

The Lamp

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United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

USACV

www.consecratedvirgins.org

February 2, 2023 — The Presentation of the Lord and World Day for Consecrated Life

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

“Lord, I love you.” This, presumably, was a last response to an ongoing “Joseph, I love you,” coming from the Lord himself. It is that constant cry of love from Jesus that any of us sinners wants to hear, especially as we prepare for our final pilgrimage. Joseph who became Benedict XVI heard and lived that divine experience. Yes, he like all of us was a sinner, but he like all of us has a redeemer, a loving redeemer, upon whose back he is carried like a lamb by a shepherd. I personally am not saddened by Benedict’s death because that is the doorway which we all seek in order to imbibe the love we have only tasted for so many years. Rather, I am overjoyed that this servant of Christ, who suffered along with his Master, is now on his way to the full presence of the Godhead. As we sing “In Paradisum” at the Funeral Mass, let this be our prayer: “May choirs of angels escort you into paradise; and at your arrival may the martyrs receive and welcome you; may they bring you home into the holy city, Jerusalem. May the holy angels welcome you and with Lazarus, who lived in poverty, may you have everlasting rest.”

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing



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By Dr. Magalis Aguilera, Psy.D.
edited by Dr. Judith M. Stegman, JCD

God's beast of burden, symbolized the weight of office that Benedict carried.

Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, in the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI

In his *Motu proprio* for the approval and publication of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, an arduous work of twenty years signed on June 28, 2005, the vigil of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in the first year of his Pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI's final words are: "Through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, may everyone who reads this authoritative text recognize and embrace ever more fully the inexhaustible beauty, uniqueness and significance of the incomparable gift which God has made to the human race in His only Son, Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (Jn. 14:6)

This is the stronghold of Benedictus PP XVI: The Divine Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, and the constant defense of His Truth, for no other offers Life, eternal life. When we read of Benedict's life through his writing, we find the elegance and profound style of his teaching that has as its common denominator the way, the truth and the life of Christ, carried through all aspects of his teaching for the Church of Christ. For example, in the symbolism of his coat of arms, the scallop shell has multiple meanings, including a reference to Saint Augustine. While he was a doctoral candidate in 1953, Ratzinger wrote his thesis *The People and the House of God in St Augustine's Doctrine of the Church*, showing the personal connection he had with the thought of this Doctor of the Church. The Moor of Freising symbolized in the Moor's head is an heraldic charge associated with Freising, Germany. *Corbinian's bear* references a legend about Saint Corbinian—while travelling to Rome, the saint's pack horse was killed by a bear, and he then commanded the bear to carry the load. Once he arrived in Rome, he released the bear from his service, and it returned to Bavaria. The implication is that "Christianity tamed and domesticated the ferocity of paganism and thus laid the foundations for a great civilization in the Duchy of Bavaria." (see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006). At the same time, Corbinian's bear, as²

With his episcopal motto "*Cooperatores Veritatis*" Joseph Ratzinger shared his mission to increase the faith of the faithful. The mission planted in his mind and soul by divine grace and by reason of his profound theological understanding was to bring to reality the incarnate Word that is the Lord. His phrase "the limit of compassion is truth" means that the mercy of God is not a limitless sensation of receiving compassion but rather a reason to change our lives based on the truth of Jesus. During the time he was Prefect of the Congregation of Faith, he taught that theology is not social liberation alone but instead is light that comes from the incarnation, the Word made flesh for our integral liberation: at Baptism we are transformed into a temple of the Holy Trinity. He was very assertive about "liberation theology" when he served as Prefect of the Congregation of the Faith, and among other points in his political visions and praxis he noted: "The crucified Christ indicates the boundaries to the power of the state and shows where its rights terminate and resistance in the form of suffering becomes a necessity. The faith of the New Testament acknowledges not the revolutionary but the martyr who recognizes both the authority of the state and also its limits. His resistance consists in doing everything that serves to promote law and an ordered life in society, even when this means obeying authorities who are indifferent or hostile to his faith; but he will not obey when he is commanded to do what is evil, that is, to oppose the will of God. He is not the resistance of active force, but the resistance of the one who is willing to suffer for the will of God. The resistance fighter who dies with his weapon in his hand is not a martyr in the New Testament sense." (See *Values in a Time of Upheaval*)



Pope Benedict's teachings are consistent and clear; he points out that relativism in regard to faith is not the same as the theory of relativity of Einstein, which has been used to try to justify the validity of relativism in faith: "Fair enough. Albert Einstein was not a moral relativist and his theory of relativity has nothing to do with morality. The problem, however, is simple — Einstein's theory of relativity entered the popular consciousness as a generalized relativism. The issue here is not to blame

Albert Einstein. He is not responsible for the misuse, misapplication, and misappropriation of his theory. But, in any event, for millions of modern people relativity was understood as relativism. And that misunderstanding is one of the toxic developments of the modern age.” (See “The Aquila Report” webpage, December 2015)

In the pre-conclave Mass on June 6, 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger spoke about what he often referred to as the “central problem” of our faith today: “Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of education is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own ego.” This “dictatorship of relativism” is what he identified as the core challenge facing the Church and humanity. At the root of this problem, he said, is Immanuel Kant's “self-limitation of reason,” which “is contradictory to the modern acclamation of science whose excellence is based on the power of reason to know the truth. This self-amputation of reason leads to pathologies of religion such as terrorism and pathologies of science such as ecological disasters.” Pope Benedict traced the failed revolutions and violent ideologies of the 20th century to a conversion of partial points of view into absolute guides. He said “Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism.” (Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at the Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the Occasion of the XX World Youth Day Vigil (Cologne: Marienfeld, August 20, 2005))

Benedict PP XVI's teachings are grounded in the uppermost level of the baptismal faith we hold in our souls and minds, illuminated by the Holy Spirit who revitalizes our Christian life in order to reach eternity: “This is why John could reply to the presumption of gnostic teachers, who wanted to persuade Christian believers that their naive faith ought to be understood and formulated in quite different terms, by saying, you do not need that kind of instructions, because as “anointed” (baptized) Christians you know everything (1Jn 2:20). This doesn't mean that the faithful possess an intellectual knowledge of every single point of doctrine, but it does mean that Christian memory is unerring. It is always learning anew, its sacramental identity allows it to distinguish ‘from within’ between that which assists the

development of its memory and that which destroys or falsifies it.”

The teaching of the Church is based upon Holy Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, and the teaching of the Church. Distortion about the conscious memory of the Church is cleared as we recognize that the “true meaning of the teaching authority of the pope is that he is the advocate of Christian memory. He does not impose something from the outside but develops and defends Christian memory.” Speaking from my own experience and from my best understanding of conscience, in relativism of faith there is a deviation between what is imprinted in one's memory that belongs to the Christian memory of faith that is developed and defended by the Church, and what belongs to the false “freedom” of conscience that does not come from genuine revelation but instead from a deviation of the truth given by our Divine Lord. (See also *Values in a Time of Upheaval*). The justification of relativism is that it attributes to our conscience the faculty to act in personal freedom guided solely by our own capacity to know the logic of our actions. This is not the genuinely redemptive truth, for the real novelty of Christianity is to know the truth and to be set free. “This is the real novelty of Christianity, the Logos, the Truth in person, is also the expiation, the transforming forgiveness that transcends all our own abilities and inabilities...The yoke of truth became light (Mt. 11:30) when the Truth in person came, loved us, and burned up our guilt is his own love. It is only when we know and experience this from within that we become free to hear the message of conscience with joy and without fear” (see *Values in a Time of Upheaval*).

Let us finish with words of Benedict PP XVI in the graphical essence of the child Jesus and his Mother Mary: “Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him” (Mt 2: 11). Dear friends, this is not a distant story that took place long ago. It is with us now. Here in the Sacred Host he is present before us and in our midst. As at that time, so now he is mysteriously veiled in a sacred silence; as at that time, it is here that the true face of God is revealed. For us he became a grain of wheat that falls on the ground and dies and bears fruit until the end of the world (cf. Jn 12: 24). He is present now as he was then in Bethlehem. He invites us to that inner pilgrimage which is called adoration. Let us set off on this pilgrimage of the spirit and let us ask him to be our guide. Amen.” (See Address at the Apostolic Journey

By Dr. Judith M. Stegman, JCD
Archdiocese of Miami (FL)

Pope Benedict XVI on the Meaning of Christian Virginity

In his homily at the consecration of Dagny Kjaergaard (see p. 14-15) in 1988, His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of the origin of Christian virginity. At the time of Christ, some men and women lived in a state of committed virginity, but the distinctive state of Christian virginity was not born until “the moment of the ‘yes’ of the Virgin to divine maternity.” What does this tell us about Christian virginity? The future pope explained that the Word of God took flesh only by means of this Christian virginity, only by means of the fiat of Mary, the fiat that represented the complete surrender of Mary’s own will to the will of God. His Eminence took us deeper in this reflection as he considered the Christian virgins who walk now, following the path of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Nazareth: if their virginity is lived as “only and simply a private decision,” it risks becoming self-centered, it risks setting the virgin’s will in opposition to His will. But at the hands of the Bishop, the Church confirms Christian virginity as “a gift received in the Church from the hands of God—a consecration in which one’s own will is accepted by God and transformed into His Will.”

