

The Lamp

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United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

USACV

www.consecratedvirgins.org

February 2, 2017 Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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

Pope Francis has decided to continue the Year of Mercy even as he concludes it: “The Jubilee now ends and the Holy Door is closed. But the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain open” (*Misericordia et Misera*, #16). He wants us to continue to celebrate mercy. He finds that the Church is already doing this throughout the Mass as well as in the Sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation.

For all of us in this association, it seems, however, that there are other ways for us to be agents of this on-going mercy. Pope Francis starts by urging us to be the face of consolation:

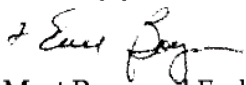
A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger...all these things express God’s closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters (#13).

He adds that sometimes it is also just being with others in silence that we show great consolation.

However, for all of us the real path that is, has been, and remains opened is that of charity, the path of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: “Mercy impels us to roll up our sleeves and set about restoring dignity to millions of people” (#18). The Holy Father wants us to be a part of the culture of mercy and to realize that our efforts will be unique to each one of us: “The works of mercy are handcrafted, in the sense that none of them is alike” (#20).

So, my sisters, perhaps this is an opportune time to reflect how each of us might be uniquely called to continue the work of creating such a culture through prayer and good works.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing



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By Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman

There are two vocations within Salvation History that have come directly from the Eternal Father, without the intervention of a human intermediary.

The Vocation of Mary of Nazareth

When our Eternal Father prefigured the image of a woman in Paradise, referring to the Church that would belong to His Son, in that very image of a woman He also prefigured the Mother of His Son, Mary of Nazareth. The work of the hagiographer in the Old Testament was to prepare the human mind to accept the possibility that a virgin would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that child would be the Immanuel: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). The Eternal Father consecrated Mary of Nazareth by the power of the Holy Spirit to be the Virgin that he announced in Paradise. He confirmed this vocation to Mary herself by sending an angel to her: "You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name of Jesus. Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be since I do not know man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God'" (Lk. 1:35). In the capacity of her own free will, Mary accepted the vocation of her virginal motherhood, and this was fulfilled. No human intervention was present in Her election.

The Vocation of Simon Peter

When Jesus of Nazareth, the Eternal Son of God, was preparing His Church to be the Sacrament of Salvation, He did so in the will of His Eternal Father. The hagiographer of the New Testament often observes Jesus at prayer before He embraces the will of His Eternal Father: "The Gospel according to St. Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ's ministry. Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his mission: before his Father's witness to him during his baptism and Transfiguration, and before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion (Cf. Lk 3:21; 9:28; 22:41-44). He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of his apostles: at his election and call of the Twelve, before Peter's confession of him as 'the Christ of God,' and again that the faith of the chief of the Apostles may not fail when tempted (Cf. Lk 6:12; 9:18-20; 22:32). Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2600).

The choice of the twelve: "He went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communication with God. At daybreak he called his disciples and selected twelve of them to be his apostles; Simon, to whom he gave the name of Peter . . ." (Lk. 6:12-13). Jesus entered communication with His Father, and, according to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, He discovered that the one who would answer His question was the one chosen by His Eternal Father to lead His Church: "He asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' . . . 'and you,' he said to them, who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, "Blest are you, Simon son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my Heavenly Father" (Mt. 16: 13-17).

The Eternal Father was the one who revealed His Son's mission to Peter; Simon Peter's vocation came from the Eternal Father. And the interpretation of the Fathers of the Church explains furthermore that Jesus fulfilled the will of His Father when he received from Peter the answer that he was expecting to hear.

Saint Cyprian of Carthage wrote: "The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and

upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . . ’ [Mt. 16:18–19]. On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep [Jn. 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair [*cathedra*], and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair.” (see www.catholic.com/tract/origins-of-peter-as-pope, quoting *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

The Vocation of the Consecrated Virgin

The vocation of the consecrated virgins is based upon the calling of Mary of Nazareth, and is a vocation not so much *to do*, as it is a vocation *to be*. Our vocation is one that is confirmed by the successors of the Apostles (the bishops). The diocesan bishop is the one to consecrate the virgin, just as happened in the ancient Church, including in Rome, where the pope himself would consecrate virgins of the Diocese of Rome. Consecrated virgins, from the time of the early Church and extending to today, represent the continuation of the vocation of Mary of Nazareth as a woman who is both in the Church and for the Church.

