in the heart's secret abode. This is the flame written in blood whose impetus startles those who hear the whispers of the deep. It lifts the small corner of the blinds and sets the sleeping giant in motion.

Time is the decisive event of life. Towards the end of the book, we read:

*"Time itself, and all acts and events that fill Time, are the definition, and it must be lived. The Lord said we were gods. How long could you bear to look (without Time's*

*lens) on the greatness of your own soul and the eternal reality of her choice?"*

Yet in between time and eternity, 'the world between worlds', there is a pause where hope swiftly glides to the soul. This is a great mystery. When all things are unveiled, the answers to the questionnaires are revealed, and the exams are over. We stand naked before the Splendor, saying: *"We have all been wrong, that's the great joke."*

Adam and Eve have seen Paradise, but for us, their children, who have not seen it, magnanimous mercy has been poured out. **We all have been born blind, with the yearning to see, yet unable to bear the rays of so bright a "Morning," we enter by the clefts of the rock, The Heart of Jesus opened by the lance on the Cross.** ■

*Sr. Roxanne Acaylar is a solemn-professed nun of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, Philippines. Many thanks to Olha Khoturianska, a Ukrainian artist, for the illustrations featured on this article.*

## The 26 Martyrs and us

MO. AGNES YOSHIOKA, OCSO

While the martyrdom of St. Paul Miki and Companions is generally celebrated as a memorial on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, in Japan, we celebrate it as a feast on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, which is the true date when the martyrdom took place in Nagasaki in 1597, forty-eight years after St. Francis Xavier introduced Christianity to Japan. Furthermore, we call the Martyrs simply "The Twenty-six Saints". This is enough for us to recognize them, the first Saints of Japan and the cornerstones of Christianity in Japan.

This is my personal story; when I was seven years old, my family moved to

Nagasaki, where my father came from. Soon after our new life started, my aunt showed me around the tourist attractions in Nagasaki. What impressed me most then were a 'sake'-bottle melted and deformed by the extreme heat displayed in the Atomic Bomb Museum, the one-legged 'torii' (a gateway of a Shinto shrine) whose another massive leg was blown away by the fierce wind caused by the Atomic Bomb, and among other things, the bronze monument of the 26 Martyrs on the hill of Nishizaka. Though I was little and non-Christian then, and I vaguely made sense of what had happened to them, I remember feeling a mix of awe and fear when I saw the scene



Photo: The 26 Martyrs Monument, Nagasaki  
Adrienne Meritt, unsplash.com

EXPERIENCE

before me. Among those crucified, some children looked to be as old as I was—specifically, the youngest one, Louis Ibaragi, was only twelve years old. Yet, despite their suffering, all the people on the crosses seemed filled with joy as they looked up at Heaven, even as they were dying.

The experience left a lasting impression on me. Out of fear, I had avoided the site until the day before I entered Imari. I chose the monument of the 26 Martyrs as the final place to visit before starting my monastic life. Perhaps, unknowingly, I identified monasticism with martyrdom and hoped to find encouragement from the Martyrs.

As a nun, I have listened to the reading of their martyrdom every year on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, which always moves me deeply. Furthermore, I was shocked by the fact that I had never known; the Martyrs who were arrested in Kyoto and Osaka had their left ears cut off on the order of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the ruler of Japan at the time, and were paraded around through the streets; after harsh mocks and scorns, they marched the 890 kilometers way to Nagasaki, where they were to be crucified, on foot in the snowy and coldest weather of winter; they were twenty-four at the start, and two more joined on the way, who had not been on the first list of the captives, but were arrested

just because they accompanied the Martyrs to take care of them and they were 'kirishitan' (Christian) as well. One could say that they happened to become martyrs. The two laymen, Francis Kichi, the carpenter, and Peter Sukejiro, could have denied their companions by saying "I do not know them" as Simon Peter denied Jesus, but they did not. On the contrary, they willingly joined the march of the Martyrs with great joy. Could I have done the same?

The world today seems to be on fire, by the missiles and fire of hatred. Human dignity is often regarded as lighter than dust. Where on earth is hope now? "Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God." (Ps 42.6) The 26 Martyrs could have sung this verse on the way to their crosses. "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for." (Heb 11.1) The faith of the Martyrs bore witness to the sublimity of human nature, the likeness of Christ, on the threshold of their life and death. Here we see Hope. This is Hope for the turbulent world now.

Somewhere in the picturesque view from Mount Koshidake, where our monastery is situated, once there was the way where the 26 Martyrs marched, tied and mocked, praising and giving thanks to God. May their songs still echo to all the corners of the world! May their prayers still touch the hearts of all people on earth! ■



Among those crucified, some children looked to be as old as I was—specifically, the youngest one, Louis Ibaragi, was only twelve years old. Yet, despite their suffering, all the people on the crosses seemed filled with joy as they looked up at Heaven as they were dying.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX' S Sermons 37 & 38  
on the Song of Songs

# The Hope of *Eternal* Salvation

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

In this article, I will explore St. Bernard's views on hope in Sermon 37 and the opening of Sermon 38 in his commentary on the Song of Songs. However, to gain a deeper understanding of St. Bernard's teachings on the core of Christian hope, it is advisable to explore his sermons on Psalm 90. These sermons beautifully illustrate the theme of hope for eternal salvation.

To better approach the content of Sermon 37 on the Song of Songs, I will present a summary of Sermon 1 on Psalm 90 in the chart below. In this sermon, St. Bernard explains three false hopes: those of the

atheists, the desperate, and the hedonists. He concludes that these people experience only the 'emotion' of hope, rather than the 'virtue' of hope.

What is hope? Is it the feeling of getting away scot-free [as the atheists and hedonists do]? No, St. Bernard underscores, hope is trust in achieving eternal salvation.

Zealous monks can also falsely hope when they put their trust in their spiritual achievements. They think that they are better than others for having amassed a whole wealth of merits by giving themselves to watching, fasting, labors, and other



Photo: The Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Love Italian (Umbrian) painter (ca. 1500), The Met Collection

Hope is portrayed with a phoenix at her feet, symbolizing Christ's Resurrection. Their eyes are fixed on the same direction.

<b>The Atheists: Those Who Hope in Themselves</b>	<b>The desperate: Those Who lost Hope</b>	<b>The Hedonists: Those Who Hope in Vain</b>
They boast in their merits.	They despair of infirmities.	They reject grace out of contempt.
Merits	Woes	Vices
They are foolish and reckless.	They are uneasy.	They are unclean.
Their dwelling crumbles to ruin.	Their dwelling is torments that they probably never experience.	Their dwelling is empty.

such things. Putting hope in their merits, they do not fear the Lord and feel entitled to judge others, criticizing and slandering them. They join the line of the atheists by failing to fear the Lord.

For this sermon, we bring home the notion that for St. Bernard, hope is not a feeling [I hope to be successful, to become rich, to have my dream-job...]. Hope is rather a covenant posture: a relationship with the God who has come, is coming, and will come again, a trust in His eternal plan of salvation.

In Sermon 37 on the Song of Songs, Bernard teaches how to attain the covenantal posture necessary to achieve the hope of eternal salvation. Hope for eternal salvation is the theological virtue of hope. God instils this virtue in us at baptism. We hope by God and for

God.

The sermon begins with a question: 'Is hope of salvation compatible with ignorance about God?'

The obvious answer is 'no'.

Therefore, Bernard focuses on knowing God. In previous sermons, he had already explained that *"No one is saved without self-knowledge since it is the source of that humility on which salvation depends, and of the fear of the Lord that is as much the beginning of salvation as of wisdom."*

True self-knowledge—knowledge of one's own sinfulness—generates the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord, in turn, generates the theological virtue of hope.

Self-knowledge leads us to fear God. Then, when we experience

forgiveness, we have hope, and it is through hope that we begin to love Him. As we progress on our journey of conversion, our love for Him grows stronger and stronger.

Thus, the virtue of hope is related to wisdom, because the fear and love of God are the beginning and end of wisdom. It motivates beginners to perform good works and avoid offending the Beloved. It then inspires the proficient to delight in the goodness of the Beloved by resting in His mercy. It promises persevering monks a taste of wisdom, a token of eternal happiness.

*"You therefore have sown righteousness for yourself if by means of true self-knowledge you have learned to fear God, to humble yourself, to shed tears, to distribute alms and participate in other works of charity; if you have disciplined your body with fasting and prayers, if you have wearied your heart with acts of penance and heaven with your petitions. This is what it means to sow righteousness."*<sup>1</sup>

*"And can the hope of this great happiness be without happiness?"*<sup>2</sup>

In response to his rhetorical question, St Bernard reflects on

<sup>1</sup>SC 37,2  
<sup>2</sup>SC 37,3  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Psalm 125, which is linked to the concepts of sowing and harvesting.

While we are exiled on earth, we suffer in hope, offering our good intentions and tears. Persevering in good works produces the fruit of joy; "...rightly do they (those who return from exile) shout for joy, since they bring back sheaves of glory. But you say: 'That is for the resurrection on the last day; a long time to wait!'

The conditions or circumstances do not matter. Hope breeds perseverance in good works.

*"Do not permit your will to be broken, do not yield to pusillanimity; you have in the meantime the first-fruits of the Spirit, which even now you may reap with joy. "Sow for yourselves righteousness, and reap the hope of life (Hos 10:12)."*<sup>3</sup>

So, in answer to the question, "Can this great hope of salvation be without happiness?" Bernard responds, "No, because, as the Apostle states, we rejoice in hope" (Rom. 12:12). Hope brings us joy now, not in the future."

To convince us of this truth, Bernard brings the example of David. *"David, when he expressed the hope of entering the house of God, said that it gave him*

*happiness now, not in the future. Eternal life was not yet his, but his hope reached out to it; so that in his heart he experienced the Scriptural truth that the just man finds joy not only in the reward but even in the expectation of it.*<sup>4</sup>

The assurance of forgiveness of sins brings joy to the heart where the seed of righteousness is sown. A holier life marked by good works—the fruit of the efficacy of the grace received—fosters hope. In this life, we already gather the fruit of our tears, and in some way, we see God and hear his voice saying, “Give him a share of the fruits of his hands.” Recalling his own experience of tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, St. Bernard bursts into prayer.

*“Lord Jesus, how pleasant and sweet must you be to him whom you have not merely blessed with forgiveness of sins but endowed too with the gift of holiness; and along with that, added to the treasury of his goods, the promise of eternal life. Happy the man with all this for a harvest, who **now** has the fruits of holiness and, **in the end**, eternal life. It was but right that he who wept when faced with the truth about himself should rejoice on seeing the Lord, whose all-merciful eyes gave him strength to carry those precious sheaves: forgiveness,*

<sup>4</sup>SC 37,3  
<sup>5</sup>SC 37,4

*sanctification, and the hope of eternal life. It bears out the truth in the Prophet’s words: “Those who sow in tears shall reap in jubilation!” We find the two kinds of knowledge within these words: that of ourselves in the sowing in tears; and that of God, in the reaping in joy.*<sup>5</sup>

We could make this prayer our own.

Hope does not disappoint because God’s love fills us with assurance, since already in this life we are given a foretaste of the Lord’s sweetness. Bernard clearly alludes to the Eucharistic food. Also in his Sermons on Psalm 90, St. Bernard speaks of the Eucharistic viaticum as the food that sustains our hope on our journey while we rest in God’s dwelling place, the Church.

Bernard concludes by stating that this twofold knowledge - knowing ourselves by sowing in tears (self-knowledge), and knowing God, by reaping in joy - prevents us from becoming conceited by any other knowledge we might acquire.

Remarkably, Bernard sees the theological virtue of hope as the fruit of this twofold knowledge: self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Without self-knowledge in light of God’s Word, we cannot avoid pride,

and the proud do not know God. Cultivating this twofold knowledge allows us to consider worldly knowledge in the proper light.

Worldly knowledge, he says, may confer earthly gain and honor, but it pales in comparison with the hope conceived in the soul and the deeply rooted joy that stems from this hope. This hope does not disappoint because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Hope does not disappoint because love fills us with assurance. The honor of being a child of God is unparalleled. Proof of this is that neither the proud nor the hopeless can claim a place among the saints: the former lacks self-knowledge, while the latter lacks knowledge of God. Rather than the honor of the proud, who lack the twofold knowledge that fosters hope and joy in eternal life, Bernard would willingly choose the last place.

*“If you pass through a low doorway you suffer no hurt however much you bend, but if you raise your head higher than the doorway, even by a finger’s breadth, you will dash it against the lintel and injure yourself.”<sup>6</sup>*

Bernard fears self-exaltation more than humiliation. Self-knowledge

<sup>6</sup>SC 37,7

<sup>7</sup>SC 38, 1-2

*Mo. Giovanna Garbelli is the Abbess of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, Philippines.*

frees us from fear and helps us “sit down in the lowest place.” Only self-knowledge protects us from the devil’s sin and the root of all sin: pride.

In addition, the knowledge of God’s mercy prevents us from despairing and thus from following the subtle suggestions of the devil about the harsh judgment of God.

When we are “swallowed up by excessive sadness and lost in a deep depression,”<sup>7</sup> We demonstrate our ignorance of God by refusing to trust in Him. We imagine Him to be harsh, severe, inflexible, cruel, and oppressive. Those who know God are always confident in his power to forgive sins.

The itinerary of Christian hope is clear. Bernard infers that the virtue of hope is the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who, after recognizing their sinful condition, repent and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to them the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, who died for our sake. Then, the Holy Spirit supports their efforts to do good works with an abundance of grace. He also gives them the gift of hope in eternal salvation, so they persevere in doing good and are received as children in the Son. ■

# Hope *in the* Brothers of Tibhirine

MO. BENEDICTE DELA CROIX AVON



From the icon of the nineteen martyrs of Algeria. Written by Odile, Petites soeurs de nazareth et de l'unité.

This conference, given in the OCSO REM Region in May 2025, was first published in Italian, in *Vita Nostra*, a journal of "Nuova Citeaux". Reprinted in English with permission.

Mother Maria Francesca asked me to speak about hope in the brothers of Tibhirine. Since the conference was not planned, I do not have a text.

I will begin with a brief homily on the Ascension and provide some key points in understanding not only this text but also the broader thinking of Christian de Chergé.

