



EUROPE/AUSTRIA - Cistercian monks from the "Stift Heiligenkreuz" Abbey on their way to Sri Lanka to found new abbey

Vienna (Agenzia Fides) - On March 14, four Cistercian monks will leave the Abbey "Stift Heiligenkreuz" near Vienna (Austria) for Sri Lanka. In 2001, three young candidates for the monastic life from the Archdiocese of Colombo had arrived in Austria with the community, to prepare for the Cistercian life along with the Austrian community. At the request of their Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith, they will now return to their country of origin to found a Cistercian abbey and spread this form of life in the Asian country. Following the request of the Archbishop of Colombo, the Abbot of Heiligenkreuz, Fr. Gregor Henckel Donnersmarck, will send the Austrian Fr. Kosmas Thielmann along with the three young monks, to support the start up phase of "Project Sri Lanka." The idea of founding a monastery in the vicinity of Colombo came about many years ago. After a series of difficulties that had to be overcome, at the last Chapter of the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz, celebrated in mid-February, it was decided that monks would be sent. Initially, the four monks will live in a formation center in Negombo, 30 km from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

"We ask for prayers for the Archbishop of Colombo and for this foundation project. We will do everything possible to spread the monks' life in Sri Lanka," said Fr. Gregor Henckel Donnersmarck. "In Asia, there is a great opening to Christ and our monasteries prove it. In Sri Lanka, there is a long tradition of Buddhist monks, but until now Christian monasticism was not known. The new Abbey will initially be founded as a diocesan institute with a contemplative character, with the hope of a future integration into the Cistercian Order."

On the occasion of his pilgrimage to Mariazell (Austria), on September 9, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI visited the "Stift Heiligenkreuz" Abbey, reminding the monks who follow the Benedictine Rule: "Your first service to the world must be the prayer and the Eucharist." (MS) (Agenzia Fides 11/03/2010)