The double mission of our Blessed Mother, as both Virgin and Mother, demonstrates the essence of the vocation of consecrated virginity, as we seek to follow our Divine Lord and Spouse. The consecrated virgin lives the mystical meaning of the Church’s motherhood and her virginal espousal to Christ. The Rite of Consecration constitutes the virgin “a surpassing sign of the Church’s love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ” (*Praenotanda* 1, Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity).

From the President’s Journal

By Judith Stegman

As we begin this New Year in our Lord, we begin as a people with hearts full of prayer for our Church, for our country, and for the world. As consecrated brides of our Lord Jesus Christ, we embrace the gift of virginity that was given first to our Blessed Mother, Mary of Nazareth, and seek always to show the undivided love of the Church for her Bridegroom. Following the way of the Blessed Virgin, we treasure all these things in our hearts and devote ourselves to prayer.

We are engaged in preparations for the 2017 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins, to be held in July under the theme of The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Virgins. The person of Mary brings great hope to the human race, and we never tire of honoring the Virgin Mother of God and imploring her help. I hope that many consecrated virgins will be able to join us in St. Louis. I have recently been reading *Mary of Nazareth* by Michael Hesemann, a book that

presents an archeological and historical biography of our Mother. It is a marvelous journey into her life and the time in history in which the world prepared for the birth of our Savior.

I have been invited to present workshops on the vocation of consecrated virginity at a March meeting of the National Conference of Vicars for Religious. My plan is to focus on topics of interest to diocesan personnel as they work with bishops in the discernment of this vocation and the formation and preparation that is necessary before consecration. The input of readers of *The Lamp* regarding topics that should be addressed is most welcome.

In this last note, I would also like to invite readers of *The Lamp* to offer the names of those who have recently been consecrated according to the *Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity*, from the United States and from other parts of the world, for publication in *The Lamp*. We rejoice with the Church throughout the world at notice of these consecrations.



**USACV Council
Members and Officers**

**Judith M. Stegman, President, 2016-2018;
Diocese of Lansing.**

**Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large, 2016-
2018 (Appointed Vice-President through
2018);
Archdiocese of Miami.**

**Margaret Flipp, Treasurer, 2017-2019;
Diocese of Arlington.**

**Marie Beccaloni, Member-at-large, 2015-2017,
(Appointed Secretary through 2017);
Archdiocese of Chicago.**

**Linda Ann Long, Member-at-large,
2017-2019;
Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis.**

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY



**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 5)**

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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
(See article page 6)**

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 contain 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 from the 2016 Convocation and 2016 Information Conference are available through our website store at www.consecratedvirgins.org.

Upcoming Issues of The Lamp:

May 25, 2017 Ascension Thursday

September 8, 2017 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 8, 2017 Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

February 2, 2018 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life

Special announcement from India:

Consecrated virgin Renu Silvano will celebrate her 25th anniversary of consecration in March (she was consecrated by Archbishop Ben Osta, SJ, in Patna Cathedral on March 25, 1992). Auxiliary Bishop Dominic Savio Fernandes will celebrate Holy Mass on March 25, 2017 in the Chapel at the Catholic Bible Institute in Mumbai, offering it for Renu and the consecrated virgins of Mumbai and her family and friends. Renu asks for prayers from all consecrated virgins on this happy, special occasion.

Meet Me in St. Louis (United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins, July 7-11, 2017)

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

“The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Virgins”



Pallotine Renewal Center Gardens

Homiletics and Pastoral Review. His presentations have been featured at Archdiocese of St. Louis Marian Conferences and he generously gives retreats for our Office of Consecrated Life. Don't let the academic credentials intimidate you, he has the gift of presenting in-depth theology in an accessible way. We are trying to arrange a tour (and perhaps Mass) at the St. Ferdinand Shrine. This is the first convent and mission of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne. The caretakers have been working hard to restore this beautiful early church (one of the oldest Catholic Churches west of the Mississippi) and the museum has many artifacts from this great saint.



**Archbishop Robert
Carlson**

In making travel plans, fly into St. Louis International (Lambert) airport. Southwest generally has the most, least expensive flights, although United and American have a presence here as well. By train, plan to use the Alton, Illinois stop as it is closest to the Pallotine Center. We would appreciate knowing who might be driving, so we can plan how to car pool the few miles to the Shrine. Please let Theresa Prosser or Cara Buskmiller know if you are driving and how many passengers you could take.

Lastly, we could use a little help “on the ground,” here in St. Louis. Some help with hostess activities would be most appreciated! Let us know you can help with refreshments (putting snacks on the trays, setting out drinks, and straightening up afterwards). If a couple of people volunteered each evening, no one would need to do a lot. Be thinking about how you would like to help in other ways, such as greeting arrivals or assisting with liturgies.

