

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

December 12, 2013
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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

Volume 18, Issue 4

December 12, 2013 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.” Pope Francis sent these words to us the last week of November.

Pope Francis wants all of us to renew our quest for a personal encounter with Jesus or if not that then, as he puts it “at least an openness to letting him encounter [us].” All of you have been formally espoused to Christ in your consecration. Yet, the Holy Father’s summons applies to you as well, perhaps even more to you.

Our relationship with Jesus is not something that can be put on hold, but must be renewed daily, just as any real friendship we have needs to be nurtured. Now for Pope Francis all of this is so that we will be on fire and go forth and proclaim the Gospel of the Lord. But it must start with and be nourished by our friendship with Jesus.

In the last chapter of his recent exhortation, which he entitles “Spirit-filled Evangelizers,” he challenges all of us to be “fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit.” We will do so if we are filled with the love of Jesus. To deepen that connection he calls us to prayer so that we will be more open to Christ’s work in us.

My sisters, in this Advent season, we are not only to be more aware of Christ’s advent 2000 years ago, and not only to be more attuned to his future coming in glory, but to be attentive to his knocking on our door each day, to the hand of God at work in our midst, and to the presence of the Holy Spirit blowing through our lives. May Mary, our Lady of Guadalupe, pregnant with Christ, aid us as we call to our Lord and Savior to fill us with his joy.

A Blessed Christmas to you all!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

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Special Points of Interest:

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Reflection upon the gift of virginity in a human being leads to reflection upon the Giver of the gift and hence to an understanding of virginity as part of the very essence of the Most Holy Trinity. The Eternal Father created the fecundity of the human couple through the bringing together of two distinct human persons as man and wife in order to constitute by their union the means of the Eternal Father's command of procreation. This fecundity of the human couple does not parallel the fecundity of the Eternal Father, who in His profound essence gives life without the participation of another being. And the fecundity of the human couple is limited to time spent in the confines of this planet Earth; in Eternity there will be no marriage nor procreation by sexual-genital union.

Such a reflection on virginity should bring joy to the consecrated virgin during this season of Advent and especially on this day of Our Lady, for the virgin can be assured that the gift of her virginity seals for her a virginal fecundity – that is, a fecundity without the participation of another sexual being. She, by means of her virginity, is able to fulfill the command that the Eternal Father gave to our first parents in the beginning: "Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1: 28) as she lives her integral virginity and gives birth to spiritual children for the time to come in Eternity. The virgin's being as a woman, just as Eve's, has its meaning in motherhood. The virgin is like Eve, who was named so because she was "life" and "the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20), and the virgin assumes a role of spiritual motherhood rooted in the virginal essence of the Eternal Father who created *the gift* of virginity for the new Eve, Mary of Nazareth, that She might be the Mother of the Church, the virginal Spouse of the Son of the virginal Eternal Father! From this gift created for our Blessed Mother, all consecrated virgins are now able to participate in the fullness of Her being as the new Eve, that is in her plenitude as life and Mother for the Kingdom to come. Often to our hearts and minds come the images of the millions of aborted children, rejected by earthly mothers. Perhaps these belong to the mystical meaning of the motherhood of the Queen of Virgins and by participation to all of us consecrated virgins, both in this mortal world and in Eternal life to come.

In his characteristically fine work entitled *Virginity*, Raniero Cantalamessa presented a quote from St. Gregory Nazianzen. Cantalamessa penned, "He wrote a splendid verse in praise of virginity. At first when I read it I thought the language was rather overdone, aimed at extolling the value of virginity. What it actually says is that there is a model for virginity that is higher than the Church, higher even than Mary: The Trinity! 'The first Virgin,' he says, 'is the holy Trinity.' On further reflection I found once again, that the Fathers never say anything just for the sake of it, without an objective and profound reason. Yes, the first virgin really is the Holy Trinity, not just because the first generation of the Word by the Father is virginal, but also because the Trinity created the universe alone, without the aid of any other principle, not even some kind of 'pre-existing matter.' It created out of nothing, virginally." (Raniero Cantalamessa, *Virginity*, trans. Charles Serignat, [New York: Alba-House, 1995], 16).

