

The Lamp

Volume 21, Issue 4 — December 12, 2016

United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

USACV

www.consecratedvirgins.org

December 12, 2016 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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

In commenting on Luke 1:30, Cardinal Kasper writes: “And so these words apply also to us: ‘Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.’” This is a great starting point for our Advent and then Christmas reflection. First of all, like Mary, each one of us has been favored by God. We have just celebrated Thanksgiving and while that is a time when we give thanks for our families and friends and for all that we have, this line from St. Luke reminds us that we, ourselves, are a blessing for which we must give thanks. God has favored each one of us with our human dignity and has created us in his own image and likeness, such that we are not just a reflection of God, but we are indeed his very image.

However, there is in addition the great favor of calling each of you to the life of consecrated virginity, to be not only the spouse of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, but also to bear in your flesh his own virginity. This is a tremendous favor God has worked and is working in you. Perhaps we need an angel arriving each morning in our rooms to remind us of this great blessing that we are individually favored by God.

Based on such a great blessing, we are told that we need not be afraid. I presume the first fear that might have affected Mary or any of us if an angel appeared to us would be that God expects something from me which will be very difficult, maybe even something I don’t want to do. That is why God’s favoring of us is so important.

We could never do the will of the Father if it were just some task imposed upon us. Rather, it is out of blessing and being favored that we wish to make a return unto the Lord. Awareness of God with us leads us to banish all fear, for if God is for us who can be against us?

My sisters, you are favored and thus God’s love and his will for you are one. This is your favored time. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. Have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

Inside this Issue

Page

Something Ancient-	
Something New	2
Upcoming Events	3
Announcements and	
News	3
From the President’s Journal	4
Homily of Bishop Kane	5
2017 Convocation: Save the	
Date	7
Anniversary Reflections	8
Jesus Crown of Virgins	10
Life Corner	15
Consecration Announcements	15
Upcoming U. S. Consecration	15



Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing

By Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman

The Feast of the Blessed Mother and Queen of Virgins in her advocacy as our Lady of Guadalupe has a mystical meaning both in the great dignity of her virginity and in her being the Mother of God. As we contemplate the revelation of her double dignity as Mother and Virgin, vividly portrayed in her image at Guadalupe, we enter into the mystery of her maternity: she was revealed there with the incarnate Word of the Father in her womb. She who is the Mother of the Eternal Priest carried Him in her womb. “She was counted worthy to bear the king of all in her own womb, the heavenly God, the Son of God. Her womb became a temple, and by God’s kindness and an awesome mystery was prepared to be the dwelling place of the Lord’s human nature.” (Epiphanius, “Paranion” 79.3.1 in *Women In Early Christianity: Translation from Greek Texts*, edited by Patricia Cox Miller, The Catholic University of America Press, 2005, pg. 67).

The virgins of the ancient Church were called to live within the freedom of the spirit lived by our Blessed Virgin Mother; they were called to live within the mirror of her maternity and virginity. “Freedom means being independent and without a master. It was given to us in the beginning by God, but was obscured by the shame of our debts.” Our Blessed Mother in her Immaculate Conception becomes by God’s power the great sign of the triumph of Christ’s Church over the power of the devil. St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of this power:

The human effort extends only to this: the removal of the filth which has accumulated through evil and the bringing to light again of the beauty in the soul which we had covered over. It is such a dogma that I think the Lord is teaching in the Gospel to those who are able to hear wisdom when it is mysteriously spoken: “The kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21).” (Gregory of Nyssa, “On Virginity” 12.5 in *Women in Early Christianity*, pg. 99).

The power of *the kingdom of God* has moved all the virgin martyrs of the Church to testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as they have given up their lives for Him. It is the power of His resurrection that has moved them to defeat the power of the devil in his unsuccessful attempts to lure them away from their faithful love for Christ’s eternal kingdom.

Let us contemplate anew this portrait of our Blessed Mother, “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, she was with child” (Rev. 12:1-2). Let us see her as the model that she is for all human virgins who follow the Divine Lord, for she defeated the limitations of the flesh. As Saint Methodius reflected:

Chastity is rare and difficult for people to maintain; its loftiness and magnificence are matched by the risks it entails. Thus it needs powerful and noble natures which, completely diverting the stream of sensuality, guide upward the vehicle of their soul, never relinquishing their goal, until, nimbly leaping over the world with the eager flight of their intelligence, and placed upon the very vault of heaven, they gaze directly upon incorruptibility itself as it wells up from the undefiled breast of the Almighty. A drink like this cannot be produced on earth, heaven alone is the source of this spring. (Methodius, Bishop of Olympus, “The Symposium” 1.1 in *Women in Early Christianity*, pg. 79).



