

LETTER OF THE PRIOR GENERAL
OF THE ORDER OF THE FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY
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TO THE SERVITE FAMILY ON THE OCCASION OF THE 7TH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH
OF ST. ALEXIS OF FLORENCE († 1310)

Fra Alexis, One of the Seven ...

Rome
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THE SAINTS AND THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF CHRIST

Ponder each day the face of the Saints to find rest in their words. [\[1\]](#)

1. Dear brothers and sisters, this exhortation was addressed to the Christians of the first generations, immediately after the death of the Apostles, by what is considered to be one of the oldest non-canonical texts, the *Didache*.

From this perspective, I think that the seventh centenary of the death of the last of our Seven Holy Founders, Alexis of Florence († 1310) which we are going to celebrate in 2010 is a truly providential occasion. I have decided to offer the whole Order and the Servite Family a meditation to help us gain full profit from this significant event in our history.

2. The presence of the saints down through all the Church's history has always made me wonder about these men and women's experience of the person of Jesus Christ.

After all, with the Ascension of Christ into heaven and the consequent absence of his physical presence in the way that we experience relationships with one another, and then with the disappearance of the generation of those who had lived with him (the Apostles especially, but not only), Christianity was presented – and will always be as long as time lasts – with a dramatic problem: how can we ourselves, who did not have the luck to be alive during the period when the Son of Man walked the dust of the earth, have the same experience? Are we condemned to live out our existence “gritting our teeth” because we did not have the good fortune to live in that golden period at the beginning but arrived on the scene afterwards? Was the experience of the saints only a feat of their imagination?

3. That fundamental question which runs throughout the entire experience of the Church is the same for us Servants of Mary who have not had the experience of living “elbow to elbow” with our Seven First Fathers, Alexis and his companions. Are we too condemned to imagining how our first Fathers lived and resign ourselves to not being able to live what they lived because we were born afterwards? Or is it possible to live out their same experience perpetuated in our own time?

4. It seems to be that, especially in Western culture in recent centuries, two “myths” have been around, contradictory to each other but firmly established even in our mentality.

For while faith is professed in the unstoppable nature of progress, especially in the realms of scientific and technological research – and therefore life itself is led to ever greater progress – on the other hand, from the viewpoint of human, and indeed religious experience, we live resigned to the fact that the farther away we move from the origin of an event, the more its intensity of impact

on our lives naturally and inevitably diminishes, leaving us to content ourselves with what destiny gives us.

5. The paschal experience of the Apostles and the first generations of Christians, however, brings into play the freedom of God and human beings, the true protagonists of history. For the risen Christ, time and space are not limitations but purely a mode of expression. Thus, those who turned to Christianity a few decades after the death and resurrection of Christ, or in the difficult early centuries of our era, were conscious of being able to have a real encounter with the risen Christ, and of exactly the same kind as his first friends. Christ is truly a contemporary of ours: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28, 20).

6. I believe we can approach the texts about our origins in an analogous way, especially the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* (LO), conscious that we can live out time and again the human and religious experience of Alexis and his early friends, as this is described in our precious document.

Therefore, I would like to ponder with you, if only briefly, the human and religious experience of the Seven, and especially Alexis, in an attempt to reveal in our own day the selfsame features of our charism gifted to our Founders by the Spirit.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SEVEN FIRST FATHERS

7. Without wishing to give an exhaustive list of the significant features of the life of the Seven, I would like to look at three elements which I think are meaningful for our lives.

The first characteristic which immediately springs to mind is that they were, in the words of Pope Paul VI, **“a little community of fraternal spirits” engaged in a constant search.**

In celebrating this centenary of the death of Alexis we are forced to start off not with a single individual – even though Alexis was a holy friar and his personal witness is a great stimulus and example for all of us – but from the fact that we are faced with a little group of men who, although they might well consider themselves successful in terms of their social and economic position, were still in search of the meaning of life.

This search can never be exhausted, it is like a thirst that is never quenched even when the Spring is found, because the characteristic of this thirst is that it does not depend on us but on the Spring itself. We, men and women of the third millennium, have constantly to ask the Lord, Our Lady and our Seven First Fathers for that unquenchable thirst for Christ.

8. It also seems to me that these were **men wide open to reality with the eyes of a child.**

If, imagine, we were to find ourselves opening our eyes to reality for the first time with the consciousness of our present age, the overwhelming feeling would certainly be one of amazement at the things that exist and that we did not make: reality as a “given” and that therefore requires a “Giver.”

