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Letter to Friends No. 76 - Transfiguration 2024

Confirmed in the path...

A few days before our **community retreat** - preached by **M. Michela Porcellato**, prioress of the Camaldolese Monastery of St Anthony in Rome - and our **annual general chapter**, Prior Br Sabino **met Pope Francis** in private audience. With cordiality and a fatherly attitude, the pope inquired about the path of the Community, to which **he has always remained close** during this time. He entrusted the prior with his word of encouragement and his blessing for each brother and sister, and **his exhortation to continue to walk confidently behind the Lord**, in fidelity to his call.

... with new sisters and brothers...

In the vigil liturgy of the 3rd Sunday of Advent - marked by the Apostle's invitation to "always rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 4:4) and for this reason called **'Gaudete**' **Sunday** - the Community rejoiced at the monastic **promise made by Sr Marica**, at the end of her novitiate journey. Meanwhile, **a brother** is completing his probationary period and **will make his monastic profession** on the **night of the Transfiguration**. We truly rejoice and **give thanks to the Lord** because he does not fail us in his mercy and blesses us with the arrival and perseverance of new sisters and brothers in our journey of celibacy and common life following the Lord.

... and sister communities

Ten years after the start of **life in common with the sisters of Bose in Civitella San Paolo**, the Benedictine nuns can look to the future of their community with greater serenity. Thanks to the recognition of Bose as a *Monastery sui iuris,* in fact, the **Monastery of St. Scholastica** has been able to affiliate with it, thus seeing **their Benedictine monastic community** recognised and guaranteed, despite the small number of professed sisters, without having to abandon the place where they matured their vocation and lived **their monastic stability** for so many years. We give thanks to the Lord for this solution that respects the identity of each of our communities and is fruitful in mutual gifts. Special thanks also go to the two successive bishops at the head of the diocese of Civita Castellana - the emeritus **+Romano Rossi** and the current **+Marco Salvi** - for their support and encouragement.

During the January Chapter we also had the opportunity to become communally aware of a bond that has lasted for some years between our Community and the Community of Emmaus, Tasmania. A bond of simple fraternity, which we wanted to renew, which rejoices us and for which we give thanks to the Lord.

Wise light

Together with the **Benedictine sisters of Civitella San Paolo,** we gave thanks to the Lord for the **gift of life of M. Francesca, who lived her Easter** last 27 February. After having served her community as abbess from 1984 to 2005, it was she, together with the then prior Br Enzo, who strongly desired the beginning of fraternal life with the sisters of Bose. A **woman of wisdom, with a lively intellect to the end and a profound culture**, with affection and humour M. Francesca knew how to transmit steadfastness in the Lord, "as if she saw the invisible" (Heb 11:27). On the occasion of her burial in the small cemetery of the Monastery of St Scholastica, on 29 February, Br Dominic expressed our sentiments with a poem

February also added a day
and the meadows cascade with violets
even the rain stayed on us
that we escorted you in silence
and then the ancient and newly true words.
After a hundred years of patient struggle
your gentle smile accompanies us now
and the wise light of softened eyes.

The blessing of fraternal bonds

At the beginning of February, the prior Br Sabino and two brothers of the Community of Bose, Br Raffaele and Br Luigi, paid a visit to Tirana (Albania) and Istanbul (Turkey) to strengthen fraternal links with the **Orthodox Church of Albania** and the **Ecumenical Patriarchate**. Welcomed in Tirana by Auxiliary Bishop +Asti di Bylis, a long-standing friend and regular participant in the conferences on Orthodox spirituality, they met with him the elderly **Archbishop +Anastasios**. refounder of the Orthodox Church of Albania and still its primate: a pastor whose mind and spirit are still very clear, whose eyes light up when he **condemns the war** in Ukraine and the Middle East and when he speaks of **dialogue between Christians**, for which he has spent so much of his ministry in the service of the Gospel.

