



United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

February 2008
Presentation of Our Lord

Volume 13, Issue 2

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS:

February 2, 2008

Dear sisters in Christ,

Happy feast day! The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is, in a special way, a festival day for you as consecrated persons in the Church. Celebrating the Presentation of the Lord, we contemplate the great mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, which we celebrated with so much solemnity during the Seasons of Christmas and Epiphany. When His Virgin Mother and Saint Joseph brought the Child Jesus to the Temple to consecrate Him to the Lord, they fulfilled what was required by the Law of Moses. The Presentation already signified that our Lord Jesus Christ, by His Redemptive Incarnation, fulfills all that God our Father had taught us and promised to us through the Law and the Prophets. He is the only Savior of the World.

At the Lord's Presentation, holy Simeon recognized Him as the Christ, the Messiah, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared Him to be the "glory" of the people of Israel and the "light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32). He also foretold the way by which the Messiah would be the "glory" of Israel by accomplishing perfectly the Father's will to save all men from sin and everlasting death, the way by which He would be the "light of revelation," bringing eternal salvation to all men of every nation, without boundary.

Holy Simeon foretold the saving Passion and Death of the Lord, and the participation of His Mother in His saving work. He declared to Mary that her Divine Son would be opposed by many in words signifying His Passion and Death, and that her own Immaculate Heart would be mystically pierced by her share in His Suffering and Dying.

The candles which we bless today and which we use throughout the year, both in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and in our devotions at home remind us of the incomparable gift of Christ, the Light of the Nations, who, consumed in His Passion and Death, brings light and salvation to all men. At the same time, the candle reminds us of our call to give ourselves completely to Christ, in order to be consumed, with Him, in selfless love, so that His light may shine in the hearts of all men. The Blessed Virgin Mary, under her title of Our Lady of Sorrows, is our model in the outpouring of our lives, with Christ, in sacrificial love of God and our neighbor.

I am certain that today's feast has called to mind the candle which you carried during the Rite by which you were consecrated to Christ as His virgins and brides. May you see in the candle the sign of most beautiful work of God's grace in your lives, the grace of giving yourselves "wholly to Christ, the Son of the ever-virgin Mary, and the heavenly Bridegroom of those who in His honor dedicate themselves to lasting virginity" (From the *Roman Pontifical*, Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World, "Prayer of Consecration").

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Virgin of Virgins, may Christ, your Bridegroom, fill your hearts with renewed joy and peace in your consecration as you celebrate His consecration at the Presentation.

Asking a continued remembrance in your prayers, I am
Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Raymond L. Burke

(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of Saint Louis
Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

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When we read the Gospels, we discover that Jesus grows in age, wisdom and grace before God and men (*Luke 2:52*). The human developmental process, created by the Eternal Father, was present in our Divine Lord and Redeemer, “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” and who predestined all the elect before time began “to become conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren.” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 1,2*)

By taking on a human nature, our Divine Lord Jesus Christ has enabled us to live in the fullness of the Eternal Father’s love. He has restored in us the original image in which we were created. You and I are living in this world as consecrated virgins, as “brides of Christ” – this is the image in which we were created. “He gives each of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ . . . a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church”. (*Homily, Rite of Consecration*) It is a joy and privilege to belong to Jesus Christ who has chosen us as His own.

How did the consecrated virgins of the ancient Church live this reality? They grew in the totality of their self- donation to Christ – through a human, spiritual developmental process to the fullness of love. In our vocabulary, it is the Mystical Way of Love, and many of the virgin-saints suffered martyrdom at a young age in expression of the fullness of their love, the fruit of their growth in age, wisdom, and grace. Sometimes we think of human affections, affective love, as the primary element of love, but these virgin-saints teach us that the essence of love is truly understood only as a manifestation of the grace coming from God’s own love.

Our growth in this Mystical Way of Love is through three stages that parallel our human development: first is the love of infancy – a love that develops as we receive and recognize the caregiver who is ready to meet each need that we present. It’s the love of a child for a parent. The second stage is love of the adolescent – a love that develops through a gesture of interchange between one person and another. It’s a love between friends who are in the same developmental stage as one another. The third stage is the love in adulthood – a love given without an expectation of reciprocity. It’s a love given freely, without an intention to receive back what is given. (*Cf. Babin, Pierre, O.M.I., Friendship and Pure Virtue, Education in the Faith for Adolescents and Adults, Marova Editions, Madrid Spain, 1972*)

In our vocation as brides of Christ, the culmination of this maturation process is in our total self-donation to our Divine Spouse, as the three human / spiritual developmental stages of our growth are directed to the virtue of purity. We mature in the virtue of purity, through the grace of God, and are able to approach His own love. Pierre Babin saw this third dimension of the virtue of purity in an eschatological sense, in the resurrected body of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, a dimension we will only fully share when our body is resurrected through the merits of Jesus Christ.