What can be deduced from this understanding of Christian virginity? In abandoning her will into the hands of God, her “virginity become[s] complete availability to the Lord. . .for the good of the entire Church” and is thus a Marian state “necessary for the fecundity of the Church.” Consecrated Christian virginity “is an act of love . . . a spousal mystery.” It is not an isolated love, but a love that draws the virgin into the life of the Most Holy Trinity as one who is mystically espoused to Christ, the Son of God, who has taken the Church as His Bride, as His own body. Mary’s “yes” is the font for the “yes” of each consecrated virgin, inseparably intertwining in her “virginity and motherhood, virginity and fertility.”

These words of then Cardinal Ratzinger give us much to ponder. Twenty years later, in 2008, addressing the International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins (see p. 16-17), Pope Benedict XVI said that the description “a gift in the Church and for the Church” summed up his earlier words about consecrated virginity as a state of life. In this light, he said to us, “I would like to strengthen you in your vocation and invite you to develop, from day to day, your understanding of a charism that is as luminous and fruitful in the eyes of the faith as it is obscure and futile to those of the world.” Consecrated virgins often find this description to be true—the world about us (and, sadly, many in the Church) see our lives as futile. But it is to these very people that our vocation is a witness. Our Marian charism, Pope Benedict pointed out, is founded on the simple Gospel invitation: “He who is able to receive this, let him receive it” (Mt. 19:12). For her part, as *sponsa Christi*, bride of Christ, the consecrated virgin cries out to the world with the Spirit, “Come!” (see Rev. 22:17). In her very choice of a virginal life, she witnesses to “an anticipation of future rewards.”

At our 2008 gathering in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI recalled words from the liturgy of consecration, “That your whole life may be a faithful witness of God’s love and a convincing sign of the Kingdom of heaven” (n. 17) and he exhorted us: “Take care always to radiate the dignity of being a bride of Christ, expressing the newness of Christian existence and the serene expectation of future life. Thus, with your own upright life you will be stars to guide the world on its journey. . . Be witnesses of attentive and lively expectation, of joy and of the peace that characterizes those who abandon themselves to God’s love. May you be present in the world, yet pilgrims bound for the Kingdom.”

Thank you, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. You have guided us well. May our heavenly Father reward you.

*Messages for World Day of Prayer for
Consecrated Life — February 2, 2023*

From the beginning of a letter to all consecrated persons from João Braz Cardinal de Aviz, Prefect, and José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M., Archbishop Secretary of The Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life:

“At this time when a synodal spirit is being breathed into the Church, we have the joy of celebrating on February 2nd, the feast of the Presentation, the 27th Day of Consecrated Life, with a Eucharistic Celebration in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. In the absence of the Holy Father due to his apostolic journey to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, the celebration will be presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz. Through this day we gratefully recall the immense grace of our vocation to be "a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting" (Vita Consecrata n. 22) and, aware that his grace is sufficient for us (cf. 2 Cor 12:9), we ask him with humility and trust, to live the gift of fidelity and the joy of perseverance.” (Link to full letter: [Feb 2 2023 Letter to Consecrated from DICLSAL](#))

From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, reflected that World Day of Prayer for Consecrated



Life provides a special opportunity for the faithful to give thanks to God for those living a consecrated vocation. “We give thanks to God today for continuing to call men and women to serve him as consecrated persons in the Church. May each of us be inspired by their example to love God above all things and serve him in all that we do.”

In Memory of Our Deceased Sister

**In Memory of
Cheri A. Cashen,
consecrated virgin of the
Diocese of Palm Beach (FL)**

**August 18, 1951 to
October 3, 2021**

*by Judith Stegman and
Magalias Aguilera*



We were saddened to learn just recently of the death of our sister in consecration, Cheri Cashen—saddened because we did not know earlier so that we could attend her funeral Mass. But we are also full of joy at the news because Cheri is now free from bodily pain and blessed with the reward of eternal life, wrapped not in blankets but in the arms of her Beloved Spouse. Magalis Aguilera and I first met Cheri a number of years ago. She was healthy and active then, and volunteered to use her linguistic skills to work with this newsletter, “The Lamp,” at a time of transition. But with her progressing illness, she was not able to take on that task. She supported our work with constancy in prayer.

As time moved on, we lost regular touch with Cheri. When Magalis and I learned that she was very ill, we visited her after attending Simi Sahu’s consecration in the Diocese of Palm Beach



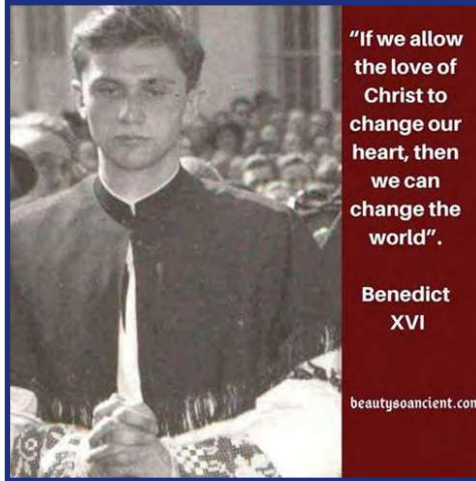
on February 11, 2021. We brought with us a relic of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr, and Cheri was so pleased to pray with us and venerate the relic. She had full-time care and was confined to her bed at the time, but was peaceful, joy-filled, serene, and hope-filled. She had entrusted herself to the will and love of her Divine Spouse.

Eternal rest grant unto her O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon her. May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

By Florence Sundberg
Archdiocese of Hartford (CT)

Pope Benedict, a true and faithful son of the Church, has passed on to his eternal home.

In our prayers for him let us remember his unwavering love for and service to the Church and her teachings and to her children. I remember watching him when he was Cardinal Ratzinger walking along the streets of Rome and seeming surprised, yet pleased, as passersby bowed or nodded to him and asked for his blessing. I remember when the USACV traveled to Rome to meet with Pope Benedict in 2008. There was such joy when His Holiness spoke to us about the beauty and the need of the vocation of consecrated virginity. Mostly though, I remember Pope Benedict's talk about his visit to the Auschwitz Camp: Auschwitz-Birkenau, in May of 2006. His holiness expressed horror and sadness at the mass slaughter of millions of Jews with the words: "To speak in this place of horror, in this place where mass crimes were committed against God and man, is almost impossible, particularly difficult and troubling for a Pope from Germany. In a place like this, words fail; in the end there can only be a dread silence - a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God: Why, why did You remain silent? How could You tolerate all this? Our silence becomes a plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, a plea to the living God never to let this happen again." I believe that Pope Benedict resigned, not to escape from the profound trials and suffering of being the Shepherd of so many millions of Christ's people, but to enter more deeply into the suffering prayer of petition for Christ's flock; Pope Benedict did not abandon his place as Shepherd of the universal Church - rather he was drawn by Christ Himself into a life of mystical, contemplative prayer of union and



intercession and was thus holding up Christ's Church and Christ's flock in a silent and hidden union with the Passion of Christ, Christ in agony in the Garden. Pope Benedict entered with Jesus into his own garden of silence, suffering and prayer and thus he continued to be our 'Shepherd' always nurturing and guiding the flock entrusted to him by God Himself. As a daughter of the Church and spouse of Christ Jesus, I am deeply grateful for the life and example of His Holiness Joseph Ratzinger.

USACV and International Resource Center for the *Ordo Virginum* Leadership Team Members and Officers

USACV Leadership Team

- Emily Byers** 2021-2023; Diocese of Lafayette (LA).
(*Secretary of the USACV-IRC and USACV Online Presence*).
- Francesca Riddick** 2022-2024; Diocese of Joliet (IL).
(*USACV Membership and eTapestry*).
- Joani McCann** 2022-2024; Archdiocese of Boston (MA). (*Convocation Liaison*).
- Elizabeth Lam** 2020-2022; Diocese of Oakland (CA).
(*USACV Website*).
- Jenna Cooper** 2022-2024; Archdiocese of New York (NY).

