

February 2, 2015 ~ The Presentation of the Lord

To the Members of the United State Association of Consecrated Virgins,

Pope Francis, in celebrating this Year of Consecrated Life, really desires that we be strengthened to live in the world but not of the world:

[We need] a wisdom that should be demonstrated by flexible consistency, the ability of consecrated people to respond in accord with the Gospel, to act and to choose in accord with the Gospel, without losing ourselves among the different spheres of life, language or relationships, maintaining an awareness of responsibility, of the networks that bind us together, of the finitude of our limits, of the infinite number of ways in which life is expressed (*Rejoice*, #12).

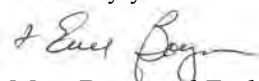
The Presentation of the Lord is symbolic of our own lives. Jesus, who is God taking on our flesh, had already entered the world, but now was being presented for an even deeper “entering.” He was being enfleshed in a religious tradition, Judaism. His entire life and ministry was delving ever deeper into our world, into our human condition and existence. However, in all this he always remained not of the world. That is our calling as Christians and certainly as consecrated persons.

Pope Francis would have us ask ourselves some questions to see how well we are living in the world but not of it:

- Where is joy born in my heart?
- Do I desire something great, or has my heart been lulled to sleep by things?
- Has my heart preserved the restlessness of seeking?
- Or is my heart suffocated by things that end up hardening it?
- Do I believe God is waiting for me or are these only words to me?
- How can I break free from the culture of the temporary?
- Am I consistent and authentic?
- Am I anxious to proclaim God, to make him known?
- Have I made myself comfortable in my Christian life, in my consecrated life?
- Am I moved by the needs of others?
- Do I speak badly of others?
- Like Mary, do I know how to wait for God’s tomorrow or do I want it today?
- Is my spiritual effectiveness healthy and is my apostolate fruitful?
- Does zeal consume us?

I hope these questions of the Holy Father help make this year a more blessed one for all of you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing

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Our virginal vocation is rooted in our Queen and Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Nazareth, who was called to be the virginal Mother of the Son of the Eternal Father, the Redeemer promised to Adam and Eve. The Blessed Virgin Mary was chosen for the Eternal Father's plan of Salvation for us, and she was prepared from the time of conception in her mother's womb to be the virgin who would be called in the plenitude of the time: "The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for 'when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:4-6 quoted in *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul II on the Blessed Virgin Mary).

Our virginal vocation is an eternal vocation, and, like the Virgin Mary, we too are called from our mother's wombs to live this vocation in the integral reality of our being as women. The sign that we have received the virginal vocation from our Eternal Father is that the physical, spiritual and divine dimensions of our being have been kept integrated and intact so that we might receive consecration in the Church of our Divine Lord. Such an understanding of integral virginity is growing to be more and more counter-cultural; even some Catholics misunderstand the meaning of our virginal vocation to be a vocation that can be adapted to time and culture. But the truth is that the meaning of our vocation has already been defined from eternity and does not change with the passing of time.

Our blessed Mother was born into a functional Jewish family. The Eternal Father had prepared Abraham to be the Patriarch of His chosen people, those He wanted to raise as His eternal family. Early in her life, Mary of Nazareth was presented in the temple: "Congratulate me, all ye that love the Lord, because when I was a little one I pleased the Most High." (from the Common Office of our Lady).

According to Exodus 13:2 and 13:12, all Hebrew first-born male children had to be presented in the Temple. With such a law in place, it is possible that Joachim and Anna may have also wanted to present in the Temple their child, who was begotten after their fervent prayers. "Though it is related nowhere in the sacred books, ancient tradition tells us of the presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple when she had been weaned from her mother at the age of three. This presentation is quite diverse from that of our Lord in his fortieth day – for Blessed Mary was given over to the Temple for her rearing and education. As Joachim and Ann returned to Nazareth, she remained in Jerusalem until her fourteenth or fifteenth year. It was during these years of dedicated service in the Temple that our Lady made her vow of virginity, which God then protected through the ministry of St. Joseph" (cfr. Father

Ryan Erlenbush, Sermons, The New Theological Movement, November 20, 2014).

As He did with our Blessed Mother, the Eternal Father continues through the ages to provide a family to care for the woman He has called to be the light of His virginal reality in the midst of the culture of this world.