Our days together will be centered upon prayer, including Lauds, Holy Mass, and Vespers, as well as times of Eucharistic Adoration and Confession. Evenings will serve as a time for fellowship with one another. A detailed program and registration material will be available in spring on the USACV website. We welcome all consecrated virgins and candidates who have attended an Information Conference to join us for this wonderful time of study, prayer, and fellowship at the 2017 Convocation. Hope to see you here!



**Pallotine Renewal Center Chapel
Florissant, Missouri**

Planning is underway for the 2017 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World, sponsored by the USACV. It is scheduled for July 25-28, at the Cenacle in downtown Chicago, IL., the same venue as the 2016 National Information Conference. This conference is so important for those women discerning a call to the life of consecrated virginity in order to develop an understanding of the vocation and to learn the necessary next steps in the process towards consecration, steps that will be taken under the guidance of their diocesan Bishop.

This conference is also helpful for those persons working with a virgin during the discernment process, especially their bishops, their spiritual directors, diocesan vocation directors of the consecrated life and consecrated virgins who may be assisting them in the discernment process.

Over the years that the National Information Conference has been held, so very many consecrated virgins have shared how important and helpful the conference was in their discernment process. The consecrated virgins themselves are the best encouragers of other women considering this vocation to attend the conference as a part of their discernment. The USACV is grateful to Bishop Boyea, our Episcopal Moderator, for his thorough presentations on the history of the vocation, along with his availability to meet with the inquirers, vocation directors, and clergy who attend the conference on behalf of their dioceses.

Along with Bishop Boyea, a team of consecrated virgins give presentations on key dimensions of the life of consecrated virginity lived in the world: the content of the Rite of Consecration, the distinct spirituality of the consecrated virgin, the meaning of virginal chastity, the dimensions of “living in the world” and more.

The Information Conference team encourages our LAMP readers to recommend the conference to those who could benefit from attendance at the conference. For more information, please contact the conference coordinator, Theresa Marshall: tel. 734-332-4648 or marshallcv@gmail.com.

Prayerful Virgins in The Kingdom of the Divine Will

by Diane Christine Farr

We read in St Luke’s Gospel, “But Mary kept all these things pondering them in her heart.” Lk. 2:19. As consecrated virgins we are called to imitate the Mother of God by allowing a prayerful atmosphere to reign in our souls. Do we treasure the gift of our vocation, pondering the goodness and mercy of God in bestowing on us such a precious grace? Do we reflect deeply on the holy mysteries of our divine Bridegroom who wishes to draw us into a closer union with Himself in the unity of the Divine Will? Can we begin to understand with thankful and humble hearts who it is that has made us His brides in a heavenly marriage that will last forever?

In the responsorial for the feast of St. Lucy we read, “She is the virgin who prepared a joyful home for God in her heart, and therefore the Lord of heaven and earth has loved her.” We pray that God will increase our capacity to receive Him with joy, allowing the operation of His will to have full reign in us. We should be more aware of His life within us than we are of ourselves. We read in the Song of Songs, “Set Me as a seal upon your heart and as a seal upon your arm,” (Song. 8:6). Christ Himself has placed the seal of His pure love upon our virginity and as sacred persons we wish to render Him perfect praise.

We seek the presence of our beloved Jesus in silent adoration as he waits for us in the cloistered garden

of our heart. It is important to remember that whether we perceive His presence or not, He never leaves us including in times of great suffering. Jesus has loved us with a love infinitely strong and tender. Let us pray that we will respond generously to the invitation of Divine Love in order to fulfill the Divine Will in doing whatever He asks of us.

The consecrated virgin is keenly aware of the fact that her virginity belongs exclusively to Jesus. This is because virginity of the body is united perfectly to a virginal heart. In the freedom of holy virginity we come to know and love our Divine Spouse in prayer with the totality of our being. We see and understand the exquisite beauty of this great gift through the lens of His most pure heart. This purity of our interior life is illustrated beautifully in the following passage from the 10th volume of Luisa Piccarreta's diary. Jesus desires us to act as mirrors reflecting His true image, comparing the soul to a clear fount. "My daughter, virgin souls are the similes of the purity of the fount: The crystal clear and pure waters are the upright working, the sun that make its rays perpendicular is Me, the variety of colors is love. Therefore, if I do not find purity, upright working and love in a soul, she cannot be my mirror."

