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"Whatever happens in the world finds a place in their heart"

In his 26 April general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal, speaking about St. Gregory of Narek.

04/26/2023

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue our catechesis on the witnesses of apostolic zeal. We started with Saint Paul, and last time

we looked at the martyrs, who proclaim Jesus with their lives, to the point of giving their lives for Him and for the Gospel. But there is another great witness that runs through the history of faith: that of the *nuns and monks*, sisters and brothers who renounce themselves and who renounce the world to imitate Jesus on the path of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to intercede on behalf of all. Their lives speak for themselves, but we might ask: how can people living in monasteries help the proclamation of the Gospel? Wouldn't they do better to put their energies into the mission? Coming out of the monastery and preaching the Gospel, outside ... outside the monastery? In reality, the monks are the beating heart of the proclamation. This is curious: they are the beating heart. Their prayer is oxygen for all the members of the Body of Christ, their prayer is the invisible force that

sustains the mission. It is no coincidence that the patroness of the missions is a nun, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. Let us listen to how she discovered her vocation – she wrote: “I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was burning with love. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church’s members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that love comprised all vocations. ... Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love my vocation, at last I have found it.... my vocation is love! ... In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love” (Autobiographical Manuscript “B”, 8 September 1896).

Contemplatives, monks, nuns: people who pray, work, pray, in silence, for all the Church. And this is love: it is the love that is expressed by praying

for the Church, working for the Church, in the monasteries.

This love for everyone inspires the life of nuns and monks, and is translated into their prayer of intercession. In this regard, I would like to offer you the example of Saint Gregory of Narek, Doctor of the Church. He is an Armenian monk, who lived around the year 1000, who left a book of prayers, in which the faith of the Armenian people, the first to embrace Christianity, is poured out; a people that, joined to the cross of Christ, has suffered so much throughout history. And Saint Gregory spent almost his entire life in the monastery of Narek. There he learned to peer into the depths of the human soul and, by fusing poetry and prayer together, marked the pinnacle of both Armenian literature and spirituality. What is most striking about him is the *universal solidarity* of which he is an

interpreter. And among monks and nuns there is a universal solidarity: whatever happens in the world, finds a place in the heart, in their heart, and they pray, and they pray. The heart of monks and nuns is a heart that captures like an antenna, it picks up what happens in the world, and prays and intercedes for this. And in this way: they live in union with the Lord and with everyone. And one of them said: "I have voluntarily taken upon myself all faults, from those of the first father down to the last of his descendants, and I have held myself responsible for them". It is what Jesus did: they take upon themselves the problems of the world, the difficulties, the ailments, many things, and they pray for them. And these are the great evangelizers. Monasteries are ... but how can they live closed up, and evangelize? It is true... because with the word, for example, by intercession and daily work, they are a bridge of

intercession for all people and all sins. They weep, even shedding tears, they weep for their sins – after all, we are all sinners – and they also weep for the sins of the world, and they pray and intercede with their hands and heart raised up. Let us think a little of this – if I may permit myself the use of the word – “reserve” that we have in the Church: they are the true strength, the true force that carries the People of God forward, and this is where the habit comes from that people have – the People of God – of saying “Pray for me, pray for me”, when they meet a consecrated man or woman, because they know there is a prayer of intercession. It will do us good – to the extent we are able – to visit a monastery, because there one prays and works. Each one has its own rules, but their hands are always occupied: engaged in work, engaged in prayer. May the Lord give us new monasteries, may he give us new

monks and nuns to carry the Church forward with their intercession.
Thank you.

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(03/23/2026)