The virtue of prudence is a product of the grace received in baptism and confirmation; as well, it is an essential virtue for any Christian called by the Eternal Father to live a virginal vocation. In the first of the three prerequisites for a candidate for consecrated virginity, listed in the Praenotanda to the Rite of Consecration, the Church demands a manifestation of the moral virtue of prudence in a woman who is requesting virginal consecration: "that they have never married or lived in public or open violation of chastity (*ut numquam nuptias celebraverint neque publice seu manifeste in statu castitate contrario vixerint*)."

Chastity is more than physical virginity because chastity reveals the ascetic disposition of our soul that is necessary to keep intact the baptismal call. The soul of a woman called to live in perpetual virginity has been prepared

Something Ancient, Something New, Continued on page 10

CURRENT COUNCIL MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Judith M. Stegman, President,
2013 – 2015; Diocese of Lansing.

Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large,
2013 – 2015 (appointed **Vice-President**
thru 2015); Archdiocese of Miami.

Margaret Flipp, Treasurer, 2014-2016,
Archdiocese of San Francisco.

Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large,
2014-2016 (appointed **Secretary**
through 2015) Diocese of Steubenville.

Marie Beccaloni, Member-at-large,
2015-2017, Archdiocese of Chicago.

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY



Upcoming events:

2015 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins

August 12—August 16, 2015



Mundelein Retreat & Conference Center

Archdiocese of Chicago

See Article on Page 7

2015 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity

August 4-August 7, 2015

St. Francis Retreat Center

DeWitt, Michigan

Diocese of Lansing

See Article on Page 8



Council News

Announcements:

Upcoming Issues of *The Lamp*:



May 31, 2015: Trinity Sunday

September 8, 2015: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 12, 2015: Our Lady of Guadalupe

February 2, 2016: Feast of the Presentation and
World Day of Consecrated Life

Consecrated Virgins “Family” Scrapbook—Vickie Hamilton

The first version of the USACV family album is complete and should be available for viewing at the 2015 convocation in August. Many thanks to all who allowed me to use materials from the archive or who sent new materials. I am in the process of scanning and printing convocation pictures going back several years for an additional volume of the family album. If you are new to the association and would like me to add materials from your consecration (programs, invitations, photos, holy cards, etc) to the album, please feel free to mail them to my address on the roster. Please encourage the newly consecrated to contribute. I view this as an ever-growing album and I have plenty of unused pages to fill!

As a reminder, the materials are only being used in the album, at this time, not on the website. In addition, the albums will only be available at official gatherings. Thanks for all your patience while I completed the first pass.

Rome 2016 for the Close of the Year of Consecrated Life

See special announcement on page 9.

Requiescat in pace, sponsa Christi.

The Most Reverend Larry Silva, Bishop of Honolulu, writes to inform us that consecrated virgin Linda Cacpal died on Christmas night, 2014. May she rest in peace in the arms of her Divine Spouse.

USACV Website Update: Elizabeth Lam reminds us that we are always happy to consider ideas to improve the USACV website. If anyone wants to lend a helping hand to keeping the site current, please let us know. We are always in need of this assistance.



From the President's journal . . .

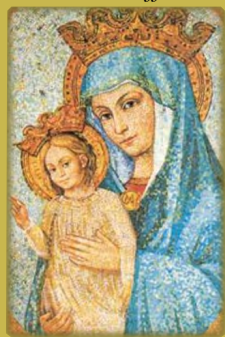
As the Church focuses our attention on the Year of Consecrated Life, let us recall words of Pope Saint John Paul II in his 1996 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "In effect, the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it 'manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling' and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse" (VC 3). Consecrated virgins desire nothing more than union with Christ, and it is with great joy that we introduce others to the Divine Spouse, whom we love so dearly. We hope that among the variety of articles in this issue of *The Lamp*, each of us will find encouragement and assistance in our journey towards this precious union.

Consecrated virgins have expressed a keen interest in focusing our attention in 2015 on the Year of Consecrated Life. The summer 2015 convocation for consecrated virgins draws its theme from the third objective for the year, as announced by Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The first objective for the year focuses on what has come before: a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of the conciliar decree *Perfectae caritas*; the second objective points to a hopeful embracing of the future; the third objective focuses on "living the present passionately" and "bearing witness to the beauty of the Sequela Christi" as we live our lives. Hence our convocation theme: "The Beauty of Following Christ: Celebrating the Distinct Vocation of Consecrated Virginity During the Year of Consecrated Life."