IRC Leadership Team

- Magalis Aguilera**; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
(*Chairperson IRC*).
- Judith Stegman**, President of the USACV-IRC 2019-2025; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
- Maria Luisa Meza**; EL SALVADOR, Diocese of Santa Ana/San Miguel.
- Renu Rita Silvano**; INDIA, Archdiocese of Bombay.
- Two Unfilled Positions**

Other USACV-IRC Services, among others

- Karen Webb** 2021-2023; Treasurer of the USACV-IRC, Diocese of Rochester (NY)
- Mary Kay Lacke**; Coordinator of the Information Conference in English, Diocese of Steubenville (OH).
- Anne Gishpert**; Archivist, Diocese of Pueblo (CO).
- Florence Sundberg**; Prayer Chain Coordinator, Archdiocese of Hartford (CT).
- Amanda Schrauth**; Publication of *The Lamp*, Diocese of Rapid City (SD).

United States:

December 17, 2022—**Tara Doyle**, Diocese of Memphis (TN), at the hands of the Most Reverend David P. Talley, Bishop of Memphis.

Upcoming Consecrations

March 25, 2023, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of our Lord, consecration of **Rosalynn Josephine Graf, Lynn Marie Kemmetmueller, Pamela Ann Schleicher, and Janice Marie Terhaar**, at 11am at the Basilica of Saint Mary, in Minneapolis (MN), at the hands of the Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda, Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. All are warmly invited. Kindly RSVP via email by March 4, 2023 to eccefiat325@gmail.com. Housing options are available for consecrated virgins who attend.

April 16, 2023, consecration of **Mary Beth Bracy**, 11:15am at St. Peter's Church in Plattsburgh, N.Y. at the hands of the Most Rev. Terry R. LaValley, Bishop of Ogdensburg. All are warmly invited to attend. If you are able to attend, please email Mary Beth at Sondance20@aol.com.

April 16, 2023, **Lorraine Manlolo**, 12pm at the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Peace in Honolulu (HI), at the hands of The Most Reverend Clarence Silva. All are warmly invited to attend. Bentos will be provided after the Mass. RSVP by April 7, 2023 to Lorraine.manlolo@gmail.com.

June 16, 2023, consecration of **Mary Rose Rynda**, 3pm at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Lonsdale, Minnesota, Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis (MN), at the hands of the Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda. All are warmly invited to attend.



2023 Membership Drive

We have had a good start to our 2023 membership drive this January. Thank you to all who have already participated! As you know, we are able to exist only through the support and financial help of our members and friends. May the Lord Jesus bring to fruition all our work for the spread of this vocation as Brides of Christ.

Francesca Riddick, USACV Membership Services

By Diane Christine Farr
Diocese of Rochester (NY)

As consecrated virgins we have all heard the Divine Bridegroom speak to our hearts calling us to be espoused to the one who is the source of all love. It is with gratitude in our hearts that we reflect upon our vocation and consider how he speaks to us in these verses from the Song of Songs.

“The voice of my beloved! behold he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me, ‘Arise my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs and the vines are in blossom. They give forth fragrance. Arise my love, my fair one and come away.’ O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face and hear your voice for your voice is sweet and your face is comely.”
Song of Songs Ch 2 8-14

The opening verse of this passage recalls to mind that Jesus is the Incarnate Word of the Eternal Father who eagerly came to us in infinite love. He came in silence and hiddenness and was received only by those with lowly and simple hearts. Likewise, He has called us to consecrated virginity in a hidden and silent manner. As it was in the mystery of the Incarnation the tender beauty of virginity is reverently and totally consecrated to

God. It is God Himself who imparts this noble beauty just as it was expressed in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We find our joy in responding to the invitation of the total gift of ourselves to our beloved Jesus. Just as Jesus coming was for all people, so also is the consecration of a virgin a gift for the entire church.

We may not perceive or notice that our Lord is always looking at us with love. He looks for our response to his grace and for our company. It was His captivating gaze that first drew us to his heart. He calls us to come to him and take note of

all that He has done and suffered in order to bring us such great happiness. We rejoice that the winter of mankind’s slavery to sin and death is over and, the springtime of the triumph of divine love has come. In our desire for a deeper union with our Bridegroom we also wish to acquire His characteristic qualities. These are so beautifully represented by the flowers that cover the earth in the Springtime. Imagine you are in the Holy Land in the Spring. Here are some of the flowers that you might see there. There is the scarlet Sharon tulip a symbol of prayer and the pale blue

hyacinth symbolizing God’s grace. There are red and purple anemones symbolizing the precious blood of Jesus and the white narcissus which tells of the resurrection. You will also see a profusion of golden chrysanthemums symbolizing our lady’s virginity and pink cyclamen representing her Immaculate Heart. There are eight species of iris native to the Holy Land including a bright purple one called Mary’s iris. The leaves symbolize her sword of sorrow and the flowers her Queenship.



Flowers of the Holy Land
artwork by Diane Farr

The Madonna lily is also native to the holy land. The fragrance of the flowers and vines signifies the abiding presence of Jesus in our Souls. As brides of Christ, we firmly desire to make God's holy Will the foundation of the life of our souls. It is the radiant sun that illumines the garden of our heart, producing the most beautiful flowerings of Divine grace.

Jesus is constantly beckoning us to come to Him, to keep him company and, to make our home in His Sacred Heart. As the dove in the cleft of the rock, we must do everything from within the shelter of this loving heart. There must be only one heartbeat between the two spouses. The more open we are to the heart of our Bridegroom the more open we will be to the needs of others. It is helpful to try to maintain a prayerful communion with our Lord, always having a listening heart. He is pleased with the voice of our praises and thanksgiving but especially from the songs of love that rise from our heart. He always wants to see us in peace. When we are tempted by discouragement or some disturbance, we need to calm all of our interior in Jesus and receive his profound peace. It is only his strength that will carry us through the many difficulties and sufferings we experience in our lives. We surrender ourselves with absolute trust to the one who is our light and our life. As consecrated virgins it is important for us to remember that God does not so much look at the work we do but rather at the love and purity of intension with which we live our lives. We will spend our entire lives coming to know and love Jesus our Divine Bridegroom more intimately. It is through the exquisite grace of holy virginity that we have come to experience Him as our only Spouse. We are attentive in listening to the voice of our beloved who speaks to us in many ways. We anticipate the day when He will come for us and say, "Arise my love, my fair one and come away to the eternal wedding feast." All praise be to the most Holy Trinity.



SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

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Consecrated virgins who celebrate significant anniversaries during 2023 are invited to submit an anniversary reflection for *The Lamp*. These anniversary reflections are popular among our readers as they convey a personal look at life lived as a bride of Christ in the *Ordo virginum*.

30 Years



Karen Bussey
consecrated April 11, 1992
Diocese of Lansing (MI)

At 30 years consecrated, it strikes me how exceedingly kind is Jesus. He knows me through and through, He loves me completely, tenderly, fiercely. I am in His embrace.

This verse sums up what I know after all these years: “Of this I am sure, that your love lasts forever.” Ps 89: 3 (Office of Readings Wk III)

All is in His hands. All that is seared into my soul, good or ill, over these thirty years, and all that He has done for me over my whole life, even if lost to memory, is held by Him. Whether I am afraid, or grieving, or going along blithely not even noticing Him at the moment, it doesn’t keep Him from reigning and orchestrating everything in His grand beneficent plan. May I keep remembering that in any distress great or small.

He never has and never will stop pursuing me. I love Him. He called me at age 16. Many years later, I learned of the events that occurred as I first heard Him invite me to be His; at that very time, far away in Rome, the Church promulgated the Rite, again allowing the vocation for virgins in the world. The Church unbound/loosed the vocation, the Holy Spirit rushed out, and among other wonders, a simple girl in Michigan received it.

It would be many years after that initial invitation until I was consecrated. Remaining faithful to my calling and a promise to Him, I was 37 when I was consecrated. In those days, I felt that the wait was due to the Church catching up and finally learning about and making available the vocation. But the Lord’s plans are perfect, and perhaps the wait was for my heart, so primitive in the ways of love, to grow a bit more. The longing so many of us

experience, even impatience, and hopefully holy impatience, is from Him who makes us yearn, hollowing out our capacity for Him.

A poignant memory at my consecration was during the Litany of Saints. Daunted by the impossibility to be a fitting spouse for the Lord, lying prone before the altar, in that moment’s realization, all quickly became light and joyful. It was not up to me; it was He who would make me the person He created me to be. It was He who would keep me in His arms, keep me in this vocation, and make me all His. So to this day, as my love falls short, it is to be remembered that of course His love never wanes. We exist in this Love.

