

Excerpts from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation

VITA CONSECRATA

(The Consecrated Life)

by Pope John Paul II

March 25, 1996.

THE ORDER OF VIRGINS

7. It is a source of joy and hope to witness in our time a new flowering of *the ancient Order of Virgins*, known in Christian communities ever since apostolic times. Consecrated by the diocesan Bishop, these women acquire a particular link with the Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute *a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come* when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND OF THE TRINITY

ICON OF THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST

14. The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus in his earthly life established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own *way of life*.

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life “in the image of Christ.” But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. This special way of “following Christ,” at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: It expresses in a particularly vivid way the *Trinitarian* nature of the Christian life, and it anticipates in a certain way that *eschatological* fulfillment toward which the whole Church is tending.

In the Gospel, many of Christ’s words and actions shed light on the meaning of this special vocation. But for an overall picture of its essential characteristics, it is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ’s radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration. A whole ancient spiritual tradition refers to this “icon” when it links the contemplative life

to the prayer of Jesus “on the mountain.” Even the “active” dimensions of consecrated life can in a way be included here, for the Transfiguration is not only the revelation of Christ’s glory, but also a preparation for facing Christ’s Cross. It involves both “going up the mountain” and “coming down the mountain.” The disciples who have enjoyed this intimacy with the Master, surrounded for a moment by the splendor of the Trinitarian life and of the communion of saints, and as it were caught up in the horizon of eternity, are immediately brought back to daily reality, where they see “Jesus only,” in the lowliness of his human nature and are invited to return to the valley, to share with him the toil of God’s plan and to set off courageously on the way of the Cross.

“AND HE WAS TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM.”

15. “*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*” “And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, ‘Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead’” (Mt. 17:1-9).

The event of the Transfiguration marks *a decisive moment in the ministry of Jesus*. It is a revelatory event which strengthens the faith in the disciples’ hearts, prepares them for the tragedy of the Cross and prefigures the glory of the Resurrection. This mystery is constantly relived by the Church, the people on its way to the eschatological encounter with its Lord. Like the three chosen disciples, the Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at his disfigured face on the Cross. In both cases, she is the Bride before her Spouse, sharing in his mystery and surrounded by his light.

This light shines on all the Church’s children. *All are equally called to follow Christ* to discover in him the ultimate meaning of their lives, until they are able to say with the apostle: ‘For to me, to live is Christ’ (Phil. 1:21). But those who are called to the consecrated life have *a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word* For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them *a kind of sign and prophetic statement* for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: “Lord, it is well that we are here” (Mt. 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the *radical* nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: How good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives!

Truly those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as if they were caught up in his splendor: He is “the fairest of the sons of men” (Ps 45:2), the one beyond compare.

“THIS IS MY BELOVED SON”: LISTEN TO HIM!

16. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father’s call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself at the beginning of his public life called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which in the consecrated life makes possible and even demands the total gift of self...

In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance “brightens the countenance of the Church.”...It is the duty of the *consecrated life* to show that the Incarnate Son of God is *the eschatological goal toward which all things tend*, the splendor before which every other light pales and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart. In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one’s whole heart, of loving him “more than father or mother, more than son or daughter” (cf. Mt. 10:37) – for this is required of every disciple – but of living and expressing this *by conforming one’s whole existence to Christ* in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms.

...[C]onsecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but strive to reproduce in themselves as far as possible “that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world”...

By this profound “configuration” to the mystery of Christ, the consecrated life brings about in a special way that *confessio Trinitatis* which is the mark of all Christian life; it acknowledges with wonder the sublime beauty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears joyful witness to his loving concern for every human being.

I. IN PRAISE OF THE TRINITY

“A PATRE AD PATREM”: GOD’S INITIATIVE

17. Contemplation of the glory of the Lord Jesus in the icon of the Transfiguration reveals to consecrated persons first of all the Father, the creator and giver of every good thing, who draws his creatures to himself (cf. Jn. 6:44) with a special love and for a special mission.