The innocent simplicity with which the Seven recognised the hand of God and Our Lady in the concrete events of their lives (the date of the beginning; the basis and therefore the foundation of their “loving friendship”^[2] that was not of their own doing but was that of the Virgin Mary; the name they received; the rule and the habit that they acquired as their experience gradually grew) seems to me to have this foundation, one which we must try to recover.

It is not a question of being naïve or simplistic but rather of staying in touch with what we were when we were introduced into reality: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 18, 3-4).

9. Lastly, I think it worth underlining **the ability and will to make decisions and carry them through together**.

I would particularly like to recall, on the one hand, the decision to have a period of more withdrawn prayer outside the city, in obedience to the will of God (LO, 40 and 41) and, on the other, the apparently contradictory decision though full of faith, – after receiving new companions (LO 48) – to leave the mountain in order to go to meet their fellow men and women. The *Legenda de Origine* attests: “With the Lord’s help they made arrangements that were practical and at the same time fostered their spiritual life. Determined in all this to carry out the Lord’s will, they received into their community many friars and associates, such as they and the Lord deemed suitable. At the same time, as the Lord seemed to be indicating this to them, they opened some other houses, suitable to their penitential way of life” (LO 49).

Obedience to the will of God discerned together is a characteristic of the religious life and of the Servants of Mary; one that, it seems to me, has to be more and more rediscovered.

ALEXIS OF FLORENCE

10. Passing on to look in particular at the figure of Fra Alexis of Florence, it is undeniable that the author of the *Legenda de origine* presents him as a **witness of the events and life at the origins**.

The *Legenda de origine*, with evident sympathy and admiration and recognising his authoritativeness, treats of the person and life of Alexis in order to highlight the elements that were decisive for the Order of the Servants of Mary in the first decades of its existence.

Writing to the friars of his own time, the author, most probably the Prior General, Fra Peter Sapiti of Todi (1310-1344), – anxious not to lose the Order’s original inspiration and enthusiasm after its definitive approval by Benedict XI and the consolidation of its life – in continual development at that time – recalls to the attention of all the friars the ups and downs experienced by the early generations and reminds them of the providential intervention of the Virgin Mary in the establishment and early development of the Servite Family.

He therefore presents Alexis as an authoritative witness concerning the foundation by Mary herself of the new group of religious of Senario. The holy friar states: “Neither I nor my companions ever intended to found a new religious Order, nor for that matter to attract a lot of others to us when we came together originally. We were under the impression that our divinely inspired purpose in going to live together was simply to flee the world and fulfill the Lord’s will better and more easily. For that reason, only Our Lady can be given the credit for beginning the Order and the only name we should have should come from her: The Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary” (LO 24).

Likewise, concerning the **date of foundation** (LO12) and the **name of the Order** (LO 33): “He [Fra Alexis] said to me: ‘I was never able to find out nor could I or anyone else ever demonstrate that this name originally came from any human source. And so, I recall that the other friars, my companions, and I always believed that it was Our Lady herself, and she alone, who gave it to our Order’. Alexis is a direct witness of the action of the Virgin.

11. This is not, however, the sole intention of the *Legenda de origine Ordinis*. Fra Peter of Todi also points to Fra Alexis as a witness of the life led by the **First Fathers of the Order** – obviously to remind his contemporaries – although it is equally valid for us now – of the simple, obedient and almost frugal life of the witness he is putting before the whole Order.

I want to pause a little over some of these elements in particular with you, my brothers, without however forgetting some reflections that may be of value for all members of the Servite Family, each according to their own style of life.

12. Alexis, first of all, like his companions at the start of the Order, was a **lay person**: it was through the power of Baptism (and religious profession, which reinforces but adds nothing to the seal of baptism) that he lived out his life as it is described in brief but effective terms in the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* and can be confirmed from the archive documents we still possess today.

Rediscovering the “explosive” power of Baptism is a journey that is now engaging the whole Church, led by the hand by Pope Benedict XVI,^[3] and which is connected with the experience of the contemporaneity of Christ that I spoke about above.

On the one hand, even those of us who have received the gift of ordination to the priesthood must acquire a new consciousness of the absolute power of Baptism which makes each of us a “new creature” and on the other, it is to be hoped that there will be a new blossoming of lay vocations to our communities so that the beauty of our charism can be seen in all its entirety.

