Dear Friends,

The month of May this year saw three of our members - Brother Arnold and Brother Reginald from the European Province and Sister Cecilia from the Province of the Americas - reach the age of 90. Friends congregated to celebrate these occasions: cakes were baked, candles were lit and blown out; landmarks recognised, thanks-givings offered, memories shared: 'Congratulations - you're looking good'. 'Do you remember...?' 'How do you keep so young?!' In the European Province we now have ten brothers of eighty and above - we're all growing older.

Most of my contemporaries outside the Society are presently in the business of planning the winding down from their jobs and measuring up curtains for their retirement cottages - just about two more years to go. I envy them a bit; how good it would be to be able to look forward to a life of rest and recreation, to reading all those novels, to living one long holiday visiting friends and far off places, but brothers and sisters seem to miss out on the retirement business; we're in it for life; we just carry on doing what we've been doing over the years but doing it more slowly; hopefully gently ripening. Anyway - in the UK at least - we are now all being told that we can't retire at 65 and that in the future we'll all have to work until the biblical three-score years and ten.

I'm beginning to recognise that growing old[er] is an art form and I'm grateful for the example of my brothers and sisters in SSF who are a little ahead of me in practice - to Vincent for his attention to the rhodos and magnolias and his always being the first one there every morning in chapel, to Anselm for keeping his mind alert and for pointing out which books I should read, to Donald for his amazing perseverance in making the daily journey from Crofton Road to Balaam Street - and to many others. It's wonderful what some of our senior brothers get up to - I hope that I can manage to cook for the community and clean the house and turn out a good sermon when/if I reach my tenth decade. Praise God for stickability over the years, for faithfulness in prayer and community life, for the willingness to accept and laugh at the limitations. Praise God for the wisdom age can bring, and for the Church Commissioners' pensions (sadly, now diminishing) on which we rely. And praise God, too, for fresh blood coming into the Society, for an increase in vocations, for new vision and energy; one day we'll be counting on those now joining to lead us and inspire us - and one day they too will grow old and mature, like good wine.

Peace and all good!