

## SERMON AT THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2025

*Colossians 1:1-8*

*Luke 4:38-44*

Brothers and sisters,

Those who called upon Jesus for help for Simon's mother-in-law, who was bedridden with a high fever, were undoubtedly filled with hope. They had witnessed the lack of health in Peter's mother-in-law. Hope for healing was apparently the only anchor left to them. But where should they cast this anchor?

They chose Jesus, probably after having tried the local doctor and many other types of healers. *"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that it is worth doing,"* according to a contemporary theologian. They expected something from Jesus. He is worth casting the anchor of their hope into. And in that hope, they are not disappointed.

Those who called upon Jesus for help remain unnamed. Just like the friends of the paralysed man who was brought to Jesus by them. Those who called upon Jesus, inspired by hope. Brothers and sisters, is that not a wonderful description of the mission we have as contemplatives in the Church and in today's world? (*The Cistercian charism in the world today as a sign of hope.*)

At this moment in the history of our Order, we are confronted with a great sense of vulnerability. Not only in the Order but also in our world: violence, famine, refugees, and the consequences of climate change. Do we bring this vulnerability to Jesus, or rather to "the hope which is stored up for us in heaven" (Col. 1:4)? Or do we allow ourselves to be tempted to deny reality, to look away? Or are we paralysed by sadness and fear? Perhaps we are gripped by the fear of dying? Or do we try with all our might to avoid the deeper questions raised by this vulnerability? Bringing our vulnerability to Jesus seems so ordinary and simple, yet how difficult it is!

"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that it is worth doing." Is Jesus worth it for us to place our hope solely in Him and to bring our vulnerability to Him? Why would we want to do that? So that He can touch and heal our vulnerability, speak His redeeming word, but even more importantly: so that we may serve.

The mother-in-law stood up and served them. She brings Jesus to the people. Is that not our mission as contemplatives? Filled with hope, we bring the vulnerability of ourselves, of the Church and the world, to Jesus. In that encounter, a marvellous exchange takes place. Our vulnerability becomes His vulnerability, our hope becomes His hope. (Isn't this the role of the eucharist in our monastic life?)

Brothers and sisters, may this General Chapter be an opportunity for all of us to bring our vulnerability to Jesus. May it be the occasion where we bring the vulnerability of others to Jesus because only in Him can we anchor our hope. May we journey together as pilgrims of hope towards Him. Then He will touch and raise us with His healing hands, so that we may once again be of service in Church and world.

May the General Chapter be like the sickroom of Simon's mother-in-law. May we experience Jesus' presence. He who in our weakness is our only hope. May our weakness become His weakness, and thereby our strength to live our mission in the Church and the world today as a sign of hope.