Many find his approach baffling, as he does not think in a Cartesian manner. He thought in networks, as he did in his lectio. This is often an obstacle for those who approach Christian. He always explored the same themes in great depth. In his early texts, we already find all the great insights that he would develop throughout his life. He was a great conservative. He kept all his homilies, all his notes. He often reused texts, changing a few sentences and taking us elsewhere.

An important point. He "converted" to Islam thanks to the gift of a Muslim who saved his life. He gave his lectures using the Bible and the Koran, but did not put the two texts on the same level.

When he writes or speaks, he always does so with great respect for the Islamic tradition. We will see this in this text.

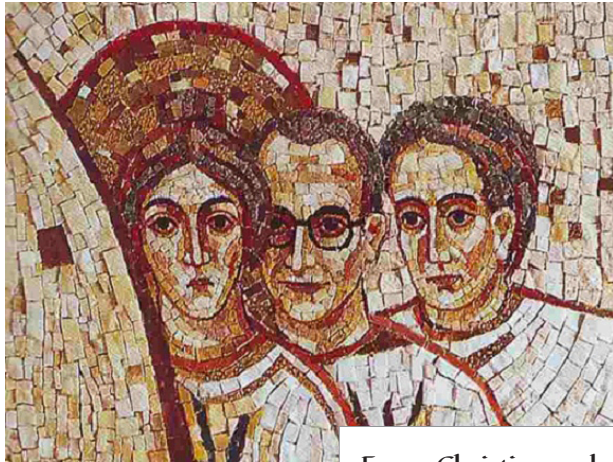
Christian's homilies are notes prepared for homilies, and they can be very short. This one is particularly well written and diverse.

I have chosen this homily, which speaks of hope. It is a homily given for Ascension Day in 1982. The mystery of the Ascension was very dear to St. Bernard. Frère Pierre-Yves Emery, who translated many of St. Bernard's texts and was a monk at Taizé, analyzed this presence of the Ascension in St. Bernard. Christian was deeply rooted in the Cistercian tradition.

We will read this homily, paragraph by paragraph. The Gospel referred to is of the day, that of St. Mark.

### *Paragraph 1*

The world that emerges in today's Gospel is a world now shaped from within by a new reality, present but beyond our understanding, the *humanity of Jesus Christ incarnate in the glory of the Father*. The WORK that is mysteriously accomplished is that of a birth that assembles and connects, that brings together all the members of Christ to lead them, as if in his wake, towards the birth of the whole Body where the head has preceded us [... From now on, existence in this world is a bit like that runway that the plane must travel all the way down, not to stop, but to take off from it. It is necessary for it, but it will have to leave it to enter its world and find the cruising speed that no runway on earth could ever give it.



A key to understanding Christian de Chergé's thinking is the incarnation of Christ in glory. For him, Easter already exists in God and is the mutual gift of the divine persons. In God, there is a permanent gestation, and it is what is lived in the Trinity that will be realized in our world, beginning with the incarnation of Christ. For Christian de Chergé, the paschal mystery of Christ begins with the incarnation and continues until the return of humanity to Glory, where it will contemplate this humanity of Christ in the bosom of the Father forever. This is the foundation of his hope. He worked on the texts of the Second Vatican Council, and in *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 22.5). It is said

For Christian de Chergé, the paschal mystery of Christ begins with the incarnation and continues until the return of humanity to Glory, where it will contemplate this humanity of Christ in the bosom of the Father forever. This is the foundation of his hope.

CHARISM

that every man is mysteriously united to Christ. Christ draws all humanity to himself for the simple fact that we are men and women. This is a fundamental fact, and with the death and resurrection of Christ, everything is already accomplished. He will continually contemplate this mystery until its fulfillment. Everything we aspire to today must be thought of as a work of generating this humanity of Christ in its entirety, and this is the foundation of hope, which says that the head precedes the body. There is a quote from St. Augustine. It is a work of generation that continues.

If there were a beatitude to characterize Christian de Chergé, it would be "blessed are the pure in heart." He is constantly inhabited by this reality that everything is recapitulated in Christ. He always uses this quote: "When I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all things to myself." This explains the image of the runway. We are like the airplane. We will walk on this runway until the moment we can take off from it. It is

heart." He is constantly inhabited by this reality that everything is recapitulated in Christ. He always uses this quote: "When I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all things to myself." This explains the image of the runway. We are like the airplane. We will walk on this runway until the moment we can take off from it. It is

CHARISM

necessary to keep these two dimensions together in Christian de Chergé: the purpose that illuminates our entire daily life. This is a strong point today. We can be absorbed by the difficulties of the world and lose sight of this purpose, which is not a distant future, but is present here and now, because we live the Paschal mystery today. This is why his conception of eschatology is very interesting, because it is an eschatology in which we live in the present.

I have the impression that this is closely linked to the intermediate event in Bernard.

Christian de Chergé explored the mystery of the Eucharist in depth. He was a priest through and through. It is in the Eucharist that we live in a privileged way; we already live this afterlife. He rarely uses the term "eschatology." He chose not to use big theological words. He says that the Gospel has a simple language, that Jesus used a simple language, so he says "the afterlife" rather than eschatology. We therefore tend to think that Christian de Chergé's theology is simplistic. An Italian scholar has recently completed a thesis at the *Centre Sèvres* on Christian de Chergé,

highlighting the powerful theology present in Christian's work. Its seemingly simple language should not mislead us.

Now he will propose different ways of taking up hope. What was not assumed was not saved, and Christ assumed hope.

Paragraph 2

Assuming hope means first and foremost facing a world of DEATH with courage. Jesus' death mortally wounds all our human hopes, even the most legitimate ones, such as escaping poison and bitter pills, cacophony, or the disease of the century.

When Christian says, "You must face the death of all your hopes, of everything you believe to be right, because Jesus faced death," I think it is necessary today to distinguish between hope and expectation.

Following a routine visit, Christian was forbidden from teaching courses on Islam in the community. And when he says, "You must face the death of all your hopes, of everything

you believe to be right, because Jesus faced death," I think it is necessary today to distinguish between hope and expectation. Theological hope does not promise us that tomorrow will be better; tomorrow could be worse, but Christ went through it, and with him we can go through it.

Paragraph 3

Embracing hope does not mean fleeing from the world, but committing oneself outside of one's

own home. From now on, no land will be foreign to the men of Galilee, demonstrating that the openness manifested in their lives affects all creation, which is destined to crown the work of the Creator in Christ, just as the love between man and woman crowned the work of the Creator in the Genesis of the world: "A man shall leave his father and mother to be united with his wife." In the same way, the apostle abandons himself to enter into communion of love with every creature, in the manner of Francis of Assisi, who brought the good news to the sultan as well as to the birds and the wolf of Gubbio (and the wolf did no more harm because he could sleep peacefully with the lamb, it is written!).

Christ shows that the Paschal mystery and Christ's return to the Father's bosom open the way forever for the return of all creation. Mother Maria Francesca presented to us this wound in Christ's side, dear to St. Bernard and to the whole Cistercian tradition. Christian insists on this opening. It is a cosmic opening. In this opening, all creation will pour forth, returning to God, and for us, it is a great source of hope.

*Paragraph 4*

To embrace hope means to experience the resurrection at work in all human realities, even the darkest ones, even those we apparently suffer. Because it is a fact, as St. Paul says, that "Christ has been placed above all powers and all beings that dominate us." Yes, the RESURRECTION and ASCENSION of humanity in CHRIST, this unique good news capable of revolutionizing all

horizons, is a reality that is experienced and demonstrated even in relationships between people, and it is possible to SEE IT at work wherever the evil mongers of power, money, class struggle, cultures, or religions are deliberately fought; wherever DIALOGUE is initiated to give life to a new language: wherever fear is taken by the arm, disarmed as one charms a snake; wherever we swallow bitter and poisonous words without changing the deep reasons that drive us to love anyway; wherever illness becomes a place of encounter, sharing, and concern, a place of purification, a place God's salvation.

Our Orthodox brothers speak of the energies of the resurrection. Today, we no longer dare to use the word energy, even though it is found in St. Paul. For Christian, the energies of the resurrection act on our world. This is the foundation of our hope, because this world is not a world of death, but is already risen (in the text: "yes..."). The resurrection and ascension of Christ are not mysteries far removed from us, but something we must experience daily. This is also a very important dimension in St. Bernard, that of being rooted in experience. Today, St. Bernard is the subject of study by philosophers precisely because of this dimension of experience, which not only has a subjective dimension, but also allows us to live the reality we live, and St. Bernard had no other purpose than to lead his brothers to the spiritual

life. We find this again in Christian, since all his writings, his chapters, are set in a liturgical context. Here we are in the great tradition of monastic theology that precedes scholastic theology. It is a theology that always goes hand in hand with life. A university professor can write very beautiful things about God, but these things are not put to the test of daily life, of fraternal life. The great characteristic of monastic theology is that it is tested in life.

*Paragraph 5*

Yes, the ascension of the universe is accomplished through all these discreet gestures of salvation and peace, when we help each other to see and breathe above the daily turmoil, when the goodness of a brother or sister prompts us to give thanks and confess our lack of love. Moments of grace when we feel the harmony at work in creation vibrating within us and around us, when we feel like dancing together the Canticle of the Creatures, raising, like Francis of Assisi, our hands made to welcome, including the stigmata of the Passion...; a fleeting experience of God's BLESSING on the world and the JOY of letting ourselves be carried away together beyond the runway, because we were dust, but now we are no longer so; this dust vibrates with love in the heart of the Father, the body of the beloved Son, and the cement of our communion.

It is a very elaborate parChristian de

Yes, the ascension of the universe is accomplished through all these discreet gestures of salvation and peace, when we help each other to see and breathe above the daily turmoil. . .

Chergé [On June 24 of this year, he will be appointed prior].

agraph. Christian will say something about himself through the figure of St. Francis, as some nuns who followed the Franciscan spirituality came to Tibhirine for retreats. It was the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary who donated the monastery to the monks.

Before reading Christian, the Ascension was very distant for me, through this text, he shows us that we live the mystery of the Ascension every day, "the smallest fraternal gesture... signifies it concretely. It is beautiful when he says that "the goodness of a brother...". There is mutual emulation. These small moments of daily life are signs, showing that we are animated by the energies of the

resurrection. Our humanity rises (like yeast in dough) thanks to Christ's resurrection. This requires a lot of faith, especially when appearances are to the contrary. You can feel all of Christian's joy. It is a theme that is very present in him. The first chapters he wrote after his appointment are about joy, ten years after the publication of Paul VI's encyclical. Deeply rooted in this vision that everything is already accomplished,

he was filled with deep joy. We must open ourselves to this reality.

The original cross is located in Aiguebelle. Christ is ascending. When Christ is removed from the cross (today, this can be done artificially with computer technology), one feels that he is elevated from the earth. In the Koran, Jesus is recognized as a prophet who suffers and reminds us of the importance of prayer. This homily connects to the Muslim tradition in that Christ, lifted from the earth, draws everything to himself.

To conclude, a few words about the Tibhirine community: after the death of the brothers, a small group of brothers with a priest, Fr. Salanson (?), who had worked on the examination of the texts, wanted to come together to live according to the spirit of the brothers in unconditional acceptance of others. This has been ongoing for about fifteen years. It involves reciting the Our Father every day and being open to meeting others. We have about 500 members worldwide and meet twice a year in Marseille.

During these meetings, around 50 members usually attend. At the last meeting, a third were Muslims, women, mainly from a Sufi group. Many of the participants are getting younger. ■

*Mo. Benedicte dela Croix Avon is the Abbess of Our Lady of Bon Secours Abbey (Blauvac, France.)*

*Photo: Martyrs of Algeria Memorial, Aiguebelle Abbey*

# One body, One *Spirit*, One hope

DOM ANTONIUS ANJAR, OCSO

*This article proposes a monastic reading of the threefold dimension of the episcopal motto of the recently ordained Bishop of Flores, Indonesia—one body, one Spirit, and one hope—in the light of the Rule of Saint Benedict and the spiritual tradition of the Cistercians.*

## Introduction

On 11 February 2026, the Diocese of Larantuka in East Flores, Indonesia, celebrated the episcopal ordination of Most Rev. Yohanes Hans Monteiro, whom the emeritus bishop ordained, Most Rev. Fransiskus Kopong Kung. Such a moment represents more than an administrative transition in ecclesial leadership. Within the Catholic tradition, the episcopal ministry is a sacramental sign of unity within the local Church. The Second Vatican

Council teaches that bishops serve as “the visible principle and foundation of unity” in their particular Churches.<sup>1</sup> Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, they participate in the apostolic mission entrusted to the Church and guide the People of God in their pilgrimage toward the fullness of the Kingdom.

The episcopal motto chosen by Bishop Hans – *Unum Corpus, Unus Spiritus, Una Spes*, drawn from Ephesians 4:4 – expresses this ecclesial mystery in a concise yet profound theological vision. The

<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.



Church is revealed as a communion gathered into one body in Christ, animated by one Spirit, and sustained by the hope to which all believers are called. This vision resonates deeply with the Benedictine–Cistercian monastic tradition. From its earliest expressions, monastic life has understood the monastery as a *schola caritatis*, a “school of charity,” in which the communion of the Church is lived in concrete and daily form.<sup>2</sup> Within the rhythm of common prayer, silence, and work, the monastic community becomes a humble sign of the unity that the Spirit continually seeks to build within the Church.

**This article proposes a monastic reading of the threefold dimension of the episcopal motto—*one body, one Spirit, and one hope*—in the light of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and the spiritual tradition of the Cistercians.** Particular attention will be given to how these themes illuminate the vocation of Trappist monks and nuns. Through the vows

of stability and *conversatio morum*, and through the daily discipline of communal prayer, the monastic community undertakes a *peregrinatio cordis*, a pilgrimage of the heart toward God. In this hidden journey, the monastery participates quietly yet profoundly in the Church’s mission of hope.

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**Unum Corpus: Communion and the Monastic School of Charity**

The first dimension of the motto – *Unum Corpus* – invites reflection on the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ. Saint Paul repeatedly employs this image to describe the ecclesial community in which diverse members are united in a single living body.<sup>3</sup> This unity is not

merely institutional but profoundly spiritual. Saint Augustine expresses this mystery with characteristic depth: “Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have become not only Christians but Christ himself. For if he is the head and we are the members, then he and we together are the whole Christ

<sup>2</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Sermon 83.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-27; Rom 12:4-5.