“This is my beloved Son: listen to him!” (cf. Mt. 17:5). In response to this call and the interior attraction which accompanies it, those who are called entrust themselves to the love of God, who wishes them to be exclusively at his service, and they consecrate themselves totally to him and to his plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34).

This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: It is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn. 15: 16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion.

The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with St. Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust.

“PER FILIUM”: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SON

18. The Son, who is the way which leads to the Father (cf. Jn. 14:6), calls all those whom the Father has given to him (cf. Jn. 17:9) to make the following of himself the whole purpose of their lives. But of some, those called to the consecrated life, he asks a total commitment, one which involves leaving everything behind (cf. Mt. 19:27) in order to live at his side and to follow him wherever he goes (cf. Rv. 14:4). In the countenance of Jesus, the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and the reflection of the Father’s glory (cf. Heb. 1:3), we glimpse the depths of an eternal and infinite love which is at the very root of our being.

Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:21, 28). Like St. Paul, they consider all else as loss “because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, by comparison with which they do not hesitate to count all things as “refuse, in order that they “may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). They strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life. This leaving of everything and following the Lord (cf. Lk. 18:28) is a worthy program of life for all whom he calls in every age.

The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share his experience as the chaste, poor and obedient one, call for and make manifest in those who accept them *an explicit desire to be totally conformed to him*. Living “in obedience, with nothing of one’s own and in chastity,” consecrated persons profess that Jesus is the model in whom every virtue comes to perfection. His way of living in chastity, poverty and obedience appears as the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called *divine*, for it was embraced by him, God and man, as the expression of his relationship as the Only Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. This is why Christian tradition has always spoken of the *objective superiority of the consecrated life*.

Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in *Christ’s mission*, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God’s plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38).

“IN SPIRITU”: CONSECRATED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

19. “A bright cloud overshadowed them” (Mt. 17:5). A significant spiritual interpretation of the Transfiguration sees this cloud as an image of the Holy Spirit.

Like the whole of Christian life, the call to the consecrated life is closely linked to the working of the Holy Spirit. In every age the Spirit enables new men and women to recognize the appeal of such a demanding choice. Through his power, they relive, in a way, the experience of the prophet Jeremiah: “You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced (Jer. 20:7). It is the Spirit who awakens the desire to respond fully; it is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action; it is he who shapes and molds the hearts of those who are called, configuring them to Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient one, and prompting them to make his mission their own. By allowing them selves to be guided by the Spirit on an endless journey of purification, they become, day after day, *conformed to Christ*, the prolongation in history of a special presence of the risen Lord.

With penetrating insight, the Fathers of the Church have called this spiritual path *philokalia*, or *love of the divine beauty*, which is the reflection of the divine goodness. Those who by the power of the Holy Spirit are led progressively into full configuration to Christ reflect in themselves a ray of the unapproachable light. During their earthly pilgrimage, they press on toward the inexhaustible source of light. The consecrated life thus becomes a particularly profound expression of the Church as the Bride who, prompted by the Spirit to imitate her Spouse, stands before him “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

The same Spirit, far from removing from the life of humanity those whom the Father has called, puts them at the service of their brothers and sisters in accordance with their particular state of life and inspires them to undertake special tasks in response to the needs of the Church and the world by means of the charisms proper to the various Institutes. Hence many different forms of the consecrated life have arisen whereby the Church is “adorned by the various gifts of her children ... like a bride made beautiful for her Spouse (cf. Rv. 21:2)” and is enriched by the means necessary for carrying out her mission in the world.

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS, GIFT OF THE TRINITY

20. The evangelical counsels are thus above all *a gift of the Holy Trinity*. The consecrated life proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, brings about by his love, his goodness and his beauty.

In fact, “the religious state reveals the transcendence of the Kingdom of God and its requirements over all earthly things. To all people it shows wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit.”

