



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Castel Gandolfo

Wednesday, 10 August 2011

[\[Video\]](#)

“Oasis” of the spirit

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In every age, men and women who have consecrated their lives to God in prayer — like monks and nuns — have founded their communities in particularly beautiful places: in the countryside, on hilltops, in mountain valleys, on the shores of lakes or of the sea and even on small islands. These places combine two very important elements for contemplative life: the beauty of creation, which evokes the beauty of the Creator, and silence, which is guaranteed by living far from cities and the great thoroughfares of the media.

Silence is the environmental condition most conducive to contemplation, to listening to God and to meditation. The very fact of enjoying silence and letting ourselves be “filled”, so to speak, with silence, disposes us to prayer.

The great prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb — that is, Sinai — experienced a strong squall, then an earthquake and finally flashes of fire, but he did not recognize God’s voice in them; instead, he recognized it in a light breeze (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13).

God speaks in silence, but we must know how to listen. This is why monasteries are oases in which God speaks to humanity; and in them we find the cloister, a symbolic place because it is an

enclosed space yet open to Heaven.

Tomorrow, dear friends, we shall commemorate St Clare of Assisi. Therefore, I would like to recall one such “oasis” of the spirit that is particularly dear to the Franciscan family and to all Christians: the little convent of St Damian, situated just beneath the city of Assisi, among the olive groves that slope down towards Santa Maria degli Angeli [St Mary of the Angels]. It was beside this little church, which Francis restored after his conversion, that Clare and her first companions established their community, living on prayer and humble tasks. They were called the “Poor Sisters” and their “form of life” was the same as that of the Friars Minor: “To observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rule of St Clare*, 1, 2), preserving the union of reciprocal charity (cf. *ibid*, X, 7) and observing in particular the poverty and humility of Jesus and of his Most Holy Mother (cf. *ibid.*, XII, 13).

The silence and beauty of the place in which the monastic community dwells — a simple and austere beauty — are like a reflection of the spiritual harmony which the community itself seeks to create. The world, particularly Europe, is spangled with these oases of the spirit, some very ancient, others recent, yet others have been restored by new communities. Looking at things from a spiritual perspective, these places of the spirit are the backbone of the world! It is no accident that many people, especially in their breaks, visit these places and spend several days here: the soul too, thanks be to God, has its needs!

Let us therefore remember St Clare. But let us also remember other saints who remind us of the importance of turning our gaze to the “things of heaven”, as did St Edith Stein, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Carmelite, co-Patroness of Europe, whom we celebrated yesterday. And today, 10 August, we cannot forget St Lawrence, deacon and martyr, with special congratulations to the Romans who have always venerated him as one of their Patrons. Lastly, let us turn our gaze to the Virgin Mary, that she may teach us to love silence and prayer.

To special groups:

I greet all the English-speaking visitors present today, including the groups from Guam, Canada and the United States of America. My special greeting goes to the young people en route to World Youth Day in Madrid! In these days the Church celebrates the feasts of great saints like Lawrence, Clare of Assisi and Edith Stein. May their example and intercession help us to draw closer to God through the practice of quiet prayer and contemplation. May the Lord bless you and your families with his joy and peace!

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