

Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ– RB 53, 1

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1. INTRODUCTION

As well as St Scholastica went out her place to meet his brother, St Benedict to spend the time in the praise of God and in holy conversation, we have left our communities and monasteries, crossed the seas, climbed mountains and crossed the skies to meet here, in Rome to open the ear of our heart to listen what God wants to tell us today. As well as Christ was present in the meeting between St Benedict and St Scholastica fifteen centuries ago, and He said that “where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Mt 18:20), today He is among us in this Symposium.

Everyone here has in her luggage the different realities we face in our monasteries and communities all over the world to be shared to each other here, in Rome. We are grateful to the CIB for this opportunity to reflect on the Benedictine Values which have endured for centuries and to make us aware of what the world demands us, benedictine sisters and nuns. CIB Symposia, whose themes provide us with an occasion for living deeply and fiercely our spirituality, are a true oasis in our Christian path and they teach us how to “listen with the ear of our heart”, as it was proposed in 2014 Symposium. This year we are invited to reflect on Benedictine hospitality values. St Benedict and St Scholastica, who looked with faith, knew how to recognize Christ in the guests hosted in their monasteries and this is why we are said “let all guests who arrive be received like Christ for He is going to say “I came as a guest, and you received Me” (RB 53,1).

At the end of this Symposium, we will certainly take an updated look of faith to our communities, and, in that way, we will live more deeply the benedictine spirituality in our places which are asked to be open and friendly without losing our identity and core values, however. Thanks to the continual presence of the Lord in our lives, we are renewed and adapted to the new times, without losing sight of the main issue and what belongs to our spiritual tradition. In that way, the VI CIB Symposium can turn into a lighthouse that illuminates our benedictine communities, we are representing, all over the world, in order us to take part in the changes we wish to see in the world and to offer a prophetic witness to meet the challenges of our age, by practising benedictine hospitality.

2. THE VIRTUE OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality remains a key value in the different cultures of the world and it is expressed differently according to the costumes of each people and to the different epochs. From a

religious point of view, hospitality means the sacred duty of welcoming the foreigner who comes from far away, and so has a need for protection and shelter. Hospitality is the virtue which consists of protecting foreigners and their needs and making them our fellow human beings, our friends, thanks to a nice and friendly welcome. The stranger, because of charity, becomes a guest.

Abraham is considered to be the hospitality icon, because he hosted those three pilgrim angels sent by God (Gn 18: 1-15). This Old Testament passage shows us how solicitude and zeal are required to host. Abraham realised that the arrival of those travellers was an opportunity to put into practice the laws requiring charity and hospitality. As the Church Fathers explained, he who welcomed did not go without his reward: Isaac was the fruit of Abraham's hospitality, in whom the promise was fulfilled. Hospitality to strangers shows gratitude to God who loves the foreigner (Dt 10: 18).

In the New Testament, Christ was welcomed as a guest by two sisters and one brother living in Bethany, Martha, Mary and Lazarus and by Zacchaeus the publican, to whom he said: 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham' (Lk 19:9). While walking together, the disciples of Emmaus listened, with the ear of their hearts, to the Scripture Christ Himself explained to them and they begged Him to stay with them saying: 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. Their eyes were opened and they realized the foreigner they had welcomed was Christ Himself (Lk 24: 13-33) Abraham's sons host the Lord!

Based on the example of Jesus, hospitality became one of the core Christian virtues practised by his disciples. In the ancient Church, hosting the evangelizers of the faith supported in such a way the spread of the Gospel, that was one of the reasons for the success of early Christianity. St John The Evangelist urges Gaius to be hospitable to brethren in Christ: 'My dear friend, you have done loyal work in helping these brothers, even though they were strangers to you. They are a proof to the whole Church of your love and it would be a kindness if you could help them on their journey as God would approve. It was entirely for the sake of the name that they set out, without depending on the non-believers for anything: it is our duty to welcome people of this sort and contribute our share to their work for the truth' (3 John 3: 5-8). Christian hospitality shows love to strangers and, at the same time, shows love among Christians themselves. This is an aspect of Christian agape.

