

Abbot Primate Jeremias' address to the Pope

Holy Father,

I hope you can feel how much your presence today means to us Benedictines – those here at Sant'Anselmo, but also our world-wide family of monks and nuns across the globe. We are very aware that we owe it to Pope Leo XIII that we have this place here in Rome. And we are deeply joyful that we can thank his successor and namesake today.

From the fullness of the heart the mouth wants to speak, and lots! The prefect of your household has warned me to be brief, however, and I perfectly understand why. So I will only say three things.

1. Our Benedictine mission: when Pope Leo XIII established this house, he had great hopes for the role which the Benedictines can play for the promotion of Christian Unity. Many of our monasteries have committed themselves to ecumenical dialogue, with a special emphasis on the Eastern Churches. Pope Pius XI repeated this request and our order reinforced its commitment. Even today, we are willing to engage in this. Monks and Nuns of our Benedictine tradition, with our roots in a time of an undivided church, and our practice of hospitality, can be bridge-builders with other Christian churches and especially monastic communities. Many monasteries have become important places of ecumenical encounter. *Mi casa es su casa*, or rather: Our houses are your houses: do not hesitate to make use of us.

2. When Leo XIII established our Collegio 140 years ago, his concern was for monks, their education and their academic contribution to the universal church. The Benedictine order today comprises twice as many women as men. For four decades we have been working and sometimes struggling to set up a Collegio for nuns and sisters who come to Rome as students and professors. We have had some serious setbacks, some very recently. I want to be bold and suggest that the work of Leo XIII in this field still needs to be completed. The symbolic presence of the Benedictine nun St Hildegard, doctor of the church, here at Sant'Anselmo today is a token of our hope.

3. In four years, we will celebrate the foundation of Montecassino by St Benedict in the years 529, 1500 years ago. The significance of this goes far beyond a local jubilee. St Benedict has inspired a way of life and legislated for it which has transformed this continent, as acknowledged by Pope Paul VI who made him principal patron of Europe. The Benedictine heritage is not just for us monks and nuns. It is something for the entire church, and for the world at large. In the sixth century, the foundation of a monastery on a hilltop in Southern Italy became a prophetic gesture for a world in turmoil. We want to explore how this tradition of St Benedict and St scholastica can become meaningful for a world that is once again on the brink of transformation and disruption. We hope and pray that the successor of Peter will help our reflection, discernment and action, for us monastics as well as for the church and the world at large.

We now ask for your blessing, on us assembled here, our university family, on all members of our order, and on the Hundreds of Thousands of faithful who are connected with our monasteries, families, oblates, students, employees, friends and benefactors