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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

I am writing you from Norfolk the day before our launching of our celebration of our 125th anniversary. As you know, I have been to Croatia, Bulgaria and Spain before coming to Norfolk. And in this trip I had the opportunity to experience a great variety of Benedictine women! In Croatia, where we had the CIB meeting, I was twelve days with Croatian nuns, and other Benedictines from the United States, Canada, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, England, Australia, India, Korea, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Inkamana, and Iles St. Louise (in the Caribbean). There was a great variety of attire. Some contemplatives wore civilian dresses and others wore the full gear one with wimples and frontlets and scapular. We, non-cloistered Benedictines wore varying habits too, some black, some grey, some blue, etc. I talked Italian to the Brazilians and Croatians, English to English speaking countries, German to the Germans and some Croatians. And when I went to Bulgaria, I was amused at the Korean Sr. Angela and Filipinos Sr. Leticia and Sr. Maria Jose praying the office in Bulgarian. In Spain, I of course prayed the office with our Spanish-Filipino community in Spanish. And here in Norfolk, we have the sister delegates from all our priories in Korea, Philippines, Africa, Iberia, the U.S., Germany and Brazil. And my insight from this experience is: HOW UNIVERSAL INDEED IS THE TEACHING OF OUR HOLY FATHER BENEDICT. It touches the hearts of women and men regardless of ethnicity and nationality and is able to inspire them to live a life of ORA ET LABORA in the SCHOOL OF THE LORD'S SERVICE.

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB



Dear Mother Prioress, Superiors and Sisters,

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. (Jn.1:16)

With joy I offer you our first common gift and task for our 125th Jubilee year: The **Statio Conferences** which came into existence with the collaboration of all Pories, some written by the Prioress herself, others by a Sister of the Priory or by a team of Sisters.

A heartfelt thanks to all of you,
the authors, the translators and secretaries.

It is because of you that we have, at the beginning of the Jubilee Year, all the conferences in the four main languages of our Congregation.

The booklet is our gift to each other at the beginning of the Jubilee year. Aside from this, an electronic copy of the Statio will be sent to the Pories/Houses a month ahead, so that it can be prepared for distribution to the Sisters on Statio Day.

The themes of the Statio Conferences, agreed upon during the Prioresses' Meeting 2008, will hopefully help us to be more conscious, more grateful, more joyous about the great gift of our Missionary Benedictine vocation, so that our being may have the evangelical impact desired by our founder Father Andreas Amrhein, that is, that we truly become ***Benedictines for Mission***. For 125 years our Sisters tried to correspond to this grace. May we now, and the future generations, continue to be open to this grace and faithfully carry out the mission entrusted to us.

In joyful and deep union while we celebrate our Jubilee,

Your,

M. Angela Strobel OSB

Mother Angela Strobel

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

COMMUNITY

By Tutzing Priory

In the first Statio Conference at the beginning of our 125th Jubilee Year, we want to reflect on community. All of you have enough experience of living in a Benedictine community to know that this is not so easy. The topics which I will touch upon are certainly not new, but perhaps they will move you to personal reflection or to conversation with co-sisters.

To me the greatest achievement of Saint Benedict was the creation of a model for living together as human beings in a humane manner. In RB Chapter 72 he describes how he envisions a community. I wish to address myself to some basic attitudes that should mark our life in community.

The first and basic attitude is reverence for our sister. The rule of Benedict is permeated by this reverence which is based essentially on the belief that Christ is present in every sister/brother. This means first of all that I believe in the other person's positive core, that I am not deceived by the negative impressions I experience, by their aggressions or by behavior that annoys me. No matter what bothers me about a person, I need to believe in the presence of Christ in the other one. Only then can I treat the other person with human kindness. I am responsible for the other person through my faith. When I judge another, have negative expectations, or reject her in my heart, I push her into a role from which she cannot escape. But if I truly believe in my heart that Christ is in her, this belief will have a positive effect on her; she will be able to unfold what is good in her-self, and the figure of Christ can become visible in her. Faith in the presence of Christ in the other frees me from measuring them according to ideals. It helps me persevere in this faith even when I see weaknesses and faults. And this faith enables the other sisters to develop and improve, far more than from my constant criticism and attempts to change her. Reverence for my sister gives her the space she needs; it does not want to know everything about her, does not look for weakness and failures.