We have to remember the recommendation of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: '...remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it' (Heb 13: 2). The same recommendation is made in the Didache: 'But let everyone who comes in the name of the Lord be received' (12.1). Showing hospitality to the poor is one of the most important forms of Christian charity, especially from its institutionalization in Emperor Constantine's times. In that way, it has contributed to the establishment and spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire, Emperor Julian (4th century)

pointed out: 'Observe how the kindness of Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of their dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause?'

In early monasticism, hospitality is associated with obedience, humility, stability and freedom of spirit. St Jerome said that in the monastery, 'Hospitality is really important. We receive visitors with joy; so that, if Joseph and Mary hence to come to Bethlehem, they may not fail to find shelter and welcome and so that Christ does not find shelter and says: 'I was a stranger and you did not welcome me'.

The Benedictine passion for receiving guests has become a distinguishing characteristic of St Benedict's sons and daughters over the centuries. Cardinal Daniélou recognised it when clarifying that: 'The Rule of Saint Benedict, which retains faithfully the tradition of early Christianity, is maybe the text which more accurately connect us to the ancient tradition of hospitality. In it, it is explicitly stipulated all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ. The ancestral expressions found at the origins of our Civilization, the liturgy will make them signs of the most appropriate form of hospitality which is how Church welcomes the Divine Guest. But Christianity, by making it a sacrament-like action, hardly consecrate it, but spreads and takes the virtue of hospitality to perfection.'

The breathing of the Holy Spirit over the Vatican II opened the Church to the needs of today's world. The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* points out that 'The principal duty of monk is to offer a service to the divine majesty at once humble and noble within the walls of the monastery, whether they dedicate themselves entirely to divine worship in the contemplative life or have legitimately undertaken some apostolate or work of Christian charity. Retaining, therefore, the characteristics of the way of life proper to them, they should revive their ancient traditions of service and so adapt them to the needs of today that monasteries will become institutions dedicated to the edification of the Christian people.' (PC 9). Dom Basilio Penido, former Abbot President of the Brazilian Benedictine Congregation, in his commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict, tells that 'in the 1966 and 1967 abbots' conferences, held after Vatican II, they dealt with the Christian mission from the Concile's view. The abbots then established the reception of guests and of everyone who often goes to a monastery as the own apostolate of the Order of Saint Benedict. It is the 'apostolate of welcoming' the more suitable way of doing apostolate according to the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict'.

Within this same spirit, in the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quarere* (2016) on feminine contemplative life, Pope Francis summons consecrated women 'to a fitting renewal in accordance with the changed conditions of the times. The document proposes the following indispensable criteria to guide such a renewal: 'Fidelity to Christ, to the Gospel, to one's own charism, to the Church, and to men and women of our time'(VDQ, 7). However, the Pope asks us not to deprive us of our 'participation in building an ever more humane and thus evangelical world'. In union with the Lord, the Pope says, 'hear the cry of the brothers and sisters, who are victims of the 'throw away culture', or simply in need of the light brought by the Gospel. Practice the art of listening "which is more than simply hearing", and the "spirituality of

hospitality”, by taking to heart and bringing to prayer all the concerns our brothers and sisters made in the image and likeness of God’ (VDQ, 36). May this be our prophecy today!

3. THE RECEPTION OF GUESTS ACCORDING TO SAINT BENEDICT

In his Rule, St Benedict organises the monastic community to lay the ground for the reception of guests. Chapter 53, ‘On the Reception of Guests’, is divided into two parts: the first one deals with the reception of guests (vv 1-15); the second part, on the measures that should be have taken to protect the community (vv 16-24). The oratory is placed between the community and those who live outside and, for this reason, the first part is characterised for a liturgic vocabulary, following the liturgic and spiritual chapters of the RB. The second part is aimed at organising the reception and the protection of the community life, which must follow its regular daily routine. As well as in relationship to hospitality, the law of charity is fundamental, since it is the Divine Law, St Benedict seeks a balance between putting it into practice and the monastic community.

As usual today, St Benedict assigns the guest house to a monk whose soul, as well as the porter’s, is possessed by the fear of God and with the warmth of charity. He acts as the ‘face’ and the representative of the monastery to the outside world (RB 66. 4). The porter and the guestmaster share the same vision of faith when they receive a visitor as Christ. St Benedict wants the entire community to take part in the blessing that Christ gives to the community through the guest. The fact the entire community is involved in receiving a guest makes the monastic community, on practising hospitality, be the big beneficiary because through the visitor, the community receives the mercy of God (RB 53: 3.14). Hospitality, therefore, is a fundamental gift to the monastic life.