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Upcoming Events Sponsored by the USACV

**2017 United States Convocation of Consecrated
Virgins**
July 7-11, 2017

Pallottine Renewal Center, Florissant, Missouri
Archdiocese of St. Louis
(See article page 7)

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**2017 National Information Conference on the
Vocation of Consecrated Virginity**
July 25-28, 2017

The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center,
Chicago, Illinois

Announcements and News

USACV Photo Albums:

We are in need of a consecrated virgin to take over a holy task for the USACV: maintaining our “family” albums, which contains photos and other memorabilia from virgins’ consecration ceremonies; and maintaining our “convocation” album, which contains photos from the convocations over the years. Please contact a council member if you are interested.

Recordings Available

Recordings are now available from the 2016 Information Conference and 2016 Convocation. Please see the USACV website for order forms.
www.consecratedvirgins.org.

Upcoming Issues of The Lamp:

February 2, 2017 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life

May 25, 2017 Ascension Thursday

September 8, 2017 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 8, 2017 Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception



From the President's Journal

By Judith Stegman

As the choir director of my parish prepared for my consecration Mass in August 1993, he immediately suggested the Advent Hymn, "Wake, O Wake, The Night is Dying." The lyrics are sure to tug at the heart of every virgin. I especially like this translation of the first verse:

Wake, O Wake, the night is dying.
The watchmen on the heights are crying;
 "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!"
Midnight hears the welcome voices
And at the thrilling cry rejoices:
"Where are the virgins, pure and wise?
The bridegroom comes, awake!
Your lamps with gladness take!
Alleluia! With bridal care
And faith's bold prayer,
To meet the bridegroom, come, prepare!"

-Phillip Nicolai

Preparation to meet the Bridegroom differs for each of us. I have been impressed this fall to witness the gladness and care with which so many virgins have taken up their lamps, in order to light the way of faith in the midst of serious challenges life has placed before them. "With bridal care and faith's bold prayer" we prepare to meet the Bridegroom anew on a Christmas morning and each day of our lives.

If you haven't yet had a chance to order them through the USACV website, I'd like to commend to you the recordings from our 2016 Convocation: Cardinal Burke's presentations, which are timely for

our vocation and for our nation, Maria Luisa Öfele's talk "Christ as Bridegroom," and, in a particular way the two DVD's that are available for order. The first DVD is historical, looking back at the 1995 Rome Pilgrimage for Consecrated Virgins; the second DVD is a photo collage and video from the 2016 symposium for consecrated virgins in Rome during the celebrations for the close of the Year of Consecrated Life.

On a personal note, I am happy to mention that my thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of a licentiate in Canon Law at The Catholic University of America. In my thesis, I studied the rich history in law and tradition of the first criterion for admission to the Consecration of Virgins as presented in the *Praenotanda* to the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, 5a: "Those Women to Whom the Virginal Consecration May be Imparted: In the case of virgins leading lives in the world it is required that they have never celebrated marriage and that they have not publicly or manifestly lived in a state contrary to chastity."— *Praenotanda* to the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, 5a).



Advent Wreath in Franciscan Chapel in Citadel Mall, Colorado Springs, CO

Homily of Bishop Francis Kane to Consecrated Virgins During Our 2016 Convocation in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Feast of St Lawrence August 10, 2016 by Bishop Francis Kane

For those of you I have not met, I am Bishop Kane. Welcome! I know many of you come from around the country. I hope your stay in Chicago has been a pleasant one. For those of you from Chicago, I am happy to see you and I thank you for your example and witness to our local Church. I hope this convocation has been an experience that has inspired and re-energized you in your vocation as a consecrated virgin. I am very happy to be with you and to celebrate this Mass with you.

Today is the feast of St Lawrence. It is a very appropriate feast on which to end your convocation, for St. Lawrence was a witness to the treasures that really count. We do not know too much about Lawrence. He was a martyr and a deacon of the Church of Rome. Apparently, he was in charge of distributing the Church's material support to the needy.

During the persecution of the Church under the Emperor Valerian in 250 A.D. he was arrested and the authorities demanded that he surrender the Church's riches. As the story is told, Lawrence gathered the poor, presented them to the Emperor and said THEY were the treasure of the Church. As you might imagine, this did not sit too well with the Emperor and Lawrence was put to death.

They say that Lawrence was martyred by grilling him to death over an open fire. In the middle of this terrible torture, he is supposed to have said: "You can turn me over now; I am done on this side." While his martyrdom must have been excruciatingly painful, I was struck by the sense Lawrence had about the true treasure of the Church:

It was not silver or gold.

It was not what pagan Rome would have defined as valuable.

It was the precious lives of the poor and the marginalized.

Every human life is valuable whether rich or poor, young or old; whether they are handicapped, unborn, sick, or suffering, they are a treasure. That was what St Lawrence presented as the most valuable asset of the Church. Such a collision of values so enraged the Emperor that he ordered Lawrence executed, but it also should give us pause to think.