13. The figure of Alexis can also be held up as an example of what I would call **not seeking “due” privileges** (by reason of one’s age, position or authority), by being “different,” which can sometimes be mere sterile self-affirmation.

This is perfectly in line with the Rule of St. Augustine, where we read: “Those who did not have possessions ought not to strive in the religious community for what they could not obtain outside it. One must indeed have regard for their frailty by providing them with whatever they need, even if they were formerly so poor that they could not even afford the very necessities of life. They may not, however, consider themselves fortunate because they now receive food and clothing which were beyond their means in their earlier lives” (no. 6). Further, “there are some who are weaker because of their former manner of life. If an exception is made for them at table, those who are stronger because they have come from a different way of life ought not to take this amiss or to consider it unfair. They should not think that the others are more fortunate because they are capable of something which is beyond the strength of the others” (no. 16). Expressed more concisely: “it is better to be able to make do with a little than to have plenty” (no. 18).

This simple and sober lifestyle is one that goes against the current of modern thinking that has perhaps tainted us as well, but I believe it has to be recovered in order to arrive at a fully authentic understanding of our vocation and our personal and community witness.

14. Something else I would like to stress in the life of Fra Alexis of Florence is his **love of work, including manual work**.

The *Legenda de origine* makes explicit mention of this: “Unlike most people of his advanced age, he did not shirk physical labour; on the contrary, he always worked hard and took on more than he could ever handle, much to the dismay of the other friars” (LO 27).

It is extremely moving to open the *Register of income and expenditure of Santa Maria of Cafaggio* for the years 1286-1289 and see noted there the sums that Fra Alexis handed in after his weekly begging expeditions every Saturday.

The labour of our hands, together with the sharing of goods and a moderate style of life are put forward as constitutive elements of our witness of evangelical poverty (*Constitutions OSM*, Chap. 7) and is a value that, in this year when we celebrate the death of Alexis, we can and must discover anew.

I believe that if we are not open and receptive to understanding everything that our vocation implies – right down to its concrete consequences – the sacrifices that it obliges us to make can seem to be objections, instead of simply being descriptions of a path, conditions of a journey. This is the great lesson of the life of Fra Alexis.

15. I would further like to highlight **his delicate attention for young religious**, in particular the first students of the Order at the great University of Paris, through the loan of a sum of money to the Prior General for their upkeep.

We live in times that are difficult, but also good and promising for the Servite Order and Family. While faced with a drop in vocations to our religious Family in some parts of the world, in others that are recently evangelised or already established in the faith, we are pleasantly surprised by a growth in numbers.

We are responsible for taking forward this blessing of the Lord. It is clear to all that the heart of Saint Alexis, who saw the needs and, insofar as he was able, provided what was necessary for the formation of the young religious, now has to find new examples (and there are many of these already in operation!) in order that our charism may still be of use to the Church and the world.

16. A last, but by no means least, important element is **the death** of Alexis.

Undoubtedly, the last years could not have been easy for our saintly friar: old age, all sorts of aches and pains, and that subtle temptation to feel that one's life is useless (which often torments the sunset of a long life) must have been features of Alexis' later years. I think that this can be, and in some cases indeed is, the experience of those of us who arrive at a venerable age.

We must beg the Lord that this sense does not determine or condition our life. There is a mysterious usefulness, known only to the Lord and the angels, in every moment of our existence. The account of the death of Alexis testifies to this, for his death reflects (as does everyone's) his entire human existence.

He died surrounded by the friars (as is our custom) and even the last instant of his existence was defined and marked by that rapport with Christ which characterised his entire life: "Just before his death, Alexis cried out in a loud voice to the friars who surrounded his bed that he saw angels approaching him looking like pure-white birds, beautiful beyond words. Amidst these birds and angels stood Christ, a lovely child wearing a golden crown with a cross on it" (LO 28). Our rapport with Christ, as we recognise him in the faces of our brothers and sisters, is the secret to always seeing our life as useful, meaningful and good.

THE ORDER TODAY, PATHWAY TO HOLINESS

17. There is another element which I want to underline because, in my opinion, it is of utmost importance.

The texts that describe the experience of our origins, along with others of our *Historical and Spiritual Sources* which we are now rediscovering, are fine and stimulating, but can be prey to our interpretation.

