



**BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO**  
Curia dell'Abate Primate

Advent-Christmas 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica,

Greetings of Advent and Christmas peace to each of you, to your Oblates and friends of your communities. Once again this year, we find ourselves in a posture of prayer in a time that has had its share of sorrows and worries with the ever-present Covid-19 pandemic and its developments. Communication with our monasteries tell us stories of how the most recent Omicron variant has invaded our cloisters. At the same time, the mystery of God's grace continues to bring new life to us in different ways. Some communities speak of how they have grown closer and more caring for one another through the time spent together. Other communities tell of the new vocations they have received in this mysterious time. In this season of the year when we think especially of Immanuel, God-with-us, we attest to God's providential care for us, even when we do not immediately see it; then, something happens, and we see the hand of God leading us forward, guiding our communities in new ways. We must remain people of hope, trusting in the Lord's guidance of us through these uncertain and mysterious time.

There are some updates to share with you from the Rector of the University and the Prior of the College. With regard to our University, after a process of re-defining the role of the General Secretary, Dr. Marco Cardinali was appointed for this central position. He is a lay theologian with a rich experience of teaching and university administration. The former Secretary General, Fr. Josep Maria Sanromà OSB (Montserrat), remains *Curator Domus* and assistant to the Prior. Two professors of our Pontifical Liturgical Institute were also recently promoted: Fr. Cassian Folsom OSB (Norcia, Italy) as *Professore Straordinario* and Fr. Juan Pablo Rubio Sadia OSB (Santa Cruz Valle de los Caídos, Madrid) as *Professore Associato* who began this academic year as a full-time professor at Sant'Anselmo. Finally, in the last few months, the discussion of a new Corporate Design was initiated to contribute to a unifying identity within the University, the College and the Abbey; participating in this process were representatives from the faculty and student body. To join forces in the sector of our publications, and to find new ways to marketing them, a committee was formed under the direction of the rector.

Life in the College remains encouraging and healthy. We have adjusted to the safety necessities of the pandemic with peace and confidence. We are again almost 90 residents in the house. We could receive one new professor as our resident, Fr. Juan Pablo Rubio OSB and new resident monks from Italy, Germany, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Argentina, Egypt, the United States, Ireland, France, and Tanzania. Besides diocesan students from Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Poland, Zambia, and Burundi, and one new orthodox lay man from Greece. At the assembly of Rectors of the Colleges in Rome – there are about 130 of them - our Prior Fr. Mauritius Wilde OSB was elected president of the association of Roman Colleges (ARCER). Usually, at this time of the year,

monks and their superiors prepare themselves if they are planning to come for studies next year. Many, also small communities, enjoy the opportunity to send their monks to Sant'Anselmo, as the College is a house of formation that helps the young men to grow not only intellectually but also spiritually and as human beings. The experience of the Eternal City and the richness of the Universal church become an unforgettable part of their life in the monastery later on. When sisters or nuns want to study at Sant'Anselmo we try to help them find accommodation nearby.

After a two-year break, the well-received program "Leadership according to the rule of Saint Benedict" is taking place again next year in July (10-22). Scholarships are available for both women and men monks and sisters who hold a leadership position in their community or are preparing for it. With the help of the "Foundation Benedict, Switzerland" and professors from Saint Gall University, a group of experienced monks and nuns provide helpful guidelines to respond to today's leadership challenges. You find more information on the website of the College or of the Confederation.

There are a few thoughts with which I would like to leave you. In the reading from the Book of Isaiah at the Christmas Mass during the Night, before the text relating to the coming Messiah, it speaks of war, enslavement, battle, darkness and a cloak soaked in blood. The situation of the prophet Isaiah describes the oppression of Assyria against Israel. But as the text continues, there arises hope for these people shrouded in darkness; a light shines forth and brings hope and joyous celebration in the proclamation of the Messiah who would come as a child and Prince of Peace. In such a moment of darkness, could these people hear the word of Isaiah and believe in the unbelievable? That is also a question for us today.

There is a message for us in these images from the Scriptures, and it points to peace. I am reminded of a movie I saw several years ago called *Joyeux Noël*. The story records an event that happened during the First World War, often referred to as the bloodiest of wars. History records it as a war with blood soaked fields. The movie begins with young men reciting patriotic texts that tell of their country's valiant history; then these same men express their hatred, disgust, and denunciation toward their enemies. As the film develops, German, French and Scottish are shown in an unoccupied area with opposing forces, called "no man's land." The time is Christmas Eve, and it's clear that all these soldiers are Christians; yet each troop remains in their trenches.

Then a German soldier from the front lines begins to sing *Stille Nacht*; ever so slowly and still singing, he walks out from his trench without a rifle in his hand, and carrying a small pine tree. All of a sudden, a Scot takes his bagpipes and begins to accompany the German singer on a second verse of *Stille Nacht*. The Scot then begins to play the Christmas hymn *Adeste Fideles* which all begin to sing. This prompts the three leaders of the troops to meet in the center of "no man's land" and consent to a truce among themselves and their troops to celebrate Christmas.

Ever so slowly, the troops begin to emerge and a German soldier offers his French counterpart a chocolate bar, another offers some champagne, while others begin to share photos of their family members back home. Then all of a sudden, the next scene shows the troops playing football with one another in the snow. As the joy and festivity of these soldiers continues into the next day, they call for another day of the truce so that they may bury their dead fellow-soldiers in an atmosphere of peace and reverence for the dead. In the midst of this bloody and intense war, the unbelievable became believable. Enemies became peaceful with one another; acts of war

turned to friendly exchanges; bombings ceased; guns were turned into expression of human solidarity and friendship.

This true story is a parable of the Isaian reading for Mass during the Night. What is important for us to remember in these coming days of the Christmas season is that our world today is marked by so many places where both war and strife continue to exist, despite both the prophet's vision and the Gospel's teaching. Our world today has been marked by both warring nations and an epidemic that continues to wage war against the whole human race. Our own feelings and sentiments turn toward those who are closest and dearest to us; that is proper and right. Yet we must also continue to pray for those parts of our world that are marked by war, violence and hatred. Our sincere prayers cannot forget our troubled and broken world, in need of so much healing with the fruits of peace, reconciliation, justice, patience and charity. These troubled places in our world may seem far away, difficult for us to imagine their reality, and complex for us to understand their cultural mindset. Yet all these people remain our brothers and sisters in the human family, all are children of God. Even within the Benedictine Order, there are communities who suffer the ravages of war, hatred and violence. As Benedictine men and women, let us storm the heavens for the peace of Christ to dwell richly in our world, in our communities, and in the lives of all.

In closing, I wish each of you, my brothers and sisters, the grace and deep inner joy of this holy season, and New Year of deep hope and interior peace of heart. May the great mystery of the Birth of Christ touch our hearts and minds, so that we can be ambassadors of hope and love, strengthening us "to prefer nothing whatever to Christ, so that he may bring us all together to everlasting life (RB 72:11-12)."

Sincerely in Christ, our Hope and our Strength,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbot Primate Gregory". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Abbot" and "Gregory" being significantly larger and more stylized than the rest of the text.

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.