A year from now, consecrated virgins are invited to attend a symposium in Rome for the *Ordo Virginum*, and to join Pope Francis and those living other forms of consecrated life for closing celebrations for the Year of Consecrated Life. Details about possible Rome housing can be found in this issue of *The Lamp* (page 9).

I close with a few words from the Message of Saint John Paul II for the first World Day of Consecrated Life, February 2, 1997: "The Virgin Mother who carries Jesus to the temple so that he can be offered to the Father expresses very well the figure of the Church who continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with the one oblation of Christ, cause and model of all consecration in the Church." Mother Mary, pray for us!

May our Divine Spouse be praised!
- Judith Stegman



Life Corner: Florence Sundberg



This year's March for Life in Washington is said to have had the largest number of participants ever and the majority were young students who came to Washington from all over the country to witness to the sacredness of each and every human life. One of the marchers, Julia Johnson, a high school senior, told the gathering crowd: "We are living in a modern-day holocaust...that takes the lives of 3,000 babies each day...it is our job to protect our brothers and sisters in the womb...to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. We march to stop an injustice that has taken the lives of a third of our generation. This pro-life movement was not born out of hatred but...out of love." Nancy Cruzan of "Silent No More" spoke of a heart wrenching experience she had after she had an abortion: "I left the clinic with no body to bury, no grave, no funeral..." She spoke of how she had to bear all this alone: "...because I was too ashamed to tell anyone what I had done." Nancy found strength, comfort and hope when she discovered women who had had similar life altering experiences in the post-abortion group "Silent No More". Let us pray and work to help women in trouble to know that there are alternatives to abortion. Death is on the march throughout the world, it seems. There are modern days Herods who want to destroy life. Let us heed the words of the young student who said: "It is our job to protect our brothers and sisters ... to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." Amen.



"Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." - J.R.R. Tolkien

Consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries are invited to offer a reflection on their years of living as a consecrated virgin. We're pleased to offer one story in this issue of "The Lamp," and will offer more in future issues.

10 Years Consecrated

DIANE CHRISTINE FARR, Diocese of Rochester, consecrated February 20, 2005

On February 20, 2005, I received the extraordinary grace of the consecration to a life of virginity. The gospel of the day was the Transfiguration. As a bride of Christ I know that I have been called to keep my focus on the radiant face of my Bridegroom throughout the joys and sorrows of this life. My heart was joyful upon receiving my First Communion. In time I would come to treasure each Holy Communion as the nuptial gift of our Lord as He gives Himself entirely to His bride. I began to understand that Jesus wanted complete possession of my heart at the time of my confirmation. At this time I began to grow in my love for our blessed Mother. I began to appreciate the richness of meaning found in the titles given to our Lady in her litany. The Holy Spirit enabled me to see that Mary's virginity was a significant part of her unique beauty. Mary's virginal being was the holy shrine wherein the mystery of the Incarnation was made manifest. Likewise our own virginity, which has been consecrated, becomes the golden couch upon which our beloved Jesus reposes. I made a private promise of perpetual virginity when I was fifteen, and I always knew our Lady was guiding me. Many years later when I read the rite of consecration I recognized the spirituality I had already embraced.

As some of you know I am legally blind. My other disabled friends can attest to the fact that the challenges and difficulties confronting us go far beyond what most people can imagine. Unfortunately there are still those who do not recognize the fact that disabled people can also be called to the consecrated life. I am forever grateful for the privilege of being chosen to be a bride of Christ. I have been blessed with the ability to compose music celebrating the beauty of our holy vocation. I have also been asked to be a frequent contributor to *The Lamp* with articles delving into the spirituality of consecrated virginity. My father types all of my hand written work into the computer.

The last ten years have been hard. My mother's health continued to decline leaving her bedridden for the last year and a half of her life. I will always treasure the time I spent taking care of my mother. Her devout life and simple wisdom influenced my personal development. Jesus came for her on January 23, 2011. In the fall of 2009, I had to give my sixteen year old cat Missy back to God and welcome a new kitten into my life. Lily has proven to be a joy and a wonderful companion. In late 2011, I became a volunteer at an assisted living center. I play old time radio comedies from the 1940s and perform programs of music and singing.