Hospitality is a humble work and, as the first step of humility is the fear of God, the guestmaster must be God-fearing (RB 53.21). St Benedict wants to educate the monks in the humility, therefore, the wisdom of the guestmaster comes from his humility, from his ability to listen to the visitor, welcome him, pray with him, give him his time and, through his witness, build him. St Benedict talks about three kinds of guests who must be shown proper honor: those who share our faith, the pilgrims and the pors. In each of them ‘Christ is to be adored’ (RB 53: 7). Such a request demands a faith vision of the neighbour and to recognise the Face of Christ in the humble people and the pors.

When we receive the guest, the liturgy of welcoming (RB 53: 3-14), which we have adapted to the current situation, plays an important role. It introduces the guest into the monastic environment and it can ease the tensions of the reception. At the same time that it determines the limits, invites the guest to live with the community by praying together. Receiving the guests as Christ, we are honoured to serve him with the gesture He Himself taught us: the lavatory of the feet. It symbolises fraternity and unity, by means of which, both we and guests enter into communion with one another. Although we do not keep this costume,

we can live according to the meaning of this gesture: the humble and unselfish service and the wish of entering into communion with one another as expression of our love of Christ.

For St Benedict, hospitality has a religious meaning. Make the stranger a friend and turn hostility into hospitality is the result of welcoming in faith. Benedictine hospitality is not based on a trade relationship, as it is usual in tourism or in hotels, but on an exchanging of gifts and on sharing the offered gift which is centered on Christ. Hospitality in our monastic tradition turns this service into an encounter with God and into a sacramental healing presence of Christ among us. In the monasteries, those who practise hospitality get more than they give, and they are loved by God, 'for God loves a cheerful giver.' (2Co 9:7)

4. BENEDICTINE HOSPITALITY IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISATION

We are used to making floral arrangements in the rooms of the guesthouse, sweeping the floor and, according to St Benedict's and St Escholastica's wishes, adequate bedding should be available there. When we open the windows to ventilate our guesthouses, we can look the landscape which unfolds before us. Depending on our monasteries are settled, we can see mountains, forests, the sea or a city. Through the open windows of our guesthouses, we look at what surrounds us and we are aware of living through a change in culture at the beginning of this millennium. We live in an ever-changing world, in which mass media and means of transport make time go faster and space be shortened. Technological advances offer a constantly changing world facing new challenges.

The concluding document of Aparecida at the end of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, Brazil 2007 states that 'We are living through a change of epoch, the deepest level of which is cultural' (Aparecida 44). The Latin American and Caribbean Bishops have realised that these changes take place at a global and individual level: 'social reality, which in its contemporary thrust we describe with the word "globalization," impacts more than any other dimension our culture and the way in which we become part of it and draw from it' (Aparecida 43). The then Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Conference in the inaugural session with these words: 'Today's world experiences the phenomenon of globalization as a network of relationships extending over the whole planet'. He said that it 'is a sign of its profound aspiration towards unity'.

However, the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops admitted that, due to unhappiness, the values which come to us through our cultural traditions, which provide the framework for the cultural building processes due to personal and collective exchange, such as family, community spirit, openness to transcendence and solidarity are beginning to erode because, and as a consequence of globalisation, homogenized culture is being imposed in all aspects of reality (Aparecida 2.1). This secularized post-modern age, which overestimates individual subjectivity, weakens community and family bonds. One of the biggest challenges we face is to find a balance between this new vision of the human being provided by the post-

modern society and the Christian proposal based on fraternal communion of life. Christianity makes us free from individual isolation and make us become disciples-missionaries. The Latin American and Caribbean Bishops claimed that 'There is no discipleship without communion' (Aparecida 156).

Through community life, which is itself a means of evangelisation, our monasteries can become venues where Gospel is announced by means of experiencing a hospitality of communion. Our guesthouses can turn into 'a school for the Lord's service' (RB Prologue verse 45) in which living in communion is taught through maintaining and strengthening Christian faith.