As prayerful virgins and brides of Christ, we pray that the Kingdom of the Divine Will shall come to reign in all souls. We desire that the petition, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" be fulfilled. In the presence of the Holy Trinity and in communion with the Divine Will, we offer love, praise, adoration and thanksgiving for the fiats of creation, the works of redemption and those of sanctification. We can apply this form of prayer to our meditation on the mysteries of the rosary. As we acquire an intimate knowledge of the Sacred Heart of our beloved Jesus, we enclose within our own heart all that He has done for us, and we offer reparation for those who do not respond to His love. In this act of intimacy with Jesus, we unite with His offering to the Father. It is the Father who has chosen us and has drawn us to His Son.

The Holy Spirit has revealed Christ to us as our Bridegroom. We are called to be attentive to all that the Holy Spirit wishes to teach us. The grace of spiritual motherhood compels us to lift up all souls in prayer into the light of God's healing presence. We pray that through the sanctity of the Divine Will working in us we will all experience His peace.

We reach the highest summit of prayer in this life in the sublime encounter with our Bridegroom in Holy Communion. We pray that we will always remain subservient and with absolute trust recognize our complete dependence on God. Consecrated virginity is a radiant flower coming forth from the Heart of the most Holy Trinity. In the light of the Divine Will, God continues to reveal to our soul an ever-new beauty, harmony and sanctity for He wishes to clothe us in His own holiness. Keeping this in mind let us reflect on these words from the homily for the Rite of Consecration. "Make your whole life reflect your vocation and your dignity. Our holy mother the Church, sees in you a chosen company within the flock of Christ. Through you the Church's motherhood of grace bears its abundant fruit. Imitate the Mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord. Preserve the fullness of your faith, the steadfastness of your hope, the single heartedness of your love. Be prudent and watch: keep the glory of your virginity uncorrupted by pride."

In conclusion, may we endeavor to allow a prayerful disposition to make us more open to the needs of those around us.



Consecration Announcements

Cristina Garcia, Archdiocese of Los Angeles at the hands of The Most Reverend Jose H Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles (11/27/16).

Catherine Dillon, Diocese of Rockville Centre at the hands of The Most Reverend William Murphy, Bishop (now Emeritus) of Rockville Center (12/8/16).

Jen Settle, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, at the hands of The Most Reverend Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Philadelphia. (2/2/17)



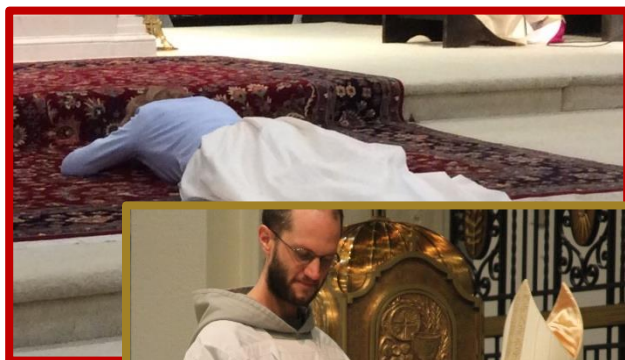
Christina Garcia and family with Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles



Christina Garcia with Archbishop Gomez and her attendants

Upcoming U. S. Consecrations

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.



Top: Catherine Dillon prostrates at Consecration ceremony; middle: Catherine receives consecration from Bishop of Rockville Center. Bottom: Virgins Sophia Winiarski, (Diocese of Hartford), Yvonne Oliver (Diocese of Rockville Centre), Catherine Dillon, and Gloria Oliver (Diocese of Rockville Centre). Photo by Rosanna L. Allende.

by Florence Sundberg

As most of us know, on Jan. 23rd, the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, President Trump signed an executive order reinstating the "Mexico City Policy" which prohibits non-governmental organizations that receive donations from the United States, in particular International Planned Parenthood, from providing or promoting abortions. This means that aid to countries in need will not depend on their willingness to provide abortions for their people. I am relieved that President Trump has begun to act on behalf of the lives of the unborn and their mothers. But I know that temporal actions, though well intentioned, may not be permanent because the next President can reinstate universal legal rights to abortion.

I believe that hearts need to be changed so that all may come to understand that each human life has immense value in the eyes of God, for all are created in His image, and to carry out a particular task for Him, one that will benefit mankind, in some special and particular way, whether small or great. Each human life sent from God comes with a blessing and a gift from God to all mankind. So, we must witness to life, stand for life and protect life through prayer and action to enable others to see and understand that their own well-being depends upon the well-being of the new life God sends into the womb of the mother and through her, into the world created by God to bless and enrich all of us.

