

BY YOUR LIGHT WE SEE THE LIGHT

July 11th 2026
Solemnity of Saint Benedict, Patron of Europe

For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light. (Psalm 36:9)

THE WORLD IN A RAY OF SUNLIGHT

This verse from Psalm 36 (35) beautifully expresses an experience that Saint Benedict had here at Montecassino, in his cell. Saint Gregory the Great recounts it in Chapter 35 of Book Two of the *Dialogues*. After spending time in a spiritual conversation with Servandus, the abbot of a nearby monastery, Benedict rested briefly, then rose to pray. While keeping vigil, he received a vision:

"He saw that a light spreading from above had driven away the darkness of the night. Its radiance was so brilliant that, though shining in the midst of the darkness, it surpassed even the light of day. As he remained absorbed in contemplation, something truly marvelous occurred, as he himself later recounted: the whole world, gathered together as if within a single ray of sunlight, was set before his eyes."

We experience our own personal history, the history in which we are immersed, and the broader history of humanity as fragmented, scattered, disjointed, and divided. Benedict, however, gazes upon reality in a way that draws every form of dispersion and fragmentation toward communion and unity.

Moreover, in the *Dialogues*, Gregory explains that this happened not because the world had become smaller, but because Benedict's heart had expanded. We are constantly tempted to reduce reality to our own measure. Benedict lives the opposite dynamic: his heart and his life are enlarged to the immeasurable measure of God and of God's vision, and therefore also to the measure of another kind of world – the world as God sees it and desires it.

The reality in which we live is complex, often fragmented, scattered, and even marked by conflict. We possess few means to change it. Often we must accept its complexity without pretending – or risking – to simplify or reduce it in a naïve or inappropriate way. Rather, it is our heart that must discover the unity enabling us to dwell within the complexity of history without suffering interior fragmentation or dispersion. Instead, we are called to seek an inner unity from which a transfigured vision can emerge – a vision that allows us to see every reality in the very light of God. "In your light we see the light!"

Pope Gregory places this vision at the end of Benedict's life. It is helpful to recall briefly what he presents at the beginning of Benedict's spiritual journey, especially at the outset of his conversion and his monastic vocation.

Gregory relates that Benedict's nurse, who had remained with him even after he abandoned his studies in Rome, borrowed an earthenware sieve used for sifting grain. By accident it fell and broke into two pieces. Moved by compassion at the woman's tears, Benedict prayed, and miraculously the sieve was restored. Gregory carefully notes that it was found completely repaired, "without the slightest trace of a crack."

To our eyes, the episode seems trivial, even insignificant. Why so many tears over a broken earthenware utensil, probably of little value? And why ask God to perform the miracle of restoring it whole again?

In the eyes of Saint Gregory the Great, and according to his spiritual sensitivity, this episode, though simple and domestic, takes on profound symbolic significance. Through the broken sieve, he intends to show us how Benedict restores to unity what had been divided, making whole again what had been broken in two. In this humble gesture, Gregory sees both hidden and revealed the entire meaning of the monastic experience: it is a journey toward unifying what we so often experience as divided, separated, discordant, fragmented, and even conflict-ridden. What is to be restored to unity is certainly not merely an earthenware sieve, but our heart, our life, our very person.

Moreover, Saint Gregory places Benedict's luminous vision shortly after the death of his sister Scholastica and their final conversation, during which Benedict comes to understand that "she who loved more was able to do more." To live according to the primacy of love is the condition for dwelling in the light, as Saint John reminds us in his First Letter:

"Whoever says he is in the light while hating his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness; he walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." (1 John 2:9-11)

PEACE, LIGHT, FRATERNAL COMMUNION, HOPE

Keeping in mind Saint Benedict's contemplative experience and these initial reflections, we can better understand the meaning of the four-stage journey we have outlined as we prepare progressively for the celebration of the Jubilee in 2029, when we will commemorate the 1,500th anniversary of the foundation of Montecassino.

Each stage is centered on a theme that presents Montecassino – and every Benedictine monastery – as a place of peace, of light, of fraternal communion in charity, and finally of hope. These are not simply words or themes placed side by side. Rather, it is important to grasp the connections that bind them together and allow them to enrich one another.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict. It is born from a heart that, by expanding, becomes capable of harmonizing and unifying, thus shaping a different, transfigured vision of the world and of history. To dwell in this light both requires and makes possible a lasting communion among brothers and sisters, lived under the primacy of a charity that learns to prefer nothing whatever to the love of Christ.