Our guesthouses can become a place where Christian leaderships are trained according to the Gospel, places where solidarity with the peoples is shown and places contributing to the globalisation of solidarity and international justice, making, in this way, a culture of communion. The Latin American and Caribbean Bishops recall that it is required a maximum degree of effort and creativity to spread the Gospel and to train people who take on public responsibilities and to create their awareness for justice and 'a Christian ethics that sets as a challenge achieving the common good, creating opportunities for all, battling corruption' (Aparecida 406).

Benedictine spirituality has something to say to people, either they come to our monasteries or to society in general. Something which resounds in their minds and reflects their own experience and their values. It is possible to revitalise the Gospel proclamation in our guesthouses through a personal and community encounter with Christ. If we promote a culture of communion in our guesthouses, we will put into practice the meaning of the Lavatory of the Feet.

5. DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The quiet of the cloisters, the architecture of the churches and the beauty of liturgy contribute to the physical, psychological and spiritual renewal of those who are hosted in our monasteries. Through a different routine to their daily one, guests are taken to the reflection, prayer and meditation on the Word of God. Silence teaches them how to enjoy one's own self (*habitare secum*) and it creates an inner space where God, they themselves and the neighbour can be received. When the guest realises, through silence and prayer, that he is received in the house of the Lord, experiences a conversation with his host. This dialogue allows to communicate with himself and with the Absolute, leading him to find his deeper identity.

Many times, people who have lost their identity and dignity, who are victims of the loss of humanity of the modern world and of the "throwaway culture", knock at our doors (VDQ 36). Our guesthouses are for them places where to refuel their inner life in a demanding and competitive world. It is there where they can reach a new understanding of their human and religious existence since Benedictine hospitality shows the guests their true identity in the light

of faith, that is to say, their Divine Sonship. Those who have found their identity can be totally present, can share, can serve others. The Prodigal Son was aware of his divine sonship and of the meaning of his life and it is why, on coming back home, he was welcomed by his merciful father (Lk 15: 11-31).

Lectio Divina is a privileged means through which the identity rebuilding happens. St Benedict wants the guest to strengthen his faith, for this reason he says that 'The divine law is read to the guest for his instruction' (RB 53.9). Reading means meditating, explaining the Word of God, by activating the passage from the biblical text to life. Reading the guest the Holy Scripture, when it is received in the heart, turns into communion. For Pope Francis, it is essential that the Word of God becomes the keystone of communion among the communities, which 'are called to welcome that word, to meditate upon it, to contemplate it and to join in putting it into practice, communicating and sharing the fruits born of this experience. In this way, you will grow in an authentic spirituality of communion' (VDQ 19).

Liturgy is other of the elements which creates communion and build the guest, which the guest participates in, either the Eucharistic Celebration or the Divine Office. The prayer is the privileged means through which the nun serves humanity. Prayer opens up a spiritual dimension in which, with all the courtesy of love, the monastic community and the guests together are 'united in peace' (RB 53. 4). On being welcomed as sisters and brothers, the guests create bonds of friendship with the monastic community, generating feelings of belonging. They that are welcomed feel loved by the monastery and the community and feel at home there, their *Heimat*. On the other hand, we, nuns, need our guests' and friends' prayer and support.

Being at the same time everlasting and adaptable to the times, Benedictine hospitality, on turning into a hospitality of communion, is relevant to the desires of those who come to our monasteries. The quality of our welcome 'full of humanity' makes the guest feel to be received in the house of the Lord, *Domus Dei*, where God's Presence predominates and all utensils and goods are regarded 'as sacred vessels of the altar' (RB 31. 10). The same love the guest mistress met by God when she sang *Suscipe me Domine*, she welcomes the guest with. Each of us, in a certain way, are guests in the house of the Lord, which is the monastery and God is our Guestmaster.

6. THE GUEST'S FACE

In St Luke's Gospel, Christ tells us the parable of a Samaritan who helps a man, who fell victim to robbers, and whom he found half-dead on his way to Jericho (Lk 10: 29-37). The Samaritan took him to an inn and cared for him and gave money to the innkeeper in order him to take care of the man until he got better. Well, this inn is often found in our monasteries. When we receive these disfigured guests with devotion, we can see in them the transfigured face of Christ, who has lead them to us.