10 Year Anniversary Reflection

Lori Rose Cannizzaro Anniversary October 7th 2016

As I reach my 10th anniversary, I find it hard not to look back at all the memories and realize how quickly the time has flown. It seems like only yesterday that our sweet Jesus asked me to be His bride. There have been many tests from health problems, to job loss, to family illness and death. But through it all HE has been faithful to me. I have felt his gentle hand guiding me in all these circumstances.

He has shown me that it is TRUST in Him at all times that is the key to navigating all of life's ups and downs.

He has also given me the blessing of mentoring three friends as they journey towards consecrated virginity. One was consecrated last spring, one will be consecrated this fall, and one is still discerning. Friendships like these are truly gifts from God. That is true of all my friends who have walked with me during these last 10 years. That is truly one of the many gifts of Consecration --- to walk with these people in a unique way and hopefully to help them in their faith walk with Christ. Women empowering women to be all that God has called them to be: what could be better than that? Now that's REAL "Girl Power!"

While no longer at the job at the seminary, I have remained in touch and friends with many of the seminarians and some who have become priests. They held a surprise party for me one evening before Christmas, complete with high end hors d'oeuvre and gifts. They said they wanted to express their love for me and all I'd done for them. So wonderful! That was our dear Lord letting me know that I had made an impact. That was so good to know. This is true spiritual motherhood. They will always be my spiritual sons.

While I don't know what the future holds, I KNOW Who holds the future, therefore I am not afraid. I don't know what Jesus wants me to do for Him or where He may call me, but I trust that in His providence, and with His care I will get there (eventually). This is faith in action; faith with "legs."

May all I do, say, think and feel, be impactful for the Kingdom of Heaven. May it help my brothers and sisters to reach their full potential for His purposes. Praised be Jesus Christ!



World Day of Consecrated Life:

A year ago at this time, many of the U.S. consecrated virgins were in Rome celebrating the close of the Year of Consecrated Life. The March 2016 issue of *The Lamp* featured many photos and reflections from Pope Francis and the consecrated who had gathered in Rome. In today's issue, we look back twenty years to the first celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life. Pope John Paul II introduced the commemoration with this announcement for February 2, 1997.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_06011997_i-consecrated-life-day_en.html

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE I WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear consecrated persons!

1. The celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life, which will be observed for the first time on 2 February, is intended to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels and, at the same time, is intended to be a suitable occasion for consecrated persons to renew their commitment and rekindle the fervor which should inspire their offering of themselves to the Lord.

The mission of the consecrated life in the present and in the future of the Church, now at the threshold of the third millenium, concerns not merely those who have received this special charism, but the entire Christian community. In the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* issued last year, I wrote: "In effect, *the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church* as a decisive element for her mission, since it 'manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling' and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse" (VC 3). Thus, I would like to renew the invitation to consecrated persons to look to the future with confidence, relying on the fidelity of God and the power of his grace, who is always able to accomplish new wonders: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (VC 110).

The reasons for the World Day for Consecrated Life

2. The purpose of such a day is threefold: **in the first place**, it answers the intimate need to praise the Lord more solemnly and to thank him for the great gift of consecrated life, which enriches and gladdens the Christian community by the multiplicity of its charisms and by the edifying fruits of so many lives totally given to the cause of the Kingdom. We should never forget that consecrated life, before being a commitment of men and women, is a gift which comes from on high, an initiative of the Father "who draws his creatures to himself with a special love and for a special mission" (VC 17). This look of special love profoundly touches the heart of the one called, who is urged by the Holy Spirit to place himself or herself in the footsteps of Christ, in a particular way of following him, by means of assuming the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. A stupendous gift!

"What would become of the world if there were no religious?" St. Teresa rightly asked herself (*Autobiography*, ch. 32, n. 11). This is a question which brings us to give unceasing thanks to the Lord, who by this singular

gift of the Spirit continues to enliven and sustain the Church in its demanding journey through this world.

3. In the second place, this day is intended to promote a knowledge of and esteem for the consecrated life by the entire People of God.