I have come to see how much our Lord desires our sanctification as His brides. I try to be attentive to His gentle corrections when I am tempted to think or say the wrong thing. Every aspect of our lives must be in perfect harmony with the Heart of our divine Spouse. In this way we will be more effective in reaching out to others, including our sisters in Christ. I am reminded of an antiphon from week two liturgy of the hours, "Yours is more than mortal beauty, every word you speak is full of grace." The unspeakable beauty of our union with our heavenly Bridegroom goes way beyond what the world can comprehend. The simplicity of our humble presence in the Church must give witness to our holy joy. Every time I write an essay on consecrated virginity, it is both a learning and a sharing experience for me. I am grateful for the positive feedback and encouragement I have received from so many of my sisters in Christ.

The sufferings and problems of this life can seem overwhelming. Looking back over the years I can see that God has strengthened me, and He has been with me through it all. Praised be the Holy Trinity, ever at work in our lives.



"Yours is more than mortal beauty, every word you speak is full of grace."

Newly Consecrated

ANNAMAE MURYASZ reflection on the day of her consecration, January 21, 2015:

Words seem so inadequate to describe the joy and jubilation that are still resounding in my heart and soul from my consecration on Wednesday, January 21, 2015 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Camden, NJ. The day was perfect in all ways planned and in all ways not planned as well. God has a mysterious way of making right what He wants for His beloved. The homily my Bishop gave was personal to me but also so practical in explaining to the people what this vocation means. He said that I needed to keep the oil in my lamp, A-1 oil so that I am always ready to do what it is that my Beloved asks of me. Although I know there were people in the Cathedral and eleven priests on the altar



with the Bishop as well as two deacons, I felt as if I was the only one present with the Lord as I lay prostrate before the altar. The Lord had truly taken hold of my heart and being and I know I am His and His alone.

At the end of last week I had requested and received permission to offer lilies and roses to the Blessed Mother after the final prayer. As I walked over to get the flowers and approach the altar of Mary I could see the Master of Ceremonies speaking with the Bishop. The next thing I knew the Bishop had begun to sing the Salve Regina and all the priests had joined in and the Cathedral bells had begun to ring as well. Together the singing and the bells made one of the most joyous and jubilant sounds I have ever heard. My heart was so full of the love of God and the joy of being His spouse forever as I walked down the center aisle to the ringing of the bells and final hymn.

As we walked over to the luncheon in the chancery building, snow had begun to fall: soft, small flakes that continued to grow and increase in size and number. When I finally left for home a few hours later my Spouse had provided me a winter wonderland to drive home in. The roads were fine but everything else was pure white with the new fallen snow. I prayed all the way home (two hours) and thanked the Lord for the many blessings of the day and the beauty of the ride home. Deo Gratias!

Consecration Announcements:

UNITED STATES:

January 3, 2015, **Karina Reyes**, Archdiocese of Chicago, at the hands of The Most Reverend John R. Manz. (See photos below.)



January 21, 2015, **AnnaMae Muryasz**, Diocese of Camden, at the hands of The Most Reverend Dennis J. Sullivan. (See reflection above)



Upcoming:

June 20, 2015, **Minette Sternke**, at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Diocese of Peoria, IL

FRANCE:

October 25, 2014, **Marie-Laure Gordien**, Diocese of Meaux, at the hands of The Most Reverend Jean-Yves Nahmias.

BELGIUM:

February 14, 2015, **Kristel Luijters**, Archdiocese of Malines-Bruxelles, at the hands of The Most Reverend André-Joseph Léonard.

***Be wise: make ready your lamps. Behold,
the Bridegroom comes; Go out to meet him.***

2015 Convocation Announcement

Please join the United States consecrated virgins for our annual convocation to be held **August 12th – 16th** at the St. Mary of the Lake Conference Center in Mundelein, Illinois. In response to the suggestions from many virgins, this year we will explore the theme of *The Beauty of Following Christ: Celebrating the Distinct Vocation of Consecrated Virginity During the Year of Consecrated Life*. All consecrated virgins, including those from other countries, are warmly invited to attend. Those virgins who have attended an Information Conference and been accepted by their Bishops as candidates for the consecration are also invited to attend.