If there did not exist the **diversity of lifestyles today** that is present in our communities, we would soon end up in the nihilism of different interpretations, each of us all on our own, if we did not have that diversity to reckon with.

If there were not still among us today examples of friars for whom the relationship with Christ is decisive, right down to the minimal particulars of life, our charism would be dead and buried. If that initial and original phenomenon were not to recur, there would not be any development because development cannot take place if the original impact is not repeated, if, in other words, the Christ Event does not remain contemporary.

So I think that we have to relate testimonies to one another among ourselves (as we did, for example, at the last General Chapter with the three testimonies of evangelical poverty) regarding the new things that are happening, the experiences and the people who most clearly call to mind that initial ideal. We must not be afraid to cite names and surnames so as to be able to see the spectacle of holiness taking place, even if this treasure is contained in "vessels of clay" (2Cor 4, 7). I believe that in our fraternal gatherings at various levels, we have to exploit to the full the experiences taking place in our midst that testify to the contemporary vivacity of the charism that so entranced Alexis and his friends.

I make my own the words of Pope Leo the Great in one of his homilies for the feast of the Epiphany and I repeat to us all: "This star exhorts us to imitate the service it gave, in the sense that,

as far as we can, we should be at the service of this grace which invites all people to Christ. In this zeal, dearly-beloved, you ought to help one another.”^[4] Another great Pope, Gregory the Great, wrote: “But that his cry should not be hidden in us, it remains that each one of us, according to his measure, should make known to those around us the mystery of our new life in Christ.”^[5]

18. In the light of this brief summary of the human and religious life of Fra Alexis of Florence, I think it important for us **to rediscover that sober style of life**, not in any exaggerated way, described in the life of the Seven and of Alexis in particular.

I believe that we have to re-acquire the healthy idea of “the happy medium” that is mentioned several times in the *Legenda de origine* (no. 19, concerning actions in general; no. 27, about clothing; no.30, with reference to words, thoughts, feelings and actions).

We have to continue along the path mapped out by the last two General Chapters and the priorities they have set for us; for these present six years we have evangelical poverty as the objective to be pursued for the authenticity of our vocation and of our witness.

19. It is clear, however, that for a correct grasp of what is meant by “the happy medium” in our own age, individual reflection is not enough. We have to recover a method of **community discernment** (which has its most tried and tested forms in the Chapter and *Lectio divina*), which can better take account of all the factors in play (the surrounding environment, the situation of the community and the needs of the Order and of the local Church, etc), and help us revive the community dimension that was constitutive of the fraternity of our Seven First Fathers.

20. Dear brothers and sisters, a life like that of Fra Alexis described in the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* is highly to be desired.

My hope and prayer to the Lord and Our Lady is that this providential circumstance of the celebration of the seven hundredth anniversary of the heavenly birthday of Fra Alexis will be a new summons to each one of us who live the spirituality and charism of the Servants of Mary in different ways (friars, cloistered nuns, sisters, laypeople) to see that our witness may become more incisive and meaningful, for ourselves in the first place, and for all our brothers and sisters.

From our priory in Nairobi, 22 September 2009

Memorial of the dedication of the basilica of Monte Senario

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica
Prior General

Prot. /2009

Texts from the *Legenda de Origine Ordinis* (1317-1318)

ALEXIS, TOGETHER WITH PHILIP THE WITNESS OF THE ORIGINS

14. I have had to rely on the incomplete facts I still remember hearing at various times from many of the older friars during these twenty-two years that I have been in the Order. Some of these men are already dead, a few others are still alive. But my primary source has been Fra Alexis, whom I mentioned before as one of the first friars of our Order.

26. Several times already we have mentioned Fra Alexis. Of the seven men through whom Our Lady saw fit to begin her Order, all perfect men and worthy, he was the only one still alive when I entered the Order. Our Lady was pleased to preserve this Fra Alexis from death until our own day so that on his testimony we could know how our Order began and so pass down from one generation to the next until the Day of Judgement this memory of our beginnings. With this very thing in mind, I personally questioned him many times about the earliest days of the Order.

I was afraid that when Fra Alexis died, the information about our origins would be irretrievably lost and those of us who were his contemporaries would be guilty of ingratitude.

