

CREDO IN SPIRITUM SANCTUM, DOMINUS ET VIVIFICANTEM.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE

How the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the Order today¹.

Pentecost 2024 Circular letter

Brothers and sisters,

"They (The disciples of Jesus) were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. " This text from the Acts of the Apostles² is used in the liturgy as the communion of the Eucharist on the day of Pentecost: "Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto, loquentes magnalia Dei, alleluia." On this day of grace, I want to speak about the 'magnalia Dei', 'the marvels of God' in the present time when God calls us, in our concrete communities, to live out our vocation to holiness in the Order and its specific charism. As I travel along the communities of the Order, time and again I get to witness the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the communities, in the concrete lives of our brothers and sisters. For if anything is certain it is that the Holy Spirit is at work in our Order even today - and perhaps especially today. Let us therefore speak of these 'marvels of God'!

This opening statement may surprise you because we are so used to talking to each other about all those difficult situations in the Order, in our communities and in the lives of individual brothers and sisters. We are so used to talk a lot about the lack of vocations, the lack of sufficient Fathers Immediate, the many requests of dispensation of vows, the sexual abuse, the abuse of power and conscience, the suppression of communities etc., etc. All these realities so dominate our lives that the danger is that we get caught in self-concern and self-pity. We too easily forget to also see the positive, recognize the signs of the times and thank God for His constant activity. Precisely this gratitude should be our first response. Some young members from a community of the Order recently expressed it very well in a letter to me: *'Please, help us to shift our focus from what is lacking in our community, in the Region and the Order to what blessings exist now. Please, emphasize the positive and give us hope!'*

Many of us think that God has abandoned us at this time when we are called by the same Lord to live the Cistercian charism. One easily recognizes the psalmist's complaint when he sees the ruined Jerusalem: *"O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have left the corpses of your servants as food for the birds of the sky, the flesh of those devoted to you for the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and no one is left to do the burying. We have become the reproach of our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever?"³* The times we live in are perceived as bad by many.

Regularly I get letters from concerned people inside and outside the Order who think we should return to the experience of monastic life as it was before Vatican II. Return to the Latin liturgy with its unified, ancient liturgy and beautiful Gregorian chants! Only then will new vocations flourish because just look at the traditionalists inside and outside the Church! People write to me about a desire to restore the old customs of the Order. Back then, everything was clear and

¹ This circular letter is an adaptation of the Oriens Regional meeting opening conference in Sujong 8/05/24.

² Acts 4, 31

³ Ps 79:1-5

above all strict. Now we no longer honor our name as Cistercians of the Strict Observance because there is no discipline and asceticism is far from it. People sometimes write to me in the name of Our Lady to listen more attentively to her messages given at several places in the world. Only then will there be vocations and a future for the Order.

On the other hand, I receive letters from brothers and sisters who just don't know it anymore. Where should we go from here? They see a return to the past as a false hope or as a temptation to escape reality. However, they do not see the future because the negativity of the current experience of the Church, the world, and the Order clouds their vision. They yearn for new paths but feel trapped in the darkness of the present. They expect more initiative from me, from the Order to undertake something new.

But no one writes to me about the work of the Holy Spirit in the present time. Does the Holy Spirit no longer work then? And if the Holy Spirit no longer works then neither do the Father and the Son because their activity may be different but at the same time inseparable. With this focus on vocations and survival we may be lost our faith. Perhaps this is the big problem today that we are no longer able to discern where the Spirit of God is blowing. Jesus *"answered them, 'When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' In the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times!'"* We lose ourselves in side-effects and make peripheral phenomena the center of everything. Only when we can see and name the working of the Holy Spirit in our day, we can also identify where the opposite - the reality of evil - is at work. Unfortunately, in our days, many turn that around, resulting in an unhealthy focus on the devil's efficacy at the expense of the working of the Holy Spirit who, by virtue of our baptism, is operative in every baptized person. *"Let us never yield to pessimism, to that bitterness that the devil offers us every day⁵."*