On their arrival in Istanbul, the brothers were welcomed by the community of the Capuchin Friars Minor of Ye?ilköy, with the superior Br Paolo Raffaele Pugliese, and there they participated in the Sunday Eucharist together with the heterogeneous local Catholic community. They then went to the Phanar, at the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, where **Patriarch Bartholomeos welcomed them** for lunch and immediately afterwards received them in private

audience. Informed of the news of community life and delighted at the serenity regained after the tribulations of recent years, **he warmly encouraged the continuation of ecumenical activities and conferences**. The following day, the brothers travelled together with the Patriarch to the island of Halki, in the Princes' archipelago on the Sea of Marmara, where the Theological School, closed to public teaching since 1971, is located, in order to celebrate the feast of Saint Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople.

The brothers finally returned to Bose, full of gratitude to the Lord for what they had experienced and for the welcome they had received from Archbishop +Anastasios and the Ecumenical Patriarch +Bartholomeos: the trip had been a precious opportunity to **remember before the Lord the gifts of grace and fraternity** received in the decades of fraternal links with their Churches.

At the end of May, the prior, Br Sabino, travelled to **Romania**, invited by the igumen of the Orthodox monastery of Bunavestire (Annunciation), **Fr Agapie Corbu**, and the **Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad**, to give some lectures on the figure of **Isaac of Nineveh**, a father who was particularly appreciated in Romanian lands. He was accompanied by **Fr Victor Cretu**, igumen of the Orthodox monastery of Pantokrator in Arona, who acted as interpreter, and by **Fr Elia Citterio**, of the Contemplative Brothers of Jesus, who spoke about **Nicodimus Aghiorite** and the famous Romanian spiritual fathers that Fr Elia met during his forty years' frequentation of that land.

The **welcome was beyond all expectations**, first by students and professors in the Faculty's Aula Magna and then, on the following evenings, in two conferences open to the city in the Philharmonic Hall and the City Hall, in the presence of hundreds of participants, as well as the **Orthodox Archbishop of Arad, + Timothy.**

Taizé and Bose

The fraternal links of **Bose with Taizé** are the oldest in our community history, and in recent years they have been experiencing a renewed impetus. On Sunday, 3 December, Br Sabino and Sr Sylvie went to Taizé to express our communion on the occasion of the **beginning of Br Matthew's ministry as prior**. Then, a few days later, **Br Alois** joined us to spend a couple of months with us in Bose at the end of his service as prior of Taizé. A discreet and participative presence his, **a daily sharing of what animates our lives**, a common quest to follow the Lord in celibacy and common life. At the end of Brother Alois's stay, during which he also shared with us his recent experience at the Synod, we had the gift of welcoming the two brothers who had come to bring him back to Taizé: **Brother Ulrich and Brother Charles-Eugène**, former secretary first to Brother Roger and then to Brother Alois. The latter was thus able to visit Bose for the first time and meet our brother Daniel among others: a fraternal friendship, theirs, dating back to the mid-1960s. Deeply grateful for the presence of Br Alois in our midst, we assure him of our remembrance and our prayers for his new mission in Cuba, where he will meet again **Br Parfait**, who has also been to Bose several times.

A common vocation

The presence among us of Sargon, an Assyrian novice from the Syrian-Catholic monastery of Christ the Redeemer in Qaraqosh (Iraq), continues for a time of monastic and ecumenical formation that strengthens our intense bonds with his community. The hieromonac Fr. Arsenij of the Moscow Patriarchate, a fraternal friend for twenty-five years now, is also sharing our monastic life, enriching it with his biblical wisdom and his quest for evangelical discipleship.

On the feast of Epiphany, the prior, Br Sabino, and Br Marcello went to the abbey of Tamié to show our closeness and communion with the Trappist monks on the occasion of the blessing of the new abbot, Br Marco. With that community too, fraternal closeness goes back to the beginnings of our common life at Bose: it is the faithfulness of the Lord that animates and sustains our fidelity and that weaves ever new threads in the fabric of monastic solidarity. On their way back, they stopped at Novalesa Abbey, to say hello to Brother Michael Davide and the other brothers who are reviving this ancient monastic place.