Our days together will include formal presentations by Bishop Boyea and consecrated virgins as we explore our selected theme. In addition to these talks, we will have panel discussions to allow those attending to share their personal experiences with other consecrated virgins. At the heart of our days together are specific times set aside for prayer, including Lauds, Holy Mass, Vespers, and Compline. In addition, the schedule includes time for Eucharistic Adoration and Confession. To round out the day, our evenings will serve as a time of fellowship as we engage in enjoyable recreational activities.

The 2015 convocation will also include a visit to Marytown – the National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe. The Shrine is a ministry run by the Conventual Franciscans Friars of St. Bonaventure Province. At the center of Marytown is the Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, which has 24 hour Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

During the convocation, virgins will also enjoy the serenity of the St. Mary of the Lake campus. Removed from the business of everyday life, the campus covers a span of 930 acres. The grounds contain many walking paths through beautiful wooded areas and around the tranquil waters of the lake.

Once again, we encourage all consecrated virgins and candidates who have attended an Information Conference to join us for this wonderful time of reflection, prayer, and fellowship at the 2015 convocation. We hope to see you all in August!



2015 Information Conference Announcement

From Mary Kay Lacke and Theresa Marshall

The 2015 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World, sponsored by the USACV, will be held at Bethany House in DeWitt, Michigan, from August 4 to August 7. Please encourage women interested in the vocation to attend this conference. Please note the full brochure regarding the conference will be available on the USACV website, a little later in the spring. We are still working out a few details with the staff at St. Francis Conference and Retreat Center on the cost of the Conference. Thanks for your help in spreading the word!



Informal Gatherings of Virgins

St. Louis consecrated virgins Cathy Maley, Paula Willenbrink, Theresa Prosser, a dedicated inquirer, and consecrated virgin Theresa Howard from the neighboring diocese of Springfield, Illinois.



Cherie Cashen, Judith Stegman, Magalis Aguilera meet in Florida.



“Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love... Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.”

Pope Francis, Message for the Year of Consecrated Life

Rome 2016 Close of the Year of Consecrated Life

The Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) has announced the following schedule of events:

ROME, JANUARY 27 -31, 2016: INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: *FOLLOWING THE GOSPEL: A PERMANENT FORM OF LIFE IN THE CHURCH, MOVING TOWARD THE FUTURE, PROCESSES ALREADY IN PLACE.*

- Jan. 27 to Jan. 31, 2016 for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.
- Jan. 28 to Jan. 31 for Monastic Life.
- Jan. 29 to Jan. 31 for Secular Institutes.
- Jan. 29 to Jan. 31 for *Ordo Virginum*.

EVENTS TO BE CELEBRATED IN COMMON:

- Jan. 30, 2016, 8:00 pm, Prayer Vigil in St. Peter's Basilica "Prophecy, Holiness and Martyrdom in the Human City."
- February 1, 2016: Audience with the Holy Father.
- February 2, 2016: Closing Eucharist of the Year of Consecrated Life.



**THE FOLLOWING IS NOT PART OF CICLSAL, RATHER ACCOMMODATIONS OPTIONS THROUGH THE USACV*
OPPORTUNITY FOR HOUSING IN ROME WITH CONSECRATED VIRGINS FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD:

- An international group of consecrated virgins has reserved a block of rooms at a religious house very close to St. Peter's Basilica, for six nights, from *Thursday, January 28 to Wednesday, February 3, 2016*. Single and double rooms are available. The number of rooms is limited, and priority will be given to those who sign up first.
- For details about location and cost of the housing, and in order to reserve a single or double room, please contact **Nicole Bettini**, at nbettini78@gmail.com.

NOTES ABOUT THIS HOUSING/GATHERING OPPORTUNITY IN ROME:

- Housing includes breakfast each day. We hope to also arrange a fixed-price option for one meal (lunch or dinner) at a restaurant near the residence.
- This housing/gathering opportunity for consecrated virgins is *not* a full pilgrimage to Rome. Virgins are responsible for arranging their own travel to and from Rome.
- As the year progresses and we learn more details from CICLSAL, we hope to also arrange visits to churches of interest to consecrated virgins (perhaps Saint Agnes in Agone and Saint Agatha dei Goti or Saint Mary Major); one festive meal together; and daily morning prayer by language group in the chapel of the residence.
- Updates will be posted in *Monday Morning Mail* and *The Lamp* during 2015. Please be sure to contact Nicole if you have an interest in housing.