The parallel verse to that cited at the start of this message shouts out: “I will sing forever of your love”. We are made for heaven to be with Him, where we will sing forever. Be it with voice or some other way, I want even now that eternal song to begin to sound from my witness. A song about the Lord and His relentless pursuit for me and for each of us; a song to the strong, kind, merciful Bridegroom.

20 Years



Amy Shank
consecrated August 10, 2003
Diocese of Grand Rapids (MI)

Many years ago, Our Father showed me His Love in a very personal way, so for most of my life, all I have ever wanted to do was to be obedient to Our Father in whatever He asked of me. It didn’t matter to me what I wanted, because I knew His Love. All that mattered to me was what He wanted, because His Love is simply BEYOND ANYTHING we can ever imagine. And so I searched, and sought, for whatever He wanted me to do with my life. It took many years, but He led me to consecrated virginity, to be mystically espoused to My Beloved.

Now, almost twenty years later, He still is, and ALWAYS will be, the Love of my Life. Our Love has grown and changed over the years, but the fire has remained the same. I’m My Beloved’s and He is Mine, now and forever!! Amen!!

Consecrated virgins and readers of “The Lamp” were invited to offer their personal memories and photos of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for this issue. We remember:

Mary Kay Lacke, consecrated virgin
Diocese of Steubenville (OH)

IN MEMORIAM OF POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI whom the Lord called home on the last day of the year 2022 AD.

It is such a privilege to have lived during the papacy of Pope Benedict XVI, having witnessed his dedication to the Church and to his predecessor, Pope St. John Paul II! I praise God for his love for the Church and for the clarity he brought as a theologian to the doctrine of the faith. During a time of great confusion for many in the Church, he always sought to lead us to God, and to remind the secular world that “Emmanuel” (God-is-with-us) reigns!

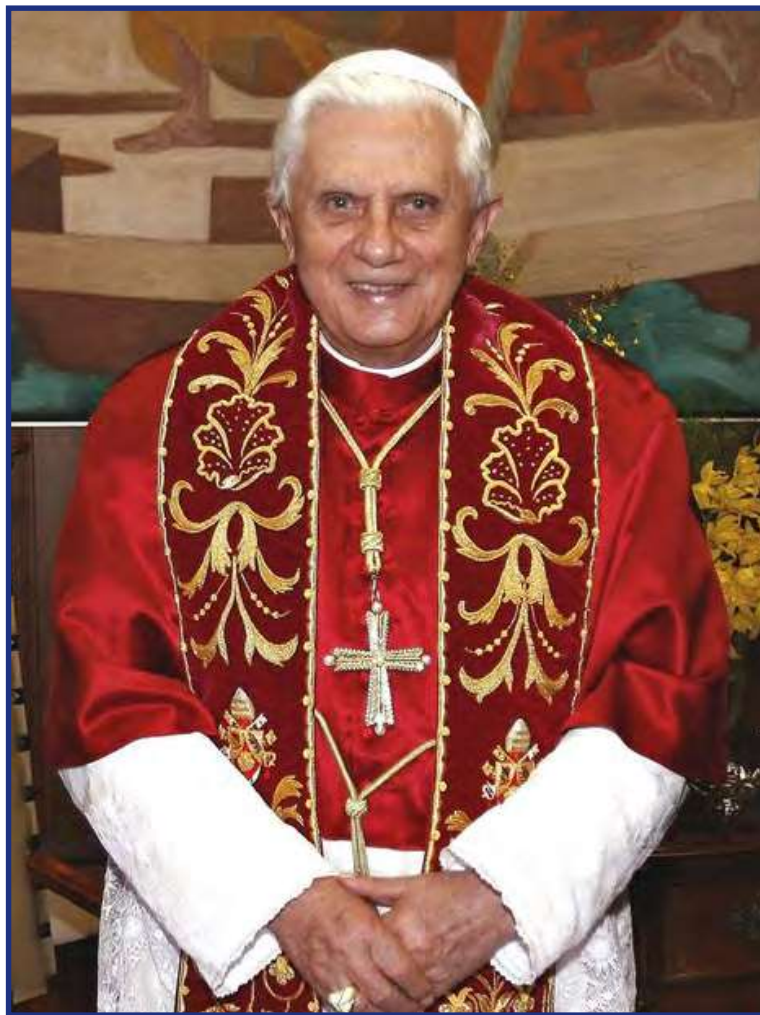
As a consecrated virgin living in the world, I believe that living this vocation was made easier because of the witness of Pope Benedict’s faithful leadership.

Claire Halbur, consecrated virgin
Diocese of Phoenix (AZ)

Pope Benedict, pray for all of us still journeying this side of eternity, that we may be faithful in all seasons and behold the face of Jesus, our Love!

Karen Ertl, friend
Archdiocese of Chicago (IL)

We pray that Pope Benedict heard Jesus say: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ as he saw Our Savior face to face. His service was a source of pride for German Americans. My dad’s ancestors come from the same part of Germany that Pope Benedict was from. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord. Let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace .



Karen Paschke, consecrated virgin
Diocese of Madison (WI)

I came into the Church in 2010, so Pope Benedict was my first Pope. His book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, is on my nightstand. (Sometimes I need to read it.) I’m thankful that I came into the Church with a Pope who so loved the intellectual side of the Faith.

Five years earlier I watched Pope Saint John Paul’s funeral. Entering the Church wasn’t even a consideration and I was far from God. But watching his funeral really moved me and I consider it my first step towards my return to God and entrance into the Catholic Church. I pray that someone out there will have the same experience while watching this funeral.

Renu Silvano, consecrated virgin
Archdiocese of Bombay (India)

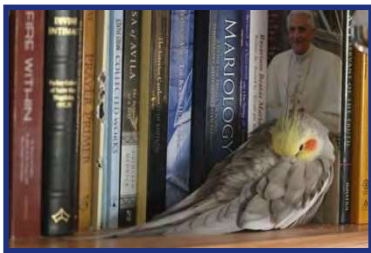
I met Pope Benedict XVI twice in the year 2005: once when I was an Executive Committee member of the worldwide Catholic Biblical Federation for 6 years. We met with the Pope in Castel Gondolfo; and a second time when the Holy Father appointed me as an Auditor at the Synod on the Eucharist in October 2005.



I am attaching two pictures of the two memorable precious meetings with Pope Benedict XVI. I always found him gentle, attentive and encouraging. At the Synod I gifted him my book on Seeking the Face of Jesus in the Old Testament. He actually opened and read the first page!

Shannon Ryan, consecrated virgin
Archdiocese of Portland (OR)

Here is a sweet photo of my old cockatiel Charlie. His favorite napping spot was right here next to a photo of our dear Pope Benedict.



I sent him a copy with a letter after his resignation. Although I never received a reply, I like to think he was tickled that he had a bird fan.

Gloria Oliver and Yvonne Oliver,
consecrated virgins
Diocese of Rockville Center (NY)

We are identical twins and consecrated virgins since 2008. We remember fondly how Pope Benedict XVI had come to visit New York City a week before we were consecrated. This felt like an

extra special blessing on our consecration! Pope Benedict XVI was not only a brilliant man but such a wonderful example of humility, gentleness, and kindness to the world. As Catholics we were blessed to have him as our leader during these times. He gave us so much hope and peace and we will miss him very much. God bless you Pope Benedict XVI and thank you for everything you did for us. Please continue to pray for the consecrated virgins.

Theresa Carrasco,
consecrated virgin
India

It was a great privilege for me to attend the 2008 Congress Pilgrimage in Rome where around 500 consecrated virgins from all over the globe (we were three from India) gathered



together and had a meeting with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. He was very happy to meet us. I found him to be such a warm hearted, soft spoken and saintly man of God. Very approachable and loving. We heard of his ill health and were praying for his recovery and renewed strength to carry on. However, God wanted him to be in the eternal home prepared for him and we had to surrender him back to his Maker. Nevertheless, I believe he is happy above and is interceding for us and the whole world which is in turmoil. May his soul rest in peace and may he enjoy the peaceful and heavenly bliss which he truly deserves.

I celebrated my Silver Jubilee (25 blessed years) as a consecrated virgin. A Thanksgiving Eucharist was held in the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Malad, Mumbai. Two Bishops concelebrated and the Church was packed with consecrated and lay faithful. This was followed by a Fellowship meal. Please join in praying that I will always live my vocation pleasing to our Spouse Jesus.

Miriam Badran, consecrated virgin
Poland

Immediately that wonderful meeting in Rome [2008] comes to mind when I think of Pope Benedict. Another ‘Santo Subito’?! May his sanctity and radiance permeate our lives and help renew the Spirit of Truth in the Church.

