

***Audience with the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, 17 October 2022***  
***Greeting of Abbot General Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori to the Holy Father Pope Francis***

Holy Father!

We are here in the course of the Cistercian Order's General Chapter above all to express to you a deep gratitude. You grant us the joy of encountering Christ, as St. Peter did, not only with this audience, but through all your words, your actions, and the charity of your prayer. We need this to find encouragement in the strains of the journey that all our communities are making, spread throughout the world, from Asia to the Americas, from Africa to Europe. We need this in order to learn, among ourselves too, the beauty of meeting each other in Christ, that is, in the communion of the Church, and to live it out with the broad dimensions of deep prayer, of missionary zeal, and of special concern for the poor, which you do not cease to give witness to.

In these days of the General Chapter, we perceive with greater intensity the challenges that we are asked to accept, and sometimes contrasting challenges, since if in Europe we are discouraged by the increasing weakness and precariousness, in Vietnam the challenge is an extraordinary abundance of vocations that require formation and accompaniment. But in the school of the charism of St. Benedict and of our Cistercian Mothers and Fathers, we know that within every challenge we are fundamentally asked to accept the challenge of faith from the Risen Lord, that is, of trust in Him who is present to save us from our sin and ask us to love him and follow him wherever he wants to take us.

We know that, to live out all that we are, to live out the Cistercian charism even in our weaknesses, it is ever more necessary to journey together, and in this we need to open ourselves truly to your call, Your Holiness, to enter with awareness and concreteness into the synodal nature of the Church, according to our specific vocation and mission. We still have a long journey to make to realize that this is the only way we can advance, that we can escape remaining alone and sterile, and that we can truly follow the Lord.

Every General Chapter is a time of grace, in which we renew our awareness of the gift of our vocation. But it is also a time of trial in which we realize that our fidelity needs to continue the journey of brotherhood, of mutual listening, in service of bearing witness to the love of Christ to the whole world.

The experience and grace of our Order is the unity, also juridical unity, of female and male members. This makes us experience the chaste complementarity of woman and man in following the Lord. We are happy to offer this, too, to the Church and in the Church for the glory of her mission.

On the first day of the Chapter, Holy Father, I took my cue from your discourse at the beginning of the synodal way, "The words 'communion' and 'mission' can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless we cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the *concreteness of synodality* at every step of our journey and activity, encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all" and that "all are called to take part in the Church's life and mission" (9.10.2021).

Thank you, Pope Francis, for confirming us, in this meeting too, in our calling, in which we want to renew today, in your hands, our joyful and filial obedience!