(*totus Christus*).<sup>1</sup> The unity of the Church, therefore, reflects the mystery of Christ himself.

Within the monastery, this unity is lived through the concrete practices of obedience and common life. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* begins with an invitation to listen “with the ear of the heart.”<sup>2</sup> Listening becomes the foundation of obedience, and obedience gradually transforms the monk’s relationship to the community. In Chapter 5, Benedict writes: “Obedience without delay is the hallmark of those who hold nothing dearer than Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Through obedience, the monk learns to relinquish self-will and to enter more deeply into communion with others. The monastery thus becomes a *schola caritatis*, where the unity of the Church is patiently learned in daily life. Thomas Merton observed that monastic community life reveals a profound truth: the human person finds authentic freedom not in isolation but in communion.<sup>4</sup> The discipline of shared life exposes illusions of self-sufficiency and gradually opens the monk to the deeper reality of the Body of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, Sermon 272.

<sup>2</sup> Rule of Saint Benedict, Prologue 1.

<sup>3</sup> RB 5.2.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.27.

<sup>6</sup> RB 7.67.

### **Unus Spiritus: Humility and the Interior Work of the Spirit**

The unity of the body cannot endure without the life-giving presence of the Spirit. The second phrase of the motto – *Unus Spiritus* – points toward the interior source of ecclesial communion. Unity cannot be achieved through human efforts alone. It is ultimately the gift of the Spirit who gathers believers into communion. As Augustine notes, the Holy Spirit is the bond of love that unites the members of the Church with Christ and with one another.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, the work of the Spirit is most clearly visible in the long chapter on humility (RB 7). Benedict describes the spiritual life as an ascent along the ladder of humility inspired by the biblical image of Jacob’s ladder (Gen 28:12). The twelve degrees of humility describe the gradual transformation of the monk’s heart as he becomes conformed to Christ. Benedict concludes the chapter with a remarkable statement: “Having climbed all these steps of humility, the monk will soon arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear.”<sup>6</sup>

Humility creates the interior space in which the Spirit can act. Bernard of Clairvaux develops this theme in his treatise *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*. For Bernard, humility leads to the discovery that the soul’s true life is found not in self-assertion but in love. Charity, for Bernard, becomes both the origin and fulfillment of the spiritual journey.<sup>7</sup> This insight resonates deeply with the monastic vow of *conversatio morum*, the ongoing conversion of life. The monk’s path is not one of immediate perfection but of gradual transformation under the guidance of the Spirit. André Louf notes that this transformation often occurs through experiences of weakness and limitation. When the monk encounters his own poverty, he becomes capable of receiving the grace that God continually offers.<sup>8</sup> When the monk encounters his own limitations, he becomes capable of discovering the deeper action of grace. Thus, the Spirit builds communion not through human perfection but through humility and conversion.

### **Una Spes: Mercy, Charity, and the Pilgrimage Toward the Kingdom**

<sup>7</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, ch. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> André Louf, *The Way of Humility* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 41-46.

<sup>9</sup> RB 4.74.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Sermon 83.

The final dimension of the motto – *Una Spes* – points toward the eschatological horizon of Christian life. **Christian hope is rooted in the faithfulness of God rather than in human achievement.** Saint Benedict expresses this conviction in one of the most memorable exhortations of the Rule: “Never despair of God’s mercy.”<sup>9</sup> This short exhortation captures the spiritual realism of the monastic path. The monk is fully aware of his own fragility, yet he entrusts himself to the inexhaustible mercy of God.

Bernard of Clairvaux frequently connects hope with charity, the deepest movement of the soul toward God. In his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, he writes: “Love is sufficient in itself; it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. Love is its own merit and its own reward.”<sup>10</sup> For Bernard, charity becomes the heart of hope, because it unites the soul to the God, who is the source of all hope.

Within the monastery, this hope becomes visible in the daily practice of fraternal charity. In Chapter 72, Benedict describes what he calls the “good zeal” that should animate the community: “They should anticipate

## CHARISM

one another in showing honor.”<sup>11</sup> Fraternal charity becomes a visible sign of hope within the community. Through patience, forgiveness, and mutual service, the monastic community becomes a small but concrete sign of hope within the Church.

### Monastic Vigil and the Eschatology of Hope

Monastic life is profoundly marked by an eschatological orientation. The monk lives between the present world and the promised Kingdom, waiting in hope for the coming of the Lord. This orientation is expressed most vividly in the night office of Vigils. While the world sleeps, the monastic community rises to chant the Psalms and await the dawn. The vigil prayer becomes a symbol of the Church’s watchfulness in history.

Saint Benedict reminds the monks: “Let our minds be in harmony with our voices.”<sup>12</sup> Through this prayer, the monastery carries before God the sufferings and hopes of the world. In this sense, monastic life becomes a quiet participation in the Church’s eschatological mission. The monk

<sup>11</sup> RB 72.4.

<sup>12</sup> RB 19.7.

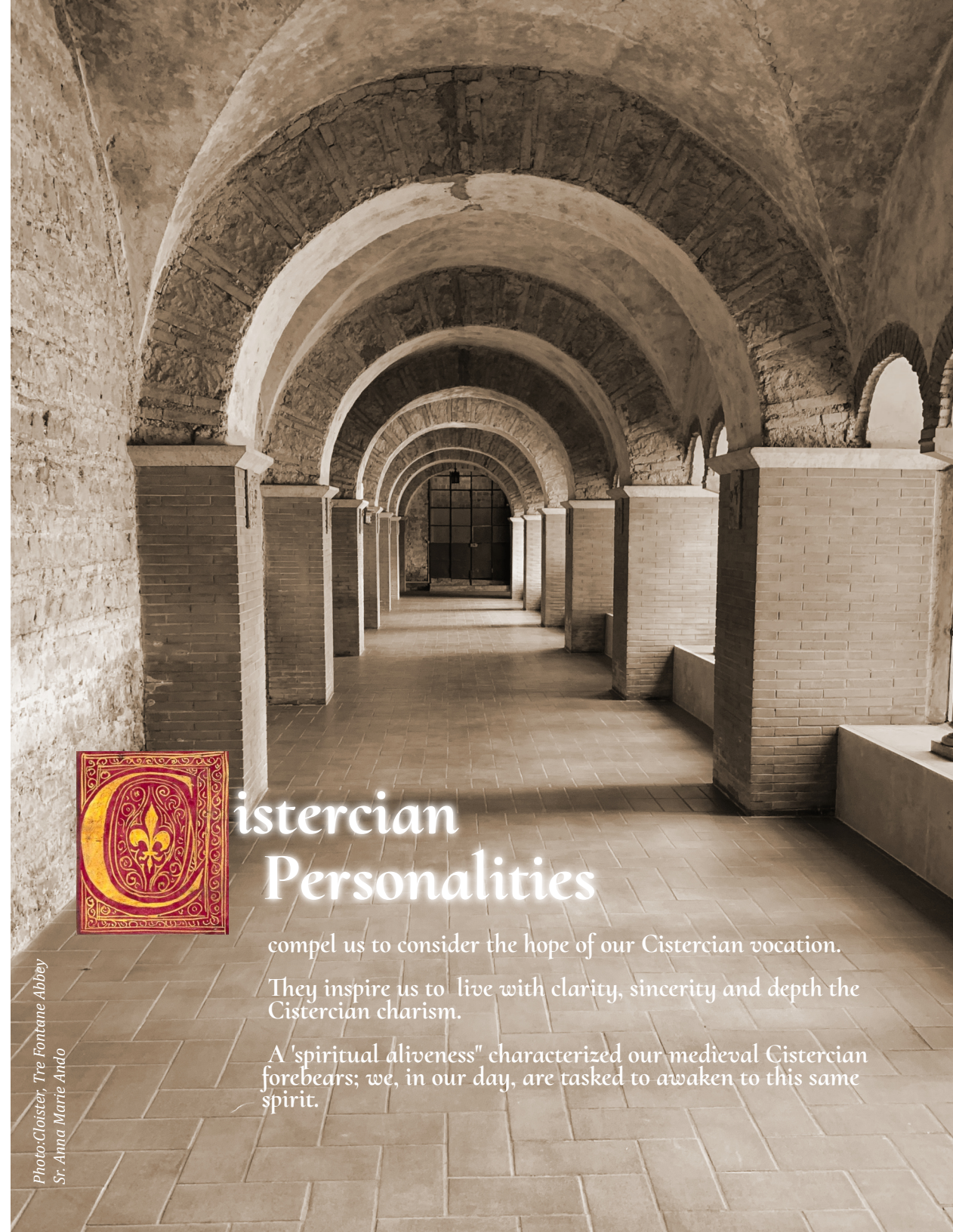
*Dom Antonius Anjar is the Titular Prior of Biara Trappist Lamanabi (Flores, Indonesia)*

*Photo of St. Benedict: Biara Trappist Lamanabi*

stands watch with the Church, awaiting the dawn of the Kingdom.

### Conclusion: A Hidden Witness of Hope

The episcopal motto *Unum Corpus, Unus Spiritus, Una Spes* offers a concise synthesis of the Church’s deepest identity. The Church lives as one body in Christ, animated by one Spirit, and sustained by one hope. Within the Benedictine-Cistercian tradition, these realities are lived concretely through obedience, humility, charity, and persevering prayer. **The monastery becomes a place where the unity of the Church is quietly embodied and where hope is patiently cultivated. Through their hidden life of prayer and vigilance, Trappist monks and nuns participate in the Church’s pilgrimage toward the Kingdom. In the silence of the monastery, the flame of hope continues to burn – often unseen, yet never extinguished – bearing witness to the enduring fidelity of God. ■**



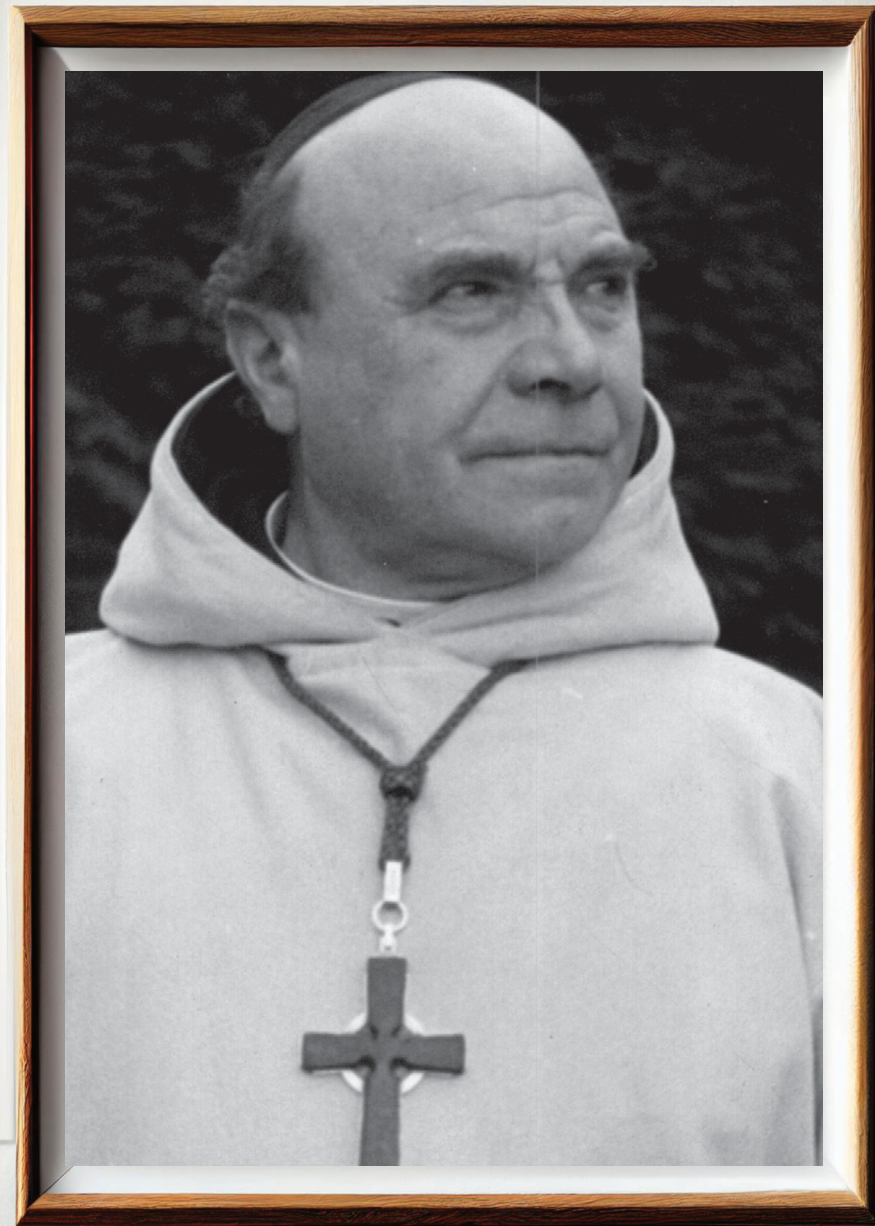
## Cistercian Personalities

compel us to consider the hope of our Cistercian vocation.

They inspire us to live with clarity, sincerity and depth the Cistercian charism.

A 'spiritual aliveness' characterized our medieval Cistercian forebears; we, in our day, are tasked to awaken to this same spirit.

"The Cistercian Fathers are perfectly cut out to be our guides. They had the grace, they had the experience... So we should go to them... otherwise we will fall by the wayside or not possess the spirit of our vocation fully."



DOM ANSELME LE BAIL

## Dom Anselme Le Bail \*

DOM MARK SCOTT, OCSO

Fr. Chrysogonus Waddell of Gethsemani Abbey in the US died in November 2008. I had been at Gethsemani a little more than a month, getting established in my new jobs as editor of *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* and editorial director of *Cistercian Publications*. I had been given office space on the third floor of the library building, the old lay brothers' novitiate. Fr. Chrysogonus's office was on the ground floor of that building. After Fr. Chrysogonus died, the abbot, Dom Elias, asked me to move downstairs and take over Fr. Chrysogonus's office space. That was fine with the workers who did a great job remodeling that space before I actually moved in. It

was there that I spent my work time over the next five years or so.