Maria Luisa Ofele, consecrated virgin
Diocese of Regensburg
(Germany)



**Liturgy as the heart of
Benedict XVI's life and
thought**

I would like to share with you a special memory of Benedict XVI, but also my gratitude for his testimony and legacy. On May 15, 2008, during the International Pilgrimage of the *Ordo virginum* in Rome, the Holy Father received more than 500 participants in an audience, coming from all over the world in the Sala Clementina.



At that time, I was part of the international preparatory group and was allowed to address the greetings to the Holy Father in the name of all consecrated virgins in German.

The Secretariat of State had given me points that should be addressed. The greetings were not published. Ten years later, attending another international meeting in Rome, I was able to present them together with Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman to the Pope Emeritus in the Vatican Gardens, after his prayer of the rosary with his private secretary. We also added a beautiful card of Our Lady from the Chapel of Grace of the Basilica of the Old Chapel in Regensburg and other gifts from the USA. He had knelt before that holy image during a visit to Regensburg and he was very happy as he took this card in his hand, as well as a beautiful icon that was written by Judith's sister. We talked about many worldwide Church topics.

On May 15, 2008, we also met in the Sala

Clementina, together with my former Bishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Dr. Christian Schaller and my current bishop Rudolf Voderholzer as they had an audience with the Pope afterwards. It had all been delayed. As it turned out, Pope Benedict XVI decreed on that day that Volume 1 of the JRSB, Volume XI, should be dedicated to the Liturgy. [Institut Papst Benedikt XVI. - Englisch \(institut-papst-benedikt.de\)](http://institut-papst-benedikt.de) Since then, I have always been very moved by this, because it expresses the heart of his life, his academic thinking and his love for the Church. Our vocation also lives solely from this center, otherwise it cannot be understood, if at all!

My last visit with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was in 2020, during his last visit with his brother George Ratzinger.

Magalis Aguilera, Maria Luisa Ofele, and Judith
Stegman, consecrated virgins
Regensburg (Germany) and Miami (FL)

The three of us had the immense privilege of working with the planning team for the 2008 Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins in Rome, the theme of which was taken from Pope Benedict XVI's depiction of the *Ordo virginum* during his homily on the occasion of his consecration of a virgin: “A Gift in the Church and for the Church.” His homily and his 2008 address to the virgins revealed his deep love for our vocation (both are included in this issue of *The Lamp*, p.18.)



Years later, Maria Luisa—being also from his beloved Bavaria—arranged for us to once again meet with him, now as Pope Emeritus, in the Vatican Gardens. His mind was sharp, recalling by name and with detail people he had met only once. His hope-filled regard for the *Ordo virginum* continued. May he pray for us, pray for the Church!

GIFT IN THE CHURCH
AND FOR THE CHURCH

On March 25, 1988, the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, during the celebration of Mass in the Church of the Monastery of Saint Scholastica in Civitella San Paolo, Rome, His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger conferred the consecration of a virgin on Dagny Kjaergaard and gave the following homily:

“The day of the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Mary is the origin of Christian virginity: it is born in the moment of the “yes” of the Virgin to the divine maternity. Contrary to this affirmation one could say: but there already existed at least attempts at a virginal life motivated by religious ideas. Even at the time of the birth of Jesus there was being formed a virginal monastic life for men and women in the locality of Qumran, that religious movement which John the Baptist was probably close to. And we also find these mysterious words on the lips of the Virgin Mary: “How is this possible? I do not know man.” (Luke 1, 34)

All this is true and one could say that the development of a virginal life in the bosom of a chosen people precisely in the messianic time was an inclination of the soul of Israel towards the Lord, a sign of the fullness of time. But it is also true that it did not yet have to do with Christian virginity. We don’t know with certainty what the true significance is of the statement of Mary: “I don’t know man.” In any case, such a declaration of the Virgin appears in that moment incompatible with the will of the Father which is, for Mary, divine motherhood. And her words even seem, at first glance, to be an obstacle rather than an adherence to the Will of God. In order to become fully available, the decision of the Virgin Mary would need to be transformed. And it was transformed in the dialogue with the angel, to whom the Virgin responded: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1, 38)

The Word was born in this way and only by means of this, Christian virginity, in fact Christian virginity is to enter in this word, to participate in the mystery of this word, which is the mystery of the Incarnation of the divine Word, the Christological center of our faith. Because it is like this: Christian virginity is never just a private, personal, decision but a gift received in the Church from the hands of God - a consecration in which one’s own will is accepted by God and transformed into His Will. It is essential for consecrated virginity that it not be only and simply a private decision - it could become in this way an obstacle to the divine will, my will opposing His Will. It is essential that my will comes to be offered, abandoned, handed over into the hands of God; that virginity become complete availability to the Lord, letting ourselves be guided by Him, in the organism of His mystical Body, for the good of the entire Church. It is deduced from this that consecrated virginity is a state in the Church, a Marian state, not less necessary for the fecundity of the Church than the ministerial state of the Priesthood in the succession of the Apostles. The Church must always be Marian and Petrine in order to correspond to her original vocation.

With these reflections we have substantially responded to the question: What is the newness of Christian virginity born of the “Yes” of Mary to the Annunciation of the Lord? The essential point lies in the dialogical character of virginity: It is a matter of my “I” being a response to a divine proposal. Renunciation of marriage counts less; what is crucial is the renunciation of self-will in one’s own life, of the self-sufficiency of an “I” shut up in one’s self. So it is not the “no” that is dominant - the renunciation of certain values; predominant is the “yes” to a higher value, to the divine “You”. Virginity is not something negative, it is the most important thing in the world, a great “Yes”: “Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me as you have said.” Christian virginity is a dialogical “yes”; in other words, it is an act of love. In fact the ancient liturgy illustrated

the occurrence of that day with a wedding psalm (Psalm 45/44), characterized by the Hebraic tradition as a “cantic of love”: “Listen, daughter, consider, incline your ear, forget your people and your father’s house and the King will desire your beauty”. Christian virginity is a spousal mystery, a quest for the true beauty which pleases Jesus the King.

A second element follows the first: dialogue with God is never a dialogue between two isolated individuals. God is Trinitarian love. God is the Creator; the Son is the before all things and all subsist in Him. He is also the head of the body which is the Church, He is the beginning, the first born of those who have risen from the dead.” To be in dialogue with God implies being open to all creatures. Dialogue with God is linked to the Body of Christ. Therefore Christian virginity always has an ecclesial character. With her “yes” at the Annunciation, Mary became the first Church, because the Church, in her most fundamental nature, is no other than the “yes” of the creature to God. In this way one also understands how virginity and motherhood, virginity and fertility, are inseparable. The virginity of Mary became Christian virginity at the same moment in which it became motherhood. It is here that the passage from the Old to the New Testament is realized.

It is not possible for me to explicate right now all that flows from these assertions. I would like only to draw your attention towards what seems to me to be a fundamental aspect. By chance - but there is no ‘by chance’ in Christian life - this year the Feast of the Annunciation coincides with that which at one time was the Friday of the Passion, dedicated in the popular

tradition to the Sorrowful Virgin and, as such, was celebrated liturgically.

The Annunciation is a joyful feast - “Rejoice Mary,” the Angel said to the Virgin. But the great, invincible joy was born in a definitive manner only from the Cross, in the Resurrection. The principle of the grain of wheat fallen to earth, which brings forth fruit only by dying, is the fundamental image of Christian virginity. (John 12, 24) Only by letting go of ourselves do we find ourselves. Christian virginity is a bold and generous image of letting go of ourselves: “At Your word, I will let down the nets!” Virginity is a radical act of faith and therefore is an intimate union with the crucified Lord in the sense of the word of St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.” I -but no longer I - I am dead and risen in

communion with the Body of Christ - this is the transformation accomplished in the virginal consecration: to abandon oneself and to find oneself again in the hands of the Lord. The Marian mystery is a mystery of the Cross and for this reason it is a joyful mystery, in the glory of the Risen Lord. I and no longer I, cross and Resurrection, virginity and motherhood, is fulfilled in that Yes of the Madonna, which is the origin and permanent locale of the virginal state.

We thank God for this gift, for this powerful and concrete sign of His Presence in the world and we pray that the “Yes” given today by our sister be accompanied always by grace and by the divine blessing. Amen.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger



TO THE ORDER OF VIRGINS

Personal journeys in holiness at service of all

On Thursday, 15 May, 2008, in the Vatican's Clementine Hall, the Holy Father spoke to 500 consecrated virgins from 52 countries who were taking part in the International Congress-Pilgrimage of the Ordo Virginum, the Order of Virgins. The following is a translation of the Pope's Address, which was given in Italian. (from English Weekly Edition of "L'Osservatore Romano" N. 22 May 28, 2008):

Very Dear Sisters,

I greet and welcome with joy each one of you, consecrated with the "solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rite of Consecration to a life of virginity for women living in the world [RCV] n. 17), on the occasion of the International Pilgrimage and Congress of the Ordo Virginum, for which you are gathered in Rome during these days. In particular, I greet and thank Cardinal Franc Rode for his cordial greeting and his dedication to this initiative, while I address my heartfelt thanks to the Organizing Committee.

