



**MESSAGE OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRIOR OF THE CHARTHUSIAN ORDER
FOR THE NINTH CENTENARY OF ST. BRUNO'S DEATH**

**To the Reverend Father MARCELLINUS THEEUWES
Prior of la Grande Chartreuse, General of the Carthusian Order,
and to all the Members of the Order**

1. At the time when the members of the Carthusian family celebrate the ninth centenary of their Founder's death, I with them give thanks to God who raised up in His Church the eminent and ever topical figure of Saint Bruno. Praying fervently I appreciate your witness of faithfulness to the see of Peter and am happy to join in with the joy of the Carthusian Order which has in this good and incomparable father a master of the spiritual life. On October 6, 1101, Bruno, aflame with divine love left the elusive shadows of this world to join the everlasting goods for ever (Cf. Letter to Ralph § 13). The brothers of the hermitage of Santa Maria della Torre in Calabria little knew that this *dies natalis* inaugurated a singular spiritual venture which even today brings forth abundant fruits for the Church and the world.

Bruno witnessed the cultural and religious upheavals of his time, in a Europe that was taking shape. He was an actor in the reform which the Church faced with internal difficulties wished to fulfill. After having been an appreciated teacher he felt called to consecrate himself to that unique Good which God is. « What is there as good as God? Better still, is there another Good than God alone? Really, a holy soul who has any sense of this Good, of its incomparable splendor and beauty, finds himself aflame with heavenly love and exclaims: 'I am thirsting for the strong and living God; when shall I go and see the face of God?' » (Letter to Ralph § 15) The uncompromising nature of that thirst drove Bruno, a patient listener to the Spirit, to invent with his first companions a style of eremitical life where everything favors one's response to the call from Christ - who indeed ever chooses men « to lead them into

solitude and join themselves to Him in intimate love » (Carthusian Statutes). By this choice of life in the desert, Bruno invites the entire Church community « never to lose sight of the highest vocation which is to remain forever with the Lord » (Vita consecrata § 7).

Bruno, when able to forget his own plans to answer the call from the Pope, shows his strong sense of the Church. He is conscious that to follow the path of holiness is unthinkable outside of obedience to the Church: and shows us in that way that real following of Christ demands putting oneself into His hands. In abandonment of self he shows us the supreme love. And this attitude of his kept him in a permanent state of joy and praise. His brothers noticed that « his face was always radiating joy, his words modest. To a father's vigor he joined the sensitivity of a mother » (Introduction to Bruno's obituary scroll). These exquisite remarks from the obituary scroll show the fruitfulness of a life given to contemplate the face of Christ as the source of all apostolic fecundity and brotherly love. Would that Saint Bruno's sons and daughters, as did their father, may always keep on contemplating Christ, that they « keep watch in this way for the return of their Master ever ready to open when He knocks » (Letter to Ralph § 4); this will be a stimulant call for all Christians to stay vigilant in prayer in order to welcome their Lord!

2. Following upon the great Jubilee of the Incarnation, the celebration of the ninth centenary of St Bruno's death acquires by this fact a supplementary emphasis. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* I invite the entire people of God again to take in Christ their point of departure, in order to permit those who thirst for meaningfulness and Truth to hear God's own heartbeat and that of the Church. Christ's words: « And lo, I am with you always until the end of the world » (Mt 28,20) call all those who bear the name of disciples to draw from this certitude renewed energies for their Christian existence and inspiring strength for their path (Cf. *Novo millennio ineunte* §29). The call to prayer and contemplation, which is the hallmark of Carthusian life, shows particularly that only Christ can bring to the hopes of men a fullness of meaning and joy.

How could one doubt for a second that such expression of pure love gives Carthusian life an extraordinary fecundity, as it were, for the missions? In the retreat of their monasteries, in the solitude of their cells, the Carthusians spin Holy Church's wedding garment (« beautiful as a bride decked out for her bridegroom », 1 Rev. 21,3); every day they offer the world to God and invite all mankind to the wedding of the Lamb. The celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and the summit of life in the desert, modeling into the very being of Christ those who give themselves up to His love. Thus the presence and the activity of Christ in this world become visible, for the salvation of all men and the joy of the Church.

3. At the heart of the desert, where men are tried and their faith purified, the Father leads them on a path of dis-possession which questions all logic of having, being successful and finding fleeting happiness. Guigo the Carthusian would always encourage those desiring to follow Saint Bruno's ideal to « follow the example of the poor man Christ, in order to share in His riches » (On the solitary life, § 6). This dis-possession passes through a thorough break with the World, which does not mean contempt for the world but a fresh orientation of one's whole life in a tireless search for the unique Good: « You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced », Jer. 20,7). The Church is fortunate to have at its disposition the Carthusian witness of total disponibility to the Spirit and a life entirely surrendered to Christ!