The second point is our dealing with needs, which Benedict describes in Chapter 34. A requirement for living with each other in peace is the proper way of handling our own needs and those of others. Needs should be recognized by ourselves and before the community and should also be met. But the first step is just being humble enough to state our needs and to acknowledge that we should not satisfy our needs secretly. Rather, we should recognize our needs as a weakness and not take their fulfillment for granted. A sister who needs less should thank God and not be sad, not jealously looking at others, and also not feeling complacent and smug. When I get upset or angry about the needs of another sister, it is a sign that I am not at peace with my own needs. Our problem is that we often count up each other's needs. This always shows that we cannot deal with our own needs. Accepting the meeting of our needs gratefully and also being able gratefully to do without—this is

Benedict's way of peace with ourselves and at peace with one another. This way is difficult, for it presupposes great honesty toward ourselves.

The third element of Benedict for creating a good community is considering each person important. If some sisters in a community keep complaining that others are not observing the norms and rules, demanding that they be punished, it is a sign that the community is not yet very mature. Benedict calls for the gift of discernment, especially towards the weak members. One sign of the degree of humane interaction in a community is its treatment of the weaker members, the marginal ones. If members are excluded, if one denies they exist, it shows that the community does not admit its weaknesses. Weak members keep the community aware of its wounds.

The fourth element is its order. The typical Benedictine schedule of living in a balance of prayer and work is intended to help me achieve order also in my inner self. The schedule also assures that the most important functions in a community are given the proper space. Without a schedule, an individual sister might simply pursue her own work or cultivate her hobby. The schedule creates the conditions for the basic daily functions of the community to be upheld, eating together, praying together, keeping silence at the same time, conversing with each other. Good order also creates an atmosphere of trust, of reliability and a sense of being accepted.

Benedict not only regulates time, but also the services in the community. He gives clear instructions about the concrete mutual love being evident. We not only need to bond emotionally with each other; rather, the daily services must simply function for a community to be in harmony. Fidelity to our daily duties keeps a community united.

One further aspect of good order seems important to Benedict for living in community: firm rituals. Such exterior forms can be of help in also showing our mutual bonds, to show feelings for each other, for this creates a sense of identity. Each religious order and each community has its own style, its special rituals! And when guests arrive, they recognize our typical style. We should have the courage to cultivate a certain style, not always adapting, and also to let visitors join our style so that they can feel a sense of bonding with us. It is our expression of community.

The final element required by Benedict is to “**prefer nothing to Christ.**” This is the core: our joint seeking of God, our love for Christ. This truly holds our community together! A community that only revolves around itself becomes barren. Benedict did not found a community for feeling comfortable and creating a pleasant life, but he wanted to establish a school for the Lord's service. He wants the monastics to go to God together, to prefer nothing whatever to Christ. Christ is to be the core, the inner center that unites the community's members. When the community allows itself to be touched by the presence of the Divine Spirit while praying and worshipping together, it grows into a much more profound unity than is achieved by expressing mutual affection. This does not happen automatically. We must seriously believe that we can truly celebrate the Eucharist only when we accept each sister standing before God with us, thinking: it is good that she is here. The Eucharist can be a means of truly creating community, but we must freely accept it as God's help, that it is God who is bringing us together, that God unites us in the one bread, the one cup.

We know that many problems in a community cannot be solved, but in our common prayer we can experience as a community the strength to live with such problems. A community that praises God, that prefers nothing to the love of Christ, is not better than another. But such a community can persevere together in living a humane way of life despite any tension and stress that threatens to break us apart. The looking towards God unites them.

Guide Questions for Reflection:

1. In faith I am responsible for the others: **What is my specific responsibility in community?**
2. Accepting gratefully the meeting of my needs but also doing without is the way to peace: **Am I able to make requests honestly and openly, to do without, to let others receive, and to rejoice with them?**
3. The weak members serve to keep the community aware of its wounds: **How do I contribute personally to human dealings with each other?**
4. Good order creates an atmosphere of reliability and fosters a sense of identity: **How faithfully do I adhere to the common schedule? Do I support it actively and feel supported by it?**
5. A community that prefers nothing to the love of Christ can persevere in human living in spite of all tensions: **How do I keep my relationship to Christ alive? Which forms of our common search for God do I treasure and cultivate?**

For deepening: Eph. 4:1-6

HOMILY

Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD

AMRSP Joint Biennial Convention
Cebu Grand Hotel, Cebu City
July 8, 2009

For our reflection tonight, allow me to share very briefly a few thoughts on two words from the Gospel reading today (Note of ed: On Jesus' question to Peter: Do you love me more than all the rest....)

The first word is the word "more". I think it is safe to say that all of you are here because of something connected with the word "more". You are here today because, in the last elections in your congregations or provinces, you got "more" votes than any other. But, of course, not just 'more' votes. For "more" votes entailed the perception among the members that you are "more" capable of leadership, or "more" qualified, or "more" intelligent, or "more" talented. And, perhaps, even the perception that you are "more" compassionate, or "more" understanding, or "more" human. Today, however, in the light of the Gospel reading, you are being asked to transform that "more" into something else. Not just more votes, or more qualifications, or more compassion, but more love for the Lord, more commitment to your congregations, more service to your members.