Fr. Chrysogonus left a lot of things behind. Among these, were several pictures hanging on the walls. I got rid of all but one of them, a small framed photographic portrait of an early-twentieth-century Trappist abbot. I hung that portrait on the wall to the right of my computer desk, so I always felt this presence looking down at me or watching over me.

The picture showed this abbot to be strong and forthright. Sometimes he looked to me stern and reproofing, other times whimsical and on the verge of laughing at a subtle joke. The

\* From *Conferences on Renewal in Cistercian Life* given by Dom Mark Scott in *Matutum* in 2024.

abbot in the picture was Anselme Le Bail. He was abbot of Scourmont, Belgium, from 1913 to 1956, when he died at the age of 78. He had been abbot for forty-three years, from the time he was thirty-five, a good deal over half his entire lifetime.

I kept that little photograph in my editor's office not only as a link with the previous occupant, Fr. Chrysogonus, but also because Dom

Anselme Le Bail was the remote founder of the two projects I was involved with in that office space, Cistercian Publications and Cistercian Studies Quarterly (CSQ). In that way, at least, Dom Anselme was the exact opposite of Armand-Jean de Rancé: I refer to Le Bail's modern critical and pastoral promotion of the spiritual and intellectual patrimony of the Order.

Le Bail was twenty-six when he entered the novitiate of Scourmont, Belgium. At the time, he had been a simple professed member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, a missionary order. For whatever reason, he had been dismissed from that congregation, but not without first having done philosophy and

theology studies and receiving minor orders. He had also fulfilled his compulsory military service. When Le Bail entered Scourmont in 1904, the abbot, Dom Norbert Sauvage, had been in office for two years. In the convergence of these two men at this time and place, you can see the working of Providence on behalf of the Order for the following century and beyond.

In the convergence of these two men (Anselme le Bail and Norbert Sauvage) at this time and place, you can see the working of Providence on behalf of the Order for the following century and beyond.

Le Bail's novice master, also quite new at the job, was Alphonse Bernigaud. He was, it has been said, "no way prepared for that responsibility," and perhaps it was just as well he wasn't. At the time, it was customary in the Order to base novitiate formation on

the three-volume work of an early-seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit, Alphonsus Rodriguez, *Practice and Perfection of Christian Virtues*. Le Bail's novice director, Alphonse, worked by trial and error to come up with another method. He was certainly encouraged to undertake this exploration of a more specifically monastic formation by his abbot, Dom Norbert. Eventually, Fr. Alphonse hit upon what at the time was a novel idea: why not use the Rule of St. Benedict as a formation manual? The

novice Anselme took to this idea with his typical zeal. By the end of his novitiate, he himself had made a huge synthesis of the Rule that he would continue to develop throughout his life as a monk and an abbot. When Le Bail himself became novice master at Scourmont, he, in his turn, based his teaching on the Rule, in addition to forming his novices in liturgy, contemplative prayer, and the interior life.

Anselme's forty-plus years as abbot of Scourmont began in a way unusual for us but not so strange for the France of the early twentieth century. Less than a year after his election, he was called up again to military service and for six years served as a military chaplain. The time coincided with what we know as World War I. Anselme's long abbacy also included the inter-war period and then World War II, when all the Scourmont monks under thirty-five were mobilized, about two-thirds of the community. Eventually, even that one-third remnant had to leave until the end of the war, German soldiers having occupied the monastic buildings.

Le Bail was a true Cistercian and monk, yet whatever it was that had led him as a youth to that missionary congregation remained with him. Twice, he was sent by the General

Chapter to Congo to help out at Kasanza, a foundation of Westmalie. In 1929, he established some of his monks on the island of Caldey, Wales, in buildings recently abandoned by Benedictine monks. Before the Second World War, as if anticipating Vatican II's openness to non-Christian religions, Le Bail encouraged the Order to be open to dialogue with the religious traditions of East Asia, even planning a foundation in India for Scourmont. The plan for a foundation in India was put on the shelf when WWII broke out, but it became a reality in 1999 when Kurisumala Ashram was incorporated into the Order. Kurisumala had been founded in 1958 by Fr. Francis Mahieu, a monk



under Dom Anselme at Scourmont, who was inspired by his vision of an Indian Christian monastery. Mokoto in Rwanda was founded by Dom Anselme in 1954.

So, there was this missionary part to Anselme Le Bail. But that is not what I saw in that little picture on my office wall. There, he was an abbot, an abba, a father, looking at me as at a son, both wise and playful. In a letter to another abbot, Le Bail quoted a long

. . . after over eight hundred years of Cistercian monasticism, the authentic Cistercian patrimony had to be rediscovered only in the middle of the twentieth century . . .

and it is Le Bail and the monks of Scourmont we have to thank for that retrieval of sources.

passage from Saint Bernard's Letter 732: *"All those among yours whom you find sad or lax, or those who have trouble living, know that it is for those that you are Father, that you are abbot... It is precisely so that you may be the source of strength for all that you have been chosen from among them."* As abbot, Dom Anselme continued to be involved in the formation of novices, as he was



for the entire community. Besides having discovered how to use the Rule as a spiritual guide, he also emphasized the Liturgy and, probably most important for us today, rediscovered the monastic and spiritual treasures in the Cistercian Fathers. There is no other way to describe it but "odd" that, after over eight hundred years of Cistercian monasticism, the authentic Cistercian patrimony had to be rediscovered only in the middle of the twentieth century, but that's the case, and it is Le Bail and the monks of Scourmont we have to

thank for that retrieval of sources.

Through these sources, Le Bail was able to fashion a monastic humanism. *"He wanted the monks to behave as adults and to be eager to develop their own personalities. He wanted to teach them how to think for themselves, how to enter more deeply into the meaning of their monastic life* (Veilleux, OCSO 20th Cent, 184). Le Bail wrote, *"Cistercian monks should have a zeal for... the Cistercian Fathers... The study of Holy Scriptures according to the commentaries of Saint Bernard, William of Saint-Thierry, Guerric, and Blessed Aelred should, at least once in the lifetime of every monk, extend over a long period... The Cistercian Fathers are perfectly cut out to be our guides. They had the grace, they had the experience... So we should go to them... otherwise we will fall by the wayside or not possess the spirit of our vocation fully."*

Le Bail followed his words with action. He mapped out a detailed project for the publication of the writings of the Cistercian Fathers. It is to this idea, proposed in 1924, that the American Cistercian Publications can trace its own roots; and in 1934, the first issue of the review

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Collectanea appeared, another child of Anselme Le Bail. Collectanea was followed, in 1965, by its English-language complement, Cistercian Studies [Quarterly]. That is how I could say that Le Bail was the remote founder of the two editing projects I did in that little office at Gethsemani.

We just spoke about Rancé. Le Bail wrote to someone, "You know that I am not a Rancé man." In another letter, he says, "The great lords of the Order don't approve of our freedom here at Chimay [i. e., Scourmont] to learn everything and say everything. ... All right! We are lax. So let them pray for our conversion. Personally, I forgot this shabby meanness by smoking a good cigar at night under the stars... while thinking that there are people who pray that I will become a good monk again."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *In 1977, a year before I entered monastic life, I visited Scourmont during a trip to Europe. A local bus dropped me off not far from the abbey. As I was making my way on foot toward the monastery, I was both relieved and surprised to see a Cistercian monk up ahead walking in my direction. Certainly, he was a monk of Scourmont, which meant that I was on the right track, but why was he out of his monastery? As the distance between us shortened, I was even more surprised to see that this monk was smoking a cigar. ■*

"I did not come here because I was attracted by the spirit of penance or the work;  
no! I came in order to love the Lord better."



MOTHER PIA GULLINI

## Pia Gullini *and* Norbert Sauvage\*

DOM MARK SCOTT, OCSO

Our last conference on Anselm Le Bail introduced us to Dom Norbert Sauvage. He was abbot of Scourmont, Belgium, in the early twentieth century, 1902 to 1913. After his retirement as abbot, Dom Norbert served the Order as procurator General until he died in 1923. During those ten years, he lived in Rome, Italy.

When I was a student in Rome in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I would frequently take a bus or a train to Grottaferrata or to Frascati, two lovely small cities in the Alban hills east of Rome. If I went to Grotta,

then it was an easy and pleasant walk to Frascati, and if I went to Frascati first, it was an easy and pleasant walk to Grottaferrata. There is an ancient Basilian monastery at Grottaferrata, Saint Nilus, where I used to spend some time in prayer. And, of course, Grottaferrata is the original home of your own motherhouse, Vitorchiano. I am sure you know the story very well.

I imagine that Dom Norbert Sauvage did the same thing that I did. He would take a day or two to get out of Rome, and what better place to go than to Grottaferrata? In his time, though, the Trappistines were still

\* From *Conferences on Renewal in Cistercian Life* given by Dom Mark Scott in Matutum in 2024.

"To take the pure water of a stream... one must go back to the source. So to find the true spirit of the Order, we must return to the founders, study their writings, their spirit, and especially their example."



DOM NORBERT SAUVAGE

#### CHARISM

there, very much a spiritual presence in that part of Italy. One historian says that "from the beginning of his stay in Rome, Dom Norbert took charge of the spiritual formation of the community of Grottaferrata" and was their confessor for many years. We can imagine that he brought the same vision to Grotta that he had brought to Scourmont, though he probably did not bring any cigars for the sisters. "He wanted the nuns to be formed in a solid spirituality, ... in the Scriptures and" in the Cistercian fathers.

Once, Dom Norbert told the sisters, "To study [the heart of Jesus] we have to study and meditate on the whole Gospel to discover all the love he shows us..we must study him in the Eucharist." At another time, he said, "to take the pure water of a stream... one must go back to the

source. So to find the true spirit of the Order, we must return to the founders, study their writings, their spirit, and especially their example."

In 1916, Dom Norbert gave a retreat at Grotta to a 24-year-old woman, Elena Gullini. Gullini was born in Bologna, but had moved to Rome. She is described as "a beauty of extraordinary elegance," "refined, cultured, and intelligent, with a golden voice, a smile, and a charm which she always preserved." In Rome, Elena Gullini studied languages, painting, and music, and was very much part of high society.

But the glamor of her life in Rome did not capture her heart. She made her retreat with Dom Norbert at Grotta as part of her discernment about entering religious life. "My way is love," she said, sounding like the Little Flower. A year later, Elena in fact became a Trappistine at Laval in France, where she was given the name Pia after Pope, later Saint, Pius X, from whom she had received her First Communion. Even though she arrived at the monastery in the luxurious sleeping car of the train she had taken from Rome, she adapted immediately to the very rough and humble ways of the French Trappist sisters at Laval. She wrote, "I did not come here because I was attracted by the spirit of penance or the work; no! I came in order to love the Lord



better." You can hear Dom Norbert Sauvage in that remark.

Even after Elena Gullini entered Laval, Dom Norbert Sauvage continued as her director, through letters and even through personal visits to Laval. In 1921, Dom Norbert conducted the community retreat at Laval. Among the topics of that retreat were, of course, the need to study Christ and to live in intimacy with him; the divine motherhood; Jesus, the divine spouse; Mary's motherhood; and the five dispositions that the knowledge of God will produce in us: admiration, adoration, respect, surrender, and confidence. Mother Pia remarked that after this retreat of Dom

Norbert the community of Laval "began to study the gospel with commentaries and synopses. .... It was," she said about the retreat, "a real breath of supernatural life, the life of love lived by the ancient Cistercians, who so deeply loved the spiritual books and whose spirituality is so simple: Jesus and nothing else besides him. But in such a relationship of intimacy, trust, and abandonment."

Soon, Pia became the novice director of lay sisters at Laval. There were about forty novices. She warned the sisters against spending too much time at work: "Imagine a bride who takes good care of her husband, preparing his meals, well and even his



clothing, but never has time to be with him, to talk to him, and live in intimacy with him. Do you think he'd be happy? No, he needs affection and intimacy with her." Her point was that Jesus needed affection and intimacy from them.

But then, in 1926, Pia was sent to Grottaferrata. It seemed that some in the Order were manipulating things so that Pia would end up as superior there.

I imagine that Dom Norbert had something to do with Pia's unusual transfer from one monastery and country to another monastery and country. For her, the transfer was, she said, "a sacrifice." And, in fact, in 1931, five years later, Mother Pia was the abbess of Grottaferrata, a fervent community, but poor materially and intellectually.

Mother Pia was into her fourth year as abbess when a young woman from Sardinia showed up to enter Grottaferrata. That young woman was, of course, Maria Sagheddu, whom we know as Blessed Maria Gabriella of Unity.

You know the story better than I do, so I will not repeat it. My point is simply to show the marvelous and providential, and you might say improbable intersection of lives, in this case, Norbert Sauvage of

Belgium, Elena Gullini of Rome, and Maria Sagheddu of Dorgali, an intersection that shaped the monastic conscience of each and even shaped their particular form of Cistercian holiness.

Madre Pia was introduced in the mid-30's to the hopes and challenges of ecumenism by a French laywoman she had befriended while still at Laval. By 1936, she was in regular contact with Abbe Paul Couturier, the great promoter of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Madre Pia would thrust her unsuspecting community of Grottaferrata into an apostolate practically unheard of for Italian women religious of the time, let alone Trappistines of any nationality: the newly opened "ecumenical movement." She was in contact with Brother Roger of Taizé and became a close friend of Brother Roger's mother.

In their news bulletin for 1950, the nuns of Grotta announced to the Cistercian Order, "Visitors to Grotta have been almost continuous during this Holy Year, coming from the many parts of Italy as well as from outside. Among our pilgrim friends are a good number of separated brethren. In September, an important international meeting of specialists in the area of Christian Unity was held at the Greek Catholic Abbey of Saint Nilus. In 1948, Madre Pia wrote a



My point is simply to show the marvelous and providential, and you might say improbable intersection of lives, in this case, Norbert Sauvage of Belgium, Elena Gullini of Rome, and Maria Sagheddu of Dorgali, an intersection that shaped the monastic conscience of each and even shaped their particular form of Cistercian holiness.

