

To the Groups of Lay Cistercians

MGM OCSO

Rome, September 23, 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Baptized into Christ and wanting to prefer nothing to Him, we are happy to address you in this way, for it is in Him that we find our true communion. This is the second time that we have received a representative of the Lay Cistercians at our MGM. At Lourdes, in 1999, we were happy to hear Veronica Umegakwe, of Nigeria, speak to us about the great vitality of the lay Cistercian groups placed under the patronage of Blessed Cyprian Tansi. On September 14th of this year, in Rome, we had the pleasure of receiving Paco and Malika Ambrosetti on the day of the Cistercian Family. Paco retraced for us the recent history of the lay Cistercians and in the name of all those who participated in their second International Meeting at Conyers last April, he read us a letter, which touched us deeply.

The hour has come in which our Order, as the Church herself, is called to look with courage and faith at the new paths opened up by the Spirit to give witness to the Gospel. We see blossoming on the Cistercian trunk a branch different from all that has appeared up to now: men, women, married or celibate, who are receiving from the Lord a call to serve Him in the school of love, according to the Rule of St. Benedict and the Cistercian tradition. How far does the openness of the Cistercian charism go? Something has developed that is becoming more and more evident: the flowering of all your groups around the world. The values and common practices such as lectio divina, individual and liturgical prayer, simplicity of life, conversatio morum, interior silence and contemplation, work as a means of sanctification, bind you to one another and to us. We welcome this new phenomenon as a sign of the times and willingly place it in relation to the role that lay people are taking increasingly in the life of the Church.

Today, you ask us for "a word of wisdom and encouragement, since you must live the Cistercian charism in the world." To answer you, it is good to remember the words of Pope John Paul II in his letter of March 6, 1998, addressing the entire Cistercian Family. He encouraged us "to discern with prudence and a prophetic sense the participation of the lay faithful in our spiritual family, under the form of

'associate members', or, following the present needs in certain cultural contexts, under the form of a temporary sharing of community life and a commitment to contemplation, on condition that the identity of our monastic life does not suffer." These words of the Pope will be for you as for us a reference point in order to discern how each of us will participate in the same charism.

Our differences are evident yet we have the same spirit. In respecting these differences, our unity will be able to grow on solid and lasting foundations. We don't know what the future holds for us, but our vision of the Cistercian Family recognizes you as authentic witnesses of the Cistercian vocation fully engaged in the world. We are moved and profoundly grateful to the Spirit working in you. The Spirit is the master and guide of our unity in the diversity of our states of life.

Even if your oldest groups have already some years of experience, it is a question of a new situation for you as for us. Each of our communities is autonomous and will respond to you according to its cultural context, its own rhythm and the sensitivity of its members. Know that your interest in our monastic life encourages us to lead it ever more faithfully. Continue the path to which you are committed, sharing with us the tradition that gives us life. May Mary, Our Lady and Queen of Citeaux, be your Mother as she is ours. We recommend ourselves to your prayer and keep you fraternally in ours.

Members of the MGM of the OCSO