It’s an ongoing process for us to grow in age, wisdom, and grace through the three stages of our human love to approach God’s own love and to fulfill the command of our Divine Lord to “be perfect (in love) as the Eternal Father is perfect.” As brides of Christ, this command of perfection, this total self-donation of our purity, enables our love to mature for Christ as Spouse. At first we behave as children dependent upon our caregivers – we are passively abandoned to receiving their affection. The virgin in her early years is called to keep her eyes fixed on her Divine Spouse and to innocently expect to be transformed by Him. This stage continues through different levels of maturity as we clarify our conscience to grow in knowledge of His love for us.

Growing as adolescents we become conscious of the free donation of our love that we may choose to give solely to him. Through the virgin’s “propositum,” her resolution to give herself solely for Christ, the virgin abandons herself to His mercy and peacefully grows in recognizing Him as her stronghold. She lives in the reality of a reciprocal relationship, where her donation of self is validated internally and externally by her knowledge of His presence. She discovers how to live with Him as Spouse, how to express her love and to receive His love.

The third stage, the stage of maturity, comes many years after receiving her consecration, as the virgin has learned in the midst of her daily living in the world to give a complete donation of herself to her Spouse. In the totality of her being she expects the manifestation of Christ’s resurrected presence, she lives with the internal expectation of union with Him. This adult stage of growth in the virtue of purity is explained by Pierre Babin as being beyond a simply human sensorial reality. He named this stage “eschatological purity,” a stage of perfection, of human love relationships characterized by complete innocence and purity and lack of egoism. (*Cf. Op.cit , Virtue of Purity*) We love our Divine Spouse expecting nothing in return except the intimacy of His presence in our souls.

We see in this third stage of maturity the seventh mansion of Theresa of Avila as she expressed: “Perhaps when St. Paul says: ‘He who is joined to God becomes one spirit with Him,’ he is referring to this sovereign Marriage, which presupposes the entrance of His Majesty into the soul by union. And he also says: ‘Mihi vivere Christus est, mori lucrum,’ ‘For me to live is Christ; and to die is gain’ (*Phil 1: 21*) This, I think, the soul may say here, for it is here that the little butterfly to which we have referred dies, and with the greatest joy, because Christ is now its life”. (*Theresa of Avila, Interior Castle, Translated and Edited by E. Allison Press, Image Books, Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc, 1989, page 215*)

And so we see in our sister Theresa of Avila that maturity comes with the grace of learning to make a total donation of ourselves in love to our Divine Spouse, learning to live fully with His resurrected presence in our daily lives in the mystical way of love.

Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2007 – 2009; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, 2007 – 2009 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2009); Archdiocese of Miami

Louise Pare, Treasurer, 2008 – 2010; Diocese of Lansing

Twanna Bolling, Member-at-large, 2008-2010 ; Archdiocese of Chicago.

Aliceanne Sawyer, 2006-2008 (appointed **Secretary** thru 2008), Diocese of Trenton.

Consecration Announcements:

Britain:

Sara Leister, October 28, 2007, in North London

Margaret Slane, November 1, 2007, in Truro Catholic Church

Venezuela:

Marielisa Puigbo, February 2, 2008

Argentina:

Teresita Peltier, December 8, 2007, Archdiocese of Mendoza

Czech Republic:

Lenka Klosova, September 21, 2007, Diocese of Hradec Kralove

Klara Domska, October 6, 2007, Archdiocese of Prague

Jindra Hubkova, December 13, Archdiocese of Prague.

Upcoming events:

International Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins

Rome, May 14 to 20, 2008

See update articles.

National Convocations of the United States Consecrated Virgins

2008: no U.S. convocation (due to International Pilgrimage to Rome)

June 24 to 28, 2009 Saint Louis area

June 23 to June 27, 2010

National Information Conferences

All in the Chicago area

August 6 to 8, 2008

August 5 to 7, 2009

August 4 to 6, 2010

2008 National Information Conference Team

Theresa Marshall has agreed to serve as the team leader for the "2008 National Information Conference Team". Theresa is in the process now of forming her team and preparing announcements for the 2008 conference. These announcements should be available soon on our website.

