

LITURGY OF VESPERS  
HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Church of the Charterhouse of Serra San Bruno, Calabria  
Sunday, 9 October 2011*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,  
Dear Carthusian Brothers,  
Brothers and Sisters,*

I thank the Lord who has brought me to this place of faith and prayer, the Charterhouse of Serra San Bruno. In renewing my grateful greeting to Archbishop Vincenzo Bertolone of Catanzaro-Squillace, I address this Carthusian Community, each one of its members, with deep affection, starting with the Prior, Fr Jacques Dupont, whom I warmly thank for his words, while I ask him to communicate my grateful thoughts and my blessing to the Minister General and to the Nuns of the Order.

I am first of all eager to stress that this Visit of mine comes in continuity with certain signs of strong communion between the Apostolic See and the Carthusian Order, which became apparent in the past century. In 1924, Pope Pius XI issued an Apostolic Constitution with which he approved the Statutes of the Order, revised in the light of the Code of Canon Law. In May 1984, Blessed John Paul II addressed a special Letter to the Minister General, on the occasion of the ninth centenary of the foundation by St Bruno of the first community at the Chartreuse [Charterhouse] near Grenoble. On 5 October that same year my beloved Predecessor came here and the memory of him walking by these walls is still vivid.

Today I come to you in the wake of these events, past but ever timely, and I would like our meeting to highlight the deep bond that exists between Peter and Bruno, between pastoral service to the Church's unity and the contemplative vocation in the Church. Ecclesial communion, in fact, demands an inner force, that force which Father Prior has just recalled, citing the expression "*captus ab Uno*", ascribed to St Bruno: "grasped by the One", by God, "*Unus potens per omnia*", as we sang in the Vespers hymn. From the contemplative community the ministry of pastors draws a spiritual sap that comes from God.

"*Fugitiva relinquere et aeterna captare*": to abandon transient realities and seek to grasp that which is eternal. These words from the letter your Founder addressed to Rudolph, Provost of Rheims, contain the core of your spirituality (cf. *Letter to Rudolph*, n. 13): the strong desire to enter in union of life with God, abandoning everything else, everything that stands in the way of this communion, and letting oneself be grasped by the immense love of God to live this love alone.

Dear brothers you have found the hidden treasure, the pearl of great value (cf. Mt 13:44-46); you have responded radically to Jesus' invitation: "*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*" (Mt 19:21). Every monastery — male or female — is an oasis in which the deep well, from which to draw "living water" to quench our deepest thirst, is constantly being dug with prayer and meditation. However, the charterhouse is a special oasis in which silence and solitude are preserved with special care, in accordance with the form of life founded by St Bruno and which has remained unchanged down the centuries. "*I live in a rather faraway hermitage...*

*with some religious brothers*", is the concise sentence that your Founder wrote (*Letter to Rudolph "the Green"*, n. 4). The Successor of Peter's Visit to this historic Charterhouse is not only intended to strengthen those of you who live here but the entire Order in its mission which is more than ever timely and meaningful in today's world.

Technical progress, especially in the area of transport and communications, has made human life more comfortable but also more keyed up, at times even frenetic. Cities are almost always noisy, silence is rarely to be found in them because there is always background noise, in some areas even at night. In recent decades, moreover, the development of the media has spread and extended a phenomenon that had already been outlined in the 1960s: virtuality risks predominating over reality. Unbeknownst to them, people are increasingly becoming immersed in a virtual dimension because of the audiovisual messages that accompany their life from morning to night.

The youngest, born into this condition, seem to want to fill every empty moment with music and images, out of fear of feeling this very emptiness. This is a trend that has always existed, especially among the young and in the more developed urban contexts but today it has reached a level such as to give rise to talk about anthropological mutation. Some people are no longer able to remain for long periods in silence and solitude.

I chose to mention this socio-cultural condition because it highlights the specific charism of the Charterhouse as a precious gift for the Church and for the world, a gift that contains a deep message for our life and for the whole of humanity. I shall sum it up like this: by withdrawing into silence and solitude, human beings, so to speak, "expose" themselves to reality in their nakedness, to that apparent "void", which I mentioned at the outset, in order to experience instead Fullness, the presence of God, of the most real Reality that exists and that lies beyond the tangible dimension. He is a perceptible presence in every creature: in the air that we breathe, in the light that we see and that warms us, in the grass, in stones.... God, *Creator omnium*, [the Creator of all], passes through all things but is beyond them and for this very reason is the foundation of them all.

The monk, in leaving everything, "takes a risk", as it were: he exposes himself to solitude and silence in order to live on nothing but the essential, and precisely in living on the essential he also finds a deep communion with his brethren, with every human being.

Some might think that it would suffice to come here to take this "leap". But it is not like this. This vocation, like every vocation, finds an answer in an ongoing process, in a life-long search. Indeed it is not enough to withdraw to a place such as this in order to learn to be in God's presence. Just as in marriage it is not enough to celebrate the Sacrament to become effectively one but it is necessary to let God's grace act and to walk together through the daily routine of conjugal life, so becoming monks requires time, practice and patience, "*in a divine and persevering vigilance*", as St Bruno said, they "*await the return of their Lord so that they might be able to open the door to him as soon as he knocks*" (*Letter to Rudolph "the Green"*, n. 4); and the beauty of every vocation in the Church consists precisely in this: giving God time to act with his Spirit and to one's own humanity to form itself, to grow in that particular state of life according to the measure of the maturity of Christ.

In Christ there is everything, fullness; we need time to make one of the dimensions of his mystery our own. We could say that this is a journey of transformation in which the mystery of Christ's resurrection is brought about and made manifest in us, a mystery of which the word of God in the biblical Reading from the Letter to the Romans has reminded us this evening: the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and will give life to our mortal bodies also (cf. Rom 8:11) is the One who also brings about our configuration to Christ in accordance with each one's vocation, a journey that unwinds from the baptismal font to death,

a passing on to the Father's house. In the world's eyes it sometimes seems impossible to spend one's whole life in a monastery but in fact a whole life barely suffices to enter into this union with God, into this essential and profound Reality which is Jesus Christ.

This is why I have come here, dear Brothers who make up the Carthusian Community of Serra San Bruno, to tell you that the Church needs you and that you need the Church! Your place is not on the fringes: no vocation in the People of God is on the fringes. We are one body, in which every member is important and has the same dignity, and is inseparable from the whole. You too, who live in voluntary isolation, are in the heart of the Church and make the pure blood of contemplation and of the love of God course through your veins.

*Stat Crux dum volvitur orbis* [the cross is steady while the world is turning], your motto says. The Cross of Christ is the firm point in the midst of the world's changes and upheavals. Life in a Charterhouse shares in the stability of the Cross which is that of God, of God's faithful love. By remaining firmly united to Christ, like the branches to the Vine, may you too, dear Carthusian Brothers, be associated with his mystery of salvation, like the Virgin Mary who *stabat* (stood) beneath the Cross, united with her Son in the same sacrifice of love.

Thus, like Mary and with her, you too are deeply inserted in the mystery of the Church, a sacrament of union of men with God and with each other. In this you are singularly close to my ministry. May the Most Holy Mother of the Church therefore watch over us and the holy Father Bruno always bless your community from Heaven. Amen.