This story of St Lawrence is inspiring in and of itself. It is also the embodiment of an important theme in the tradition of the Church. The values of the Church are far different from the values of the world. For the Church, treasure is not about the things we accumulate.

It is the human person.

It is about who we are, the lives we live, the way the world is better or worse because of us.

It is how we treat others.

It is the values by which we live.

It is about our relationship with the Lord.

I would leave you with two thoughts regarding true treasures.

First, it is a challenge that is very personal. What is important to you? What is your treasure? You have consecrated your lives to the Lord. You have to figure out how to live in the world even though your treasure is not of this world.

While you have received consecration, you still have to deal with all the things that are a part of your everyday life IN the world. You have to worry about a job and keeping food on the table. You have to be concerned about where you will live, about providing for your health care and retirement, about having enough saved to provide for yourself if something goes wrong. You have to deal with family and friends and neighbors. All of that can seem like a temptation to distract you from what you really value, from your real treasure. And all these worries and responsibilities can be that.

If you become preoccupied with those things, if you love all those things too much and dedicate yourself to pursuing those kinds of goals, you will be unable to pursue your real treasure. If you compromise the values embodied in your consecration, you will lose them. If you seek just your own comfort or choose to serve those worldly standards, you will not be able to serve the Lord.

However, if you keep all these things in perspective, they can help you in your quest for the Lord. If you transform the circumstances of your life into opportunities to find grace for yourself and to bring grace to others, then you will build up a treasure that the world can never comprehend. . . . You have to be in the world, but you have to let go of its values.

Second: While your consecration is personal, it is also a witness to the world. Our contemporary world is probably not all that different from the pagan world of Rome that Lawrence confronted. Our world is about wealth and power and position. Our society celebrates the wealthy who have more money than they could ever spend, but so often some of these wealthy people continue to pile up more and more while they ignore the cry of the poor. The people our society admires most are often people of power or position. Our so-called stars and heroes are often abysmal failures in their personal lives.

The world today needs witnesses to authentic values and true treasures. The world needs you to show them a life that has meaning and purpose, values that have substance, treasures that are not vulnerable to the whims of fame and fortune. You are in a unique position to offer alternatives to the self-absorption and quest for instant gratification of our contemporary world.

As consecrated virgins, be witnesses to the goodness and grace that our world so desperately needs. In your personal lives, pursue the treasures that really matter. God bless you in your vocation. And may the treasure of God's grace always be in your lives.



O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice; come, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Antiphon for December 21

2017 Convocation

Save – the – Date

July 7-11, 2017

United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins

“The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Virgins”

An invitation from Theresa Prosser and Cara Buskmiller, 2017 Convocation Host Team Leaders

We hope that consecrated virgins will meet us in St. Louis for the 2017 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins. We are planning a wonderful convocation program. So far, Archbishop Robert Carlson has graciously accepted our invitation to celebrate Holy Mass with us on Friday evening and visit with us at the opening reception afterwards. Originally from Minneapolis, MN, he has been Archbishop of St. Louis since 2009. As former chair of the USCCB Committee on the Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations, he will have interesting perspectives to share with us.



Pallotine Renewal Center Gardens

We are also grateful that Bishop Boyea, episcopal moderator for the USACV and Bishop of Lansing, plans to join us once again. He will also be with us for our opening Mass on Friday evening and will offer presentations and celebrate Holy Mass for us on Saturday morning.

The site for the Convocation will be at a new location for us, the Pallotine Renewal Center. The Pallotine Center is conveniently located only about 25 minutes from the St. Louis airport. All of the facilities, including meeting, sleeping, and dining rooms are very accessible under one roof; the grounds beautiful.



**Archbishop Robert
Carlson**



Pallotine Renewal Center Chapel

30 Years

**Magalis Aguilera, Archdiocese of Miami,
consecrated February 22, 1986**

On February 22, 1986 I was consecrated for a life of perpetual virginity, as the culmination of a call I received when I was in my early adolescent years. I left Cuba in 1968 and flew directly to our nation but soon decided to move to Puerto Rico. I waited 13 years there to be admitted to the consecration by His Eminence Luis Cardinal Aponte-Martinez (RIP). This waiting was providential because during the time, His Eminence asked me to investigate for him the history of our vocation. He was also waiting for the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983 that gave juridical recognition to the restored Order of Virgins, paving the way for him to decree the opening of the Consecration of Virgins in the Archdiocese of San Juan.

