

MONASTERO DI SAN BENEDETTO NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY OF MARIA SEDES SAPIENTIAE

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Year XI, n. 1



JANUARY - APRIL 2009

Dear friends:

We delayed in preparing this newsletter so as to have some good news to communicate. So many things happen in the daily life of the monastery, but I will limit myself to two important events.

The first is Br. Thomas' Solemn Vows, which took place on January 8, 2009. There is nothing more beautiful than to see a man consecrate his life to God. I asked Br. Thomas to write a reflection on his profession for you. He was also ordained a deacon on the Feast of St. Scholastica, February 10th.

The second item is a special mission given us by the Holy See, in the form of a letter which I read to the community on April 29, 2009, the 25th anniversary of my priesthood ordination. In this letter (see p.2), the Holy See asks our monastery to take on the unique apostolate of celebrating the Eucharist *in utroque usu*: according to both usages, that is to say, both the New Mass (the ordinary form) and the Old Mass (the extraordinary form).

Of course, we want to respond to the desires of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI as expressed in his Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, and we are honored to receive a such an important mission for the life of the Church. Sometimes the Holy Father's decisions are misunderstood, and sometimes our decisions are too, so I am including an interview in which I try to anticipate some of the questions which might be raised and respond to them as best I can.

We remember our friends and benefactors in prayer every day, wishing you every grace and blessing.

In Domino,

Fr. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B.

Very Rev. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B.
Prior



Happy monks on a study trip to Ravenna

BR. THOMAS MAKES SOLEMN VOWS



Br. Thomas sings the profession formula from his vow chart

The Church in her wisdom requires that monks make simple vows, on a temporary basis, for a number of years, before making solemn vows, a lifelong commitment. There is mainly a prudential reason for this, namely to ensure that those making the vows are capable of keeping them and are willing to do so, with all that this entails. But one consequence of this is that a monk's solemn vows can seem somewhat uninteresting, at any rate to outsiders. After all, didn't he become a monk a long time ago? What's new about this? Yet for the monk himself, the experience gained during the period of temporary vows can lead to a better understanding of the nature of the commitment that he is making, and so to a much fuller appreciation of the solemn vows than he could have had without the temporary vows.

In my time in the monastery in Norcia, I have experienced this myself. St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the vows as a “holocaust” in which one offers oneself entirely to God, especially by the vow of obedience, since it is most of all by the possession of one's own will that one possesses all other things. I had this idea of religious life and of the vows when I joined the monastery almost five years ago, but during the period of simple vows, I came to understand this in a much more concrete manner. I attempted to sum this up with my choice of two Scripture verses for the holy card for my solemn vows. The first text was, “I said to the Lord, You are my God, because You have no need of my goods” (Ps. 15:1), and the second was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk. 12:30). These texts might seem opposed to one another, since love is asked of us, even required of us, despite the fact that we are also told that in His supreme independence from every creature, God needs nothing from us, not even our love. Yet I have learned to see my vocation as a call to reconcile this apparent contradiction by the way I live the “holocaust” of the monastic life, by always striving to love God as much as I can, to serve Him as well as I can, yet recognizing that in the end, I am completely unnecessary. In the end, all that I seem to give to God is not, most fundamentally, a gift that I give to God, as though it were for His benefit. Rather, the monastic life according to the vows is a gift that God has given to me, for my good. As St. John says, “We love because He loved us first” (1 Jn. 4:14).

SPECIAL APOSTOLATE FROM THE HOLY SEE

Very Reverend Father Prior:

April 21, 2009

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, from the very beginning of his pontificate, has made known his desire to foster the unity of the Church. As in the past so also today, the careful celebration of the Sacred Mysteries is a most efficacious instrument for achieving this goal.

*For this reason, faithful to the intentions of the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, this Pontifical Commission, responding to your request, entrusts to the Monastery of San Benedetto in Norcia the special apostolate of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist “in utroque usu”, that is, both in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, in collaboration with the Holy See and in communion with the diocesan bishop.*

I am confident that your young Benedictine community will always support the pastoral activity of the Supreme Pontiff with faithful prayer;

With my best Easter wishes,

*Dario Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos, President
Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei”*

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIOR

Does this decision respect the Second Vatican Council Council?

It would be useful to read carefully the Council document on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. SC 22 says that: “Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.” Pope Benedict's Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* simply reiterates that principle, and legislates for the use of the old rite alongside the new. Pope Benedict also emphasizes that the way to interpret the Council documents is by the hermeneutic of continuity. That principle is also expressed in the document on the liturgy where it says: “...care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing” (SC 23). What we're really talking about here is legitimate pluralism, which the Council advocates as well: “Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community” (SC 37). So the celebration of the Mass *in utroque usu* by all means respects the Second Vatican Council. We are embracing both usages, and reaching out to other groups in search of unity. That's a very conciliar approach.

But doesn't this mean “turning back the clock”?