When St Bernard preaches to his brothers on the day of Pentecost, he tries to make visible to them what is invisible because *"Today is the feast day of the Holy Spirit, on which the Invisible became visible⁶".* In this letter, let me try to make visible where the Invisible Spirit of God is at work in the life of the Order today. He is the Lord in whom we believe, the Giver of Life! I do this only to proclaim His great deeds and not to pat ourselves on the back because *"Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name give glory for your loving kindness, and for your truth's sake⁷."*

The Holy Spirit at work in the life of the Order today

Looking at the life of the Order right now, I see the Holy Spirit actively present in the following five movements:

1. In the courage of embracing our vulnerability
2. In engaging in innovative collaborations
3. in the new life of (the projects of) foundations
4. In a growing awareness of the complementarity of men and women in the Order
5. In the actual lived co-responsibility

⁴ Matt 16:2-4

⁵ Pope Francis: Audience with the College of Cardinals, Friday, 15 March 2013

⁶ Pent 1.1

⁷ Ps 115,1

Perhaps there are several more to point out, but these suffice for the moment. The purpose of this circular letter is to give thanks to God for the great things He is doing today among us through the work of the Holy Spirit and to give you, at the same time, some information about the life in the Order. We need what Pope Francis calls in *Laudato si*: *'the grateful contemplation of the world'*⁸ or in the words of *Evangelii gaudium*: *'we need to look with a contemplative gaze'*⁹. It is a *'different way of looking at the reality'* to *'gather the positive and sustainable developments'*¹⁰.

1. God's Holy Spirit does great things in the courage of embracing our vulnerability

Since the General Chapter of 2002, we have been discussing the theme of fragility in the Order and in our communities. A discussion that, through many detours, finally led, in 2022, to the acceptance of the new Statute for the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities and the suppression of a community (SAFC). A discussion that has gone through all the well-known phases of: *'shock and reluctance to believe it; an attempt to "bargain" and an irrational longing to somehow "avert" or negate the painful event, followed by an inner struggle sometimes involving feelings of rage and revolt; and moments of resignation - before we finally achieve the peace of reconciliation - accepting the reality'*¹¹ Which are the 5 stages of the announced death.

The new Statute is truly the work of the Holy Spirit and in the past two years that we have been working with it now, it shows already its good fruits. It helps communities, and therefore the Order as a whole, to face fragility with courage. Through the Statute, the Holy Spirit has made us realize that fragility is no longer seen as a threat but truly as a participation in the Paschal Mystery.¹² It helped us distance ourselves from a monastic life in which vulnerability was not allowed and in which we often hid behind a misunderstood autonomy. A legend tells us that the devil once tried to fool Saint Martin of Tours into worshipping him by appearing to the saint dressed in fine clothes and jewelry and claiming to be Our Lord. Martin spotted the devil's ruse immediately, saying, "Where are your nails marks? Where is the wound in your side? When I see the marks of the Passion then I will adore Him." Without the wounds, Martin knew it was not Jesus¹³. After all, the devil knows no vulnerability!

In the past two years, I have been privileged to meet many communities who dare to face their fragility with courage. In the council, we are sometimes greatly impressed by this courage. We see an increase in the quality of visitation cards but also in the house reports given to the regional meetings. People are open and honest and dare to ask the right questions. Vulnerability is faced not only regarding the question of a community's future but also regarding economy, community life, full and active participation in the liturgical and communal life, not to mention vulnerability in individual lives of brothers and sisters, and even of superiors.

The new Statute sees in the vulnerability of communities an opportunity to choose life, possibly resulting in a revitalization of the community. If this revitalization is not possible then the new Statute even puts the closure of a community on the line. Closure, sometimes unavoidable, allows a community to enter the dying of the grain to bear fruit. A fruitfulness that is invisible

⁸ Pope Frances, *Laudato si*, 214.

⁹ Pope Frances, *Evangelii gaudium*, 71.

¹⁰ Pope Frances, *Laudato si*, 114.

¹¹ T. Halik, *Touch the Wounds*. p. 14.

¹² SAFC 3.

¹³ Sulpicius Severus, *On the life of St. Martin*. C. 24.

and which we do not know but in which, thanks to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, we may believe.