Holy history is the life of a virgin. Those years spent waiting for my consecration were fruitful in service and love for our Divine Spouse. As a professor at the University of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I collaborated with the pastoral office of the Archdiocese in developing five “Communities for Evangelization” for young people. The communities were under the spiritual direction of Father Pablo Straubs (RIP), a Redemptorist priest who was a great missionary (perhaps you watched him on EWTN during the last years of his life). The communities were instrumental in assisting young people to evangelize in their parishes and with their classmates. The courses I developed and taught to the youth pastoral leaders in the Institute of Theology of the Archdiocese of San Juan gave more to me in the way of His love than the time I devoted to them. Ever since the earliest days of my life, and continuing to the present, children and youth have been the most important mission the Divine Lord has given me for His glory. My practice as a clinical psychologist for children and their families keeps me very close to the will of our Divine Spouse in all that I am and do.

I returned to Miami 25 years ago. My life is a continuation of my early call to be a spouse of Jesus. I keep giving myself in complete donation to our vocation and also in helping nuns who request my help in the discernment process for admission of young women to the contemplative life. I love the contemplative life and, as an aside, the current prioress of the Monastery of the Carmelites in Puerto Rico was one of the youth leaders who years earlier had attended the Pastoral Institute in the Archdiocese of San Juan of Puerto Rico. She discovered her vocation while devoting herself in her early years to the young people, and her decision to enter the contemplative life is truly a blessing that she received and that I keep always in my heart. When I visit Puerto Rico for extraordinary events, she and her community open for me their "next door" or "mini-monastery" and I enjoy so much those brief days sharing in their refectory "behind iron" with her and her community.

Being a consecrated virgin is the most important title I have in my mortal life. I follow my Divine Spouse and in doing so I am expected to be a mirror of His Spousal love for His Church. Jesus Christ is the One who is present in my life day and night; no woman in this mortal world has a spouse who can be with her day and night without missing one second of the wife's life – only the consecrated virgin! I live in the world, but the nun who lives in a monastery also lives in His presence, sharing everything with Him. I do not lack anything that a woman can have from union of love with a mortal man. I think that if there would be emptiness in me as a spouse of Jesus Christ it would be because I lose the meaning of His life that was a complete abandonment to His Father's will. I try constantly to think more in the senses of my soul than in the emptiness of the senses of my human nature: not to see the Spouse with the eyes of my human nature but to see Him in the deepest place of my soul. The interior presence of our Divine Spouse, in faith, is a stronghold for me in the midst of the apparent solitude or routine of the daily living arrangement.

My testimony is simple to the married couples who bring their children to my professional care, when they sometimes ask me about the message offered

them by a woman who is consecrated in totality to Jesus Christ. I let them know that they are following their vocation by showing the meaning of their matrimony, and I am following my vocation by showing the life of Jesus Christ as Spouse of the Church, and witnessing to His kingdom to come, where His being as Spouse will be the eternal manifestation of spousal love. Both vocations – marriage and consecrated virginity – give eternal testimony.

This is a joyful way to be for Jesus who is true God and true man, an "invisible" spouse to mortal eyes; but truly in totality for each one who follows Him alone. As I wrote for a newspaper after my consecration in 1986: "In a world that devalues virginity – physical and emotional as well as spiritual – embracing consecrated virginity is a challenge. It is a voice that shouts, in complete surrender, that the strength of the risen Lord is with and among us." I try to live this challenge day by day with faith and love in His promises of eternal life and love.

I join my prayers to the Most Holy Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our mother who is Mother and Queen of Virgins, that she may always accompany me in living with blessed joy this mystical wedding with her beloved Son.

20 Years

**Carol Lankford, Diocese of Jefferson City (MO),
consecrated July 10, 1996**

On the occasion of my 20th Anniversary of consecration to Jesus Christ in a life of virginity for women living in the world, which took place on July 10, 1996, I wanted to express my deepest gratitude to my Lord, Jesus Christ, my Husband — the absolute love of my life!

Reflecting on my letter of application written in 1996 to the Bishop of my Diocese of Jefferson City requesting this consecration, I wanted to express the following things held deeply then, and even more deeply *now*...

...my love for Jesus, who first loved me and gave Himself completely for me.

...my coming to understand *His* invitation, *His* call, to me in this very particular vocation to be His Bride, to "follow Him wherever He goes"...

...my willingness to allow our relationship to be one that would be a "public witness," not simply personal and private.

...my understanding that the gift of virginity received and offered out of love to Jesus, for the sake of His Kingdom, is not barrenness, but spiritual fruitfulness for the world — and my desire that in this relationship with Him there would be many, many children born and nurtured of our marriage.

...my awareness of the special grace bestowed through this consecration to live out a continual "yes" to Jesus, and my deep desire and great need to receive this grace.

...the realization, that continues to grow ever more deeply within my heart, that every "yes" I make in response to Jesus is really only a very tiny participation in that great "yes" which the Virgin Mary gave to God and which bore *perfect fruit — Jesus Christ Himself*.