Continued:

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by the moral virtue of chastity, that hard discipline of submission of the senses of the flesh to the senses of the soul. This means that a woman who has been touched in her soul with the gift of virginity during her passage through this world in shadows, is also a ray of light from heaven revealing the eternal world to come.

The historical circumstances in which we live on this mortal earth are no different than the time and space in which our sisters of the ancient Church lived their lives of virginal consecration. We are living in a pagan culture, and it is not a secret that the cult of this pagan culture is aggression and an unhealthy sexual intimacy. Human sexuality is a gift created by God as a great image of His own love revealed in a couple that he has called to live in the union of His law of love, transformed by the gift of His Spirit: "now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6).



It is also no secret that the pagan view of sexuality that is rampant in today's culture is taking its toll. A report of the American Psychological Association presents evidence that our society is developing "negative consequences for girls when they are sexualized or exposed to sexualized images: body dissatisfaction, depression and lower self esteem; research today suggests that these effects are not as pronounced for African

Americans girls." There are negative consequences in "girls' sexual development when they are exposed to models of passivity, and studies indicate that the media may influence a girl's perception of her own virginity or first sexual experience." There are also negative consequences in relationships: "girls' relationships with boys and men are affected in that exposure to sexualizing and objectifying media has been shown to relate to girls' and boys' views on dating, boys' sexual harassment of girls, and attitudes toward sexual violence" (quotes taken from the Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, available online at <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/program/girls/report-full.pdf>).

As we contemplate the difficult social structures in which our girls and adolescents are growing up, we must keep in mind that preparation to live our virginal vocation means growing up to live the very life that was lived by our Blessed Virgin



Mother. Our hope must be to light our lamps in the fire of the virginal lamp of Mary of Nazareth as she grew up in the Temple and was prepared for her YES or FIAT to the Eternal Father. We must join our prayers to those of our Mother and Queen, asking the Eternal Father to show us the meaning of our vocation in His eternal will upon us. Our virginal vocation is a sign of His presence to married couples raising children in families. At the same time, for girls and adolescents who are not well guided, we are called in the silence of our beings as virgins for the Eternal Spouse to show that human sexuality is a gift that is fully understood only in the context of the Eternal Father's plan of love for each one of us, to be married or to be consecrated to His Beloved Son.

Saint Ambrose wrote about Saint Agnes in his Treatise on Virginity that virginity is praiseworthy not because it is found in martyrs but because it makes martyrs.



Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life!

Renu Rita Silvano,
coordinator for the
Order of Virgins in

Mumbai, India, wrote with thanks to us for always sending the *Lamp*. She included the following report and photo on an historic gathering of virgins:

To celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life, the Order of Consecrated Virgins held their first National Conference, 8-11 January 2015, at the Anubhav Retreat Centre, Mumbai. Nine virgins consecrated through the public liturgical Rite of the Church by their archbishops in Patna, Delhi, Kolkata, Goa and Mumbai attended, as well as five candidates for consecration. The conference was addressed, and Mass celebrated, by Bishops Dominic Savio Fernandes and Agnelo Gracias of Bombay. The event was coordinated by Dr. Renu Rita Silvano, of the Catholic Bible Institute. These virgins, "living in the world," went away refreshed and strengthened in their vocation through the fellowship, prayer and the teachings they received in these days.

Most have experienced that in their dioceses and parishes, their state of life was unknown to priests, men and women religious, and the laity, and that Canon 604 which explains this form of consecrated life needs to be made known more especially. It was decided to have the next annual meeting on an Asia/Pacific level in Mumbai in May 2016, and to invite the dozens of known consecrated virgins in Bangladesh, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and other countries.



Continued from back cover.

accept in faith and love what they cannot humanly know. The family returns to its own town of Nazareth, a village even more obscure than Bethlehem, where He whom heaven itself cannot hold (2 Chron 2:6) happily makes His home for the next 30 years. Faithfully obedient to his earthly parents, the Lord quietly goes about His Father's business as He patiently waits for His hour to come.