"Years of experience with this question of 'Reunion'... have led me to understand that the success of your book will rest on the fact that there is nothing whatsoever about her life that anyone could use as a fulcrum for controversy... Those who are ignorant of the problem will come to understand it from the example of Sister Maria Gabriella. Those who are experts will find in her a repose they had never known before, a pacifying light, a new horizon disposing them to love rather than debate."

letter to a woman doing research for a new biography of Maria Gabriella.



*Chapel of Blessed Ma. Gabriella, Our Lady of St. Joseph, Vitorchiano, Italy*

In his homily on the occasion of the beatification of Maria Gabriella, January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II observed that she had the capacity to receive and put into practice with 'the intelligence of love' Saint Benedict's 'school of the Lord's service'... "It was precisely in her fidelity to listening that the young Maria Sagheddu succeeded in realizing that 'conversion of heart' that St Benedict asks of his children; conversion of heart that is the true and primary source of unity."

- Some months before her death, Maria Gabriella confessed, "I have abandoned myself totally into the hands of the Lord...I feel I love my Spouse with all my heart, but I want to love him even more. I want to love him for those who do not love him, for those who despise him, for those who offend him: in short, my desire

is nothing but to love." You can, can't you, hear Dom Norbert in that prayer, and through Dom Norbert Madre Pia, and behind Dom Norbert Dom Anselm Le Bail.

"Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu," said John Paul II, "became a sign of the times and a model of that 'Spiritual Ecumenism' of which the Second Vatican Council reminded us. She encourages us to look with optimism -- over and above the inevitable difficulties that are ours as human beings -- to the marvelous prospects of ecclesial unity, whose progressive verification is linked with the ever deeper desire to be converted to Christ, in order to make active and effective his yearning: Ut omnes unum sint!" ■

*Dom Mark Scott is a monk of Our Lady of New Clairvaux (Vina, California, USA). He is the editor of Cistercian Studies Quarterly (CSQ).*

"It is truly a great fortune to live here. If we fall, even by accident, one hundred arms are ready to lift us. I live, eat, and sleep under the same roof as Jesus. This place is a true paradise."



BLESSED MA. GABRIELLA

## Who *is* Blessed Gabriella?

MO. CRISTIANA PICCARDO, OCSO

**A** brief text of the great Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* summarizes Blessed Gabriella's entire life. This text emphasizes that the Church does not seek anything for herself and that her authority exists solely to serve love.

*"Taught by the events of her history, the Church is committed to freeing herself from every purely human support, to live in depth the Gospel law of the Beatitudes. Conscious that the truth does not impose itself except "by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once*

*quietly and with power", she seeks nothing for herself but the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed, her authority is exercised in the service of truth and charity" (Ut Unum Sint 3). We are already familiar with the life of Blessed Gabriella, so it is not necessary that I recount it again. Yet there is another way to know her: through our personal experiences and encounters with her small yet immense presence. Around 1955 or 1956, our Catholic Action magazine asked me to write profiles of young women whose lives embodied Delia Agostini's yearning. "The ideal is better than life."<sup>1</sup> So I went to look for*

<sup>1</sup> Delia Agostini (1904-1927). In 1918, at the age of 14, she joined the G.F. (Catholic Action, Young Women's Association) in Milan. Author of the book: *L'ideale vale più della vita* (The Ideal is Worth More than Life), edited by Maria Sticco (Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1929). She offered her life for the Church. Her tomb is located in the Monumental Cemetery of Milan.

the girl who played Maria Goretti in the great movie *Cielo sulla Palude*,<sup>2</sup> But it turned out to be a disappointing experience. The young actress had grown up and gained weight. She was a poor conversationalist and had been somewhat ruined by the illusion of being a true star. Yet, she was still charming. I almost felt sorry for her.

The same column in our magazine led me to Grottaferrata to write about another girl, Maria Gabriella, whose simple yet radical heroism was then much praised and had brought her to Paradise at the age of 24. She had been seized by the ecumenical ideal, which, at that time, was capturing the attention of the Church and the world.

To enter the narrow space of the monastery of Grottaferrata, one had to pass through a dark green gate. The gate opened onto the road to Frascati and the Castelli Romani. The reception area was a small, dimly lit room. M. Ludgarda's sister Irene and her mother lived there and served as doorkeepers. Though they were a bit surly and reserved, they were welcoming. From there, we passed through a parlor with heavy grilles and thick curtains that blocked any view of the other side. Yet, right out of that "visual barrier," M. Assunta

would suddenly rush out with her exuberant, jolly, and rowdy vitality. However, her vivacity was immediately tempered by the tender maternity of M. Immacolata, the abbess. So, I began my interview with Blessed Gabriella, which was the purpose of my visit. However, I was truly fascinated by the jocundity and tenderness of these two individuals. Of this interview, I recall only M. Immacolata's last sentence. I asked her what the secret of *La Trappa* was, and she answered: "To die sweetly."

Of course, she was not referring to physical death, but rather to the path of conversion. This path involves dying to oneself with amiability, like a great, luminous smile blossoming out of many tears. Perhaps this was also the secret of a twenty-year-old woman who dedicated her life to the Church's ideal of uniting all Christians. Gabriella believed it was worth risking her life for this ideal so everyone could return home to the Lord's unique flock and the vital womb of the Church. I went back to the Abbey of Grottaferrata many times afterward, not because I was attracted to the ecumenical ideal, but because I was fascinated by M. Assunta's spontaneous, loud joviality, and by M. Immacolata's simple, intelligent tenderness.

<sup>2</sup> *Cielo sulla palude* (Sky Over the Marsh) is a 1949 Italian film directed by Augusto Genina, based on the story of Maria Goretti. For this film, Genina won the Silver Lion and the Silver Ribbon for Best Director.



The Church at Grottaferrata

Then I had the chance to meet the novices, and I found myself in the presence of three young women: Gabriella, Angelica, and Bernarda, who just looked alike: same height, same tiny, round faces as clear as spring water. They wore dazzling white monastic habits. I gaped in admiration and wondered: What is the difference between these three and the famous Blessed Gabriella of Unity? Gabriella was like them, with the same youthful charm and white habits. Perhaps they were also in the same state of innocent wonder that Gabriella expressed to her mother in

this letter.

"It is truly a great fortune to live here. If we fall, even by accident, one hundred arms are ready to lift us. I live, eat, and sleep under the same roof as Jesus. What more could I want in this miserable mortal life? This place is a true paradise. I have found many sisters here who love me. I could not desire better superiors, even though we cannot talk, we still love each other."

Gabriella's exuberant expressions may be due to the euphoria of youth,

the charming discovery of her vocation and true identity, and her fresh capacity for wonder. Yet, something much deeper certainly surfaces from these.

Maú, as she was nicknamed, was not someone who was easily carried away by superficial and imaginative enthusiasm, according to her friends and acquaintances in Dorgali. Like any good Sardinian, she was somewhat intractable, gruff, and reserved. She was more inclined to rebellion than encounter and more prone to autonomy than docility. Yet, Blessed Gabriella continued to express her admiration and love for her monastery and community until the end of her life. This is easily perceived when she feels an excruciating nostalgia for her monastery while in the hospital and far from it. She does not long for healing; she simply yearns to return "home" without delay to the "house" she loves, and to her superiors and sisters, whom she loves with faithful tenderness. "The man of faith gains strength by putting himself in the hands of the God who is faithful," Pope Francis says in *Lumen Fidei* (LF 10). This is what Gabriella embodied. She put herself completely in God's hands. The logical consequence of her complete self-surrender to God, her Father, was putting herself in the hands of her superiors and her sisters in her monastery.

Blessed Gabriella's ecumenical vocation consists in this complete self-surrender.

Entrusting ourselves to God and, through him, to the community that has welcomed us is an existential act of trust that opens us to embracing a dimension as vast as the entire world. It proclaims universal brotherhood. This gesture grows into a cosmic act of humanism. The universal embrace is not a theoretical concept. Rather, it expands from concrete gestures in daily life to universal gestures. As Pope Francis has often repeated,

*"Certainly, this invitation could cause many to feel somewhat afraid, thinking that to be a missionary requires leaving their own homes and countries, family and friends. God asks us to be missionaries. But where – where he himself places us... (Homily at the Mass of July 27, 2013)."*

Gabriella did not know anything about this, but she lived it out.

This is the first great lesson in holiness, taught by a poor girl who encountered the Lord and did not succumb to "the multiplicity of her desires, disintegrating into a myriad of unconnected instants" (LF 13): trust comes only by faith.

When someone enters a community, she steps into an unfamiliar world.

She is not acquainted with its lifestyle, the layout of the house, or her sisters. Upon entering the monastery, she entrusts herself. Although she had some prior understanding from her meeting with the Mistress of Novices, truly entering the heart of this unknown reality requires a profound act of faith in the One who calls us: the God of Abraham, who reveals Himself as a God who speaks and calls us by name. (Cf. LF 8).

We know that mistrust is an evil that easily affects not only modern youth but also adults. The "malady" of doubting, the common practice of testing things out first to see if they are suitable for us, the mechanical and calculated option of choosing only what works, what's in, what is effective, popular, interesting, and relevant, has, as a consequence, pathological indecision, which we all witness nowadays. It goes by a variety of names: anxiety, depression, perfectionism, fear, emotional insecurity, and many more. But it only has one name: idolatry of the self. Its true name is an intolerance of the mystery of God's hiddenness and His presence in our lives, which rules out any calculated proof. It is safer to venerate what we can touch, what meets our current needs. The unconscious shatters us, and calculating risk causes us to sink.

Gabriella's holiness stems from her leap of faith in a mysterious calling. She opens herself to the indefinite pursuit of her own consistency, identity, and adherence to something worthwhile. Gabriella begins to live out her calling by obeying the simple reality of her small town, Dorgali. She helps her mother with household chores, serves the parish priest, and belongs to the Catholic Action group at her parish. She slowly learns to pray silently before the tabernacle. This is not a clear vision, but rather waiting for God's will to be accomplished in her.

"She had changed..." the neighbors said.

Saying "yes" to a vocation transforms a person. It breaks unnecessary ties, delves deep into one's conscience, preserves memories, and imbues every gesture with meaning.

It transforms the individual into someone conscious of their own lived experience, giving them a new capacity for vision and relationships, and fostering the mysterious growth of the experience of God's mercy in their heart. This happened to Gabriella.

*Lumen Fidei* says, "Faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on

*the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all."*

Her life in the monastery will not be different than life at Dorgali. The impact of human misery should never be taken for granted. Even in the monastery, we are tempted by discontentment, grumbling, negative comments, the cult of appearance, and Pharisaic perfectionism. This perfectionism presupposes that we are okay with ourselves and God when we perform the observances perfectly, even though our hearts do not adhere to them. There, too, we experience the falsehood of putting ourselves at the center of everything, the obstinate desire to save face, and the cult of our own "ego." Gabriella likely experienced the dark side of monastic life, yet she chose to "follow."

At the core of Gabriella's monastic experience is the remarkable figure of M. Pia: a woman of extraordinary faith, intuition, Eucharistic passion, and ecclesial spirit. Gabriella was certainly fascinated by her and followed her with filial tenderness. M. Pia endured difficulties and experienced the unfaithfulness of

her followers. Yet, at her school, Gabriella quickly learned that loving means believing, that affection requires faith, and that following means internalizing the word we receive.

In the Report of a Regional Conference of our Order, they stated: "Traditionally, death to self to live for Christ takes place through monastic obedience, which involves renouncing our will, ideas, and plans. However, there has been a crisis of authority and obedience, resulting in a lack of trust in authority as the representative of Christ, through whom one can know the will of God, renounce one's own will, and find one's true self while dying to one's false self." I don't think this is a problem of today, as the Lantao Conference seems to claim, but rather a problem that has always existed. Man's proud autonomy has always rebelled against faithful trust and surrendering himself. It has rejected authentic sonship, which recognizes that God is the origin of all that we are, all that we have, and all that we live for. Those who represent God show us the path of freedom and truth so that we may adhere to his will and mystery.

While Moses spoke with God on Mount Horeb, the Israelites built the Golden Calf.

They wanted a user-friendly god who would walk with them and be made by their hands.

Gabriella also crosses her Red Sea and decides to follow, to trust. She is not a "santerellina<sup>3</sup> (saintly girl)" She loses her patience, she rebels, she knocks violently on the abbess's door because she wants to be listened to immediately and demands to be proven right.

She is like all of us.

Nevertheless, she fundamentally obeys and continues to be in love with her community, her monastery - this is paradise -, her abbess and her sisters; she wants to follow. She trusts.

How could she define the large house of Grotta as a paradise? It is difficult to pinpoint.

The sisters indeed kept it with great care. Floors were polished. The house had that certain flavor of simple, clean beauty that always flourishes in the house of God. True beauty never blooms from costly furniture, but from the loving details that shine through simple things, even if they are poor.

When Gabriella made her simple profession, she wrote her mother with confident conviction that she was a queen.

"I tell you the lilies of the field are better dressed than Solomon in all his splendor," Jesus says. "I feel I am a queen," Gabriella says.

What makes little Gabriella great is her secret, humble joy of belonging and her freely received predilection. She knows she belongs to someone, and she wants to belong to someone, too. A boundless joy seizes her, possesses her, and gives firmness to her desires. In essence, Gabriella's holiness lies in her ability to allow herself to be transformed, penetrated, and possessed.

We call this growth in freedom and truth humility. Gabriella was not born humble, but she became humble.

Although we immediately perceive our "I" at the instinctive level of our being because of our fundamental life needs and desires, we know that our true identity emerges slowly through real maturation and self-knowledge. Humility is what truly reveals a person's maturation. It is the summit of human intelligence, where freedom and truth meet. Along the

<sup>3</sup> An informal Italian term, often used ironically or pejoratively, to describe a girl or young woman who flaunts, through her behavior or appearance, an innocence, naivety, or devotion that she does not actually possess. It is synonymous with hypocrisy in feigning candor.

monastic path, humility is achieved only through faith and entrusting oneself to the person who represents the Lord in our lives. In Gabriella, we find a mature and conscious humility, evident in simple gestures proper to those aware of their evil and nothingness. "She would kneel and strike her breast. She always pleaded guilty, even when a general observation was made. She was ready to receive a reproach, and she remained silent." Above all, her humility is revealed by her ability to listen with a heart penetrated by faith.