Am I living out my vocation in the way God desires? I do believe that our relationship is growing and strong *because He is strong*, and His strength is made perfect in my weakness. I receive Jesus in the Sacraments frequently — trusting in His work of merciful love. And I pray often...and continually for the grace of an actively receptive heart — one that is always open, ready, and willing to receive His Presence, His will, His purpose.

He continues to teach me the value of genuine, honest "lament" — that cry of belief in His goodness — the "kind of complaint" that trusts His heart — regardless of overwhelming circumstances. And equally, the tremendous significance of "...always giving thanks in all things..." (Eph. 5:20). I am learning that the power of this continual *thanksgiving*, which very often begins with an act of the will, contains the secret that transfigures the "ugly" into the truly beautiful.

Continued on page 12

Jesus, Crown of Virgins

by Diane Farr

The following is an English translation of the Latin hymn, “Jesu Corona Virginum.”

Jesus, crown of virgins, conceived by that mother who alone as virgin gave birth: mercifully receive these prayers.

You feed among the lilies, encircled by a virgin band, adorning your brides with glory and bestowing their rewards.

Wherever you go forth, virgins follow singing praises as they run along behind you, ringing out their sweet voiced hymns.

We pray you more liberally to strengthen our spirits that they know nothing at all of the pain of corruption.

To God the Father be glory and to his only Son with the Spirit Paraclete now and for all time.

The following are my thoughts regarding the themes presented in the hymn:

Every baptized Christian is a temple of the Holy Trinity and is called to place their relationship with God above all things. The consecrated virgin by her vocation points to the primacy of this communion that God wishes to have with everyone. In the Gospel of Matthew we read, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Mt. 22.30. The consecrated virgin through her exclusive bridal love for Christ anticipates this blessed state. Truly Jesus is the crown of the virgin who has loved and desired Him alone as her supreme joy and greatest treasure. She has not been wedded to another created being, but to Christ who is love incarnate in a marriage that will last forever.

It is during the season of Advent especially, that we contemplate the holy virgin of Nazareth pondering the Word Incarnate dwelling within her womb. The mother of God was prepared for her divine maternity by her Immaculate Conception, and she anticipated the fulfillment of the Divine Will by her resolve to remain a virgin. The catechism states, “Christ’s birth did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity, but sanctified it.” (CCC 499) It further states, “Mary is a virgin because her virginity is a sign of her faith unadulterated by any doubt, and of her undivided gift of herself to God’s will. It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Savior.” (CCC 506) Our Lord loves to see the beauty of His mother’s immaculate heart reflected in the hearts of his brides. In order to acquire this splendor and receive the grace that God wishes to give us, we must imitate Our Lady in lowliness and humility.

The hymn says of Jesus, “You feed among the lilies.” Jesus finds refreshment in the company of his virgin brides for they possess something of His own divine purity. It is by the merits of His cross and resurrection that he bestows this gift flowing from the Divine Will upon his brides. Speaking of Jesus’ love for His brides the servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta writes in volume 3 of her diary, “He is taken by so much love that He gives her His Most Pure Heart for refuge.” She goes on to say, “Our Lord delights greatly in walking in the midst of these lilies that perfume earth and heaven. And much more does it please Him to be surrounded by these lilies for being the first noble lily, and the model He is the exemplar of all the others.”

These lilies that adorn the Heart of Jesus are rooted in faith as they grow in divine wisdom and perfect charity. The light of the Holy Spirit illuminating their hearts has drawn them to the heavenly beauty of virginity

consecrated to Christ. The consecrated virgin surrenders her entire being to Christ in an act of pure love. In turn her glory and reward will be the complete possession of her Bridegroom. He clothes her in His own holiness, and she loves with His own love. As consecrated virgins, we have been given the extraordinary grace of knowing and loving Jesus as our Bridegroom. It is through His infinite mercy that we have been invited to follow the Divine Lamb into the sweet intimacy of virginal love. It is in a deep spirit of gratitude that we sing our hymns of praise honoring the majestic beauty and goodness of our Lord and Spouse. The image of our beloved is imprinted in the depths of our souls. We draw our life from Him and seek to always live in His Will. It is vital that we radiate the light of our Bridegroom through our prayer and service to others. It is by the strength of His love that we will carry our cross in union with Him for the benefit of His entire Church. If we are faithful and loving brides of Christ we will allow His compassion to flow through us in our concern for our sisters in the Lord.

Just as we have been given the special gift of preserving the virginal integrity of our bodies, we pray also that we will never suffer the pain of breaking with God's Will and deliberately sinning against His goodness. Our desire is to glorify the most Holy Trinity working and acting in our lives. We conclude this meditation with a quote from the prayer of the Consecration of Virgins, "Your joy and your crown even here on earth will be Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will call you to His presence and into His Kingdom where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever He leads you."