In choosing the theme for these days, you were inspired by one of my affirmations which sums up what I have already had the opportunity to say concerning your state as women who live consecrated virginity in the world: A gift in the Church and for the Church.

In this light I would like to strengthen you in your vocation and invite you to develop, from day to day, your understanding of a charism that is as luminous and fruitful in the eyes of the faith as it is obscure and futile to those of the world.

"Imitate the Mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord." [RCV, n.16] The Order of Virgins is a special expression of consecrated life that blossomed anew in the Church after the Second Vatican Council (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n.

7). Its roots, however, are ancient; they date back to the dawn of apostolic times when, with unheard of daring, certain women began to open their hearts to the desire for consecrated virginity, in other words, to the desire to give the whole of their being to God, which had had its first extraordinary fulfillment in the Virgin of Nazareth and her "yes".

In the thought of the Fathers, Mary was the prototype of Christian virgins and their perception highlighted the newness of this new state of life, to which a free choice of love gave access.

"They have chosen You [Lord] above all things; may they find all things in possessing You". (cf. RCV, n. 24). Your charism must reflect the intensity but also the freshness of its origins. It is founded on the simple Gospel invitation: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt. 19:12), and on St. Paul's recommendations of virginity for the Kingdom (I Cor 7:25-35). Yet the whole of the Christian mystery shines out in it.

Christian mystery in Christ's brides

When your charism came into being, it did not take shape in accordance with specific ways of life. Rather, it was institutionalized little by little until it became a true and proper solemn, public consecration, conferred by the Bishop in an evocative liturgical rite which made the consecrated woman the sponsa Christi, an image of the Church as Bride.

Dearest friends, your vocation is deeply rooted in the particular Church to which you belong; it is your Bishops' task to recognize the charism of virginity in you, to consecrate you and, possibly, to encourage you on your way, in order to teach you the fear of the Lord, as they commit themselves to do during the solemn liturgy of consecration.

From the sphere of the Diocese with its traditions, its Saints, its values, its limits and its problems, you broaden your horizons to the universal Church, sharing above all in her liturgical

prayer, which is also entrusted to you so that “the praise of our heavenly Father be always on your lips; pray without ceasing”, (RCV, n. 28). In this way your prayerful “I” will gradually be enlarged, until there is no longer anything except a great “we” in the prayer. This is ecclesial prayer and the true liturgy.

May you open yourselves in your dialogue with God to a dialogue with all creatures, for whom you will find you are mothers, mothers of the children of God. (cf. RCV, n. 28).

However, your ideal, truly lofty in itself, demands no special external change. Each consecrated woman normally remains in her own life context. It is a way that seems to lack the specific characteristics of religious life, and above all that of obedience.

For you, however, love becomes the sequela: your charism entails a total gift to Christ, an assimilation of the Bridegroom who implicitly asks for observance of the evangelical counsels in order to keep your fidelity to Him unstained (cf. RCV, n. 26). Being with Christ demands interiority, but at the same time opens a person to communicating with the brethren: your mission is grafted on this.

Sisters, despite your differences

An essential “rule of life” defines the commitment that each one of you assumes, with the Bishop’s consent, at both the spiritual and existential levels. These are personal journeys. There are among you different approaches and different ways of living the gift of consecrated virginity and this becomes much more obvious in the course of an international meeting such as this, which has gathered you together during these days.

I urge you to go beyond external appearances, experiencing the mystery of God’s tenderness which each one of you bears in herself and recognizing one another as sisters, even in your

diversity.

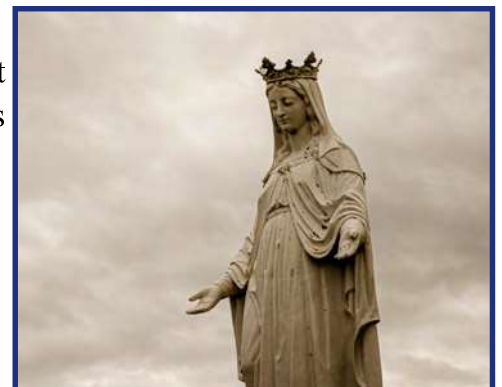
“That your whole life may be a faithful witness of God’s love and a convincing sign of the Kingdom of heaven”, (RCV n. 17). Take care always to radiate the dignity of being a bride of Christ, expressing the newness of Christian existence and the serene expectation of future life. Thus, with your own upright life you will be stars to guide the world on its journey.

The choice of virginal life, in fact, is a reference to the transient nature of earthly things and an anticipation of future rewards. Be witnesses of attentive and lively expectation, of joy and of the peace that characterizes those who abandon themselves to God’s love. May you be present in the world, yet pilgrims bound for the Kingdom.

Indeed, the consecrated virgin is identified with that bride who, in unison with the Spirit, invokes the coming of the Lord: “The Spirit and the Bride say: ‘Come’” (Rv 22:17).

As I take my leave of you, I entrust you to Mary; and I make my own the words of St. Ambrose who sang the praises of Christian virginity, addressing them to you: “May there be in each one the soul of Mary to magnify the Lord; may there be in each one the Spirit of Mary to exult in God. If there is only one Mother of Christ according to the flesh, Christ on the other hand, according to the faith, is the fruit of all, since every soul receives the Word of God so that, immaculate and immune to vice, she may preserve her chastity with irreproachable modesty” (Comment on St. Luke 2, 26: PL15, 1642).

With
this heartfelt
wish, I bless
you.



Greeting to the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, from consecrated virgins gathered in audience May 15, 2008, during the International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins, composed and delivered in German by Maria Luisa Öfele. English translation follows:

Your Holiness!

Filled with joy and a deep spirit of thanksgiving, consecrated virgins from fifty-two countries find ourselves gathered here today by the Successor of Peter. We would like to thank you with all our heart for the gift of this encounter, which we have awaited in prayer and in joyful hope! Many consecrated virgins who could not be present for the international congress and the pilgrimage are at this moment united in prayer with your Holiness and with all of us here in Rome.

From apostolic times the Lord has called Christian women “to cling only to him with greater freedom of heart, body, and spirit.”¹ “The rite for the consecration of virgins is one of the most treasured in the Roman liturgy.”² Like the sacrament of marriage, it speaks of the bond between Christ and his Church and of the beauty of the betrothal with Christ. Through a solemn rite of the Church the virgin becomes a consecrated person. She becomes an ecclesial sign, for the Church herself is before all else virgin and spouse.

The nuptial relationship with the glorified Christ in the *ordo virginum* is a charism which the Holy Spirit gives to the Church. It is not a thing to be possessed but rather a gift received, ordered to the building up of the Church in her innermost being. Holy Father, we thank you today for this gift which we have received through the service of the Church. This gift commits us in every stage of our life and unites us to the Church in the urgent cry, “Come! (...) come, Lord Jesus!” (cf. Rev 22: 17a; 20b)

Consecrated virginity is never a private, personal decision but rather “a gift of God in the Church and for the Church” (Cardinal Ratzinger). As the “bride

of Christ”, invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb, the *virgo consecrata* belongs to Christ and to his Church. We are “espoused to him, whom the angels serve” and before whose glory “sun and moon stand in wonder.”³ The mystical marriage which lies at the heart of the prayer of consecration is the determining factor in the life of us *virgines consecratae* in the whole world and in every single diocese.

Holy Father, today we renew our fidelity to you, the Successor of Peter, to all bishops and to the Magisterium of the Church. Through the celebration of the Eucharist and of the liturgy of the Church, through meditation on the Word of God and through prayer, we live out our service to the Church. In union with the Church and under the protection of Blessed Mary, Virgin and Mother, we want to bear witness “to God’s love and be a convincing sign of the Kingdom of heaven,”⁴ “to the praise of God’s glory” (Eph 1:14) and for the salvation of all people.