"Everywhere the same Lord is served," recalls the Rule of St Benedict when speaking of welcoming 'stranger monks' into the monastery (RB 61:10), but living this welcome in practice reveals that in the Church and in monasticism no one is a stranger. It is with great joy and mutual consolation that in these months we have "received the mercy of the Lord" (RB 53.14) in the person of monks and nuns who have visited us. We remember in particular the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines, Fr Gregory Poland, the new Prior General of the Camaldolese (and a fraternal friend for many years) Br Matteo Ferrari, M. Haregewin from Ethiopia, the entire community of the Cistercians of Pra 'd Mill with their prior Br Emanuele, with whom we shared a beautiful moment of monastic fraternity, Br. Matteo, Br Agostino and Br Lorenzo of Germagno, the prioress general Sr Emmanuelle and two sisters of the council of the Soeurs de Bethléem, Sr Deborah, a Camaldolese nun from the community of Poppi, Sr Chiara Luce, a Poor Clare from Altamura, who spent two months with us, Fr Michel Van Parys of Chevetogne, a faithful companion of our journey for many years. Anita, a sister from the San Valentino di Ala community, also spent time with us.

Seeking God in sisterly relations

As for some years now, during the month of January the sisters spent **a day together visiting another monastic community**: on this occasion the meeting was with **the Poor Clare sisters of Lovere** (BG). In the serene atmosphere of the Monastery, with a view of the lake, moments of prayer and a shared meal were followed by a rich reflection by **M. Emanuela Roberta** on "**Seeking God in fraternal relationships starting from the writings of St Clare of Assisi**", a saint who always defined herself starting from her **relationship with Christ and with her sisters**. The sincere and profound exchange that followed cheered and heartened everyone, who was grateful for the gift of encounter and **reciprocal welcome** that they are given to experience continually thanks to the Lord's faithfulness.

Towards a single chalice

Prior, Br Sabino, took part in the **Coordination Committee of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church**, which met at the beginning of June in Cassano delle Murge (BA). After the important document on **'Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium',** discussed and approved last June in Alexandria, the group, composed of ten Catholic and ten Orthodox members, discussed the **continuation of the dialogue, with a view to that communion at the Eucharistic chalice desired by all**. The meeting took place in a particularly fraternal atmosphere, sustained by the warm welcome of the Church of Bari, in the person of its **archbishop + Giuseppe Satriano**, who welcomed the members of the Committee for the celebration of the Catholic Eucharistic liturgy in the cathedral, and of the **Dominican Fathers**, where the Orthodox divine liturgy was celebrated at the tomb of St Nicholas, in the basilica of the same name.

Growing together

In recent times, the community has given much thought to the formative journey of its members, not only focusing on initial formation. In particular, the first years after profession are a delicate time of transition in a person's life, which it is good to live with specific support from the community. So from this year we have started a path for the **brothers and sisters of the first five years of profession**: a few stages in which to address fundamental themes for our lives, in as experiential a way as possible.

In late autumn we went to **Concenedo to meet Fr. Franco Brovelli**, long-time collaborator of Card. Martini, with whom we had a very rich discussion on spiritual accompaniment. Our aim was to understand and taste, from Fr Franco's long experience, the importance of **being accompanied during all phases of life**, and not only during the time of the novitiate and probation. Fr**. Franco's friendship, positive outlook and evangelical words** warmed our hearts, on an unfortunately leaden day! We then also had the opportunity for a quick greeting to the Discalced Carmelite nuns not far away.

In January, we travelled to the Aosta Valley to meet **the Benedictine nuns of Saint Oyen**. With the abbess, M. Agnes, the novice mistress and two young sisters, we addressed the topic of **fraternal relations**. In the afternoon, we met with the entire community: an excellent opportunity to discover once again how common life is always demanding when we try to live it according to the Gospel, and to forge **bonds of friendship and communion so fundamental to our lives.**

After Easter, another important stage in our journey was a visit to the **brothers of Dumenza**: with them we experienced a day of discussion on **relations between young and old in the community**. The topic is emerging for us, and the dialogue with those who have already been dealing with it for a while proved necessary and fruitful. In the time of transition that we too are experiencing, we believe it is fundamental to **open ourselves up to comparison and dialogue with those who have already travelled a similar road to ours**. The excellent welcome given to us by the brothers also gave us the opportunity to savour once again the ancient friendship that binds us to this community.