As the Council underlined (LG 44) and as I have had occasion to emphasize in the above-mentioned Apostolic Exhortation, consecrated life "'constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding re-enactment in the Church' of the way of life which Jesus, the supreme Consecrated One and missionary of the Father for the sake of his Kingdom, embraced and proposed to his disciples" (VC 22). It is thus a special and living memory of his being Son, who makes of his Father his only love -- his virginity; who finds in him his exclusive richness -- his poverty; and who has, in the will of his Father, the "food" by which he is nourished (cf. *Jn* 4:34) -- his obedience.

This form of life, embraced by Christ and made present particularly by consecrated persons, is of great importance for the Church, called in every member to live the same upward striving toward God who is All, following Christ in the light and power of the Holy Spirit.

The life of special consecration, in its many forms, is thus at the service of the baptismal consecration of all the faithful. In contemplating the gift of consecrated life, the Church contemplates her own intimate vocation of belonging only to her Lord, desirous of being in his eyes "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (*Eph* 5:27).

The fittingness of dedicating a special World Day is evident, then, for it assures that the doctrine about consecrated life will be more widely and deeply meditated and assimilated by all members of the People of God.

4. The third reason regards consecrated persons directly. They are invited to celebrate together solemnly the marvels which the Lord has accomplished in them, to discover by a more illumined faith the rays of divine beauty spread by the Spirit in their way of life, and to acquire a more vivid consciousness of their irreplaceable mission in the Church and in the world.

Immersed in a world which is often agitated and distracted, taken up sometimes by the press of responsibilities, consecrated persons also will be helped by the celebration of this annual World Day to return to the sources of their vocation, to take stock of their own lives, to confirm the commitment of their own consecration. In this way, they will be able to give witness with joy to the men and women of our time, in diverse situations, that the Lord is the Love who is able to fill the heart of the human person.

Truly there is great urgency that the consecrated life show itself ever more "full of joy and of the Holy Spirit," that it forge ahead dynamically in the paths of mission, that it be backed up by the strength of lived witness, because "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41).

On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

5. The World Day for Consecrated Life will be celebrated on the feast which commemorates the presentation which Mary and Joseph made of Jesus in the temple "to present him to the Lord" (*Lk* 2:22).

This Gospel scene reveals the mystery of Jesus, the One consecrated by the Father, come into the world to carry out his will faithfully (cf. *Heb* 10:5-7). Simeon points to Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (*Lk* 2:32) and by a prophetic word foretells the supreme offering of Jesus to the Father and his final victory (*Lk* 2:32-35).

In this way the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is an eloquent icon of the total offering of one's life for all those who are called to show forth in the Church and in the world, by means of the evangelical counsels "the characteristic features of Jesus -- the chaste, poor and obedient one" (VC 1).

Mary is associated with the presentation of Christ.

The Virgin Mother who carries Jesus to the temple so that he can be offered to the Father expresses very well the figure of the Church who continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with the one oblation of Christ, cause and model of all consecration in the Church.

For some years now, in the Church of Rome and in other dioceses, the feast of 2 February has almost spontaneously brought numerous members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life around the Pope and diocesan pastors in order to demonstrate together, in communion with the entire People of God, the gift and commitment of their call, the variety of charisms of consecrated life, and their special place within the community of believers.

It is my wish that this experience be extended to the whole Church, so that the celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life may gather consecrated persons together with other faithful in order to sing with the Virgin Mary the marvels which the Lord accomplishes in so many of his sons and daughters, and to manifest to all that being a "people consecrated to himself" (cf. *Deut* 28:9) is the condition of all those who are redeemed by Christ.

Fruits hoped for the mission of the whole Church

6. Dear brothers and sisters, as I entrust to the maternal protection of Mary the institution of this World Day, I deeply hope that it bear abundant fruits for the holiness and the mission of the Church. May it help, in a special way, to heighten in the Christian community an esteem for vocations of special consecration, to stimulate ever more intense prayer for obtaining them from the Lord, in this way helping to mature in young people and families a generous willingness to receive them as gift. The life of the Church as a whole will draw benefit from this and so will the new evangelization.

I trust that this World Day of prayer and reflection will help the *particular Churches* to treasure ever more the gift of consecrated life and to be measured by its message, to find the proper and fruitful balance between action and contemplation, between prayer and charity, and between commitment in the present time and eschatological hope.

May the Virgin Mary, who had the sublime privilege of presenting to the Father his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a pure and holy oblation, obtain for us that we may constantly be open and welcoming in face of the great works which He does not cease to accomplish for the good of the Church and of all of humanity.

With these sentiments, and with the prayer that consecrated persons may persevere with joy in their vocation, I impart to all the Apostolic Blessing.

Vatican City, 6 January 1997.



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