The bridegroom calls, “Listen, (...) understand; pay me careful heed” (Ps 45:11a). Our response is and always shall be an answer springing from that faith which we daily renew in communion with the whole Church. We ask you, Holy Father, to confirm us in the faith, so that we may “find all things in possessing” Christ, whom we have “chosen above all others” and to whom we have given ourselves wholly and forever.⁵

¹Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, second edition, Rome 1994, Nr. 922

²Decree of Promulgation of the revised Rite of Consecration; Congregation for Divine Worship; May 31, 1970; *AAS* 62 (1970): 650

³Antiphon after the handing over of the insignia in the Rite of Consecration

⁴Cf. from the Examination in the Rite of Consecration

⁵Cf. Prayer of Consecration

Father David Whiteside

Homily 1

In God's beautiful providence, this year's National Convocation of Consecrated Virgins begins on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. There is nothing more important to a consecrated virgin, a bride of Christ, than the loving Heart of her Divine Spouse, Jesus. In the 17th Century Jesus revealed to St. Margaret Mary His Divine Heart full of infinite love both for her and for all humanity. During this convocation Jesus desires to reveal His Heart to all of you, His brides, more deeply, more intimately.

And where do you find the Heart of Jesus most tangibly on this side of eternity but in the Most Holy Eucharist? Remember the first and the greatest Eucharistic miracle ever recorded in the year 700 AD in Lanciano, Italy... The priest, offering the Mass during which the miracle took place, doubted the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In God's abundant mercy, during the consecration, He allowed the bread to turn into visible flesh and the wine to turn into visible blood that the priest may believe. Another aspect of the miracle is that this visible Eucharistic flesh and blood have been miraculously preserved to this day (over 1,300 years later) that our faith in the Eucharist too may be strengthened. I have had the privilege of visiting Lanciano three times and seeing the Eucharistic miracle myself. In the 1970's scientists were allowed for the first time to analyze the miracle and they came to find out that the flesh is the flesh of a man's living (not dead) heart tissue. Jesus is revealing to us not only His true presence in the Eucharist, but highlighting in a particular way His Sacred Heart in the Eucharist. It is from His Eucharistic Heart that He longs to pour out His love upon us and especially upon His brides.

This gets to the "heart" of one aspect of our theme for this year's convocation: "Communion in the Bride of Christ." We celebrate the union of hearts between the Bridegroom and His bride culminating in the Most Holy Eucharist. This is my prayer for



all of you (and for me) that during this convocation, we all enter into a deeper union with our Eucharistic Lord... Heart to heart. Amen.

Homily 2

As we reflected this morning in my conference, as Consecrated Virgins, you are called to keep your lamps burning bright. This is achieved through interior prayer, meditation... mental prayer. Through daily mental prayer you will have a regular Heart to heart encounter with your Divine Spouse. As we reflected yesterday in my homily, the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Heart are one and the same reality. It is in the Eucharist that we tangibly encounter the Heart of the Beloved and keep our lamps burning bright.

St. Alphonsus says: "We can meditate in every place... but the best place for making mental prayer is the church; for Jesus especially delights in the meditation that is made before the Blessed Sacrament, since there it appears that He bestows light and grace most abundantly upon those who visit Him."

It was while St. Margaret Mary was praying before the Blessed Sacrament that Jesus appeared to her all three times revealing His Sacred Heart to her. The first time was on December 27th, the Feast of St. John the Apostle. This is so very significant! Remember how the virgin, John rested his head upon the Heart of Christ at the Last Supper, the

same occasion of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. As John rested upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he entered, in a way, into a school of Love where he learned that Jesus is gentle and humble of Heart. This image of the virgin John resting upon the Heart of Jesus is a beautiful image for us of mental prayer before the Blessed Sacrament (the Heart of Jesus in the flesh). Like John, we rest upon the Lord's heart during interior prayer and enter into the school of Jesus' sacrificial love.

Entering this school of love is intrinsic to Consecrated Virginity. Pope Benedict XVI says in *Sacramentum Caritatis*: "Consecrated men and women know that the principal purpose of their lives is the contemplation of things Divine and constant union with God in prayer... Here I wish to reaffirm the importance of the witness of virginity, precisely in relation to the mystery of the Eucharist... The Eucharistic mystery has an intrinsic relationship to Consecrated Virginity in as much as the latter is an expression of the Church's exclusive devotion to Christ, whom she accepts as her Bridegroom with a radical and fruitful fidelity. In the Eucharist, Consecrated Virginity finds inspiration and nourishment for its complete dedication to Christ." Clearly an essential key to keeping your lamps burning bright is interior prayer in the presence of your Eucharistic Bridegroom as much as you possible can.

Like the virgin John, Consecrated Virgins are called to rest upon the Heart of their Beloved Spouse, Jesus, to enter His school of love, to contemplate things Divine and thereby grow into a deeper union of love. Let's respond daily to the call of the Bridegroom: "Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."



Homily 3

Yesterday we considered the image of the virgin St. John resting his head on the Sacred Heart of our Lord at the Last Supper. We reflected on how this is an image for us of mental prayer before the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, resting upon and drawing lessons of love from His Sacred Heart.

Today I would like to reflect on the image of the Virgin Mary contemplating the pierced Heart of Jesus at the foot of the Cross. The pierced, opened Heart of the Savior on the Cross is both a revelation and an invitation. It is a **revelation** of the deep sacrificial love in His Heart poured out for us all and an **invitation** to enter into His open Heart thereby entering into an even deeper school of love.

In her revelations of the Sacred Heart, St. Margaret Mary saw Our Lord's pierced open wound. She recounts: "I saw this Divine Heart as on a throne of flames, more brilliant than the sun and transparent as crystal. It had its adorable wound and was encircled with a crown of thorns and was surmounted by a cross." The flames, the crown of thorns and the cross are a revelation of Our Lord's infinite sacrificial love for all humanity. However, it was also for her an invitation: "He demanded my heart, and I supplicated Him to take it. He did so, and put it into His own adorable Heart, in which He allowed me to see it as a little atom being consumed in that fiery furnace. Then, drawing it out like a burning flame in the form of a heart, He

put it into the place whence He had taken it, saying: "Behold, my beloved, a precious proof of my love. I enclose in thy heart a little spark of the most ardent flame of my love, to serve thee as a heart and to consume thee till thy last moment."

Like St. Margaret Mary, Jesus is inviting us to enter into His pierced Heart, the Burning Furnace of Charity, that our hearts may experience a transformation, a transformation of sacrificial love.

Where do we find the sacrifice of the Cross and the piercing of the Sacred Heart most tangibly in this life, but in the sacrifice of the Mass at the consecration of the bread and wine? In the same way that the Virgin Mary stood at the foot of the Cross and witnessed the pierced open Heart of the Savior, so at the consecration of the Mass we find ourselves at the foot of the Cross and in and through the Eucharist we have access to the adorable wound in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Each Mass we attend is an awesome privilege and opportunity to enter into the Heart of Jesus. So, at the consecration of each Mass like St. Margaret Mary lets spiritually enter into this adorable Heart of Jesus and be set aflame with His Divine Sacrificial Love and in this way, keep our lamps burning bright for the Beloved Bridegroom.

Homily 4

We have considered the image of the virgin St. John resting on the Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper as an image of entering a school of love through the daily practice of mental prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We have also considered the image of the Virgin Mary standing at the foot of the Cross witnessing the piercing of Our Lord's Sacred Heart and how this is both a revelation of the sacrificial love of Jesus for us and an invitation for us to enter spiritually into His Heart each time we participate in the consecration of the Holy Mass. Finally, I would like to reflect on the image of St. John taking Mary into his home in Ephesus and offering her Holy Communion, the Sacred Heart of her beloved Son.

St. John was the bishop of Ephesus and therefore lived there with Mary. The ruins of this house were discovered in the 19th century after Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich received revelations about its location and description. Her description of the house was a small

stone house in the shape of a cross on a mount surrounded by forest overlooking the city of Ephesus.

We can only imagine with what recollection, purity, love, faith and devotion the Blessed Mother received communion from the hands of St. John. Like the rest of us, it was Mary's way of maintaining physical contact with her Son after His Ascension into Heaven. At communion Mary received the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus into her heart. Their hearts were one not only spiritually, but physically. Heart to heart... Mary's Immaculate Heart and Jesus' Sacred Heart beating as one. What a beautiful image for us to consider at communion: our heart and the Lord's Heart beating as one.

So, the three images to take with you as you leave this convocation:

Resting on the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus during
mental prayer before the Blessed Sacrament
Entering the Eucharistic and pierced Heart of
Jesus during the Consecration of the Mass
Receiving the Sacred Heart of Jesus into your
heart at the moment of holy communion

By doing these three acts of devotion you enter into a school of sacrificial love in the Heart of Jesus, you grow more in deeper intimacy with Him, and your virgin lamps are set aflame with Divine Love. If you neglect this kind of prayer, devotion and contact with the Eucharistic and Sacred Heart of Jesus, your Bridegroom, eventually your lamps will

go out. Remember the warning and rebuke that our Lord gave to St. John's church of Ephesus in the Book of Revelation: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand [lamp] from its place..." Instead, always strive to be like the wise virgins who have plenty of oil (prayer and devotion) and keep their lamps burning bright. Amen.



