

Dear friends, chaplains to Faith and Light,

I have just returned from Vilnius where I had been invited to take part in the organisation of a retreat for Faith and Light communities. We met – about 80 participants – at Trinapolis, an old monastery, now a retreat house, built in the XVIIIth century on the banks of the River Neris. In this season of Advent, we prepared together for the coming of the Lord together. And since this year we are celebrating the jubilee of the Lourdes apparitions (1858), it was also with Bernadette Soubirous that we made our journey of prayer, listening to her story and watching the film of her life. Retreats like this allow us to deepen what we have received in Faith & Light, and renew the lives of individuals and communities. I wish that you also could lead or take part in such meetings. Several chaplains were present and it was a joy to be able to discuss our ministry, to pray together and simply to “be there”. Cardinal Audrys J. Bačkis himself presided over the Eucharist on that first Sunday of Advent. The presence of our reference bishop was a beautiful testimony for Faith and Light.

During a conversation with Fr. Ramunas, national chaplain of Lithuania, he asked me if there was still a place for a “national chaplain” within the new structures. Several of you have asked me the same question. We should remember that the new Constitution makes provisions for the movement as a whole. It cannot deal with local situations where we must always consider the good of the communities. If for cultural, religious or historical circumstances, it seems better or even necessary to appoint a national chaplain, there is no difficulty in doing so. It is a matter that you can take up and discuss with the provincial team.

Whatever the structures are, the important point is the life of Faith and Light. In this the chaplains have a unique place. It is good to be encouraged and affirmed in this ministry. There are so many things to do and our diaries are so full that it is not easy to give priority to just “being there”, rather than be active and organise things. Surely, as ministers of Christ, we should always remind ourselves that Jesus spent thirty years in the humble and hidden life of Nazareth before setting out on the roads of Palestine to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

The hidden life which leads us to the mystery of Christmas. As Pope Benedict XVI said in a homily given when he was still archbishop of Munich: “God hides Himself. He does not dazzle us with the brilliance of his glory; he does not make us bow the knee before his power. He wishes to make real between Him and us the mystery of Love which presupposes freedom”. This is the mystery we celebrate at Christmas. In Jesus, God became a tiny child. He became close to each one of us at a point that we could never dare to imagine. Without losing his glory and his transcendence, he abolishes all distance and becomes accessible to each one of us. Only Love can give rise to such closeness in such respect. May this overwhelming Love transform our lives and those of our nearest and dearest. May it become a reality in us and around us.

With all my heart I wish you and all the members of your communities a Holy and Happy Christmas celebration,

Father Guy