The first duty of the consecrated life is *to make visible* the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in

words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world. To people's astonishment they respond by proclaiming the wonders of grace accomplished by the Lord in those whom he loves. To the degree that consecrated persons let themselves be guided by the Spirit to the heights of perfection they can exclaim:

"I see the beauty of your grace, I contemplate its radiance, I reflect its light; I am caught up in its ineffable splendor; I am taken outside myself as I think of myself; I see how I was and what I have become. O wonder! I am vigilant, I am full of respect for myself, of reverence and of fear, as I would be were I before you; I do not know what to do, I am seized by fear, I do not know where to sit, where to go, where to put these members which are yours; in what deeds, in what works shall I use them, these amazing divine marvels!"

The consecrated life thus becomes one of the tangible seals which the Trinity impresses upon history, so that people can sense with longing the attraction of divine beauty.

REFLECTION OF TRINITARIAN LIFE

21. ...The *chastity* of celibates and virgins as a manifestation of dedication to God with *an undivided heart* (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) is a reflection of the *infinite love* which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren...

CONSECRATED LIKE CHRIST FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

22. The consecrated life, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, "constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding reenactment in the Church" of the way of life which Jesus, the supreme consecrated one and missionary of the Father for the sake of his Kingdom, embraced and proposed to his disciples (cf. Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:10-11; Jn. 15:16). In the light of Jesus' consecration, we can see in the initiative of the Father, the source of all holiness, the ultimate origin of the consecrated life. Jesus is the one whom "God anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38), the one "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). Accepting his consecration by the Father, the Son in turn consecrates himself to the Father for the sake of humanity (cf. Jn. 17:19). His life of virginity, obedience and poverty expresses his complete filial acceptance of the Father's plan (cf. Jn. 10:30; 14:11). His perfect offering confers an aspect of consecration upon all the events of His earthly existence.

Jesus is *the exemplar of obedience*, who came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him (cf. Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:5, 7). He places his way of living and acting in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk. 2:49). In filial obedience, he assumes the condition of a servant: He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). In this attitude of submissiveness to the Father, Christ lives his life as a virgin even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals *the sublime excellence and mysterious spiritual fruitfulness of virginity*. His full acceptance of the Father's plan is also seen

in his detachment from earthly goods: "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). *The depth of his poverty* is revealed in the perfect offering of all that is his to the Father.

The consecrated life truly constitutes *a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren. It is a living tradition of the Savior's life and message.

FROM TABOR TO CALVARY

23. The dazzling event of the Transfiguration is a preparation for the tragic but no less glorious event of Calvary. Peter, James and John contemplate the Lord Jesus together with Moses and Elijah, with whom, according to the evangelist Luke, Jesus speaks "of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31). The eyes of the Apostles are therefore fixed upon Jesus, who is thinking of the Cross (cf. Lk. 9:43-45). There his virginal love for the Father and for all mankind will attain its highest expression. His poverty will reach complete self-emptying, his obedience the giving of his life...

ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

26. Since the demands of the apostolate today are increasingly urgent and since involvement in temporal affairs risks becoming ever more absorbing, it is particularly opportune to draw attention once more to the *eschatological nature of the consecrated life*. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). The unique treasure of the Kingdom gives rise to desire, anticipation, commitment and witness. In the early Church, the expectation of the Lord's coming was lived in a particularly intense way. With the passing of the centuries, the Church has not ceased to foster this attitude of hope: She has continued to invite the faithful to look to the salvation which is waiting to be revealed, "for the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31; cf. 1 Pt. 1:3-6).

It is in this perspective that we can understand more clearly *the role* of consecrated life as an *eschatological sign*. In fact it has constantly been taught that the consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom. The Second Vatican Council proposes this teaching anew when it states that consecration better "foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom." It does this above all by means of *the vow of virginity*, which tradition has always understood as *an anticipation of the world to come* already at work for the total transformation of man.

Those who have dedicated their lives to Christ cannot fail to live in the hope of meeting him, in order to be with him forever. Hence the ardent expectation and desire to "be plunged into the Fire of Love which burns in them and which is none other than the Holy Spirit," an expectation and desire sustained by the gifts which the Lord freely bestows on those who yearn for the things that are above (cf. Col. 3:1).

