

## **Feast of Saints Robert, Alberic and Stephen, Founders of Cîteaux Monastery of the Bernardine Nuns in Hyning (GB), 26 January 2023**

*Readings: Hebrews 11:1-2.8-16; Mark 10:24b-30*

The readings of the liturgy for the Founders of Cîteaux insist essentially on the fact that all the fruitfulness of a life, of a community or of an Order depends only on God. This work is only possible for Him. As Jesus says about the salvation of the rich: "For men, it is impossible, but not for God! Because everything is possible for God." (Mk 10:27)

This makes us realize that if the first Cistercians gave birth to a great monastic movement that has spread all over the world and survives to this day, it is not because of their abilities, but because of their poverty lived out in faith. The secret of all fruitfulness for the Kingdom of God is to live poverty with faith, even when personnel and means are lacking.

This is the one great rule for the advancement and success of the whole Church and every ecclesial reality. The Church is always renewed and revived by the faith of Abraham who, against all evidence and hoping against all hope, believed and hoped for numerous inheritance simply because it was promised to him by the Lord. The same is said of Sarah: "It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it." (Heb 11:11)

Every charism is a promise from God that faith welcomes like a seed, and hope makes grow. Only faith welcomes and makes fruitful this gift of God, the gift of a vocation, the gift of a mission. This evangelical law is the reason why poverty is necessary, not only to enter the kingdom of God, as Jesus emphasizes in the Gospel we have heard, but also for the kingdom of God to enter the world. A charism that is born and develops is always an event of the kingdom of God in the world and in history.

But for this, poverty is necessary, the poverty of not relying on ourselves, our means, our qualities and capacities, because the Kingdom is God's work, His work, impossible for man but possible for Him.

This is why the poverty needed is not only and above all material poverty. More necessary is poverty of spirit. It is more necessary because it is in it that faith finds a place in our hearts and in our lives.

In the audience he granted to the Cistercian Order during the General Chapter, Pope Francis, among other things, reminded us of this poverty of goods and spirit:

«Another aspect on which I want to encourage you is your intention of greater poverty, both in spirit and in goods, so as to be more available to the Lord, with all your strengths, with the frailties and the blessings he gives you. Therefore, let us praise God for everything, for old age and youth, for sickness and good health, for the communities in "autumn" and those in "spring".

The essential thing is not to allow the evil one to rob us of hope! The first thing the evil one tries to do is to steal hope, so he snatches it out of our hands, always. Because evangelical poverty is full of hope, based on the beatitude that the Lord announces to his disciples: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6:20).» (17 October 2022)

This call reflects both the way in which the first Cistercians began to live the charism and the current reality of our communities and Orders. Indeed, we understand that when we are smaller and more fragile, this does not mean that we are in decline, but that the Lord takes us back to the origin of our charism, where the situation of fragility at Cîteaux called the monks to rely on faith, prayer and hope, more than on any other human strength. Accepting this is the secret of the joy that makes us always praise God for everything, and opens us up to the impossible work and fruitfulness that God has promised us, as to Abraham and Sarah, and as to Robert, Alberic and Stephen, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world that is ever more thirsty for and in need of the kingdom of God.

*Br Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori*  
*Abbot General OCist*