The new Statute is a great help for the superiors, the Fathers Immediate, and the communities to choose life in their fragility. Perhaps the most striking feature of this Statute is the new figure of the Monastic Commissary¹⁴. His/her first and main task is to search for new life together with the fragile community. His/her main task is revitalization, making the search for God and life central again. A good example in this regard is the work of Dom Guillaume, Monastic Commissary of Latroun (Israel). Together with the brothers of both Latroun and the mother house, Sept Fons, he has been able to revitalize the community. Another example is the work of Dom Rufus, Monastic Commissary of Mount Melleray, Roscrea and Mellifont (Ireland). These communities are now trying to come to a union and already have a common novitiate in addition to one superior and one council for the three communities.

There are also examples of monastic commissaries who, having done everything, came to the conclusion with the community that closure is inevitable. In the end, then, it is about living, and dying with dignity. I am thinking here of the good and hard work of M. Genevieve-Marie, monastic commissary of the Nuns of Notre Dame de l'Assomption (Canada). The blowing of the Spirit in these difficult and painful situations is often not a gentle breeze. It is the storm on the lake in which the enticing voice of Jesus sounds: *"Take courage! It is I! Don't be afraid."*¹⁵

Currently, there are 11 communities in the Order with a Monastic Commissary. Among the monks: Westmalle, Oelenberg, Mount Melleray, Roscrea, Mellifont, Latroun, Oseira, Snowmass, Las Escalonias and Myrendal. With the sisters: Assomption.

In the application of the new Statute, the Holy Spirit is truly at work. He helps us as an Order and as communities to free ourselves from the prison of self-concern. This requires courage, which is not possible without the Holy Spirit. *"The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body"* (Patet arcanum cordis per foramina corporis), according to St. Bernard¹⁶. The Holy Spirit teaches us in the present time to face with courage the fragility to reach the secret of God's heart: the Paschal Mystery!

2. God's Holy Spirit does great things in innovative collaborations

Thomas Merton wrote in *New Seeds of Contemplation*: *'If your regard contemplation principally as a means to escape from the miseries of human life, as a withdrawal from the anguish and the suffering of this struggle for reunion with other men in the charity of Christ, you do not know what contemplation is and you will never find God in your contemplation. 'For it is precisely in the recovery of our union with our brothers in Christ that we discover God and know Him, for them His life begins to penetrate our souls and His love possesses our faculties and we are able to find out Who He is from the experience of His mercy, liberating us from the prison of self-concern'.*¹⁷

The great fruit of the Holy Spirit that we currently see in the Order is a growing collaboration, *'liberating us from the prison of self-concern'*. Communities, as well as individual superiors, Regions are seeking collaboration with each other more than ever and are willing to help each other. This willingness to help each other has characterized our Order from its beginnings, with

¹⁴ SAFC 10; St. 34bis

¹⁵ Matt. 14:27

¹⁶ commentary on the Song on Songs, 61.

¹⁷ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 92.

the Carta Caritatis and all other structures like filiation and Fathers Immediate but the current experiences of vulnerability allows new initiatives and other structures to flourish, "*because wounds and pains become openings and occasions for a new vision*".¹⁸

Is the Holy Spirit not at work in the help some brothers of Guimaras are giving to Kopua? Instead of making a new foundation, did not the Holy Spirit inspire the community of Esmeraldas to help the communities of Geronde, El Rosal, Carrizo and Fons Pacis? In western France, the communities belonging to the filiation of La Trappe are trying to seek more cooperation with each other through regular meetings of superiors and their bursars, cooperation regarding economy and formation (initial and ongoing formation), joint retreats. On Schiermonnikoog, (Netherlands) the monks try to shape together a monastic life that transcends the boundaries of different monastic spiritualities by praying the Divine Office together with a small group of Carmelites. I am also thinking here of the regional nursing home Monte Sion of the Spanish monasteries together with the Congregation of Las Huelgas. How was the Holy Spirit not palpable during the General Chapter of the Congregation of Las Huelgas in 2023 where there was not only the courage to face vulnerability but also the openness to greater and innovative cooperation between communities by accepting the figure of affiliation? Since the Covid 19 pandemic, hasn't the Holy Spirit opened to us the positive possibilities for online meetings, especially formation sessions?