This is why Mother Pia's announcement about Father Couturier's proposal, asking for donations and prayers for the ecumenical initiatives he intended to undertake, resonated so strongly with her.

It is a radical and intense resonance that blooms from her humility and freedom. "What am I worthy of? Nothing... therefore I can offer everything." Through her abbess, she asks the Lord for permission to offer her life for the ecumenical cause. "I am worthless anyway..."

The permission is given with prudence and reticence, but Gabriella does not hesitate. The Lord who knows her through and through takes her as a host on the

altar of the world and of time. "For the believer who is transformed by the love to which he has opened himself in faith," Lumen Fidei tells us, "existence expands beyond himself... In faith, the believer's self expands to be inhabited by another, and thus his life expands in love. In this way, the believer's existence becomes ecclesial existence. Faith is not a private matter, an individualistic conception, or a subjective opinion; rather, it arises from listening and is destined to become proclamation" (Lumen Fidei passim 21-22).

The moment of offering oneself can also be exhilarating, like the initial "yes" to one's first love or vocation, but illness, hospital, pain, and death are certainly not exhilarating. Nothing can be taken for granted on the path to fulfillment, even if motivated by a great cause. Illness brings with it the extreme existential loneliness of human powerlessness in the face of pain. The step towards the ultimate goal of life always requires a very high act of faith and abandonment that overcomes all despair, and one never crosses the threshold of existence without the tears of the original struggle for survival. Gabriella learned that beyond the normal, long groaning of human nature, made to live, the ability to listen and obey always remains intact in the depths of the soul. At the moment of her agony,

when her abbess asked if she wanted to remain faithful to her vow, she answered with certainty and strength, despite her suffering. There was no dismay or lament in her, only pain, life, and an ineffable love exuding from her littleness. Like a springtime flower, like a secret scent of violets hidden in the depths of the mysterious forest, like the joyous tolling of festive bells that accompanied the moment of her definitive embrace with divine Love, she seemed to say: "This house is like a paradise... paradise is now given."

This is the story of a humble heart that desired to embrace the world and dedicate her life to fulfilling God's plan by offering it to the eternal Shepherd of one flock. She lived in his Word and wanted to offer her life out of her passion for a united Church, born from the Blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

"The transmission of the faith not only brings light to men and women in every place; it travels through time, passing from one generation to another. Because faith is born of an encounter that takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus" (LF 38). Gabriella is a small link in this chain, but a precious link.

"Self-knowledge is only possible when we share in a greater memory... the memory of the Church... which unites every age and makes us contemporaries of Jesus" (LF 38); and therefore contemporaries of Gabriella.

No one is left out of her offering, no one is excluded from her path of littleness and entrustment, which has made her so great in the eyes of the Most High.

It surpasses our understanding that such a humble, silent, and docile gesture, though highly meaningful, had such wide appeal in secular, ecclesiastical, and monastic circles, not only Catholic ones.

Gabriella's offering indeed represents the profound tension towards the unity of believers which animated the great priestly figures in the Church of the XX century but Gabriella's offering would be incomprehensible without the great figure of M. Pia, with her exceptional intuition of the path of faith "which is never a private relationship between the "I" of the believer and the divine "Thou," between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the "We" of the Church; it always takes place within her communion (LF 39).

Closer to us is the unforgettable

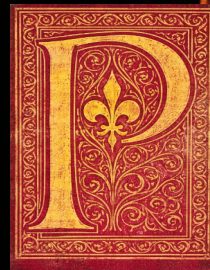
figure of Fr. Paolino Beltrame Quattrocchi. He was a tireless organizer, a courageous innovator, and a prophet of the ecclesial path. He enthusiastically embraced the liturgical explosion of his time and recognized the need for saints, who provide light and strength to the Church and our human experience. We owe the grace of the beatification of Maria Gabriella to him. She was a frail monastic figure suspended on the bridge of communion between the imposing Orthodox Church of Saint Sophia and the magnificent Anglican Cathedral of Lincoln. (Tapestry for the Beatification.)



Of this feast of faith, held in the Basilica of Saint Paul, on January 25, 1983, the last day of the week of prayer for Christian unity, I remember above all the ascetic and pensive face of Brother Roger Schutz and the worried, anxious but joyful face of M. Giovanna Recchia, who offered to the Pope the gifts of our community. Yet, my heart still burns when I remember the Sardinian people's overwhelming singing. They greeted John Paul II's entrance into the basilica with the famous Sardinian "Hail Mary," a composition in the Sardinian dialect of unspeakable beauty. They were a

people who sang. They were simple, probably poor people who wore the heavy Sardinian customs. They were God's people. The infinite echo of this song should have reached Gabriella, who is vibrant in the light of God. She must have certainly felt connected to her people, the people of Dorgali—the Cistercian monastic people. ■

*Mo. Cristiano Piccardo was Abbess of Vitorchiano from (1964 - 1988) and Titular Prioress of Humocarò (1991-2002). She celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday last September 25, 2025.*



## laces of hope

In this section, we feature some monasteries of our Order who in marking milestones in their monastic journey have "communicated" hope to our Order and local communities.

Such communities, St. John Paul II calls, **places of hope** and of the discovery of the Beatitudes, a place where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion is called to become a pattern of life and a source of joy.

- St. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 51



# Tre Fontane & Acque Salvie:

A place in Rome that offers a message of hope today

SR. GABRIELLA MASTURZO, OCSO

In our cities, we see many churches emptying, with attendance mostly consisting of elderly people. We read about the decline in the number of priests and religious throughout much of the West. Conversely, it is clear that many people are thirsty for hope and are looking for something new in their lives. During the Jubilee Year, people of all ages, nationalities, and backgrounds came to Rome. Some came consciously; others, to a lesser extent. They came to draw from the living source of the Gospel, which the Church offers so that many may renew their life of faith. From this faith comes the hope that brings newness, initiative, and a future

when every certainty seems to collapse.

We see the Abbey of Tre Fontane along Via Laurentina in Rome as a place of hope. Not only is it a jubilee church, but the male monastic community of the abbey and a small group of sisters in the adjoining house, which stands next to the Church of the Martyrdom of St. Paul, are also developing a life within it.

### **A brief historical overview**

The small but lively and welcoming Trappist community lives in a particularly evocative location, thanks to the church

commemorating the site of St. Paul's martyrdom in 67 AD. Two centuries later, in 298, Zenus and 10,000 other Christians were martyred during the Diocletian Persecution. The monastery became a place of memory and holiness when the relics of St. Anastasius were brought there by Greek monks from Cilicia. Around the 11th century, Armenian monks were replaced by Benedictines, and from 1140 onward, by Cistercians. The abbey church was dedicated to the martyrs Vincent and Anastasius.

The Cistercians arrived in a challenging location: a marshy, malarial area. They constructed the new buildings according to the style conceived by St. Bernard. They faced many hardships in their efforts to establish the community.

The architectural structure of the church and monastery is one of the few places in Europe that remain exactly as St. Bernard of Clairvaux intended. Only the stained glass windows, which were redone in the 1930s, are recent. The frescoes depicting the apostles on the supporting columns of the main nave were also created after the Cistercian era.

The marshy terrain, malaria, the lack of means of subsistence and vocations, and the difficulty of

integrating with Roman society marked the early days. What followed was no easier. After a long period of decline, the site was entrusted to the Franciscans in 1826, but remained abandoned until it was handed over to the Trappists in 1868.

### Today

From the bustling Via Laurentina, a narrow avenue lined with holm oaks and eucalyptus trees winds its way to the abbey church. There, you are immediately enveloped in silence and greeted by the imposing statue of St. Benedict, who invites you to: *Pax*.

A large square and a portal dating back to the time of Charlemagne lead to the Cistercian abbey church. To the right is the Church of *Scala Coeli*, which is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The community of the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld resides up on the hill. An avenue of eucalyptus trees lines the road to the Church of the Martyrdom of St. Paul, and a short stretch of this road reveals Roman-era cobblestones. A small building to the left of the church is home to six Trappist nuns.

Since 2019, a house of sisters has been joined to the monks' community. The sisters are present at liturgical celebrations and provide support in terms of organization,

work, formation, and welcoming guests to the guesthouse. The Trappistine community of Vitorchiano has taken responsibility for this "annex" house. This initiative has received strong support from the vicariate of the Diocese of Rome.

The integration between a male house and a female community seems to represent well the face of the local church and that of the Trappist Order with its two branches, male and female, and a global openness that fits into multiple cultural contexts while maintaining its contemplative identity. The support of the Abbot General, Dom Bernardus Peeters, is fundamental to this initiative.

Over the years, we have witnessed the active collaboration between the brothers and sisters present at Tre Fontane. The entry into the monastery of a young Roman man who is about to make his final vows to belong to the community and the Order, of a postulant; and, currently, the arrival of a monk from Indonesia, Dom Maximilianus, as superior, and two Nigerian brothers to help the community are signs of vitality. The collaboration has also led to better and more effective organization in monastic work and in welcoming

guests.

Confirmation that the path taken could bear fruit for the Church of Rome came in two forms: first, in 2023, the visit of Tawardos II, Pope of the Copts, after he met with Pope Francis, which resulted in the inclusion of the 21 Coptic martyrs killed on February 15, 2015, in the Roman Martyrology. Second, on November 5, 2025, the updated Ecumenical Charter was signed following the joint work of the CCEE and CEC. The working group participated in an ecumenical liturgical celebration in the Church of the Martyrdom of St. Paul before meeting with the Holy Father the following day.

If we receive one message of hope from this experience, it is that the way forward in the arduous task of living through the difficulties history places before us is faith in the promise of life that the Lord gives us. This faith is in accord to a charism that becomes life for us and for those we encounter, and supporting our efforts both "for" and "in" communion.

*First published in the Vatican  
Governorate Newsletter of December  
2025*

*Sr. Gabriella Masturzo, a nun of Our Lady of St. Joseph (Vitorchiano, Italy), is the Postulatrix of our Order.*



## Hope: *Oculi mei semper ad Dominum!*

Six sisters of our abbey (Matutum, Philippines) were present for the 150th founding anniversary of our founding house, Our Lady of St. Joseph Abbey in Vitorchiano, Italy, in September 2025. I was one of them, and this was my second visit to Vitorchiano.

*Oculi semper mei ad Dominum* was the chosen motto for their 150th. And it was eloquent for its simplicity – words from the Psalm, often recited. *My eyes are always on the Lord.* To fix our eyes on the Lord is to remember his gaze

upon us; it is to become what we truly are in His sight.

After 150 years, that humble acknowledgement of indigence and utter dependence on God's gaze, which resounds in the Psalms, still echoes in the heart of Vitorchiano. In that gaze upon the Lord is hope, the source of Vitorchiano's unfailing hope.

In our day, when time seems a commodity, it was good to pause and reflect on 150 years of history. It is a great gift of God that the past remains

available to us by remembrance. To remember, to commemorate, is an act of love for the sacredness of our history, the place where the Lord has walked with us.

It was truly a celebration of that transmission of life, ongoing for 150 years, beginning with our earliest Mothers in San Vito, then moving on to Grottaferrata, and finally to Vitorchiano. From Mother Pia to Mother Cristiana to Mother Rosaria, a story of a maternity that has now born daughters on several continents of

the world. A life handed on, that it may flower in those who receive it, carried forward in the vast space of time that makes history.

It is a seeking together of the Lord's face, who has gazed upon our poverty, blessing us abundantly.

This commemoration renews our hope – for a love deeper than ours, a fidelity more faithful than ours, a far greater heart, looks upon us, ever and always. *Oculi mei semper ad Dominum!*

# Vitorchiano: A century *and* a half of prayer

HOMILY OF DOM BERNARDUS PEETERS  
ABBOT-GENERAL, OCSO

**B**rothers and sisters, today we gather as one big family, filled with gratitude and wonder, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of this community in Vitorchiano. What a blessing it is to pause and reflect on a century and a half of prayer, dedication, and community life! What a joy it is to do so as an Order, as a family born of this community! A moment like this invites us to look back on the great milestones and blessings that have been given to us. But it also invites us to consider the small, often unnoticed gestures that have shaped and sustained this community to this day.

At the heart of this celebration is the simple but profound statement of your founder: "The greatest happiness of my life is to work for the glory of God and to suffer for his love." These words are not an empty slogan, but the beating heart of Cistercian life. They are the source from which you, and we too, draw ever new courage, joy, and inspiration, precisely in that simple and silent life that is Cistercian life.

Today's Gospel tells us about the boy with two fish and five loaves of bread. In a crowd of thousands, a small boy goes almost unnoticed. His offering seems too modest to make a difference. Yet it is precisely his



Photo: Procession to the Cemetery,  
150th anniversary Vitorchiano, Sr. Anna Maria Ando



humble gift that, in the hands of Jesus, becomes a miracle that feeds many. We do not know his name. We do not know his story, but his small gesture becomes a source of abundance for the whole community.

This Gospel story is a beautiful metaphor for the life to which we are called. In our existence, it is often not the great gestures that bear the most fruit, but the small, hidden acts of love and fidelity. A kind word, an extra prayer for those in need, a smile, an offering made in silence: these are all small "loaves and fishes" that we, sometimes timidly, offer to God.

The world often looks to greatness: to success, power, and obvious achievements. But we are invited to look with the eyes of God. To discover in humility, in weakness, in what seems insignificant, the work of his grace. This requires a continuous conversion, a purification of our human gaze. We must learn to see less and less with the eyes of the world and more and more with the loving and gentle gaze of Christ.

This purification sometimes hurts. It asks us to let go of our attachment and desire for what is spectacular. It demands a humble acceptance of our smallness. This is also what it means to "suffer for love," to which we are called. Because suffering for

his love is not only enduring adversity, but above all allowing God to shape our hearts and our gaze more and more according to his Son, even when this involves effort and inner struggle.

Yet, brothers and sisters, let us not forget: from this journey of conversion, of smallness and abandonment, springs the true joy of which the first reading speaks. The joy that does not depend on worldly success, but is rooted in the mystery of God's love. It is that deep and silent joy that your foundress meant: the happiness of working for the glory of God and suffering for love, in the certainty that He welcomes even the smallest gesture, breaks it, blesses it, and distributes it as a blessing for many.