In today's gospel, Jesus asks Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" And Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you". From then on, Peter became the leader and servant of the young church of Jesus. And he did so, not because of any special professional qualification, or any particular organizational talent, or any specific scholastic degree; his only qualification was that he loved the Lord more than the others. Like Peter, you too are called to be servant leaders of you congregations and provinces. And your only title to such a position of privilege and of service is to be that you love the Lord more than the others.

What does this entail? What does loving the Lord more than the others entail? Strangely enough, it entails being led by others, rather than leading others. This is what today's gospel say:

In all truth I tell you,
when you were young
you put on your own belt
and walked where you liked;
but when you grow old
you will stretch out your hands
and somebody else will put a
belt around you
and take you where you would
rather not to go (Jn 21:18)

Loving the Lord more than the others entails this – no longer walking to where you like, but being ready to be taken to where you would rather not go. And this is what being a servant leader in your congregations means – no longer living your life as you wish, but living your life completely according to God’s will, the good of the congregation, and the needs of the sisters and confreres.

The second word is a word found in the earlier part of this post resurrection narrative and not included in the passage that we actually read. It comes from verse 9 which mentions the “charcoal fire” with some fish cooking on it, when Peter and the disciples came to shore after fishing. Commentators say that this “charcoal fire” around which Peter professes his love for the Lord three times, recalls the “charcoal fire” in the courtyard of the palace of the high priest where Peter denied the Lord three times. This parallelism is meant to underline the fact the Peter’s profession of his love for the Lord no longer comes a youthful exuberance, but from a humble recognition of his earlier failure. The message seems to be that Peter became the servant leader of the Christian community not because he was a perfect disciple but because he was a disciple humbled by his terrible experience of failure. It was an experience that became a source of the strength to profess his love for the Lord that was more than that of the others.

And the strange thing about loving the Lord is that it is really a question of allowing the Lord to love us, despite our fragility, our weakness, our sinfulness. Love does not have to come from a perfect heart, from a heart that has never known failure or sin, betrayal or unfaithfulness. The strange thing about love is that often it comes from a heart broken but restored, sinful but forgiven, unfaithful but healed.

For God does not look for genius and strength, or influence and power. For these he has no need. He asks of those he has chosen only the readiness to put their hands in his and lose their lives in silent majesty of his will. He asks only for the willingness to be made use of, in the humiliation of their weakness and their stumbling.

It is said that one of the more touching moments of the Holy Father’s visit to the USA was the Holy Mass that he celebrated for priests and religious at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. After referring to the sex-abuse scandal in his homily, at the end of the mass, before the concluding prayer, the Holy Father departed from protocol and gave a few unscripted remarks. He said he understood his role as successor of Peter, but reminded his listeners that, like Peter, he himself was a “sinful” man, a man “with is faults”. And so, he said, “ I rely on your prayers”.

In the gospel reading tonight, Peter had learned his lesson. On his own, he can only betray the master. But in the hands of the Lord, he could be the rock-foundation of the Church and thus tend the Lord’s sheep.

A story is told of a young novice who approached an old experienced Desert Father to ask him a question. “Father, how does one build a community?” “In the same way as one constructs a house,” the old experienced Father responded. “What do you mean, Father?” the young novice continued. “Well, in constructing a house, one uses many and different kinds of stones. But the most important thing is the cement that keeps them together”. “So, what is the cement that keeps our community together?” the young novice insisted. The old experienced Desert Father bent down and took sand in his hand. And he said, “Cement is made of sand, which is a very fragile thing; one little wind and it is blown away. In a similar way, the cement

that keeps our life together is our fragility, our vulnerability, our weakness. From our fragility, vulnerability, weakness we learn to live in community, knowing that we need one another and depend on each other.

Like Peter, we harbor in ourselves our own “charcoal fire” which reminds us of our weaknesses and our failures. But our “charcoal fire” can also become a source of strength, if it can lead us to confess our love for the Lord that is more than that of the others.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, last night I had a dream. And in my dream, I saw the founders and foundresses of our congregations approach their provincial superiors in the Philippines. And with a gentle smile on their face, each one said to his/her provincial: “Sister / Brother / Father. Provincial superior, do you love the congregation more than these others do?” Each one provincial superior, with a puzzled look on his/her face, replied: “Yes, Mother or Father, you know I love the congregation”. And the founder/ foundress said: “ Take care of our congregation”.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, for agreeing to help take care of the religious congregations in the Philippines, for agreeing to help to tend consecrated life in the Philippine Church as religious superiors or leaders, thank you very much indeed.

“That in all things God may be glorified.”