You may contact Theresa for more information about the 2008 national information conference at

marshall@wash.k12.mi.us

Team Announcements:

Membership Team: **Shalina Stilley** announces that registration for members and friends of the USACV is now open for 2008. Registration forms will be mailed soon by email and U.S. mail, and we appreciate your support. Please return forms by March 1, 2008. Members who register will be sent a beautiful calendar with the anniversary dates of consecrated virgins in the United States. The calendar is being offered for personal use, and is compliments of the consecrated virgins from Trenton, New Jersey, and from the pastor and congregation of St. Thomas More Parish in Manalapan, New Jersey.

Rome 2008: Approximately 430 participants from 40 different countries will gather in May for the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins. Registrants will soon receive a detailed update letter from the International Planning Team. (*See page 6 for more updates.*)

Note from Isabel Bettwy: Final U.S. payments are due by March 12, 2008. Some have already paid in full and we are grateful to you. We were informed that there has been an increase in the airport taxes (something we have no control over) and you probably have been invoiced by 206 Tours if we are making your air reservations. The increase applies to those going to the Congress-Pilgrimage only as well as those participating in the Shrines of Italy pilgrimage. If you are going only to the Congress, payments, including the airport taxes, should be sent to USACV, P.O. Box 4505, Steubenville, OH 43952. If you are participating in both the Congress and the Shrines of Italy pilgrimage, that payment goes to 206 Tours, 333 Marcus Blvd, Hauppauge, NY 11787. However, if you need to make payments for the Congress Registration Fee and for the Hotel and Meals during the Congress, that payment should be sent to the Steubenville address. Sorry if this is confusing! E-mail Isabel at imabettwy@aol.com if you have any questions.

More details on costs will be included in the upcoming mailing. Registration for the International Congress-Pilgrimage is closed. However, you may register for the Shrines of Italy pilgrimage without a late fee until March 12.

See you in Rome! **Isabel**

Reflections

Editor's note: We invited brief stories from those recently consecrated, and are pleased to present them here on the Feast of Presentation, (designated World Day of Consecrated Life by our beloved John Paul II.). We hope to make this an annual feature of the newsletter.

Karen Hund, Diocese of Erie:

I was consecrated a virgin on the Feast of the Annunciation in March 2007. I was recently talking with my 8th grade religion class about my consecration, and I said to them, "Nothing has changed, yet everything has changed."

I am still the Director of Religious Education and Youth Ministry for the Cathedral. I live in the same house. I have the same crazy schedule. I am involved in the same ministries at the Cathedral. I have the same car. I have the same friends, with a few additions though. So, pretty much nothing has changed in my day-to-day realities.

Yet, everything has changed. I wake each morning realizing that I am a Bride of Christ each time I see my ring. My prayer with Christ has definitely taken on a deeper and fuller meaning. The sacraments of the Church I have come to see as such a grace in my life, and more central to each day. My work among our youth and families has not changed; yet I desire to be a more faithful witness to my Groom, Jesus. Even the every day choices I make somehow take on a different meaning. I tend to think through decisions, as how they will be received by others and what message those decisions send to people, especially my youth.

Being among youth most of my time, I realize how my vocation within the Church is a sign of contraction for them. We have talked about people who are those signs of contradiction – and signs of TRUTH- for them in religion classes. Our society sends our young Christians a clear message about sexuality, power, prestige, and possessions. Frankly, the messages often confuse them in relationship to their faith – and they want to be true followers of Christ. They need to ask their questions and our youth hunger for the TRUTH. They truly strive in their faith and want to see models of prayer, purity, modesty, simplicity, and humility. Models they can follow and respect. They challenge me the most to be faithful to my vocation. For them, I am most grateful.

Praised be Jesus Christ now and forever!!

Karen Webb, Diocese of Rochester

Congratulations to all fifteen of the other women who also received this great blessing from our Lord Jesus this last year! I was consecrated on November 18, after just over two years of spiritual preparation. I'd felt a call, though, for almost twenty years, to privately live a life of virginity for the Lord, not having heard of the vocation of consecrated virginity until late 1999. The Lord certainly was generous with grace and protection all those years, and the consecration day itself, and time following it, was a wonderful, peace-filled experience. The experience was made even better by the January 1 private-final-vow ceremony at an abbey of one of my two witnesses, a good friend, at which I was privileged to be one of *her* witnesses. She jokes that she is privately "consecrated" with a public veil (she wears a short plain scarf everywhere) while I'm publicly consecrated but wear my veil internally. We are both so very blessed and we pray for all the consecrated virgins, as well as those called to private vows.



Rosie Capalad – Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

I have always wanted to be consecrated to God alone. When the diocesan newspaper ran an article on consecrated virginity lived in the world, for the first consecrated virgin in the diocese, I said to myself that this was what I've been looking for. "This is it." But I was held up by my sense of unworthiness. Later after much thought, prayers, and inquiries of friends and my spiritual director, I discerned that indeed God was calling me to this special vocation.