It is good to see that communities are not (anymore) afraid to ask for a Commission for the Future, according to the Statute on the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities. This commission can be a good help for a fragile community to experience the brotherhood and care of the Order. Even in large regions, this commission for the future has now penetrated (Guimaras ORIENS – Kokoubou RAFMA). People no longer hide behind distance, language barriers and cultural differences, etc. I am thinking here of the commission for Guimaras. This commission even brings together different cultures and shows that we all have a responsibility to each other. Aren't all these collaborations the work of the Holy Spirit? As a result of having the courage to face our fragility, new and innovative initiatives around solidarity are emerging. The help the sisters of Sora (Panama) received from the communities of the Order after they had to leave Nicaragua made a deep impression on everybody, not least on the sisters themselves. "*Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Pay your vows to the Most High!*"¹⁹

I was also impressed by the brothers of Oita who donated part of their cemetery to the local Muslim community because they could not bury with dignity their dead. In many communities, I also see a sharing of their own fragility with people around the monasteries. The brothers of Mokoto, inspired by the Holy Spirit, show everyone inside and outside the Order that with God there is no standing of person but that everyone can knock on the door of the monastery as a guest, because "*I came as a guest, and you received Me*".²⁰ They set up their monastery and property to receive 25,000 refugees. Many monasteries in Europe have taken in refugees from the Ukraine. All these, and many other examples, are in line with Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli tutti: "*Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community.*"²¹ These acts of solidarity are not against our contemplative vocation but are the consequence of it.

¹⁸ H. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, p. 94.

¹⁹ Ps 50 (51), 14

²⁰ RB 53, 2; Matt. 25:35.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 116.

I often see this renewed collaboration in communities that take seriously, not only the cry of the poor but also the cry of Mother Earth and, in agreement with *Laudato si*²², open themselves to renewed collaboration with the earth in their daily lives and work. Here too, the wounds and fragility of creation have become openings and opportunities for a new vision.

3. God's Holy Spirit does great things in the new life of (the projects) of foundations

Amid all the fragility of communities and the closure of some communities, it is remarkable to see that the Order is currently engaged in five projects of foundations. In Senegal, the community of Sept Fons (France) is engaged in a project of foundation at the request of the of the Benedictine abbot of Keur Mousa. He wanted a greater diversity of Benedictine life in Senegal. Currently, there are eight brothers in Badí (Senegal) and some Senegalese brothers have already made solemn profession in Sept Fons. The community of Sept Fons is asking the Central Commission of June 2024 for official recognition of this project of foundation. At the same time, the community of Sept Fons is also considering a project of foundation in Vietnam.

In Columbia, the community of Humocaró (Venezuela) is working on a project of foundation in El Rosal, north of the capital Bogota. The sisters have been living in this place for several years and have already set up a good economy. They enjoy the trust and support of the local population. However, the current housing is too small. Two sisters from Esmeraldas have joined this project.

In Nigeria, the community of Awhum in Akokwa has a project up of foundation. Because of the Covid 19 pandemic, this project could not yet be recognized by the Order as an official foundation. It is planned to do so during the 2025 general chapter.

Since 2023, the community of Rawaseneng (Indonesia) has had a foundation project on the island of Kalimantan.

These new projects testify to new life and the willingness of communities to pass on and enculturate the Cistercian charism in a new environment. Here the Holy Spirit is at work in a special way 'in fulfilling the mission of evangelization, in a monastic manner, as the contemplative presence of the Church²³'.

As Pope Francis made clear to me during an audience, it testifies to courage that our Order, inspired by the Holy Spirit, took seriously its mission of evangelization in 'a monastic manner' by having its last two officially recognized foundations take place in Europe. Precisely there, in this most secularized part of the world, Palaçoulo (Portugal) and Munkeby (Norway) became witnesses of the Church's contemplative presence, each in its own way.

Do not all these new Cistercian communities testify to a strong desire, with all kinds of forms of new life and new connections, which are constantly at risk of breaking and failing. Even in that new life, fragility is always present.

4. God's Holy Spirit does great things in the complementarity between monks and nuns within the structures of the Order

Opinions on the document *Cor Orans* vary widely in the Church and among contemplative nuns worldwide. The document unintentionally put great pressure on the unity between monks and

²² Pope Frances, *Laudato si*, 44.