Along with humility, we learn obedience from our dear Lord in His Presentation in the Temple. As the author of the book of Hebrews states, "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said...'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God'" (Heb 10:5, 7). Our Lord's whole life is a lesson in obedience for us. He plainly tells us that He always does what is pleasing to His Father (Jn 8:29) and that it is His very food to do the Father's will and to accomplish His work (Jn 4:34). Humility and obedience are so tightly intertwined that they cannot be separated. True obedience in the fullest sense, in the manner in which Christ Himself practiced it consistently and uncompromisingly, is not possible without humility. And true humility leads to obedience. If it fails to do so, then it's a false humility that will lead us away from God and straight into the hands of Satan, the father of lies (Jn 8:44).

In the Entrance Antiphon at the beginning of the Mass for this splendid Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, we exult with joy as we pray: "Your merciful love, O God, we have received in the midst of your temple" (cf. Ps 48:10). We receive our Father's merciful love in the temple of the Catholic Church so many times during our lives, particularly in the holy Sacraments and through our blessed consecration to a life of virginity. Indeed, all of us consecrated virgins can declare with St. John the Evangelist, "And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). In profound gratitude, let us bend the knee and adore this King of Glory, our Beloved Spouse. Let us lift up the gates of our hearts that He may come in and make them His own. And let us pray for each other that we may always be Christ's humble, obedient brides and that through us His praise, like His name, shall reach the ends of the earth (Ps 48:11).

REFLECTION ON THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION ~ by Alice Claire Mansfield

Come, let us worship the Lord of creation; he enters his holy temple.

~Invitatory Antiphon for the Presentation of the Lord

On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the liturgy celebrates primarily the entrance of the Infant Jesus into the temple for the first time. Let us go back in time to that glorious day when suddenly there comes to the temple the Lord whom we seek (Mal 3:1). We don't notice anything out of the ordinary, just a typical Jewish mother and father coming to the temple 40 days after the birth of their firstborn to fulfill the Mosaic law. In keeping with their Jewish customs, their little one will be presented to the Lord and his mother will be purified. Nothing unusual, nothing special. This has happened before, and it will happen again. Such is life.

Yes, but – ! Here is no ordinary child! This small, weak, dependent, silent baby is called "Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6). Jesus, whose name is above all other names! (Phil 2:9) He is the King of Glory – the Lord, the mighty, the valiant! (Ps 24:8) This is the Son of God – and, as such, He is not subject to the prescriptions of the Jewish law as are the other firstborn of the Hebrews. But all is hidden right now, covered by the veil of the deep humility of this Divine Child.

From the moment of His birth in the obscure town of Bethlehem, amidst the squalor of animals whose crude trough serves as His makeshift bed, our Lord Jesus is teaching us His way of humility. Wrapped in swaddling clothes that limit his movements and curtail his activity, the Holy Babe gazes upon us with pleading eyes and invites us to imitate Him. "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart!" (Mt 11:29). He who by the oblation of His Body upon the Cross will show himself "the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of sacrifice" (Preface V of Easter), now allows His mother to offer Him to the Father.

The Incarnate Word, whose voice will one day go forth throughout all the earth and whose words will resound to the end of the world (Ps 19:4), remains silent as the righteous and devout Simeon takes Him into his arms, blesses God and utters the most stupendous prophecy. This Child will be the salvation of mankind and the light for all the nations (Lk 2:29), a sign of contradiction, destined for the fall and rise of many (Lk 2:34). Anna, who worships in the temple night and day with fasting and prayer (Lk 2:37), also gives thanks to God and prophesies of the Child to all who are awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem (Lk 2:38).

Mary and Joseph marvel at hearing these things about their Son (Lk. 2:33). They also teach us humility for only the humble are amazed. The proud are too full of themselves to be astonished by anything, not even by their own stupidity and foolishness, which squelch their capacity to be surprised by God. Our Holy Father is fond of telling us that our God is "a God of surprises" and often reminds us that we must be open to being surprised by God. He suggests that we ask ourselves the question "am I open to God's surprises?" While meeting with thousands of young people at the university of Santo Tomas in Manila this past month, Pope Francis encouraged the youth to let themselves be "surprised by God's love." Mary and Joseph's humility keeps the door of their hearts ajar to the wonders of God, not only here in the temple when they present Jesus to the Father but even before His birth as well forever after.

There is humility as well in the couple's acceptance of Simeon's chilling warning to Mary that a sword will pierce her own heart (Lk 2:35). Both she and Joseph must have been bewildered and afraid upon hearing these ominous words so far beyond their grasp, but with an unshakeable confidence born of humility, they

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