The preliminary steps were done and my formation began. I encountered some detours because I experienced some discouragements and feelings of inadequacies along the way, and I wanted to give up. But the coordinator and my spiritual director guided and encouraged me to continue. The information from the web-site of consecrated virgins helped me so much to understand what I was going into.

I received the consecration at the hands of Archbishop Daniel N. DiNardo on Sept. 29, 2007, the Feast of the Archangels, at Notre Dame Church, Houston, Texas, my home parish. The celebration was well-organized and everything was wonderful. Family and friends realized the solemnity of the occasion and through the liturgy, especially the homily of the Archbishop, many understood the meaning of this unique vocation.

However, I did not remember anything, because I was too full of joy and excitement. One week after, I still experienced the happiness I felt on that day; it was a different kind of happiness, a heavenly one. It was apparent to everyone close to me that I radiated peace, joy, and tranquility. I was still on my "honeymoon stage" with the Lord. I felt Him embracing me with His love and affirming me, "I am His Beloved."

I could not contain myself every time I recalled the Rite of Consecration and the Archbishop's homily. Now I am learning that trying to live as a consecrated virgin living in the world is not easy. But for me, it is a wonderful life, a life lived for the Lord where our relationship brings me constantly in intimate conversation with Him; where He teaches, chides, reminds, and guides me. I find the strength to be true and faithful to my vocation through the daily Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, penance, private devotions and as always, I listen and obey.

Consecrated Virginity As Reflected In The Divine Office

by Diane Christine Farr

In our vocation as consecrated virgins we have the joy of praying the Liturgy of the Hours. It is striking how many references to consecrated virginity can be found within its antiphons and prayers. We would do well to take the time to ponder their meaning for our lives.

On Saturday evening within the octave of Easter we pray, "You alone are the Bridegroom of the Church, born from your wounded side, make us reveal to the world the love of Bridegroom and Bride." On the following Tuesday evening we pray, "Lord Jesus, from your wounded side flowed blood and water, make the Church your spotless Bride."

The consecrated virgin, through her unmediated spousal union with Christ is uniquely called to reveal this special love between Bridegroom and bride to the world. This can only be achieved through her perfect fidelity to Divine Grace and her openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The virgin's intimate union with Jesus is a reminder to the whole Church that God is our origin and our final destination. Fashioned from the heart of Christ, His bride has been brought forth in infinite love and great suffering. Her life is to be an expression of his own holiness.

On Monday evening week II of the Psalter the whole tome of Psalm 45 is the marriage of the heavenly King. The first antiphon reads, "Yours is more than mortal beauty; every word you speak is full of grace." The consecrated virgin finds in her beloved Lord Jesus a beauty and splendor that far surpasses any human attraction. The strength and love from his infinite being will carry her through the circumstances of this present life.

On Thursday evening week II of the Psalter we see a specific reference to virgins in the prayers of intercession. We read; "Take

care of your handmaidens vowed to virginity that they may follow you, the divine Lamb, wherever you go." The consecrated virgin strives to follow the divine Lamb in every virtue that she may please him in all things. She desires to be a consolation to him in His passion.

St Augustine tells us that the consecrated virgin follows the Lamb where not all may follow; that is to say in the way of virginity. Within the Liturgy of the Hours the Common of Virgins offers a wealth of food for meditation. The first antiphon of morning prayer expresses our whole attitude at prayer, saying, "With my whole being I worship Christ, I long for him and desire to be with him forever."

The happiness of each of us is directly linked to our fulfilling the purpose for which we have been created. The second antiphon of morning prayer is a profoundly beautiful insight into the consecrated virgin's vocation. "O virgins, praise the Lord with all your heart. He sowed the seeds of your virtue; he crowned the fruits of your life with his gifts." We find joy in being called to virginity because in the depths of our hearts we have heard the voice of the Heavenly Spouse beckoning us. We have recognized the hand of the Divine Gardener who has planted and cultivated this choice flower only for himself. We will see that it is He who brings about the fruitfulness of our lives, if the generosity of our hearts reflects that of our Devine Spouse."

The first antiphon in evening prayer in the Common of Virgins expresses our steadfast love and enthusiasm. "I have kept myself for you alone, and now with lamp alight I run to meet my Spouse."

It should be noted that anyone wishing to dedicate their chastity to God should be highly commended. However in order for consecrated virginity to be what it is, true virginity must be present. We who have been called to consecrated virginity know that it is something we have experienced and preserved on every level of our being. It has both a physical and spiritual dimen-

sion and we find joy in its perpetual nature. This is why we can identify with the responsory for evening prayer in the common of virgins. "The virgins are led into the presence of the King amid gladness and joy."