Our guesthouses are a privileged place where we can encounter with Christ and we can always keep alive 'a passionate quest to see the face of God' (VDQ 9). The Aparecida Document recognises Christ in the suffering faces of women and men living on the street, migrants, sick people, addicts and the imprisoned (Aparecida 407-430). The migrants and the refugees who arrive at our borders, need to be shown every kindness (RB 53.9) instead of hostility. Our guesthouses are an essential place in the restructuring process of people whose life is blighted by misfortune.

In our guesthouses we can evangelise by showing great care and concern in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received (RB 53.15). Mother Aquinata Böckman says that 'before growing world poverty, the significance of this verse (RB 53.15) leads us to a preferential option for the poor. Think about the thread of hunger in many regions of the world, areas where people live in ghettos, areas affected by disasters. It is not enough to give and to show willingness. Showing great care means building awareness and the force activation existing among the poor, supporting personal effort, working to improve the structures and a prophetic appeal to wealthy people. According to St Benedict and the Bible, spiritual and social dimensions are linked in an inseparable manner'.

St Benedict places special emphasis on humaneness and heartiness, which shown towards strangers, become hospitality. It is the fruit of a vision of faith that is evident by showing great concern for the needs of the weakest. Showing great concern for the neighbour means keeping him in mind in your prayer and in your work, sharing your time, feeling you are responsible for him and help him in a lasting and effective way. It demands a careful approach of listening to what he says or needs. For this reason, the service of the poor and needy is an encounter with God and a means by which you receive His mercy. Practising hospitality becomes a means for the renewal of our communities through the Holy Spirit.

Once, we received in our monastery a young man who was on treatment for drug abuse. Being on treatment, he realised he had a special gift for arts and asked his coaches to spend some time in our guesthouse to learn how to mould human figures, because he knew we ran an image restoration workshop. At the end of his staying among us, and after having learnt how to use his gift, he came back to the centre where he lived and, when completing his treatment, he sculpted an almost two-meter high image of Saint Benedict in gratitude for the time he had spent with us. This sculpture of St Benedict is placed on the esplanade of our monastery, from where he can remain vigilant to the mountains of Rio Pardini Valley, caring for the world.

7. DIALOGUE AND HOSPITALITY

After the Reading of the Word of God and the prayer, the guest is received to eat. By having table fellowship, the communion with the guest is closer. Apart from being a medium of hospitality and sharing, this fellowship generates identity and preserves traditions and values. The meaning of feeding is prolonged by table fellowship and then eating becomes a ritual and

promotes dialogue. St Benedict and St Scholastica had table fellowship when they met once a year to spend the whole day praising God and talking about sacred things, according to the story by St Gregory the Great. And the Lord poured out many blessings and graces on them by means of the heavy downpour of providential rain.

In these times of globalisation, the guests who come to our guesthouses can be Christian or belong to other religious traditions. They can be believers or agnostics. They often come to our monasteries to allow themselves time and silence to give new meaning to their lives and to cope with religious and existential issues. Most of them are people who seek a spiritual growing or live through a work, family or personal crisis. They usually practise yoga and have already been to a Buddhist monastery. They are the new pilgrims. When we receive them in our guesthouses, the conversation is the way to understand their true spiritual quests. We must be careful to their needs, since when they come to us looking for real religious experiences, we have to be able to show them Christ in such a way they can fully understand Him.

Our world, which is characterised by rapid communications, the mobility of the people and the interdependence, raises new awareness on religious diversity. The different religions share essential values such as love, mercy, equality, integrity and the ideal of treating others in the same way we want them to treat us. Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, says that 'Nowadays the quickened pace of globalization makes it possible for people of different cultures and religions to be in closer contact. This represents a providential opportunity for demonstrating how authentic religiosity can foster relationships of universal fraternity. Today, in our frequently secularized societies, it is very important that the religions be capable of fostering a mentality that sees Almighty God as the foundation of all good, the inexhaustible source of the moral life, and the bulwark of a profound sense of universal brotherhood' (VD, 117). This dialogue among all the major religious traditions of humanity asks for deeper reflection on the most pressing challenges of today's world, such as wars, violence, poverty, ecology and the lack of respect for human rights.

In a context of religious diversity, monks and nuns are expected, due to their religious sensitivity, to show respect for the different religions and spiritual traditions all over the world in order to promote the mutual understanding among individuals and peoples. The Latin American and Caribbean Bishops remember 'interreligious dialogue has a specific significance in the building of the new humanity: it opens unexplored paths of Christian testimony, promotes the freedom and dignity of peoples, stimulates collaboration for the common good, overcomes violence motivated by fundamentalist religious attitudes, and educates in peace and civic tolerance: it is an area of the beatitudes which are promoted by the Christ's social doctrine' (Aparecida, 239).