*O Emanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of nations and
their Savior: Come, and save us, O Lord our God!*

(O Antiphon for December 23)

Special gratitude to Mary, Virgin of virgins and my Mother, and St. Joseph, spiritual father and protector of virgins.

I didn't know it was possible to fall in love with God — with Jesus. This has been the greatest surprise — the greatest joy of my life and I am eternally grateful!

Carmen Margarita Muñoz, Diocese of St. Augustine, consecrated November 23, 1996

I was asked to write a reflection on my 20th anniversary of solemn consecration in the Order of Virgins. I must start by proclaiming with the Psalmist: *I will sing forever the Mercies of the Lord (Psalm 89:1)*. Glory, praise, honor and thanksgiving today and always to God the Trinity.

How can I describe in these short paragraphs the undeserved mercies and graces received from God, the origin and source of life and every vocation, during these 20 years of solemn consecration and all along my whole life? Yes, a very short time, and at the same time a beautiful lifelong journey of Love. It began with and continued, accompanied by His Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, to whom my parents dedicated me when I was born and in Baptism.

"It is I who chose you" (Jn. 15:16), said Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate. The merciful love of God creates and chooses us from all eternity to love Him and live the *Sequela Christi* – the following of Christ – in totality, in order that we live forever with Him after this earthly life: a life in eternity praising and loving God the Father, whose Word is revealed in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, Whose love "has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rm. 5:5).

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, asked all consecrated persons to "Remember the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and view the future with HOPE" (cf. Apostolic Letter to Consecrated persons, 21 November 2014). And on 2 February 2016, at the end of the Mass of the closing the Year of Consecrated Life, during the Jubilee of Mercy, he told us: "*Please, do not forget the first vocation. Remember...!*" "*Memory: Do not forget the*

first call! And with the love with which you were called, today the Lord continues to call you."

I experienced that love of God at a very young age, and with it a call to consecrated life/consecrated virginity, to be spouse of Jesus Christ forever. It was a gift of the Holy Spirit. And, as St. Paul declares: "The graces and gifts of God are irrevocable." When He calls, it is forever. And because God has this mercy, unbounded love, He fulfills what He promises. That is our Hope.

The devotion to Our Blessed Mother, deep contemplative prayer, the sacramental life – especially the Eucharist, and total surrender to the will of God – these are essential. Lived in silence and solitude, God's love is revealed so brightly that no words can explain "what He has in store for all who love Him."

After God and the Blessed Virgin Mary, I am greatly indebted to my parents for the gift of life and for having raised us in a deeply Catholic environment, and with a strong Catholic education. As the Church says, the family is "the domestic church." In our family one could learn, through their example, the meaning of faithful love, always supporting each other, praying together, and serving the Church, with joy and patience. Their spousal love, authentic, genuine, that union of hearts reflected the love of God, of Jesus Christ for us, for each person. A special devotion to our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus was lived in the home.

The graces received during this Holy Year of Mercy were highlighted with the excellent and blessed pilgrimage to Rome and the events for the Year of Consecrated Life meeting, as well as the passing of my beloved mother into Eternal Life. It was a blessing to be and pray with her until her last breath, witnessing how holy persons leave this life, as she entered into the embrace of the eternal love and joy of God.

Because God loves each person with an everlasting love, all good things come from the Lord; even our fidelity to grace is in itself a gift from God. And our *fiat* is free, like the Virgin Mary, because He chose us beforehand and showed us His infinite, merciful Love. The love of God is above all

our ideas, expectations of, and reasoning about Him, even the most sublime feelings. Because of that, what remains perpetually is Love (1 Cor. 13).

10 Years

Theresa Catteruccia, Diocese of Alexandria (LA), consecrated February 11, 2006

Reflecting on my consecration is joyful and painful. In 1979 I had a profound conversion experience that changed my life. A time of prayer, listening, and trying to obey what I believed to be God's will. Studying scripture, learning more about the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and serving God consumed my days.

In 1996 I began making private temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience according to my state in life and wearing a wedding band blessed by my Bishop. Each year I would renew these vows in private with a priest before the Blessed Sacrament.

One day while in prayer I believe I heard the Lord requesting that I wear a chapel veil to Mass in lieu of the veil I would take. I did not understand since I had already discerned religious life by visiting several orders. My parish priest encouraged me to follow the Lord's request and I began wearing a chapel veil.

While attending a conference in March 2003 in Kenner, Louisiana, a priest was processing with the Blessed Sacrament when I began to weep. I asked the Lord to reveal the reason for the tears and I heard very clearly, "Take the next step to consecration." After speaking with my spiritual director and my Bishop, I discerned that God was calling me to consecrated life.

