

Statio March 2007

The Charism of our Congregation

Constitutions, Chapter 1; RB Prologue, RB chapters 1 – 3

My dear Sisters,

The 11th General Chapter asks us to make a systematic and prayerful study of the Constitutions (Chapter Message, page 11). This month we shall gather for our 17th Priory Chapter. For our own Chapter it is important that we are rooted in the charism of our congregation; based on this foundation we deliberate and make decisions. With this background I recommend to devote this Statio to a prayerful meditation of the first chapter of the Constitutions. As the heading of this chapter tells us it has to be seen in connection to the Prologue and the first three chapters of RB:

RB 1 The kinds of monks;

RB 2 Qualities of the Abbot,

RB 3 Summoning the Brothers for Counsel.

Though each one of us read and heard these parts of the Rule many times, please, take all these texts now and during this month really into your hands for reading them carefully again and to see the connection to our Charism, to your vowed life.

The word *Charism* or *Charisma* comes from the Greek language and means *a free gift from God*, resulting from God's grace. The word for *grace* is *charis*. The word for *joy* *chara* has the same root. All three words belong together; Joy, joined in thanksgiving and praise because of God's gracious gifts. "The charisma of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord", Paul writes in Rom 5:15. Paul writes in his letters about the different charisms in the church, provided by the Spirit for service, for the good of all.

We believe that the religious vocation of each of our Sisters to live as *Missionary Benedictine Sister* is a special gift from God, given to us by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. I look at my own vocation history. Can I rejoice in this amazing sign of love given to me by God, who loves me and knows me by my name? I affirm the acceptance of this gift as I have done on my profession day. Humbly I say: "Lord, thank you. Help me to understand ever deeper and to live accordingly".

CN 1 starts with the Holy Trinity and the mission of Christ. Compare the text with the Message General Chapter, page 3 *Mission is a Call by God*. What is the work Christ came to accomplish: the glorification of the Father and the salvation of the world. This is the cosmic context of the meaning of my life, the meaning of our community, of our congregation. We are rooted in this universal perspective of the Risen Lord. Therefore we say and write so often. *That God in all things may be glorified* and that we are concerned with the *mission for the whole world*. This opens our horizon far beyond our individual life and narrow view!

We want to understand deeper the particular way of life as Missionary Benedictine Sister of Tutzing. Perhaps we look sometimes with jealousy at other congregations and believe that their way of life, spirituality would fit better. How much are the Jesuits doing! Or the Sisters of Luagala! I used to work closely with the Maryknoll Sisters in Windhoek. How much impact had the work of 2 sisters only in whole Namibia. But we cannot compare in this way. Their spirituality, apostolate is different. It is important to understand and to acknowledge this. Now what is our particular way of life as formulated in CN 2: living the gospel, rooted in the Rule of St. Benedict and in the founder's idea Fr. Andreas Amrhein, in our Constitutions.

CN 3 speaks about the fundamental characteristic of our way of life: seeking God in community, under a rule and a superior. This living in community is so important for us, and often so difficult! Look at the kind of monks described by Benedict in RB 1. The second kind, the hermits, attract us from time to time, especially when we are a bit fed up with community, society and would like to live for God only, as we tell ourselves. But Benedict tells us: when you want to be holy, stay where you are

in the human community, learn patience, learn wisdom, learn unselfishness, learn love. Don't fool yourself with your holy desires!

The third kind, the sarabaites, presented themselves as religious but separated themselves from a disciplined life and spiritual guidance in order to concentrate on themselves. They called themselves religious, but they were the worst thing of all things religious. They pretended to be what they were not. They lived lives of moderate commitment, chaste and even simple lives, but they listened to no one's wisdom but their own. The importance of this kind of monks for today is that it is not so uncommon to use religion to make oneself comfortable, to have a sense of personal goodness, but not a sense of Gospel challenge. There comes a time in our lives where the effort of it all begins to seem too much, the temptation to settle down on what was achieved is strong in us. We do the exercises, we pray, we do the externals, but we cease to "listen with the heart". We call ourselves religious, but we have long since failed to care. A sense of self-sacrifice dies in us and we obey only to desires within us. What about the fourth kind, the gyrovagues? They had a noble beginning, founded to follow Christ, "who had nowhere to lay his head." The first gyrovagues had nothing, owned nothing, but trusted only in the providence of God. But finally they lived from begging from other people without contributing anything themselves. Gyrovagues in our days are plenty. They talk high virtue and demand it from everybody but not from themselves. They live off a community but they are never available when the work to contribute is necessary. Benedict's reference to the gyrovagues teaches a good lesson to us today. Extremes in anything, even in religion, are dangerous. When we go to excess in one dimension of life, the unbalance in something else destroys us. Work is good, but not at the expense of prayer. Prayer can become more important than work. Religious exercises become more important than personal responsibility. There is a little gyrovague in us all.

With Benedict let us concentrate our lives on the strong kind of monks, the cenobites: seeking God in community, under a rule and a superior, praying and working together, sharing our goods, both material and spiritual (this applies to each sister!), in mutual service, support and striving together to discern the will of God ever anew, in order to respond more fully to our vocation. Cf Constitutions

Sisters, let us never think or believe, that the response to our vocation, to God is somehow achieved already. The process to the "more fully response", the process of our ongoing conversion, our need for change has to be ongoing until we die – if we stop this process earlier, then we are spiritually dead already though walking around.

CN 4 speaks of our Benedictine prayer life: Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina*, high point is the celebration of the Eucharist. I guess that we have to be more faithful to the *lectio divina*, as a daily binding commitment of a full hour, based on Holy Scripture. Therefore I stressed this point at Ash Wednesday. The daily Eucharist can become a routine, not being a real high point in my personal prayer life any longer. Each sister is responsible to make efforts that this does not occur. How can one do that? Take books out of the library to understand the Eucharist in a deeper way. Prepare the texts for mass on a daily basis. Be aware of what is going on here and now.

"We wish to make our communities places of God-seeking, divine praise and human encounter, and to witness to the presence of the Risen Lord in all that we are and in all that we do". The text speaks for itself. Do not blame community, if you feel this lacking, but better ask yourself: "what can I do and contribute so that this becomes more fully a reality?"

My dear Sisters, I referred only to some points in this Chapter of our Charism. It is full of challenges for you and me to repent and to open up for conversion. That is what Lent is all about. And it challenges us for our upcoming Priory Chapter to find here the basis and as well the goal of our lives as Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Ndanda Priory.

May our Mother Mary, Star of the Sea, guide us this Statio, during our Chapter, to the Risen Lord.

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27 February 2007-02-27

Thanks to Sr. Joan Chittister OSB for some insights on RB 1.