²³ C. 68.1

nuns in our Order. However, the General Chapter of 2022 showed that Cororans became for us a reason to affirm and even strengthen the complementarity between men and women in our Order. If the family is the natural community where the complementarity between man and woman is fully realized, the Order is increasingly becoming a family within which this complementarity is realized as a visible sign of that invisible mystical body: the Church.

To better understand the work of God's Holy Spirit on this point, I recommend everyone to read and meditate on Pope Francis' catechesis on this point. He says e.g.: "*Experience teaches us: to know oneself well and mature in a harmonious way, man needs reciprocity between man and woman. If this does not occur, one can see the consequences. We are made to listen to each other and mutually help each other. We can say that without mutual deepening of this relationship - in thought and deed, in feeling and work, and also in faith - neither one nor the other can deeply understand what being a man and a woman means.... We have not yet deeply understood what the feminine genius can teach us, what the woman in society and also us can teach: the woman can see things differently, which completes the man's thinking. It is a path to be taken with more creativity and courage.*"²⁴

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, our Order is walking this path and, since the last General Chapter, for example, we see female superiors acting as Father Immediate of communities of nuns and even of monks. So far, experiences are positive, and we see that these female superiors are exercising their duties with great competence. Their experience is positive but also that of the brothers and sisters entrusted to their vigilant care. Currently, there are 4 female superiors acting as a Father Immediate for 6 community of nuns²⁵ and 6 female superiors for 8 communities of monks.²⁶

We also see that it is not a problem for female superiors to participate fully in commissions for the future or commissions for the suppression of a community. However difficult and vulnerable, the communities of Tre Fontane and Aqua Salvie in Rome are - in my opinion - a prophetic experiment that should count on more support from the Order in terms of manpower (especially from the monks). Especially in this important place in Rome, in the heart of the Church, the witness of the complementarity of monks and nuns is of great importance. In two places in the Order, a sister is now also serving as formator for monks in the initial formation (Tre Fontane – New Melleray). Yet another example of how the Spirit opens new, and surprising paths, which until recently we thought unthinkable and even undesirable.

As a Church and as an Order, we are still at the beginning of this road, and it will require much more creativity and courage from all of us. A road that can only be taken by continuing to listen to each other in dialogue and prayer. A recent study of the Order's statistics shows that with the current decline in both the number of monks and nuns, the Order will have (probably) as many monks as nuns by 15 September 2025 (during next GC). After that date, nuns will be in the majority. A situation not seen since the 13th century. What will this mean for the future of the Order?

5. God's Holy Spirit is working in an increasing awareness of co-responsibility in the communities.

²⁴ Pope Francis, 15 April 2015 Audience.

²⁵ M. Dominique of Soleilmont for Laval, Nazareth; M. Isabelle of Val d'Igny for Bonneval, Baumgarten; M. Marie Christine of Rivet for Blauvac; M. Anne-Emmanuel of Blauvac for Fons Pacis

²⁶ M. Brigitte of Tautra for Bethlehem; M. Marie of Glencairn for Mount Melleray, Roscrea, Mellifont; M. Jo of Whiteland for Bolton; M. Katharina of Nazareth for Aiguebelle; M. Pascale of Arnhem for Schiermonnikoog; M. Rebecca of Mississippi for New Melleray

The current fragility of communities worldwide has also made us all realize that there is a shared responsibility of all members of a community and of all communities of the Order²⁷. Is it not the work of the Holy Spirit that He is, at this moment, causing all communities to reflect on this theme of co-responsibility? Our structures may be synodal, but do we really make use of them? Precisely in our fragility lies a call to shared responsibility.

The danger of vulnerability is to shut oneself up in one's own world, cutting oneself off from belonging not only to the larger human family, but also to the community of the Church and of the Order. We see (often) this spirit of isolationism not only in small communities but also sometimes in large and vital communities. The latter are vulnerable in their large numbers and the belief that they are better than others. They lock themselves into a world of their own in which the Constitutions of the Order are used at will. This is not the co-responsibility that God's Spirit wants to give to us today as a gift to truly be a visible sign of unity in diversity in the world as the Body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is currently inspiring communities of the Order to reflect on how co-responsibility is lived out in community governance. In this sense, the Abbot General's call to have an economic visitation before the 2025 General Chapter can be understood. Such an economic visitation is not so much a visitation on the financial situation of a community but mainly to gain an insight into the co-responsibility that all in the community have for the economy at the service of the Cistercian charism. Who makes the decisions on the economy? Is there a financial council? Are there limits set by the community on the spending of those responsible? What is the state of accountability? This economic visitation is an aid to making communities more aware of shared responsibility so that our economy is truly at the service of the charism and does not take on a life of its own apart from our vocation.