The USACV is pleased to announce the 2023 Information Conference on the Ordo Virginum, which will be held in a virtual format once again. The conference includes prayer together, personal testimonials from consecrated virgins, and times for questions and answers in addition to core presentations on the life of consecrated virginity lived *in saeculo*.

As hostess of this event, I encourage anyone with a serious interest in finding out more about the vocation of consecrated virginity, or who is pursuing the consecration as an applicant or candidate, to attend this conference. Also invited are diocesan delegates for consecrated life or other diocesan personnel involved in the preparation of virgins for consecration.

Virtual Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity

Dates: Friday to Sunday, **March 10-12, 2023**

Time: 1:00-6:00pm EST each day

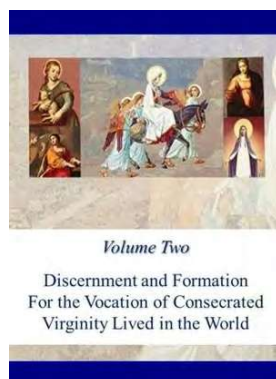
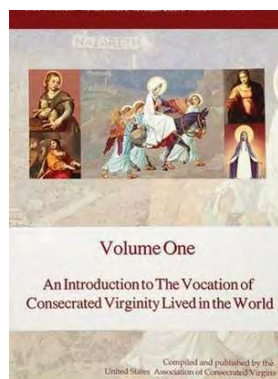
Format: Webinar

Coordinators: Mary Kay Lacke and Judith Stegman

Presentation topics:

- † Overview of Vocations in the Catholic Church, and the Ecclesial Identification of the *Ordo virginum*
- † The Liturgical Rite of Consecration and the Marian Dimension of the Vocation
- † The Liturgy of the hours and Prayer Life of the Consecrated Virgin
- † Historical Aspects of the Consecration of Virgins; Virgin Saints
- † Sacred Scripture and the Witness of the *Ordo Virginum*, in *Ecclesiae sponsae imago*
- † Mystical Espoused to Christ, the Son of God
- † Living *in saeculo* and in the Local Church
- † Personal Testimonies of the Consecrated Virgins Serving on the Team
- † Psychological Maturity for Living the Virginal Vocation
- † Prerequisites for Admission to the Virginal Consecration
- † Stages of Preparation for Admission to the *Ordo virginum*
- † About Associations, the *Ordo virginum*, and Next Steps

Online registration is now open! Click [here](#) to register or visit the consecratedvirgins.org website. For more information, contact info@consecratedvirgins.org. Resources available in the online store at consecratedvirgins.org.



A Note from the Archivist

Anne Gishpert, USACV-IRC archivist, reminds consecrated virgins who have not done so to please send her a copy of your consecration certificate (providing this copy also enables United States virgins to be full voting members of the USACV). Anne also keeps the USACV "family" albums, which include mementos from consecrations. You are warmly invited to send Anne the program, invitation, holy cards, photos, or other items from your consecration. Anne especially asks those consecrated in recent years to send these so that she can update our albums. The "family" albums travel each year to our convocation and information conference, and always bring smiles and memories. You can email Anne at anne.gishpert@gmail.com.

Upcoming Issues of the Lamp

May 31, 2023 Visitation of the Blessed Virgin

September 8, 2023 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin

December 12, 2023 Our Lady of Guadalupe

February 2, 2024 Feast of the Presentation and World Day for Consecrated Life

Submissions Accepted

If you would like to submit an article, artwork, or a reflection for consideration in a future edition of The Lamp, please email it to info@consecratedvirgins.org. We accept articles and artwork from consecrated virgins related to our vocation or related to Our Lady and the virgin saints. If you would like to write and submit a remembrance or memorial for a deceased consecrated virgin to be published in a future edition of The Lamp, please email it to info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Volume III of the Ordo Virginum series

Shalina Stilley, Diocese of San Diego Volume III, about virgin saints, is coming along nicely. Many thanks to those who have already submitted their work. If you have volunteered to write about a Saint but are unable to submit your work by May, please contact me at catherinestilley@gmail.com. If you are an artist, would like to submit a piece, and have not yet contacted me, feel free to do so. We are aiming to finish this project this summer.

2023 USACV Leadership Team Elections

Emily Byers' term on the USACV Leadership Team ends December 31, 2023, and she will not be running as a candidate to serve another term. Emily has served faithfully as the USACV Secretary and we are grateful for her service in a variety of ways over the past number of years. Thank you, Emily!

At this time, we are inviting consecrated virgin members of the USACV to nominate yourself, or another consecrated virgin, to put forward your name as a candidate to serve as a member of the leadership team. Our Divine Spouse has entrusted us with the joyful duty of fostering this vocation in the United States, and we hope you will prayerfully consider serving in this way. Please feel free to contact Francesca, Judith, or other members of the leadership team if you have questions, and contact Francesca Riddick, our membership chairperson, or Judith Stegman, with nominations.

2022 Recordings Available!

Great news! Links to recordings from the virtual sessions of the 2022 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins (held in La Crosse) and the 2022 Virtual Information Conference on the Ordo virginum, are now available. If you attended a particular conference in person or virtually, and would like to receive a link to the conference you attended, at no charge, please email info@consecratedvirgins.org with your request. If you did not attend the conference, links to the recordings are available for purchase through our online store at consecratedvirgins.org.

Pray with Us! — Virtual Vespers

Claire Halbur, Archdiocese of Phoenix (AZ)

Consecrated virgins and candidates continue to have the joy of gathering once every month or two, via video call, for shared prayer time. Our last virtual Vespers was held on January 21 in honor of Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr. Please join us for the next two Virtual Vespers:

Pray with us on Monday, March 20th for the [transferred] Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Guardian of Virgins! Also mark your calendars for Monday, May 29, Memorial of Mary, Mother of the Church. Prayer will begin at 6:00pm Arizona time (9:00pm ET).



Convocation 2023

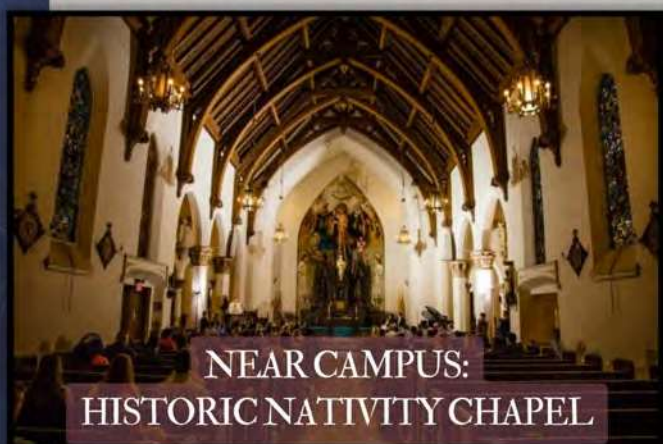
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

FRIDAY, JUNE 23-TUESDAY, JUNE 27

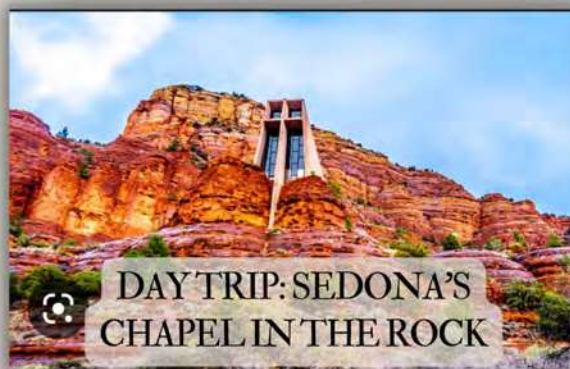
Theme: The Voice of the Bridegroom

Consecrated Virgins and Candidates* are invited to come together for prayer and fellowship on the picturesque campus of Northern Arizona University, nestled in the high country mountains, 90 minutes from the Grand Canyon and less than an hour from the red rocks of Sedona.

**who have attended an information conference*



NEAR CAMPUS:
HISTORIC NATIVITY CHAPEL



DAY TRIP: SEDONA'S
CHAPEL IN THE ROCK



OPTIONAL EXTENSION TRIP
TO THE GRAND CANYON

Flight booking info:

Flagstaff has its own airport minutes from NAU. Another major airport is 3 hours away in Phoenix.

Registration available soon!

Approximate costs: Convocation \$550, optional extension trip \$200. Pre-register by email to info@consecratedvirgins.org.