Also in April 2003, the Lord provided the means to fulfill a word He had given me thirteen years previously. A small group of people began meeting which eventually became the Handmaids and Servant Sons of Mary, the Helper. Our service is to/for our priests, deacons, seminarians, and those in the diaconate formation program.

It took me almost three years to be consecrated because my bishop was transferred and we had to wait

for a new bishop. There was a waiting period with the new bishop. However, on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 2006, I was consecrated as a virgin living in the world.

Things began to happen that I really do not understand even now. The new Bishop did not permit me to have the Blessed Sacrament in my apartment due to our priests being too busy to celebrate Mass there as required by Canon Law. Although we have a perpetual adoration chapel in our town, it was not advantageous for daily attendance. Therefore, I make a holy hour before Mass. The Bishop also stated there was no need for him to meet with me once a year since I saw my spiritual director every month. Not long after my consecration, the call to suffering increased so much I had to stop most of the volunteering in which I was involved. About two years after my consecration, my job with the diocese was terminated due to the financial crunch.

I have had a great struggle to have the deep prayer life I had before my consecration. About five years ago, I began making a 5-8 day yearly Ignatian Retreat which has been a marvelous experience.

The sorrows following my consecration one can readily read. My joys revolve around my assurance from the Lord of His love, mercy, and forgiveness for me, as well as the multitude of graces I receive from Him through the Eucharist, Sacrament of Reconciliation, and His Mystical Body. Serving our priests, deacons, seminarians, and those in diaconal formation has and continues to be one of my greatest joys. With these graces, His strength comes for me to persevere in cooperating in His efforts to make me holy as He is holy — a life-long journey.

Cathy Maley, Archdiocese of St. Louis, consecrated April 1, 2006

Recalling a statement from my current Archbishop to his seminarians, when they lament their unworthiness to be priests, "You'll never be worthy; God doesn't choose the worthy, He chooses those whom He wants. . .", I'm reminded of the mystery of why the Lord has called us to a public state of consecrated life and a mystery it remains.

This vocation of consecrated virginity has truly been my life's calling since I was 10 years old although it was not ratified by the Church until later in life. On this journey I have been so struck by the life of St. Angela Foligno, a reckless woman, married with children, who made sacrilegious confessions after those first interior movements toward conversion. In the last years of her life she lamented in prayer, "Jesus, will you ever refer to me as your daughter?" Finally, Jesus responded, "You are not only my daughter, but you will march with the choir of virgins in heaven." What struck me too about Angela was that when grace touched her, she knew no limits on making a public spectacle of herself, to humiliate herself before the whole town how she had, in sinning, denied God. Her entire focus became centered on Jesus and only Him. The saints have so much to teach those of us who have responded to this invitation to be so utterly consumed in the Divine Bridegroom.

In these years, I have come to understand how critical it is for us to grow in humility, to prefer the agenda of Jesus over our own and to defer to others. St. Teresa of Ávila said, "There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world." And, St. Thomas went on further saying, "Speaking absolutely, humility excels virginity."

When I left teaching, I had plans! I was going to move back home, volunteer in a soup kitchen and get involved with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. But God revealed He wanted something more: not just a resignation to His Will but a complete embrace of it: a call to embrace the hiddenness of Nazareth and that meant tossing my plans to the wind. The hiddenness of St. Clare who became the patroness of television, the Little Flower who became patroness of the missions and St. Faustina who became the Apostle of Mercy struck me like never before. There is a greatness in the hidden life to be treasured by those of us leading active lives. There is greatness in receiving no recognition and experiencing little gratitude and even criticism from those we serve. In fact, it is in humility and in entering into the hiddenness of the Virgin of virgins that we realize the infinite power of God and the great mission of the Church. St. Teresa of

Calcutta said it so well, "Look what God did with nothing!" It was her Eucharistic life and her life of prayer that drove everything she did! It is my prayer for each of us that we strive to see who we are before the Lord, Most High; that we seek to be small and little for Jesus so that He may be all and that, truly, we may find our identity as consecrated virgins only in Him. For in this calling to serve Him in such a public state in the Church, let us not forget to seek our hiddenness in His Heart. Let us not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ alone!

Nancy Kushman, Diocese of Lansing, consecrated December 13, 2006.

A Prayer in Thanksgiving for Ten Years of Consecrated Virginity

You created me: out of nothing I have come. But you had me in your mind all along. You made me a child of God and put a call before my eyes: You said "Do not be afraid." The same words you have said to your Church all along.

I answered the call to give my life to God. Nurtured by you; at every step you were there. But not only did you say, "You are a child of God" but also: "Be my bride."

On bended knee you came to me. I said: "Yes!" I knew at the moment you spoke that I wanted to be exactly that.

But: "How, Lord, can this work? How exactly is this to come about? Leave my life behind and go somewhere else?" "No" you said. "Stay here and be with me."