Immersed in the things of the Lord, the consecrated person remembers that "here we have no lasting city" (Heb. 13:14), for "our commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The one

thing necessary is to seek God's "Kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt. 6:33), with unceasing prayer for the Lord's coming.

THE VIRGIN MARY, MODEL OF CONSECRATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

28. Mary is the one who from the moment of her Immaculate Conception most perfectly reflects the divine beauty. "All beautiful" is the title with which the Church invokes her. "The relationship with Mary most holy, which for every believer stems from his or her union with Christ, is even more pronounced in the life of consecrated persons.... Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity and progress of the whole community.

Mary in fact is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of *the primacy of God's initiative*. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word made flesh in her, Mary is the *model of the acceptance of grace* by human creatures.

Having lived with Jesus and Joseph in the hidden years of Nazareth, and present at her Son's side at crucial moments of his public life, the Blessed Virgin teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service. In Mary, "the temple of the Holy Spirit," all the splendor of the new creation shines forth. Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the "virginal and humble life" of Christ also means imitation of Mary's way of life.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary consecrated persons also find a *Mother who is altogether unique*. Indeed, if the new motherhood conferred on Mary at Calvary is a gift for all Christians, it has a specific value for those who have completely consecrated their lives to Christ. "Behold your mother!" (Jn. 19:27): Jesus' words to the disciple "whom he loved" (Jn. 19:26) are particularly significant for the lives of consecrated persons.

They, like John, are called to take the Blessed Virgin Mary to themselves (cf. Jn. 19:27), loving her and imitating her in the radical manner which befits their vocation, and experiencing in return her special motherly love. The Blessed Virgin shares with them the love which enables them to offer their lives every day for Christ and to cooperate with him in the salvation of the world. Hence a filial relationship to Mary is the royal road to fidelity to one's vocation and a most effective help for advancing in that vocation and living it fully.

NEW AND SPECIAL CONSECRATION

30. ...[A]ll those reborn in Christ are called to live out with the strength which is the Spirit's gift the chastity appropriate to their state of life, obedience to God and to the Church, and a reasonable detachment from material possessions: For all are called to holiness, which consists in the perfection of love. But baptism in itself does not include the

call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior, in the form proper to the evangelical counsels.

The profession of the evangelical counsels thus presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone, as Jesus himself emphasizes with respect to voluntary celibacy (cf. Mt. 19:10-12).

This call is accompanied, moreover, by *a specific gift of the Holy Spirit*, so that consecrated persons can respond to their vocation and mission. For this reason, as the liturgies of the East and West testify in the rite of monastic or religious profession and the consecration of virgins, the Church invokes the gift of the Holy Spirit upon those who have been chosen and joins their oblation to the sacrifice of Christ.

THE SPECIAL VALUE OF CONSECRATED LIFE

32. Within this harmonious constellation of gifts, each of the fundamental states of life is entrusted with the task of expressing in its own way one or other aspect of the one mystery of Christ. While *the lay life has a particular mission* of ensuring that the Gospel message is proclaimed in the temporal sphere, in the sphere of ecclesial communion *an indispensable ministry is carried out by those in Holy Orders* and in a special way by Bishops. The latter have the task of guiding the People of God by the teaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of sacred power in the service of ecclesial communion, which is an organic communion, hierarchically structured.

As a way of showing forth the Church's holiness, *it is to be recognized that the consecrated life*, which mirrors Christ's own way of life, *has an objective superiority*. Precisely for this reason, it is an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the Church's purpose, which is the sanctification of humanity. The consecrated life proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age, when the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven, already present in its first fruits and in mystery, will be achieved and when the children of the resurrection will take neither wife nor husband, but will be like the angels of God (cf. Mt. 22:30).

The Church has always taught the pre-eminence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, and rightly considers it the "door" of the whole consecrated life...