On this day of celebration, therefore, be especially grateful. For the many small acts of love that together have made this community flourish. For the sisters who have gone before you, for the countless prayers, offerings, and moments of abandonment that together have

formed a stream of grace. And for the promise that God, if we offer Him what is small, always multiplies it to abundance for the world. In this history of the salvation of the small, you are walking together again.

May this jubilee instill in all of us a new zeal to remain faithful to our vocation: to see the small and the modest, to be grateful for every new beginning, and to bring our gifts—however humble—before God with hope and joyful penance. Thus, this community, now and in future generations, will remain a sign of hope in a world that thirsts so much for liberation and communion.

Amen.



## How Gedono *is* a sign of hope

BY SR. MARTINA SURJOSEPUTRO, OCSO

The majority of people in Indonesia are Muslims, more than 90 per cent. Christians/Catholics, together with Hindus and Buddhists, form a minority. In most areas, people of different religions live side by side harmoniously, hopefully, yet in some areas, there still exist prejudices, which from time to time, will explode, as one of the causes of anarchy. Yet it subsides quickly due to the timely handling of the police.

In our monastery (Gedono), we have workers from the neighborhood, and they are almost all Muslims. We have no difficulty. We appreciate Muslims and their religious customs.

For example, on Fridays, they stop working at 11:00 to go pray in the mosque, which is very close to our location. They resume work at 12:30 after the prayer service has concluded. Almost all the nearby areas have their own mosque or *langgar* (similar to chapels). To call people to prayer, they either sound a *gong* or announce the prayer time through a microphone, which resonates throughout the entire area.

Instead of complaining that the loud sound is deafening or disruptive, we view it as a helpful reminder for our prayer time. This practice helps unite our hearts with the Muslim community as they engage in their

prayers.

What connects us with the other is the spirit of being together, the spirit of respect for others. We can appreciate each other's presence.

As a clear example, we have the poor and the rich. Although there is a gap between the poor and the rich, we live by the principle of our country, which is UNITY IN DIVERSITY.

We have been confronted by the richness of their lives of poverty, as Pope Francis convinced us that the poor are the Church's treasure. While we should be more conscious of the poverty of our lives of comfort, we should also learn from the poor. They are our teachers of hope; they are our living hope. Our prayer life is embodied in hope, yes. When all is dark, we hope that one day it will be bright.

Approaching Lebaran, the Muslim holiday, Id'ulfitri, our friends, the Lay Cistercians. Gedono, organized a distribution of rice to our poor neighbors. They announced the opportunity for each household to obtain a package of 10 kg of rice, paying half price at 70,000 IDR. They can have it per house. The list of inhabitants, or better, the list of houses, was very carefully prepared by our bursar, so that we can trust

everybody. People came in turn, village by village. Each came prepared with their *slendang*, or tablecloth, so that they could carry their 10 kg rice easily. There were 11 villages, a total of 435 houses.

People were content and grateful, because they could hardly buy rice in the market. Our Lay Cistercians and their "rich" friends were very happy to be able to help the poor. They learn from the smiles on the faces of men, women, and children, as a token of gratitude for the gift they have received.

Thus, we experience communion with our neighbors. This experience made me look up at the window pane of our church, which symbolized COMMUNION. Communion in faith, in Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI teaches us, Faith is a light that leads society to truth and goodness.

As we prepared for the Dedication of our church, we decided to renew the large window pane behind the altar. We were very happy when the old window was replaced with a circular design with a motif that signifies COMMUNION; it was exactly what we had envisioned. Communion!!

I particularly remember Psalm 66, which expresses our inner HOPE, our deep conviction that God embraces

us all; that He will not delude us.

Every time we sing this psalm, I have this idea in mind. A HOPE that one day God's ways be known upon earth and all nations learn his saving help. I am confident that one day all the peoples will praise God, the one God who made heaven and earth.

I can share with you some small anecdotes as examples that this hope has become real in our lives, in communion with our Muslim neighbors.

One day, when we were preparing some children from our village (Catholic families) as flower girls to join the procession of the Blessed Sacrament on the solemnity of Corpus Domini, a man, Mr. B, who used to be one of our workers, was waiting for me at the entrance of our church. He is a Moslem. He approached me at once and introduced me to his little granddaughter and grandson, who had come to join the procession, to be flower *strewers*. Now, his daughter, a young woman, mother of these children, told me that she became Catholic because of her husband. Her father wanted to give her in marriage to a man, a Moslem. But to his amazement, she refused. And she explained why. She told her father that she wanted to marry a Catholic, because in a Catholic

marriage, you marry only once, 'until death you depart', while matrimony in the Muslim way can happen several times. People marry, get divorced, and remarry. No, she resolutely wanted to marry a Catholic man!

And the father could not understand that fully, yet he had no objection. I wondered how she could possess such conviction? Surely, it must be the Holy Spirit guiding her and giving her light! Praise be to the Lord!

The wedding took place in their small town, not far from Gedono. The matrimonial Mass was held in their parish church and attended by the local parishioners, her father, and the entire Muslim family. It was like a miracle. The ceremony went on smoothly, without any disturbances, and the entire family was very happy. Afterwards, every Sunday after Mass, her daughter, son-in-law, and two siblings visited Mr. B in his home near Gedono. He was aware of their weekly visits, and nothing made him happier.

Another significant experience for us was how our neighbors supported us during times of sorrow. We held funeral Masses for two of our sisters, Sr. Assuntina and Sr. Agatha, six weeks later, both at 11:00 AM. People from our five neighboring villages—about 400 in total—came to our

place after their prayers at the mosque. Men and women, young and old, gathered solemnly, waiting for their turn to enter the church and pay their respects to the deceased by saying their goodbyes around the coffin. Most of them did not know the sisters personally; they only knew that they were part of the Gedono Sisters and thus considered part of their family.

Before the coffin was closed, the close relatives of Agatha (all Catholics) gathered around and prayed together. Beautiful! Then our workers, all clad in uniform, gathered around the coffin and said their prayers in their Muslim way. One led the solo prayer in Arabic, and all responded in unison: AMIN. Beautiful! It was very peaceful. Everybody respected everybody else. How can this happen? Different religions praise the same God in different ways.

Then, in a long, long line, and each of them greeted the sister lying in the coffin, without any prejudice, while our community was singing a Song to Our

Lady: thousands of times, until the line was finished, then the burial and the covering of the vault and petals thrown over the coffin. It seemed endless, but finally all 400 people gathered outside our gate, where we had prepared chairs for them and provided a box lunch for each. That's how the funeral came to a close.

So we live our monastic life in enclosure, but our hearts reach out to the world, the world that needs God's mercy and love. The world that points forward to the next world where all is one, where the Good Shepherd is leading us together, fulfilling the hopes and desires of all God's children, and praising his name together forever and ever. Amen. ■



*Sr. Martina Surjoseputro is one of the foundresses of Pertapaan Bunda Permersatu (Trappistine Abbey) in Indonesia.*

## Sujong: *Towards* Hope

BY SR. JOSEPHA CHANG, OCSO

Monastic life simultaneously embodies two elements: a test bed of hope and a light of hope. This unique situation—where living quarters are confined, choices are limited, encounters with others are extremely restricted, and the rhythm of daily life remains almost unchanged—constantly serves as a test bed for the monks and nuns. Although we are encouraged to sing a new song, life often settles into a semi-desert state where nothing seems new or surprising. No one can boast that their life does not drift this way. Moreover, precisely because one can become ensnared by a pseudo hope, living within the monastery yet drifting toward a life seeking

satisfaction in worldly achievements, the call to “stay awake” is so frequent in monastic life. Yet despite all this, hope is always presented before us in clear form. Not only are the daily Mass readings and the Eucharist important, but also the message the General Chapter, the Abbot General's circular letter, and the stirring wisdom we receive from tradition are always close to us, shining the light of life.

Founded in 1987, the Sujong will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2027. Its nearly 40-year journey itself clearly demonstrated that hope is both a test bed and a light. The decision to engage in eyeglass frame manufacturing—a

# Sujong

After a journey of over forty years, we are now hoisting fresh sails toward a new island—toward hope.

livelihood difficult to reconcile with monastic life—plunged the founding community into chaos. Ultimately, paying the heavy price of losing everything financially served to awaken us more profoundly to the nobility of the monastic life. The arduous search for a livelihood continued thereafter. Only after four business failures did the jam business stabilize, enabling us to begin the path to self-sufficiency starting in 2006. Until then, for nearly 20 years, we endured a period where we could not survive without the economic support of the founding monastery of Sujong, Tenshien. From December 2007 to April 2011, the Sujongman Shipyard issue distracted the Sujong community from focusing on its internal journey. Yet, on this testing ground of hope, we felt our longing to immerse ourselves more deeply in Cistercian spirituality only grow stronger.

Throughout this journey, the community possessed all the conditions necessary to become an abbey, yet hesitated to pursue it. This hesitation stemmed partly from concerns: what relevance would an abbey hold in



*Foundation Day, 1987*

modern times? Might not the community become intoxicated by the grand-sounding title of "abbey," thereby losing the very simplicity of Cistercian life? In 2024, during this period of reflection, the new Abbot General, D. Bernardus, visited Sujong. He strongly encouraged us to proceed with the elevation to an abbey, emphasizing that our community was experiencing normal growth and there was no reason for delay. This news of elevation is, in fact, a joyful message of renewal for the Order, especially for communities facing challenges like aging and potential closure. We felt the Holy Spirit urging us to move forward, and we responded with joy.

The future life of Sujong, like all monastic communities, will depend on how sensitively we awaken to

and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Amidst concerns about the decline of monastic life, the Sujong feels a keen need to witness the joy of the Gospel centered on Christ by living out the spirit of desert life and community life, the foundations of our charism. We sense that we are entering a new era, a time when we can and must impart new life as a mature community. This presents a new test of hope, while simultaneously offering us a light of hope. In other words, from the destination we have reached by rowing in hope, we must once again raise our sails and set out for a new hope.

This urges us to immerse ourselves in the hidden apostolate of daily life within the Cistercian community. Repeating the minute tasks of

monastic life, routines too trivial to savor their fruits, journeys where trials and oblivion are more common than recognition and encouragement—repeating this, one may suddenly find oneself having lost that light, standing in the pitch-black night. It is precisely this absence of hope that often leads to losing sight of the meaning of the path one walks, changing course, or losing momentum in one's activities. Such endeavors not only yield few tangible results but also frequently bring criticism instead of recognition, even for dedication. Without a light to illuminate the way ahead, human despair may well be the inevitable outcome.

Even monks or nuns may lead a lukewarm life or leave the monastery if there is no certain light of hope. If hope is a light in the night, this hope is different from the goal to be achieved. There is often a tendency to confuse goals with hopes—such as obtaining a university degree, advancing in a career, or achieving success. Monks and nuns are not free from this either. While these objectives may provide a temporary sense of hope, the excitement they bring often fades once they are accomplished. It is well-known that many people who achieve great things and

succeed in society often experience a sense of emptiness afterward. Why does this emptiness occur after achieving their goals? This observation suggests that these accomplishments are not the ultimate solution to happiness. We might find ourselves on a similar path, and perhaps these pursuits can obscure true hope. Hope is closer to an attitude toward life than a goal to be achieved. In this context, St. Paul said hope is invisible. What is invisible gives light to what is visible. Only what lies before us can illuminate us, and only what transcends us can lead us forward. When this invisible thing becomes our true hope, true life becomes our true self deep within us.

So whenever hope seems within reach, we must lift our eyes forward once more to seek new hope. Our life is a pilgrimage. What a great blessing this is—how vigorously life becomes when there is always a place to reach! Now, with hearts pounding, we await that unseen thing that awaits us. Such a life is ever new, even in old age. Countless islands lie before us— islands we must continually reach, explore, observe, and live upon. Today, too, we are heading toward some island.

After a journey of over forty years, we are now hoisting fresh sails toward a new island—toward hope. ■

*Sr. Josepha Chang is a solemn-professed nun of Our Lady of Sujong Abbey in Changwon-si, Korea.*

# Hope *does not* disappoint

SR. ANNA MARIE BUDI, OCSO

What a profound series of graces we received from the hand of our merciful God, freely and lavishly given, since the preparation and arrival to the moment of thanksgiving celebration of our community's erection into a Simple Priory last January 26, 2026. All of us in awe and wonder! We are a small, monastic Cistercian community, yet we consistently find, in the depths of our community's soul, a profound strength of hope and faith. This reality often becomes evident during our dialogues, sharing, and any other fraternal gathering. We believe that Our Lady Star of Hope is truly with us, guiding us in every step we take.

Star of Hope - Macau



In 2007, when we were forming the group of founding sisters for the future foundation of Gedono, we were together with Mother Martha. She suggested naming this foundation "Blessed Virgin Mary, the Star of Hope." This title was taken from the newly released Encyclical Letter "Spe Salvi" of Benedict XVI, Pope, at that moment (cf. nos. 49 and 50). We agreed to take that name for our future community. We only desire and do hope to continue the mission to offer our lives for the unity of Christian that we received from Vitorchiano, and as Gedono also took the name "Bunda Pemersatu – Mother who makes us one", in Macau. To bring Christ, our True HOPE, to this city where the seed of Christianity was first planted in Asia. But nowadays it is becoming more and more secular.

*Thanks be to God, and let all be done according to his will.  
He who called us will bring us all to completion.*

The journey of our community is unique and specific, not because of our certain excellence. Even in the beginning, it was questioned, "Why Macau?" Macau is so small and insignificant as a Church. But in fact, as mentioned above, there was a rich and vast history of Christianity in Asia. When God wills, who can say "NO", but walk and follow his signs and guidance, as our Father

Abraham responded to the call of God.

We experience a strong bond of charity among our Filiation and the Order, which is why the General Chapter voted unanimously for the Simple Priory. The support and guidance of the Abbot General, the intense help of the Procurator General, Dom Anastasius, the loving availability of some sisters of Matutum to provide help for the preparation, the motherhood of Gedono, and the fatherhood of Dom Paul Kao and the Community of Lantau as our Father Immediate.

