

2nd Conference on “A Vision of the Order for the 21st Century”

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(This reflection is the fruit of community reflection, discussion and written input from each sister that was then unified into a single document.)

Our Gospel Mission

The Gospel tells us about the requirements for following Christ: the primacy of God's love and the need to love God in our neighbor. Everything has meaning in love when God is in the first place, even a glass of water. We are called to give a privileged testimony of this constant search for God, of a unique and indivisible love for Christ and neighbor, and of absolute dedication to the growth of his kingdom.

Humanity is lost in a network of non-values because of the lack of any real points of reference. Monastics living in community, united in the love of God, can become witnesses that adherence to Christ can truly unify their life in God by integrating all their faculties, purifying their thoughts, spiritualizing their senses, in the crucible of their perseverance. In short, they witness that there is hope, there is meaning and there is God.

How can we give this witness in the 21st century?

“We are faced with a call to conversion. We are at a moment in which we are called to a new consciousness of our situation, to seek the spiritual roots of our problems, to admit our mistakes and to pose ourselves questions.... Our motivation to transmit the Cistercian charism to new generations needs to be stronger than the desire of individual communities to survive in their present situation.” (Cf. Abbot General’s Conference General Chapter 2014)

We found a strong meditation on this call to conversion to deeper monastic commitment in the 2017 Pentecost Letter of Dom Mauro Lepori OCist:

“Troubles and infidelities in monastic life are often the final result, sometimes tragic, of the refusal to live our vocation: accepting, for Christ, to renounce goods, affections, personal projects, personal conveniences, personal pride....Christ does not ask anything more than that to which he has called us: the renunciation of ourselves and of everything for Him. And that is what repairs and rebuilds our house, our Order, our Church, and even the society in ruin.... The renunciation made in order to correspond to Christ’s love is never negative... because it opens up to the gift of the freedom of love, of giving one’s life. And this is the perfection, the fulfillment of every life and vocation.... Jesus never demands our renunciation except in order to prefer Him, the Lord of life....”

We found some questions in the Global Vision of the Order GC 2002 that are still relevant:
*“God wants to work through us so that we may be the incarnation of his Love in the world today.”
God wants to be present to the world in and through us. How do we let ourselves be used by God in this moment of history? How aware of our mission are we? How are we incarnating the love of God in our communities? How is that love being communicated to those around us?*

In VDQ the Church tells us what is hoped for from a Contemplative Order:
*“Be beacons to those near to you and, above all, to those far away.
Be torches to guide men and women along their journey through the dark night of time.
Show us the One Who is the way, and the truth and the life, the Lord Who alone bring us fulfilment and bestows life in abundance. (6)*

... may your communities become true schools of contemplation and prayer. The world and the Church need you to be beacons of light for the journey of the men and women of our time. This should be your prophetic witness.” (36)

Our vision starts from our reality

In this time of globalization when the culture of relativism becomes the globalization of indifference, unity in the family becomes almost impossible. Many young people suffer from the absence of family life and values. There is hunger for companionship, love, attention, mercy and respect. They live in a world of competition that makes them despair. They don't know who they are or why they are living. They look for the meaning of life and desire to see the beauty of unity and love; to find someone really credible, someone who does what she says, an integrated person that they can trust and follow.

In the midst of this culture, we are called to incarnate Christian humanism and to be the authentic family of God, living witnesses of Jesus for each other. We are brothers and sisters, we belong to each other, to the community. We support each other so that God's will can be done in each one of us. We remind each other to live in the way of holiness, especially in the obedience of faith, as a concrete way of life. Our life consists in many choices and, whether we are aware of it or not, because we are one Body, our choices have an impact on others. We learn solidarity together, to give space to one another, to have compassion, to learn from our mistakes. But in the School of Divine Service, we also learn that it is not enough to serve, or to get the job done. We are created to live in relationship, to live as a Church. It is not enough that we pray the Divine Office seven times a day as son and daughters of God. He wants us to live the “sonship” of Christ in a concrete way through the presence of a vicar of Christ, a spiritual father/mother that gives us the opportunity to obey and challenges us to grow. Filial obedience is not just a matter of doing what is demanded but it is what allows us to enter into God's life and his plan of redemption: communion with him and with all mankind.