Peace, light, and communion in love thus become the pillars that sustain hope. Hope, in turn, nourishes our commitment to peace, becomes the light that illumines the path, and teaches us to journey together toward a different future, supporting one another through the bonds of sincere fraternal communion.

For to hope means adopting the attitude of those who know how to wait together with others and, above all, who know how to sustain — through bonds of fraternity and peace — the waiting of those who, left on their own, are no longer able to wait and no longer expect anything, not even the dawn of a new day to rise upon their lives.

THE OPENING OF THE EYES AND OF THE EARS

The light of hope is what awakens us each morning, as Saint Benedict reminds us in the Prologue to his Rule:

Let us arise, then, at last, for the Scripture stirs us, saying: "Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep." Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and with ears attentive in wonder let us hear what the divine voice cries out to us each day in its exhortation: "Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And again: "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."

And what does he say? *"Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you."*

Every authentic awakening requires eyes opened to contemplate the light that shines forth from God and ears opened in turn to hear his Word, his *Logos*, which the Spirit addresses to the Churches and, within the Church, to each one of us. Enlightened by this Word, which is "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path" (cf. Psalm 119:105), we are able to walk — and indeed to run — in the light of life, remaining children of the day even amid the darkness of the night. Saint Paul repeatedly reminds Christians of this in his letters, urging those who have received the enlightenment of Baptism to remain children of the light and children of the day.

The journey toward 2029 that we are undertaking here at Montecassino is thus woven together, in a wise and fruitful way, with the itinerary proposed by the Abbot Primate for the entire Benedictine Confederation. He has anchored it in the four key places of Benedict's biographical and spiritual journey: Norcia, the place of awakening; Rome, the place of listening; Subiaco, the place of growth; and Montecassino, the place of flourishing.

Light and listening, which characterize the second stage of this spiritual itinerary, can indeed be understood in their mutual relationship. The Word can truly become a light for our journey and a lamp for our steps only if it is welcomed by an open ear and an attentive listening, enlivened by a desire that keeps the heart awake.

Moreover, light is a metaphor for life itself, as everyday language reminds us: to be born is literally to "come into the light." The Word we hear is the bread that nourishes this life dwelling in the light.

In the biblical vision, ears and eyes are also the organs that, more than any others, reveal the condition of the heart. Blindness and deafness, together with the inability to speak, are signs of a hardened and unresponsive heart, incapable of believing or loving. By contrast, the heart of flesh is revealed in ears that know how to listen, making possible both the opening of the lips and the opening of the eyes. Then we shall not only see the light, but also speak words of light – words capable of bringing light to others.

The monastic journey that every monk and nun seeks to live is marked by these stages. Each day begins anew – or rather, allows itself to be begun anew – by a Word received with a docile, humble, and obedient heart, so that one may be enlightened by it and, as children of the day and of the light, arrive at the unification of a heart transformed from stone into flesh. Then we shall be able to perceive the mystery of God, hidden and revealed within the ordinary folds of history.

The light in which we dwell, and which illumines our path, is also the light of careful discernment. It enables us to understand the choices we are called to make today, the directions toward which we should strive, and the decisions we are to embrace.

We must therefore ask ourselves: How can a Benedictine monastery truly become a place of light? What does it mean to be such a place? What conditions are necessary?

Every community could reflect on these questions and seek answers that are faithful to its own history, its distinctive character, the environment in which it is situated, and the relationships it ordinarily cultivates. I would like to offer a few suggestions that may help begin this process of reflection.

A PLACE OF ATTRACTION

For a monastery, being a place of light means, first of all, being a place of attraction, where people feel welcomed and listened to, in accordance with the distinctive spirit of Benedictine hospitality described in Chapter 53 of the *Rule*.

The guest receives light from the community that welcomes him, and at the same time brings light. If the community is able to recognize in the guest the visitation of God, then even the guest's "importunity" – as in the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11) – can illuminate the life of the community, revealing both its radiant qualities and those aspects that still remain in darkness, awaiting a word of light that will illumine and evangelize them.

Montecassino, by virtue of both its architectural design and its geographical setting atop a hill, resembles the city set on a mountain of which Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount – a city that cannot be hidden but stands forth as the "light of the world." With the white stone of its buildings, especially when bathed in sunlight, it truly possesses a remarkable radiance.