At times you seemed to have left me. But then you came again and said again: "Be my bride and remain here with me. Lean your head upon my chest and remember that the night is for lovers."

Then my path changed when you said to me: "Take your desires and your call and go to the Church. I will be with you. I will give you words to say. Tell them what I told you and see what they say."

A shepherd of souls, in *persona Christi*, he said to me: "Yes, daughter, we will talk to you and guide you. Bring your thoughts, bring your prayers as an offering of love to your King."

Continued on page 16

Life Corner

by Florence Sundberg

I've always loved the season of Advent, the sense of moving towards new life but this year there are shadows hovering over mankind as the forces of darkness gather together to block the Light of Christ. So much is at stake and we who are called to be His Light and His Presence in the world must stand fast in Christ and witness to life and to goodness among God's people.

Seventy five years ago the Bishop of Munster, Clemens August Graf von Galen spoke out against those who would kill the defenseless, the unproductive, the pre-born babies, the mentally and physically challenged. He spoke about those who were deemed 'unworthy to live' because they were classed as 'unproductive members of the national community.' We see this continue in the ongoing termination of the lives of the unborn, the severely handicapped, the elderly - the 'unproductive.' This contaminates the spirit of mankind and if we do not stand unwaveringly for life, if we do not proclaim unceasingly in word and in action the sanctity of all life, then the Light will truly be diminished because it will have gone out in our hearts. Bishop von Galen called on the faithful to speak out "... lest we become infected with their godless ways of thinking and acting, lest we become partakers in their guilt." His motto was *Nec Laudibus, Nec Timore* - "Unconcerned about praise, or fear."

Consecration Announcements

United States:

November 27, 2016, Cristina Garcia, Diocese of Los Angeles at the hands of Archbishop José H. Gomez.

December 8, 2016, Catherine Dillon, Diocese of Rockville Centre at the hands of Bishop William Murphy.

Upcoming U. S. Consecrations

February 2, 2017 Jen Settle, 5:00 pm at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the hands of The Most Reverend Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Philadelphia. Holy Hour 3:30-4:30pm. All are warmly invited. Contact Jen at jensettle@hotmail.com.

February 11, 2017 Karen Paschke, 1:30 pm at St. Patrick's Church, Madison, Wisconsin, at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison. All are warmly invited.



The Wise Men followed a star: many astronomers think that their "star" was a planetary conjunction. In ancient times, a planetary conjunction was a sign that something wonderful was happening, such as the birth of a king. I shot this unusual grouping of Venus, Mercury, and Jupiter from my balcony. (News media called this a conjunction at the time; however a much rarer classic conjunction actually occurs when the planets appear to be so close that they cannot be separated by the naked eye)

Joyce Stolberg

My day of consecration came: It was final; it was beautiful; it was holy. I was to be yours forever and you mine. "My beloved is mine and I am his...Set me as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death." (Song of Songs)

My prayer to you my Beloved is this: Let me unite my will to your will. Let me live in your love forever. Let my flame be united to the roar of your fire to give light and warmth to all around. Amen.

5 Years

**Sue Gudenkauf, Diocese of Madison (WI),
consecrated December 11, 2011**

Dear Sisters in Christ,

God is incredibly good! His ways are a mystery, but His plans always faithful. As I come upon my 5th anniversary on Gaudete Sunday, with joy and awe, I marvel at God's goodness. He has continued His work within me to help me grow closer to Him. I am humbled at His generosity. Aren't you? For all of us, He is deeply in love with His little ones and our response....love in return.

For more than a year, He has been working to draw me closer to Him and to His Sacred Heart. I am grateful! To do so, He has asked for more time in solitude and to respond in love, it required me to separate myself from my family and friends and where I have worked. I have moved, with permission of my Bishop in the Diocese of Madison (Wisconsin), Bishop Morlino to whom I am incredibly grateful, to the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Archbishop Lori has agreed to receive me and I am working part-time in the Department of Evangelization as Coordinator for Deaf Ministry. It has been great and going really well, albeit not without sacrifice, but all love requires sacrifice! I am not sure if this move will be temporary or permanent, but it lies in His loving hands. He continues

to work well beyond me - I just have to get out of the way & let Him work. He does things that amaze me and leave me in gratitude for His goodness. As the seed lies in the ground, it is watered and fed by the farmer. I am that seed he is working on, but lying underground, it remains to be seen how the seed may grow. I pray that He will help me grow in virtue and be more attentive and aware of my fallenness so that I may learn to avoid those traps to decrease vice. Love never fails.

Let us join together in prayer and love for our Divine Spouse. May you enter more deeply into His love. May your hearts expand in capacity to resemble Him more. And may your soul be on fire with holy joy during this season of anticipation for His coming! "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I propose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Is 55:8-11.

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