In mid-June, we carved out three full days in our **fraternity in Assisi**: time to review the path, to plan for the coming year, but also for **encounters rich in spirituality and joy.** A day's "outing" on foot on Mount Subasio, a meeting with the master of novices at San Damiano, a greeting to the Benedictine nuns of Bastia, and above all **life with the brothers of the fraternity**, confirmed us in the goodness of the intuition of this time dedicated to the young professed, and in the choice to continue the journey, aware that our formation will never be finished.

The taste of wisdom

The Community as a whole also provides moments dedicated to the **ongoing training of** brothers and sisters, asking **competent friends for** their help. So this year **Licia Sbattella** - bioengineer, clinical psychologist, psychotherapist and musician - introduced us to 'Listening and dialogue with young people and young adults'; Fr. **Adalberto Piovano** from the Monastery of Dumenza spoke to us about 'Living time in the different ages of life in the monastic experience'; **Michel Nseir**, a Lebanese Orthodox theologian, presented 'Origins, present and challenges for the future of the Ecumenical Council of Churches', where he has been working for several years; **Serena Noceti** - full professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological Faculty of Central Italy in Florence - passionately conveyed how 'Rereading *Lumen gentium* today'. Lastly, **Daniel Marguerat** - Reformed biblical scholar, professor emeritus of New Testament at the University of Lausanne - wisely led us through 'The difficult compagination of diversity in the *Acts of the Apostles'.* To all of them our fraternal thanks: as always, the time spent among us in **daily fraternity** gave their teaching all **the flavour of Christian koinonia**.

The richness of confrontation

Again this year, the **Days of Discussion** offered to friends and guests further enriched **our awareness of our human and Christian experience**: **Fr. Giacomo Costa s.j. - Giuliano Zanchi**, director of the *Italian Clergy Review,* fascinated

those present by talking about the 'Spiritual of Art', i.e. 'Aesthetics and Society in the Post-Secular Era'. For her part, the theologian and philosopher **Isabella Guanzini** - lecturer at the University of Linz - conveyed her reflections on 'Ethics and Politics of the Affections' with resolute delicacy. With them, too, our ancient or recent friendship has enhanced the deep harmony and made our gratitude all the more pregnant.

Local Churches and the Universal Church

Hospitality gives us the precious opportunity to share **the breath of the local churches** to which those who visit and stay among us belong. This gift is most evident when people are ministering in the service of the church - whether particular or universal - in which the Lord has placed them as pastors. Thus, on the occasion of the days of retreat that **Fr Cesare Pagazzi** wished to spend among us in preparation for his episcopal ordination, we were made aware of his work at the **Dicastery for Culture and Education**, of which he was recently appointed Secretary.

The presence among us for the Easter Triduum of Undersecretary **Fr. Samuele Sangalli** and some officials of the **Dicastery for Evangelisation** revealed to us something of the daily expansion of the proclamation of the Gospel to the heart and peripheries of the world.

The spiritual exercises that **the bishops of Calabria** wanted to experience at Bose made us breathe in the challenges and hopes of that church, while teachers and students of **the Apulian Theological Faculty** - accompanied by the Archbishop of Bari **+ Giuseppe Satriano** and the Bishop of Pinerolo **+ Derio Olivero** - questioned together with us the pastoral needs that the increasingly numerous presence in Italy of **Christians of different denominations** poses today to our dioceses in the ecumenical sphere.

And to the same pastoral challenges were dedicated the two days spent in Bose by the **regional delegates for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue**, brought together by the director of the corresponding national office, **Fr. Giuliano Savina**. On this occasion too, the presence of **Bishop + Derio**, president of the appropriate national bishops' commission, was invaluable.