Every abbey and every monastery, however modest in size, possesses its own distinctive light that attracts and draws people. This light can be fostered and brought to fuller expression according to the unique character of each monastic building and its church.

ATTRACTION, RADIATION, AND CONTAGION

In this way, our abbeys and monasteries can – and indeed must – live out a particular form of evangelization that takes place through attraction, radiance, and contagion.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini spoke of this many decades ago in his 1991 pastoral letter to the city of Milan, entitled *Arise and Go to Nineveh*, echoing God's words to the reluctant and disobedient prophet Jonah. Distinguishing among the various forms of evangelization, all of which are necessary to the Church in their diversity, the Archbishop of Milan wrote:

There are many ways of evangelizing.

Evangelization through attraction: this is how the first community of Jerusalem evangelized. Even without sending missionaries, it saw "the people from the towns around Jerusalem" come to it (Acts 5:16).

Evangelization through radiance: like the lamp set on a lampstand or the city set on a hill, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16); or like "a burning and shining lamp," in whose light people rejoice (cf. John 5:35). One evangelizes through "honorable conduct among the Gentiles, so that... seeing your good deeds, they may glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

Evangelization through contagion (a particular nuance of the previous form): just as one lamp is lit from another lamp, just as one smile gives rise to another. It may pass from person to person, from group to group, or from a community to individuals who become infected by the joyful faith of that community. "I came to cast fire upon the earth" (Luke 12:49). Even "those who do not obey the word" may "be won over without a word by observing your conduct" (cf. 1 Peter 3:1–2).

The light of the Gospel must illuminate the life of our monastic communities so that they, in turn, may illuminate others by radiating light, attracting hearts, and spreading the joy of faith.

THE LIGHT OF THE CROSS, THE BOOK, AND THE PLOUGH

In our monasteries, light has given birth to culture. Thus, when Saint Paul VI proclaimed Saint Benedict the principal Patron of Europe, he recalled how the Benedictine monks, through the light of the Rule and the witness of their lives, made a substantial and irreplaceable contribution to the birth and growth of the European continent. Later, through countless monastic foundations, they extended that same light to other continents – not only with the cross, the symbol of faith, or the plough, the symbol of labor, but also with the book, the symbol of culture.

To this day, Montecassino, like most of our abbeys – especially those in Europe – preserves artistic and cultural treasures of inestimable value. These can be further enhanced so that, by attracting visitors and pilgrims, they may radiate the very witness of faith that originally shaped them.

In *Pacis Nuntius*, what proves fundamental is not so much each of these individual images as the fact that they belong together and mutually illuminate one another, according to that dynamic of the heart's expansion and unification that I recalled at the beginning. The cross — that is, faith — becomes the book, and thus culture; culture, in turn, is embodied in the plough, in labor understood as a work of solidarity within history for the transformation of the world.

Conversely, historical commitment is inspired by faith and animated by a cultural vision. Culture itself refuses to separate God from humanity, or transcendence from immanence. The spiritual life is indeed a flight from worldliness, but not from the world. It not only gives work its soul, but is itself nourished by work, embracing it as a place of both human and spiritual growth. Each of these dimensions continually enriches and completes the others.

Father Bartolomeo Sorge, S.J. — theologian, expert in the Church's social teaching, and for many years editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica* — said in a lecture delivered at Montecassino in 1980, on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of Saint Benedict's birth:

In this synthesis of faith, culture, and labor lies the essence of Saint Benedict's message and the originality of the Benedictine institution. In this synthesis of the cross, the book, and the plough is also found the inspiration — the very idea — of Europe.

We must therefore ask ourselves not only how to preserve and promote this cultural heritage inherited from the past, but also how, today, in the age of artificial intelligence and the digital revolution, we can continue to illuminate contemporary cultures with the light of faith, while remaining deeply committed above all to "safeguarding what is human," as Pope Leo 14th urges us to do in *Magnifica Humanitas*.

At least as far as the book and the plough are concerned — the question of the cross is evidently of a different order — they now represent a broader way of thinking and acting that is no longer confined to Christian wisdom alone, much less to monasteries. There has been a genuine transmission of values that has permeated and enriched society on a much wider scale. This places monasticism in a position to renew dialogue and engagement with other worldviews that recognize, in certain fundamental values, points of convergence and shared commitment. Not alone, but together with many others, we can work for an integral culture and for labor that is truly humanized and humanizing. Together with many others, we can also confront the distortions that affect these very fields — sometimes in dramatic ways — where culture degenerates into subculture and work becomes once again an experience of slavery rather than freedom. In this endeavor we are not alone. We can forge alliances, develop partnerships, chart common paths, and welcome the challenge of mutually enlightening one another.