THE LIVING IMAGE OF THE CHURCH AS BRIDE

34. In the consecrated life particular importance attaches to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church's duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing. This spousal dimension, which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.

A moving sign of this is seen in the New Testament passage which portrays Mary with the Apostles in the Upper Room, in prayerful expectation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts

1:13-14). We can see here a vivid image of the Church as Bride, fully attentive to her Bridegroom and ready to accept his gift. In Peter and the other Apostles there emerges above all the aspect of fruitfulness as it is expressed in ecclesial ministry, which becomes an instrument of the Spirit for bringing new sons and daughters to birth through the preaching of the word, the celebration of the Sacraments and the giving of pastoral care. In Mary the aspect of spousal receptivity is particularly clear; it is under this aspect that the Church, through her perfect virginal life, brings divine life to fruition within herself.

The consecrated life has always been seen primarily in terms of Mary – Virgin and Bride. This virginal love is the source of a particular fruitfulness which fosters the birth and growth of divine life in people's hearts. Following in the footsteps of Mary, the New Eve, consecrated persons express their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the word, in order to contribute to the growth of a new humanity by their unconditional dedication and their living witness. Thus the Church fully reveals her motherhood both in the communication of divine grace entrusted to Peter and in the responsible acceptance of God's gift, exemplified by Mary.

FRATERNAL LIFE IN LOVE

42. The fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion. It is practiced with special care in Religious Institutes and in Societies of Apostolic Life, where community living acquires special significance. Nor is the dimension of fraternal communion alien to Secular Institutes or even to forms of the consecrated life lived individually. Hermits, in their profound solitude, do not withdraw from ecclesial communion but serve that communion by their specific charism of contemplation. Consecrated virgins in the world live out their consecration in a special relationship of communion with the particular and universal Church. The same is true of consecrated widows and widowers.

All these people, by practicing evangelical discipleship, commit themselves to fulfilling the Lord's "new commandment," to love one another as he has loved us (cf. Jn. 13:34). Love led Christ to the gift of self, even to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross. So too, among his disciples, *there can be no true unity without that unconditional mutual love* which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without "judging" them (cf. Mt. 7:1-2) and an ability to forgive up to "70 times seven" (Mt. 18:22). Consecrated persons, who become "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5), experience an interior call *to share everything in common*: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service: "In community life, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual passes at the same time to all. Here not only does each enjoy his own gift, but makes it abound by sharing it with others; and each one enjoys the fruits of the other's gift as if they were his own."

THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

105. ...Beyond all superficial assessments of its usefulness, the consecrated life is important precisely in its being *unbounded generosity and love*, and this all the more so in a world which risks being suffocated in the whirlpool of the ephemeral. “Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted and that the ‘salt’ of faith would lose its savor in a world undergoing secularization.” The Church and society itself need people capable of devoting themselves totally to God and to others for the love of God.

The Church can in no way renounce the consecrated life, for it *eloquently expresses her inmost nature as “Bride.”* In the consecrated life the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world finds fresh enthusiasm and power. There is a need for people able to show the fatherly face of God and the motherly face of the Church, people who spend their lives so that others can have life and hope. The Church needs consecrated persons who, even before committing themselves to the service of this or that noble cause, allow themselves to be transformed by God’s grace and conform themselves fully to the Gospel.

The whole Church finds in her hands this great gift and gratefully devotes herself to promoting it with respect, with prayer and with the explicit invitation to accept it. It is important that Bishops, priests and deacons, convinced of the evangelical superiority of this kind of life, should strive to discover and encourage the seeds of vocation through preaching, discernment and wise spiritual guidance. All the faithful are asked to pray constantly for consecrated persons, that their fervor and their capacity to love may grow continually and thus contribute to spreading in today’s society the fragrance of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15).

The whole Christian community – pastors, laity and consecrated persons – is responsible for the consecrated life and for welcoming and supporting new vocations.

For the full text of this document, go to:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata_en.html