So I invite the members of the Carthusian family to remain, by holiness and simplicity of life, like the city on the mountain or the lamp on the lamp stand (Cf. Matt. 5, 14-15). Rooted

in the Word of God, quenching their thirst with the sacraments of Holy Church, upheld by the prayers of St Bruno and their brothers, let them remain for the entire Church and at the heart of the world « a sort of place for hope and discovery of the Beatitudes, where Love leaning on prayer - source of communion - is called to become logic of life, and source of joy »! (Vita consecrata § 51) The cloistered life as an outward expression of the offering up of one's whole life in union with Christ's, shows the fleetingness of our existence and teaches us to count only on God. It increases the thirst for graces given in meditation of the Word of God. It also is « the place for spiritual communion with God and our brothers and sisters, where the restricted character both of space and of contacts favors an interiorization of Gospel values » (Ibid. § 59). The quest for God in contemplation is indeed undissociable from love of our brothers, love that makes us recognize the face of Christ in the poorest of men. Contemplation of Christ lived in brotherly love remains the safest path of all for a fruitful life. St John unceasingly reminds us of it: « Beloved, let us love each other, because love is of God, and whoever loves is born of God and knows God » (1 John 4,7). Saint Bruno understood that well, he who never separated the primacy he gave to God in all his life from the deep humanity he showed his brethren.

4. The ninth centenary of Saint Bruno's *dies natalis* gives me the occasion to renew my trust in the Carthusian Order in its mission of selfless contemplation and intercession for the Church and the world. Following Saint Bruno and his successors, the Carthusian monasteries never stop awakening the Church to the eschatological dimension of its mission, calling to mind God's marvelous deeds and being watchful in the expectation of the ultimate accomplishment of the virtue of Hope (Cf. Vita consecrata § 27). Watching tirelessly for the Kingdom to come, seeking to Be rather than to Do, the Carthusian Order gives the Church vigor and courage in its mission to put out in deep waters and permit the Good News of Christ to enkindle all of mankind.

In these days of Carthusian celebration I ardently pray the Lord to make resound in the heart of many young the call to leave everything to follow the poor man Christ, on the demanding but liberating path of the Carthusian vocation. I also invite those in charge of the Carthusian family to respond without timidity to the requests from the young Churches to found monasteries on their territories.

In this spirit the discernment and formation of the candidates presenting themselves necessitates renewed attention from the novice masters. Indeed today's culture marked by strong hedonistic currents, by the wish for possessions and a certain wrong conception of freedom, does not make it easy for the young to express their generosity when they want to consecrate their lives to Christ, to follow him on the path of self-offering love, of concrete and generous service. The complexity of each one's itinerary, their psychological fragility, the difficulties to live faithfully over the years, all this suggests that nothing must be neglected to give those who ask for admission to the Carthusian « desert » a formation spanning all the dimensions of the human person. What is more, particular attention must be given to the choice of educators able to accompany candidates on the paths of interior liberation and docility to the Holy Spirit. Finally, aware that life together as brothers is a fundamental element of the itinerary of consecrated persons, communities must be invited to live unreservedly their mutual love, and develop a spiritual climate and lifestyle in conformity with your Order's charisma.

5. Dear sons and daughters of Saint Bruno, as I reminded you at the end of my post-synodal apostolic exhortation « Vita consecrata » « you should not only reminisce and

tell a glorious past history, but make a grand history! Look towards the future, where the Spirit is sending you to do with you still great things » (§ 110). At the heart of the world you make the Church attentive to the voice of the Bridegroom whispering in her heart: « Courage! I have defeated the world » (John 16,33). I encourage you never to give up the intuitions of you Founder, even if the impoverishment of your communities, the drop in vocations and the incomprehension, which your chosen radical lifestyle provokes, might make you doubt the fecundity of your Order and your mission whose fruits in hidden way belong to God!

It is up to you, dear sons and daughters of the Charterhouse, heirs to Saint Bruno's charisma, to maintain in all its authenticity and depth the specific spiritual path, which he traced for you by his words and example. Your pithy knowledge of God, matured in prayer and meditation of His word, calls the people of God to look further, to the very horizons of a renewed humankind in quest of fullness of meaning and unity. Your poverty, offered for the glory of God and the salvation of the world, is an eloquent contestation of the logic of profit and efficiency, which often closes the hearts of men and nations to the real need of their brothers. Your hidden life with Christ, as the Cross silently planted in the heart of redeemed mankind, remains in fact for the Church and for the world the eloquent sign and the permanent reminder that anybody, yesterday as today, can let himself be taken by Him who is only love.

Entrusting all the members of the Carthusian family to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mater singularis Cartusiensium, star of the evangelization of the third millennium, I give them all an affectionate apostolic blessing, which I extend to all the benefactors of the Order.

From the Vatican, May 14, 2001,

Joannes Paulus II