One day in particular I went to him in his cell specifically to gather such information. Attentively and eagerly, one point after another and as well as I knew how, I questioned him about all the essential facts of the Order's origin. As he spoke I wrote everything down in my own hand on a piece of parchment. I used to read this parchment frequently afterwards and with great interest. In fact, I reviewed what I had written there and thought about it so often that I memorized it. But then the devil did his work. One day I was sitting at the well at our house in Siena, devoutly reading this parchment; I always carried it with me. Suddenly, by the envy of the devil, without any warning the sheet flew out of my hands, went up a bit into the air and straightway fell into the well. I was heartbroken.

Of course, the result of this loss was that, with the passage of time, I have forgotten many of the details that were in that document. On the other hand, I had memorized the essential points on the origins of our Order exactly as Fra Alexis had narrated them to me. These I am now going to pass on faithfully, like a great, long-awaited treasure, so that our friars in the future will remember them. I feel particularly constrained at this time to fulfill Our Lady's will by doing this.

THE YEAR OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORDER

11. Blessed Philip was born in the year of the Lord 1233, during the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX, in the province of Tuscany and in the city of Florence. Our Lady willed that her own Order, one specially consecrated to her and even bearing her name, should begin in that same year, in that same province and city.

12. But how do I know the date of the beginning of the Order? Well, for many years before his death I had asked a lot of questions of Fra Alexis, one of the seven who first began our Order.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORDER AND ITS NAME

24. If the foundation of Our Lady's Order were to be attributed to anyone other than to herself, it would have to be to these seven men, precisely because of their perfection. Besides, they were the Order's first members. Yet how many times did not Fra Alexis, one of the seven, say to the friars that it would be wrong to accredit the foundation to the group of the seven first friars or to any

single one of them. I heard this myself from his own lips. These were his exact words: *Neither I nor my companions ever intended to found a new religious Order or for that matter to attract a lot of others to us when we came together originally. We were under the impression that our divinely inspired purpose in going to live together was simply to flee the world and fulfill the Lord's will better and more easily. For that reason, only Our Lady can be given the credit for beginning the Order and the only name we should have should come from her: The Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

33. It can be shown that this name did not originate with any person, but with Our Lady; for when I specifically questioned Fra Alexis about the Order's name, including whence it had originally come, he said to me, *I was never able to find out nor could I or anyone else ever demonstrate that this name originally came from any human source. And so, I recall that the other friars, my companions, and I always believed that it was Our Lady herself, and she alone, who gave it to our Order.*

Now, Alexis was among those first seven friars who came together to start our Order, so it is hard to believe that he would have been completely unaware of it if the Order's name had originated with some person. The friars of our Order should firmly believe that the name of the Order was initially chosen by Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, and graciously bestowed on us.

THE EXEMPLARY LIFE OF FRA ALEXIS

27. I learned about the kind of life Fra Alexis lived from my own experience, from seeing it with my own eyes. He was a man who moved those who knew him by the example he set. He was a living proof of the perfection and piety I earlier ascribed to him and his companions. In view of his advanced age, his poor health and the long time he had borne the heat of the day in the Order, he could have been forgiven if he had quite naturally wanted quiet, food in keeping with his infirmity, warm clothing and a soft bed whereon to rest his feeble body. But in fact he sought just the opposite, a sign of his perfection and piety. He never asked for special delicate foods but was content with the normal food of the community. It was his wish always to eat in the refectory. If at times when he was seriously ill he could not go to the common refectory with the other friars, he still remained content with the ordinary food served in the community. At the most he would collect some herbs from the garden, warm them and eat them from time to time to relieve his old and frail body of the chill, but he never sought fancier food than this.

He shied away from soft clothing, yet tried to strike a happy medium in matters of dress, wearing neither the clothes of a beggar nor those of a noble. Alexis refused to have a soft and comfortable bed as his weakened condition seemed to demand. In fact, it was well known by all who ever lived with him that he used wooden planks instead of a mattress and coarse covers in place of sheets.

Unlike most people of his advanced age, he did not shirk physical labor; on the contrary, he always worked hard and took on more than he could ever handle, much to the dismay of the other friars. Although, as we have said, he was a man of such great perfection and was revered by all the friars as one of the first seven whom Our Lady used to begin her Order, yet he remained humble and loving in everything he said and did and never let this esteem rob him of his humility. Lowly or difficult though they be, he tried his best to fulfill all the duties of the common life, like the least of the friars. As long as he could, Fra Alexis insisted on taking his turn when it was his day to go out into the streets to beg for bread or do any other work expected of a stronger and younger man, even though the other friars often attempted to stop him. He tried to keep pace with the others in performing in the community all those duties which the world considers base. Thus he showed his love for the brethren and the humility he had in his heart; thus he left an example to do likewise to all friars who want to serve Our Lady faithfully.