Hospitality is linked to the ecumenical character of the Church. Although tested, the encounter with otherness is a rehearsal for the building of a true human brotherhood, in which the ideals of truth, goodness, justice and peace, which are the basis for a true and fraternal dialogue. The more you are prepared to listening and understanding people of our times spiritual desires, the better we will discern the spiritual quest of the guests who come to our monasteries and we will be able to share with them new and old things related to our Benedictine spiritual tradition.

8. HOSPITALITY IN THE COMMUNIO INTERNATIONALIS BENEDICTINARUM (CIB)

The conversation around a table between St Benedict and St Scholastica continues until nightfall. The communion among the Benedictine women's communities all over the world is inspired by these words of St Benedict: 'Proper honor must be shown to all, especially to those who share our faith' (RB 53.2). Without the support of hospitality, CIB would never achieve its bigger goal, which is the communion among the Benedictine women in the different regions of the world.

Pope Francis states 'No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance'. Taking care to avoid 'the disease of self-absorption', the Pope asks us 'to preserve the value of communion between different monasteries as a path of openness towards the future and a means of updating and giving expression to the enduring and codified values of your autonomy' (VDQ 29)

In this way, CIB proposes solidarity among the Benedictine communities, promoting mutual help by sharing personal, spiritual and material support. Given the experience of the CIB, it has been observed that the dialogue and the help among the different communities strengthen the Benedictine tradition by transmitting their values experientially. Among all the values hospitality points out. The differences existing among the communities, in fact, enrich their way to be in the world and, at the same time get inside the roots of the spiritual tradition in what it is essential. The CIB is in harmony with the present time, which demands our co-responsibility to take care of life, because the generations coming after us in our communities and monasteries have the right to receive a habitable world. Whenever young people come to our guesthouses, we are questioned about that.

In the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us that 'Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded'. It is necessary to show the young people that 'Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home' (Laudato Si N° 13), where all of us live.

The Benedictine communities are called, through the centuries and all over the world, to promote peace. For Joan Chittister, 'Peace is not monastic romanticism. Peace is a monastic mission. Benedictine peace flows from the scriptural vision of the mandate to co-create the Kingdom, to "till and nurture and tend the Garden" (Gen 2:15) that has been left to us.' For the American benedictine nun claims that 'Benedictine Peace is founded on justice: give to the poorer; be open to the stranger; care for the weak, respect one another; be gentle with one another; work for the Community; guard the earth' (Wisdom Distilled from the Daily). Our Benedictine monasteries have a spiritual point of view on our planet which is higher on the places where our monasteries are placed, contributing this way to peace building.

At last we are called 'to be expert in communion, within Church and society' (Aparecida 218). May we live in communion with all our communities by means of hospitality, in this way, our testimony will be, as it were, 'a necessary complement to the witness of those who, as contemplatives in the heart of the world, bear witness to the Gospel while remaining fully immersed in the work of building the earthly city' (VDQ 36)

9. CONCLUSION

St Gregory The Great writes that, when St Benedict was living in the cave in Subiaco, he greeted a priest who went to take refectio with him on Easter Day, telling him: 'I know it is Easter, because I have found so much favour as to see thee'. After the priest affirming that it was truly Easter Day, they ate together praising the Lord. St Benedict says that there will always be guests in our monasteries and that is true: Christ is ever present in our guesthouses and is among us, He walks besides us. For this reason we can say, when opening the eye of faith: Today is Easter!

The experience attending this CIB Symposium, in which each region of the world is represented here, in Rome, is a Paschal experience! It's spring! In the Southern Hemisphere it is actually springtime! This Paschal experience reminds us of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II, which states: 'One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light' (NA 1)

We are pilgrims in this land and our final destination is heaven, where Christ has prepared a place for us. He is our guestmaster who will receive us in His Kingdom, the celestial Jerusalem. But while pilgrimating in this world, we will work and pray to grow a fraternal hospitality in our communities, in our monasteries and in our regions, 'so that God may be all in all' (1Co 15:28).