The e-invitation for the Eucharistic celebration of the erection to Simple Priory, on the Solemnity of our Fathers Founders, was ready. Friends who offered to help us with the celebration were also ready on their part. We had our former Parish Priest, Fr. Domingos Un, who helped and supported us in the first 5 years we were in Macau, and who is now our Confessor. He and his parishioners offer the rich catering free of charge after the Solemn Mass of the erection. It was a joyful time of refreshment. An old friend, a professional photographer, generously offered to capture important moments during the celebration. We were very moved by their generosity. From the very beginning, we have experienced such deep support and gratitude for

our presence in Macau, from the faithful of the Diocese.

The delay in receiving the Decree of Erection from the Dicastery allowed the community to deepen its unity in facing uncertainty. We experienced the struggle between hope, faith, and anxiety. So, when the document arrived, deep joy filled our hearts as confirmation of God's will. We immediately proceeded with the planned schedule. The invitation was soon sent, and all the other things followed. Once again, we were moved by the availability and great support of the priests, religious, and the faithful in our Diocese with their holy curiosity for the celebration.

We are very grateful to Dom Paul Kao and the 5 brothers who accompanied him to Macau for the celebration. In their simplicity and humility, openness and readiness to work together with us for the preparation of all the celebrations on January 26 and the election of the Prioress on the following day. We learned a lot from Dom Paul's openness to corrections, patience, and the promptness to adapt to our situation. He already had experience with our sisters of the Rosary. *"God looks to the heart and not in the appearance only"* (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7).

Our happiness increased when Mother Cornelia and Sr. Christiana arrived on January 23. God is always good and faithful to those who trust in him. **TRUST is the keyword we**



## EXPERIENCE

**hold on to together.** We are *nothing* and *really nothing*; only he can use us, broken vessels, to become *something* according to his will. *Praise to you, Lord God, for your love endures forever! He made the impossible possible.*

The Mass was very solemn and moving, especially when Mother Cornelia read the Document from the Holy See, and continued with the homily by the bishop, which was both encouraging and challenging. He emphasized the role of our monastic community in the heart of the Diocese, as the source of hope, prayer, and holiness, inviting the faithful to be grateful for our presence and to continue to support us. The rite of change of stability was the most solemn moment, and some priests and faithful were moved to tears. God himself was present in the midst of all of us.

After Mass, the volunteers, led by Fr. Domingos Un, wearing their special black and white aprons, representing the "Trappist colour", began serving a rich and delicious lunch.

The day after, January 27, we had the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, and at the appointed time, we proceeded with the election of the prioress. Everything was very smooth, calm, and peaceful. We unanimously elected Mother Caterina as our Prioress. She is already "our Mother" since the very beginning of this foundation. We are very happy that she accepted it with joy and firmness of heart. Thanks be to God for his guidance through the Holy Spirit. Thursday, January 29, we all went to visit our future house, "Vila de St. Isabel," and had lunch together there in great joy and communion.

Full of thanksgiving, we begin our daily simple and hidden life, and walk and work together to renovate Villa St. Isabel. *"Although the site at first glance is not very large, by Macau's standards, it is an excellent place to fully live the monastic life!"* ■

<sup>1</sup>Regular Visitation Card, 2025, Abbot General

*Sr. Anna Marie Budi is one of the foundresses of Our Lady Star of Hope Monastery, Macau.*

# SACRED MUSIC



Musical art has a unique calling to instill hope in the human soul, so marked and sometimes wounded by the earthly condition. **There is a mysterious and profound kinship between music and hope, between song and eternal life:** it is no coincidence that Christian tradition depicts the blessed spirits singing in chorus, enraptured and ecstatic with the beauty of God."

-Benedict XVI

1.

**O** quantum in Cru-ce \* spi-rant amó-rem caput tu-  
 um, Chri-ste, incli-ná- tum, manus expánsae, pectus apér-  
 tum! Fi-li De-i, qui ve-nísti red-íme-re pérdi-tos, no-li  
 damná-re red-emptos : de valle fle-tus ad te clamánti- um,  
 Je-su bone, exáudi gémi-tum, nec men-sú-ram obsérves  
 crími-num : vulne- rá-tum Cor pre-cá-mur tu-um, pi-e  
 De- us.

“Oh, how much love radiates from the Cross, Christ, your head bowed, your hands open, your chest pierced. Son of God, who came to redeem the lost, do not condemn the redeemed. From the valley of tears of those crying out to you, good Jesus, hear our groans. Do not regard the extent of our sins. We pray to your wounded heart, loving God.”

## O QUANTUM IN CRUCE

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

This antiphon or sequence to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is generally sung during Passiontide. Like many other medieval musicians, the composer of this moving antiphon is unknown. Giovanni Vianini, 76, founder of the *Schola Gregoriana Mediolanensis*, defines it as a Cistercian chant and attributes it to San Bernard. Again, as with other texts attributed to the Abbot of Clairvaux, this attribution cannot be certain.

Yet, since the antiphon was composed in the late Middle Ages, it could very well be attributed to a Cistercian.

In the translation, we cannot do justice to the beauty of the Latin text, especially the expression *spirant amorem*, which captures the moment when Jesus breathes His Spirit and thus pours His love upon us. I chose 'radiates' as the Spanish.

In two sentences, the author encapsulated the long Cistercian tradition of devotion to the wounds of the Lord, which was inspired by St. Bernard's commentary on the Song of Songs. As we read in Sermon Sixty-One: *"Where can the weak find safe, sure rest except in the Savior's wounds? My secure dwelling depends on the greatness of his saving power. The world rages, the body oppresses, and the devil lays his snares. Yet I do not fall, for I am founded on a rock... 'The iron pierced his soul,' and his heart has drawn near, so that he is no longer one who cannot sympathize with my weaknesses. The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body; that mighty mystery of loving is laid open, laid open too the tender mercies of our God, in which the morning sun from on high has risen upon us. Surely his heart is laid open through his wounds!"* (SC 61:4).

Today, the devotion to the Wounds of Christ continues to influence the lives of many Cistercian monks and nuns. It is evident in the biography of St. Lutgarde, the book *"What are these Wounds?"* by Thomas Merton, and in the recent work, *"Healing Wounds"* of Bishop Erik Varden.

He writes: *"We tremblingly affirm what John the Evangelist teaches: in and through the cross God's glory erupts as Christ's annihilation manifests a sacrificial love so*

*utter that it subverts and opens up from within the very word 'love,' making it at once terrible and sweetly comforting. For if love is present here, no circumstance is beyond love's reach." While we sing: "O quantum in crucem spirant amorem caput tuum, Christe, inclinatum, manus expansae, pectus apertum!"*<sup>1</sup>

We tremblingly affirm the splendor of love. The healing power of the wounded Heart of Jesus radiates the glory of the Godhead.

The first Gregorian mode, often defined as serious and noble melodically, expresses the seriousness and nobility of the Passion. The melody rarely goes above the dominant note A and rarely goes as high as B flat. The B-flat notes emphasize the words *perditios, clamatum, crimum*, bringing forth their poignant plea. Otherwise, the melody evolves within the interval between the final D and the dominant A, imparting a sense of contemplation. ■



<sup>1</sup>Healing Wounds, Bishop Erik Varden

# VISIO DIVINA

## CIMA DA CONEGLIANO: The Incredulity of St. Thomas

BY MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

Photo: The Incredulity of St. Thomas,  
Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano, 1502  
Public Domain, The National Gallery



## “My Lord and my God”

“My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). St. Thomas’ confession of faith before Christ’s pierced Body gives light to the entire Gospel of John. Jesus’ words to Thomas: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing,” are forever carved in John’s heart, burning like fire. They clarify the Eucharistic words “Take and eat.” We touch and are touched by the resurrected Body offered for the forgiveness of sins. The power of this touch changes our vision of reality. In light of this Eucharistic Body, of his touching of Jesus resurrected Body, John remembers “the life of Jesus. This is also evident in the opening words of his First Letter: “What we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed” (1 Jn 1:1-2). At every Eucharist, our touching reminds us of the

open heart on the cross.

Cima da Conegliano’s painting effectively conveys the Eucharistic significance of the scene from the Gospel of St. John. While it lacks the dramatic gestures found in Caravaggio’s namesake painting, the expression on Jesus’ face is calm and contemplative. His resurrected body commands the space, drawing the viewer’s attention. From his shoulders upward, Jesus, at the center of the stage, is taller than any of the apostles. The true king of Israel, unlike Saul, reigns by giving his life for the sheep and allows the lost sheep, Thomas, to touch his open side. Jesus’ Body is “the way” to the heavenly sanctuary also for us who, every day, touch his Eucharistic Body.

It’s hard to miss that the setting is a sanctuary with a golden, ornate ceiling whose windows open to a path leading to a royal castle. The “way” through the Body of Jesus leads to the heavenly city, the royal, eternal abode of the Lamb of God. The Church’s sacramentally touching the resurrected Body of Jesus sets on the way to the heavenly Jerusalem.

We can also notice that John, the evangelist, is depicted with eyes lifted in contemplation as if in ecstasy and with his breast bare to signify his union with Jesus’ resurrected Body.

Looking at this colorful and vivid painting, we can only pray with Thomas: “My Lord and my God!” ■

## O Cross

O Cross  
Sword of Paradise  
Noah's Oar  
Abraham's Altar

O Cross  
Jacob's ladder  
Moses' Staff  
David's Scepter

O Cross  
Tree of Life  
Dry Olive Branch  
Wood of Sacrifice

O Cross  
Pillow of sinners  
Commandment of Love  
Throne of Grace



Photo: The Tree of Life, San Clemente Cathedral  
Legacy Icon

Sr. Julie Ann Pesongco, OCSO

## John the Baptist, prophet of hope

Green-parched waterless courses  
bore the deer-like thirst of that  
Songless wilderness - save howls  
Of winds, its rocks burning like fire,  
its oases - a restful paradox!  
The sand aggrieved against the  
Zipped mouth of rain; a scorched earth  
Hemmed in by unfriendly horizons -  
Only a floating mirage in fiery velvet  
teasing the bleary-eyed.

Then from there, an odd man leapt,  
Quizzed the 'submerged' ...Look out -  
The Winnower was wading waist-deep.

Prepare! You may weigh wanting!

Now - sprouts a new desert,  
Reed-like fibers embedding its arid trails

Then, in a suddenness,  
out of the howls-silent,  
that same Odd man, Pythagorean lean,  
cultured-wild wise, sifter of nations,  
whisperer of dust-speech, the Lion's ally,

leaped

with his pointing finger,  
like blade-glinting a pleated sun,  
still honey-drenched,  
there a low-flying hopper perching  
as though soldiering its Master's hand, --

John bellows his last:

'Vae victis! At your peril! Do your worst!'  
Unto the fan,  
the threshing floor, and the axe.

Sr. Leah Socorro Ponteras, OCSO



Photo: Saint John the Baptist Preaching  
Mattia Preti (Il Cavalier Calabrese), 1650  
(Public Domain) The Met Museum

## Hope

. . . is the song of a promise;  
A sojourn in a strange land.  
Deep down into the abyss;  
To be held by a mighty hand.

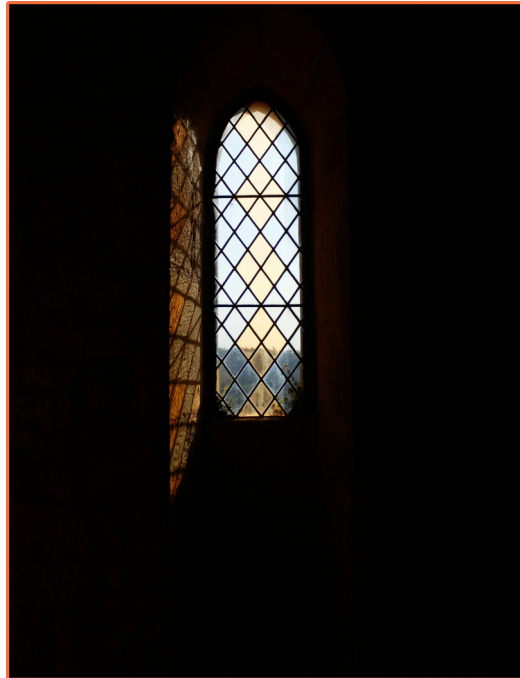
It is the awakening moment,  
Where the dim is brought to light  
Shining brightly in the tent,  
To the inner man's great delight.

It is that flavorful essence;  
The newness of a springtime;  
Acknowledging a presence;  
The gift for endless time.

It is the adherence to life -  
That Life given to mankind,  
Which gives flower to man's life;  
The enlightening of mind.

It is the Great Definition,  
Planted like a mustard seed,  
Daily bringing to fruition,  
The revelation received.

*Sr. Roxanne Acaylar, OCSO*



*Photo: Anna Wolff, unsplash.com*

Call for papers/photos for our next issue on:



*The Virgin Sheltering the Cistercians  
Douai, Musée de la Chartreuse*

## Mary, Queen of Citeaux

E-mail contributions in .docx format to:  
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Word count must be from 500 - 2000 words.

It is preferable to cite references as footnotes.

Scriptural citations should be placed alongside text.

EDITORIAL

EXPERIENCE

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Mo. Gabriella Masturzo  
Sr. Martina  
Sr. Josepha  
Sr. Anna Marie Budi

SACRED MUSIC

Mo. Giovanna Garbelli

VISIO DIVINA

Mo. Giovanna Garbelli

VERSE

Sr. Julie Ann Pesongco  
Sr. Leah Socorro Ponteras  
Sr. Roxanne Acaylar

EDITORIAL

THE PAIN OF WHY?  
HOPE SWIFTLY GLIDES  
THE 26 MARTYRS AND US

HOPE IN ST. BERNARD  
HOPE IN THE TIBHIRINE MARTYRS  
ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE

DOM ANSELM LE BAIL  
PIA GULLINI AND NORBERT SAUVAGE  
WHO IS BLESSED GABRIELLA?

VITORCHIANO: 150TH | Homily  
TRE FONTANE & ACQUE SALVIE  
LIVING SIDE BY SIDE WITH MUSLIMS  
SUJONG: TOWARD HOPE  
STAR OF HOPE

O QUANTUM IN CRUCE

VISIO DIVINA

Cima da Conegliano's  
The Incredulity of St. Thomas

O CROSS

JOHN THE BAPTIST, PROPHET OF HOPE  
HOPE