28. Fra Alexis lived to an extreme old age. He lived to see the Order grow in numbers and holiness of friars. And at the end he went to his Lady, the Virgin Mary, joyfully, assured that there awaited him the reward of his faithful service. In the last moments of his life, something happened that demonstrates the depth of the contemplation and the purity of this man and his companions. I heard about this from one who was at his bedside when he died, Fra Lapus of Florence, the nephew of Fra Sostenes. Just before his death, Alexis cried out in a loud voice to the friars who surrounded his bed that he saw angels approaching him looking like pure-white birds, beautiful beyond words.

Amidst these birds and angels stood Christ, a lovely child wearing a golden crown with a cross on it. Alexis lived almost 110 years, surviving until the year of Our Lord 1310. This means that from the time he joined the others at the beginning of the Order until his death, Fra Alexis lived in our Order almost seventy-seven years.

INVOCATION TO SAINT ALEXIS

*Alexis, Servant of Mary,
elder brother to us,
saint in the Church of God,
may your prayer sustain our commitment of service.*

*Simple and sober friar,
whose food was frugal,
and clothing humble
you refused all comfort and ease.
Look upon the young people
who, seeking what is lasting and essential,
want to follow the Son of Man
who has nowhere to lay his head.*

*Charitable friar,
active and joyous servant,
forgetful of self and swift to respond
To the needs of the brothers “without creating a fuss”,
help us to be faithful to our commitment
to bear each other’s burdens,
to love each other in deed and truth.*

*Friar of prophetic insight,
witness of the Kingdom,
intercede with the Lord Most High
for your brothers laden with age
that they, like you, venerable old man,
may preserve intact the ideal of service
to God, to Our Lady and to their brothers and sisters,
in the sure hope of winning the reward of the faithful servant.*

*Pray for us, Alexis, brother worthy of praise,
you who now live in the “Promised Land”,
the inheritance of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
to whom be honour and glory forever and ever.
Amen.*

^[1] *Didache* IV, 2

^[2] LO 29

^[3] Cf., for example, BENEDICT XVI: *Homily at the 2006 Easter Vigil*: “A qualitative leap in world history comes to me, seizing hold of me in order to draw me on [...] The great explosion of the Resurrection has seized us in Baptism so as to draw us on. Thus we are associated with a new dimension of life into which, amid the tribulations of our day, we are already in some way introduced [...] I think that what happens in Baptism can be more easily explained for us if we

consider the final part of the short spiritual autobiography that Saint Paul gave us in his Letter to the Galatians. Its concluding words contain the heart of this biography: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal 2:20). I live, but I am no longer I. The “I”, the essential identity of man – of this man, Paul – has been changed. He still exists, and he no longer exists. He has passed through a “not” and he now finds himself continually in this “not”: *I, but no longer I*.

With these words, Paul is not describing some mystical experience which could perhaps have been granted him, and could be of interest to us from a historical point of view, if at all. No, this phrase is an expression of what happened at Baptism. My “I” is taken away from me and is incorporated into a new and greater subject. This means that my “I” is back again, but now transformed, broken up, opened through incorporation into the other, in whom it acquires its new breadth of existence. Paul explains the same thing to us once again from another angle when, in Chapter Three of the Letter to the Galatians, he speaks of the “promise”, saying that it was given to an individual – to one person: to Christ. He alone carries within himself the whole “promise”. But what then happens with us? Paul answers: You have become one in Christ (cf. Gal 3: 28). Not just one thing, but one, one only, one single new subject. This liberation of our “I” from its isolation, this finding oneself in a new subject means finding oneself within the vastness of God and being drawn into a life which has now moved out of the context of “dying and becoming.”

^[4] LEO THE GREAT: *Sermon 3 for the Epiphany*, PL 54, 240-244, in *Liturgy of the Hours*, Feast of the Epiphany.

^[5] GREGORY THE GREAT; *Commentary on the Book of Job*, Book 13; *Liturgy of the Hours*, Friday, Week 3 of Lent.