We also pray with fervor in the prayers of intercession, "Christ, the holy virgins went out to meet you with their lamps alight, keep the fidelity of your consecrated handmaids burning brightly."

In the intercessions of Monday evening after Epiphany we read, "In the womb of the Virgin Mary, you brought about a mystical union of divinity and humanity, bless the virgins consecrated to you their heavenly Spouse." Here we see how important was the gift of virginity in our Lady and its direct link to the mystery of the Incarnation. We also see how the consecrated virgin is drawn beyond this world into a marriage covenant with our Savior who because of the Incarnation is both true God and true man.

We read in the intercessions of evening prayer for All Saints day; "You gave holy virgins the gift of imitating the virginity of Christ, may those consecrated to virginity be steadfast witnesses to the coming of your Kingdom."

The consecrated virgin reminds the whole Church of the necessity of a deep interior life and the primacy of our union with God in his divine will. We must consider very carefully what it means for us to be brides of Christ and images of the resurrected life of heaven. Let us ask our beloved Jesus, through the intercession of all holy virgins who have gone before us to help us enter more deeply into this mystery of virginal love. May our Beloved be the foundation and the very life of our being.

We will close this reflection with the responsory prayer in the office of readings for the feast of St. Lucy: "She is the virgin who prepared a joyful home for God in her heart and therefore the Lord of heaven and earth has loved her."

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*Members of the Council would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank and bless Judith on her birthday—
February 29th!*

As other Virgins of the Church, past and present, she does not hold a systematic degree in Theology, but she lives her life of Consecrated Virginity fully in Spousal Union with Our Lord Jesus Christ, received on the day of her Virginal Consecration. Our Eternal Father was preparing her from birth, by bringing her to a holy Catholic family. Her parents, and all of her extended family, including an uncle who was a Jesuit Priest, now deceased, were and are her role models of love and fidelity to our Holy Catholic Church.

We are proud of her and we celebrate joining her with our prayers on her birthday feast. We are full of joy to have the opportunity to walk with her, doing our Divine Spouse' will, in this great moment of our Virginal Vocation in our Nation and in the all the World.



*"Happy Birthday to you, Judith,
happy birthday to you!"*

Judith's "4th" birthday at age 16.

President's Journal

Such a joy-filled greeting from Archbishop Burke on this Feast of the Presentation, the feast of our Lord designated by Servant of God Pope John Paul as World Day of Consecrated Life. In dioceses throughout the world, Consecrated Life was celebrated in its various flowerings as members of monastic, contemplative, apostolic and secular institutes, as well as diocesan hermits and consecrated virgins living in the world, were invited to gather with their Bishops in thankful prayer.

In my Diocese of Lansing, Bishop Carl Mengeling reminded a candle-filled Church of our call to be lights in the midst of the world. He focused on that word "be" as our first priority – we must remain with Jesus in prayer as our first priority, as that which allows us to shine forth with the light of Christ. Following Mass, consecrated persons were invited to a luncheon and enjoyed conversations with people we hardly knew from various forms and institutes of Consecrated Life. How easy it was to kindle friendships among us, based upon the love of Christ that we shared.

As you know, I am in frequent contact these days with our sisters in consecration around the world – with virgins in France, Spain, Germany, Mexico, Italy, Argentina, Venezuela, India and others – we expect 40 countries to be represented at our Rome International Congress-Pilgrimage. It's not surprising to find that we share the same love for our Divine Bridegroom, the same desire to belong to Him alone, and many of the same questions and concerns among us. I heard from some of these new worldwide friends and from a number of you describing similar celebrations of World Day of Consecrated Life in your own dioceses.

We deepen in an understanding of consecrated virginity lived in the world by deepening in an understanding of other forms of Consecrated Life in the Church, by seeing the distinct beauty of each flowering. Ann Stitt, consecrated virgin from Boston, recently drew up a chart comparing religious life to the life of consecrated virginity lived in the world. Barbara Swieczak, consecrated virgin of LaCrosse, put Ann's chart on paper. We'll post it on our USACV website soon and I think you'll find it helpful and interesting.

In a special way, I ask each of you to keep in prayer the upcoming Rome International Congress-Pilgrimage of consecrated virgins. This will be a defining moment for our vocation as we gather with our Holy Father and Bishops and consecrated virgins from all parts of the world to deepen in our understanding of this ancient, and new, form of Consecrated Life.

Judith Stegman