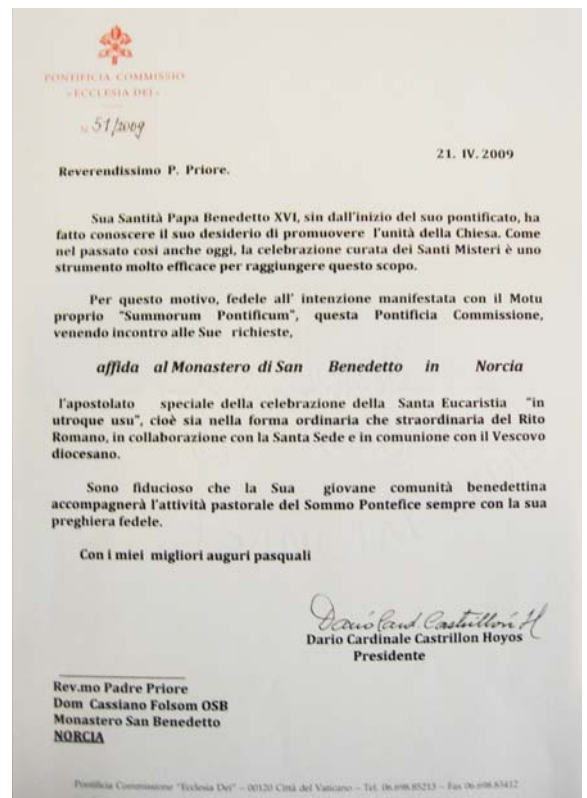
On the contrary, I see a monastery “*utriusque usus*” as very forward looking, especially in terms of authentic ecumenism. By that I mean two things. First, the ethos of the extraordinary form is very similar to the ethos of the many oriental rites, and therefore celebrating the Eucharist according to both the *Novus Ordo* and the *Ordo Antiquior* allows us to serve as a bridge between East and West. Second, I think we need a good dose of “internal ecumenism” in the Church, so as to be able to dialogue with Catholics attached to the older liturgical forms without ideological prejudice.

How can you, as a liturgist, justify such a decision?

It is precisely as a liturgist that I have had the opportunity to study and experience the rich variety of liturgical traditions that exist within the Church. It is “politically correct” for Latin rite Catholics to be enthusiastic about the Byzantine rite. Why isn't it “politically correct” to be enthusiastic about the extraordinary form as well? The history of the liturgy shows clearly a multiplicity of usages within the one Roman rite. It is thanks to many years of studying the liturgy that I came to see the importance of this unity in diversity. In fact, I argued this point in the presence of the then-Cardinal Ratzinger at a liturgical conference held at Fontgombault in France in 1997. As a liturgist, I would also like to say that there is no perfect rite; there are positive and negative aspects in every liturgical tradition. The only perfect liturgy is the heavenly one. In addition, both the extraordinary and the ordinary form can be celebrated well or celebrated poorly. For a comparison to be fair, we have to place the best of both side by side.

How can the two usages influence each other?

The ordinary form stresses such elements as the participation of the faithful, the use of the vernacular, the ongoing development of the liturgy by the addition of new saints to the calendar, etc.: these are all very important. At the risk of oversimplifying, I would say that the ordinary form stresses rational understanding, speaking in prose, as it were. The extraordinary form provides rich food for the intellect also, but relies heavily on gesture, symbolism, intuition, silence, ritual action without words, speaking in poetry, you might say. Man knows both rationally and intuitively. He needs both prose and poetry. If the two usages, like two different cultures, can patiently live with each other over time, they can become friends.



[The letter from the Holy See](#)

What pastoral benefits will come from this new apostolate?

The monastery of San Benedetto in Norcia is in a unique position. The pastoral life of the town is served very well by the diocesan clergy. The Basilica, on the other hand, is not a parish, but a shrine, whose pastoral attention is focused on pilgrims who came from all over the world. We are an international community serving an international public. The pilgrims come for a specifically Benedictine liturgy, which is characterized by what I would call a monastic or contemplative style. This is our unique contribution. The extraordinary form is very conducive to this contemplative, even mystical style, which is why the young people are so drawn to it. We celebrate the Mass in the ordinary form in the same style, which is why people come from far and wide to participate in our Sunday Mass.



Fr. Cassian gives the morning conference on the Rule of St Benedict

Wouldn't it be better to be just like everyone else?

To use an expression taken from the world of commerce, growth and development depend on finding a distinctive “niche”. This special apostolate of celebrating the Eucharist *in utroque usu*, makes the Norcia monastery distinctive, unique. I'm sure it will contribute to the growth of the community, in a time when young people aren't interested in a vocation that means living “just like everyone else”.

NEWS FLASH!

On June 17, 2009 we finally passed papers on the property and are the proud owners of a beautiful piece of land and a monastic ruin. Now we can at least do some preliminary work. More news in the next issue.

GIFT GIVING

If you are able to help us and are in the United States, please address your check to the SEDES SAPIENTIAE FOUNDATION. This foundation is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization whose purpose is to support the monastery. Your donations can most quickly benefit the monastery if you send them directly to the foundation address in the United States:

Sedes Sapientiae Foundation - 511 Kearsarge Mountain Rd. - Warner, New Hampshire 03278

For benefactors in Great Britain, please address your check to FRIENDS OF SAN BENEDETTO, NORCIA (registered charity no. 1107186):

**English Friends of San Benedetto, Norcia
c/o Stuart Dewar - 15, Main Street - Adlestrop - Moreton-in-Marsh - Glos. GL56 0YN - England**

For benefactors in Europe, please address your check to MONASTERO DI SAN BENEDETTO and send it directly to the monastery in Norcia, or make a bank transfer to:

**Cassa di Risparmio di Spoleto - Agenzia di Norcia - IT / 39 / F / ABI 06315 / CAB 38580 / c/c 000001005246 (IBAN)
Swift (BIC) - CRSPIT3S**

Personal correspondence should always be sent directly to the monastery.

Reward with eternal life, O Lord, all those who for your sake do good to us.