THE LIGHT OF SEEKING

We can become places of light if we continue to cultivate the vocation of being seekers of God, and if we pursue that search together with many others — especially with those who, for a wide variety of reasons, find their way to our monasteries. We must know how to offer places of encounter and convergence, of listening and dialogue, of welcome and

understanding, accompanying people along their journeys of searching, even when these are not consciously religious or spiritual journeys. They remain, nevertheless, a search for meaning, for life, for truth, for justice, and for peace. Certainly, we are called to foster the search for God. Yet God is also sought when his name is not yet known or cannot yet be spoken. Without realizing it, people seek him while believing they are searching for something else. We must accompany these journeys so that hearts may be rekindled, just as the Risen Lord—still unrecognized—did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, whose hope had been shattered. Their hearts were set aflame once more as they passed from disappointment to hope, as their horizons widened and their vision was purified. What should concern us above all is that the search be genuine. When Saint Benedict, in his Rule, proposes the search for God as the sole criterion for discerning the authenticity of a monastic vocation, he adds one decisive adverb: *si revera Deum quaerunt* (Rule 58:7)—"if they truly seek God." *Revera*: truly. We must attend carefully to the truthfulness of the search. For if it is nurtured as a genuine search, the One whom we seek allows himself to be found. We find him, and others find him together with us. We encounter him because we have sought him together, in truth. Our first concern should not be to declare whom we have found. To rush too quickly to share the answer is to interrupt the dialogue. In the multireligious world in which we live, beginning dialogue with the answer rather than with the search makes genuine dialogue inaccessible. It aborts it before it has begun, reducing it to a conversation among the deaf—or among people who no longer listen because they are concerned only with speaking. This does not mean renouncing our faith, relativizing it, or concealing it. Rather, it means believing with a living, certain, and unconquerable faith in the Risen Lord—a faith so confident that it never doubts that if we truly seek, we cannot fail to encounter him, even when he first appears to us as a stranger, a foreigner, someone whose name we do not yet know. Yet it is he whom we encounter, and no other.

We must, however, seek him truly, and seek him within the realities of life—life as it is, as it presents itself, as people actually experience it—even beyond the boundaries of an explicitly professed faith. The question addressed to the women at the tomb, as recounted in Luke's Gospel, remains just as relevant for us today: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" He is not here. Go elsewhere. We cannot expect people to encounter the Risen Lord if we continue to lead them to tombs of death instead of accompanying them into places of life and light. Only a genuine search can lead us—I repeat—to encounter him, because he, and no other, is the Living One; he, and no other, is the Risen One; he, and no other, is the Lord.

THE LIGHT OF PRAYER

Finally, we can become places of light if we are truly places of prayer, where the Word—heard, meditated upon, and prayed in the practice of *lectio divina*—opens our eyes to contemplate the Light that comes from Light, and where the mystery celebrated in the Eucharist fills our vision with radiance through the remembrance of the One to whose love we must prefer nothing, because he himself preferred nothing—not even his own life—to our salvation. Saint Cyprian reminds us of this in his commentary on the *Our Father*, in a passage from which Saint Benedict most likely drew the principle he bequeaths to us in his Rule: that nothing is to be preferred to the love of Christ. Each day, as we pray according to the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, we experience the passage from the darkness of night to the light of day—a movement that the Psalms themselves lead us to make. Our

prayer is thus marked by the rhythm of the sun, whose setting and rising evoke the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the true Sun who rises from on high upon us "to shine upon those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace," as we pray each morning at daybreak in Morning Prayer.

On this Solemnity of Saint Benedict, Patron of Europe, which we celebrate today, July 11th 2026, the Year of Peace comes to its close and gives way to the Year of Light.

May the Lord truly illumine our steps along the path of life and peace.

May Saint Benedict, who contemplated the whole world gathered into a single ray of sunlight, intercede for us, that our own eyes too may be opened to behold the true Light, so that both our personal lives and the life of our communities may become radiant with that light – a life that evangelizes through attraction, radiance, and contagion, through the Cross, the Book, and the Plough.

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