This shared responsibility, like the complementarity of monks and nuns is based on our baptism. More and more, the Holy Spirit makes us realize that it is not our own will, our profession, our priesthood that is the basis of our monastic life but only baptism. The baptism we share with all our brothers and sisters inside and outside the community. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, we are rediscovering the grace of baptism in this time of the synodal process in the Church. It makes us monks and nuns more convinced that we are on the road together with all the baptized persons. Each of us has our own vocation but all the special gifts that come from the one baptism complement each other and need each other. As contemplatives, we have our mission amid the pilgrim people of God. It is the Holy Spirit who invites us today to rethink our mission in communion with all the baptized persons in the Church for the sake of the world.

In this re-thinking of our mission, we need to hear the voices of everyone. The Holy Spirit is inviting us today in our Order to become more sensitive for the silent voices outside the Western world. One of the fruits of the Synodal Church is that we learn to be more open for each other. It is a challenge, inspired by the Holy Spirit, for the western communities to listen more. But for the others is the challenge, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not to be afraid to speak! Let us not be afraid to listen! Let us not be afraid to speak! For me, here lies a task for the ORIENS, RAFMA and REMILA regions in our Order. These regions are by nature a collection of a rich diversity in cultures, languages, and origins (more than others). One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit given to the Church in these regions is its 'sense for interconnectedness of the human

²⁷ Cf. Cst. 4

community'²⁸ They can help the Order to be more attentive to this interconnectedness, being relational in unity and diversity by patiently listening to each other.

²⁸ Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, 16 March 2023, 2. *“Through the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws the Asian people together. The Asian value of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos) brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia.”*

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, as an Order we are also part of the mystical body of Christ. Yes, this mystical body is fragile. The vision of St. Martin of Tours has shown us that fragility belongs essentially to the Church, the body of Christ. Thomas Merton uses the image of the Body of Broken Bones in this context. We see the body of the Risen Lord but with its obvious wound marks. In those wounds, in our fragility, doors to a new future open, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the Risen Lord who in and through this vulnerability gives us his Spirit. A Spirit of courage. A Spirit of collaboration. A Spirit of new life! A Spirit of complementarity. A Spirit of co-responsibility.

I am grateful that, as Abbot General, I can experience the work of the Holy Spirit in the vulnerability of the Order. This gives really Hope! The Holy Spirit is propelling us towards a deeper and better understanding of our vocation in the present time. Perhaps it is time for us to try again to find words to formulate our mission in the Church and the world today in order to give direction to our lives. To formulate that mission, we need each other! We need the Holy Spirit!

This year during the Easter Vigil, I was particularly struck by the words uttered by the priest when he blesses the Paschal candle, *"Through His holy and glorious wounds, may Christ our Lord guard us and keep us"*. During this prayer, he presses into the candle the five gilded grains of incense, symbolizing Christ's five transforming and healing wounds, using them to inscribe the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in remembrance of the cosmic greatness of the Risen One, which encompasses time and space: *"Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, all time belongs to Him"* Suddenly I realized that this paschal candle is not only Christ Himself, but this is our Order, fragile in time and space but its flame is burning, thanks to the Holy Spirit, still giving light in the darkness. Lumen Christi! Deo Gratias!

The Holy Spirit is Lord and He is the Giver of Life. Life we may receive in abundance from Him. Let us not lose our faith in the work of the Holy Spirit! Let us be grateful for that and live from it. May Mary, the Bride of the Holy Spirit, lead us in that gratitude for our present life. May she help us with her intercession to shape the gift of life to the praise and honor of God's name and to the salvation of all Creation.

All times belong Him! We live in a time full of grace!

I wish you all a Blessed Solemnity of Pentecost!

Br. Bernardus Peeters ocso
abbot general

Sujung, 7 May 2024