Our reality

In Macau, we are a “homeless” community. When the news that our request to the local government for a land concession was rejected, humanly speaking we felt shaken. But the bishop who brought us the news, with deep concern and mercy, was a real presence of Christ for us. “Don't worry! You can continue to use the place where you are now as long as you need it. I promise to find a place for your future monastery.” In response, our superior said: “We have found our stability in the Bishop's heart!” At the same time the bishop told us not to be too attached to this place because it is not big enough, however that is no reason for us to refuse newcomers. There is no love without sacrifice.

We renewed our commitment to remain here where we already feel rooted: in the will of God, without knowing our future. But isn't that the situation of every community, of every person? We have no permanent home in this world; we are citizens of heaven, journeying towards the Father's house.

In times when we depended on agriculture, monasteries needed large properties. In the industrial age they become a luxury, a problem. Sacred architecture is part of our charism and heritage. But when we applied for a small piece of land, one of the objections was: why do you need so much space, so many large rooms for only 20 people, when others live 10 people in one small apartment? In this moment of history when there are so many refugees who have no home, we are blessed to have this small and precious place. We live in a wealthy society but in solidarity with the poorest: no land, no property and very little income, in a borrowed house without enough space for a “usual” Trappist community. We are missionaries in a country that refuses permission for land concessions or construction for religious purposes. Our sisters at Rosary are in a much worse situation. There are similar restrictions in other countries of our region and perhaps there will be more and more in Western secularized society. Other communities live in areas threatened by violence. It is not the exception any more.

Life in today's world is insecure. How can we demand security that others do not have?

Perhaps the Order has gotten too stable, too comfortable, too secure, too rich in property and the Lord is waking us up to a new consciousness?

Prophetic Gaze

Our experience teaches us to live with a prophetic gaze on our reality. We come to understand that there is no ideal monastery in today's world. We live in the modern desert: solitary life, integrally dedicated to contemplation, in the midst of the city and its noise, where people live, struggle and suffer, as a sign that God is very close to the people of our city.

Therefore, the important thing is not the place. The 'place' we live in is our community as the Body of Christ, the kingdom already present among us. So rather than design buildings, we need to build up community life through conversion, struggle, and death to self. We need to renounce even our desire for a monastery surrounded by the beauty of nature in order to follow Christ. We believe that our sense of mission will overcome all the crises that we will have to face. If we truly love Christ, we cannot avoid suffering. This is our participation in His sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. Jesus never promised to free us from suffering, but on the contrary, He invited us to take up our cross. He is there accompanying us in our sufferings and struggles. We do not need to be afraid of our fragilities, our weaknesses.

What the Church asks of us as contemplatives is to be a living witness of the presence of the living God, to be experts of communion who keep alive the fundamental questions of human life. In the School of the Lord's Service, we learn every day through our prayer and lectio, how we can become instruments of God's Word. We lend our voice to pray the psalms, to let Jesus pray to the Father through our lips. The word of God educates us seven times a day. At work time, we also lend our mind, heart and body in obedience to let Jesus fulfill the will of the Father in us. We learn from Jesus how to please the Father and how to be authentic human beings. We learn to know Him more in order to love Him more. For in the School of Love, through lectio and liturgy, we gain knowledge that is practical: the knowledge that turns to love. Love seeking its object with the view of being united to it. Our way of life preaches the gospel in silence. **We can live it anywhere.**

Our mission in the Church is to live and transmit the Benedictine charism of humility and obedience, as understood and lived by the Cistercian Fathers, as a concrete path toward mystical union with God in the School of Love. (Working paper on the Father Immediate 2017)

For that "We need people and communities that rededicate themselves to the path of a conversion, of a "conversatio morum," that respond day by day with joy to the demand to leave all for Christ." (Lepori)

Each year thousands of people visit our church which is also the last station of the annual diocesan procession of Our Lady of Fatima. We believe that our life, our future, the future of the Order and of the world is in the hands of Mary, the Star of Hope. So our vision is a vision of hope by living our reality, embracing our vocation and mission here and now for the glory of God and the salvation of the human race.

Community of Our Lady Star of Hope – MACAU