This joy-filled gift of perpetual virginity that we experience as consecrated virgins differs from the joy displayed at virginity in the Old Testament. Francisco Vizmanos, for example, presents a graphic picture of the young woman left to "bemoan [her] virginity" (Judges 11:38) with her companions in mourning (*plañideras*) in Jerusalem's Mountains of Galaad, due to her sad fate as the sacrificial victim of her father's vow after the defeat of Israel's enemies. This virgin and her *plañideras* cried together over her pain at being required to die while still a physical virgin. (See Francisco de B. Vizmanos, *Las vírgenes cristianas de la Iglesia primitiva*, [Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2009], chapters 1, 3).

It is the Protoevangelium, or the first announcement of a coming Messiah in the book of Genesis, that began to convey for us the meaning of the eternal virginity of our Blessed Mother. For the Eternal Father would grant to the virginal womb of our Blessed Mother the conception of His Eternal Son: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the Holy offspring to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:34). The Annunciation recorded the fulfillment of the seven hundred year old prophecy of Isaiah, "The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14), and the fulfillment of the ancient words of the Eternal Father recorded in the Protoevangelium, words which also indicated that the coming Christ would be born of a virgin: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

In this passage from Genesis, the Lord is speaking to Satan, who has enticed Eve into disobeying the Lord's command against eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He is saying that Satan will someday be crushed and utterly defeated by the seed of the woman. The pronoun used to designate the seed is "his" (in "his heel"), and rather than "it" (in "it shall bruise"), the more accurate translation is also "he." Therefore, the coming conqueror must be a single man. "But why is He called the seed of a woman? A child is ordinarily regarded as the seed of his father and forefathers. The striking character of the expression 'her seed' suggests that it is a uniquely fitting name for the victor over Satan. Unlike other men, He would be the seed of a woman only. He would not be a man's seed. A virgin would conceive Him without losing her virginity." (See E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, trans. Theod. Meyer and James Martin, 4 vols. [n.p., 1872-1878; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1956], 2:44-45; and *English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* [n.p., 1906; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979], 761. As quoted in *Biblical Studies.com*, accessed December 10, 2013).

The gift of virginity is a gift intrinsically tied to fecundity for the Kingdom of God, fecundity modeled first on the virginity of the Most Holy Trinity and evidenced for the salvation of man in the ever-virgin and expectant image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A holy Advent and Christmas season to all.

Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2013 – 2015; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large, 2013 – 2015 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2015); Archdiocese of Miami

Nicole Bettini, Treasurer, 2011 – 2013; Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

Margaret Flipp, Treasurer-elect 2014-2016, Archdiocese of San Francisco.

Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large, 2011-2013 (appointed **Secretary** through 2013), Diocese of Steubenville, (re-elected Member-at-large 2014-2016)

Florence Sundberg, Member-at-large, 2012-2014, Archdiocese of Hartford

Team Announcements:

Consecrated Virgins “Family” Scrapbook: Vickie Hamilton

Many thanks to all my dear sisters who responded to my email request to use materials from their consecrations that we have in the archive. I will be sending out snail mail requests soon for those who do not have an email address. I hope to have the scrapbook available for the convocation in 2014.

Formation Resource Development Team – Mary Kay Lacke:

We are making good progress on three additional volumes of *ORDO VIRGINUM: The Restoration of the Ancient Order of Virgins in the Catholic Church*. Readers who have enjoyed reading *Volume One: An Introduction to the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World* will be interested to read *Volume Two: Discernment and Formation for the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World*, which is in the process of being written and intended to be published by the end of 2014.

The third volume, which is on virgin saints, the volume to which a number of consecrated virgins have contributed, is well underway to completion. We are devoting the first part of this volume to Our Blessed Mother. Bishop Boyea has graciously contributed the text from his talks on Our Lady at the 2013 USACV Convocation. There will also be essays by other authors in this section of the book. The middle section of the book will feature the writings of various consecrated virgins on virgin saints. The final section of the third volume will contain several essays on St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the co-patroness of the USACV. The publication date for this work is anticipated to be December 2014 as well.

Volume Four on the history of Consecrated Virginity is in the planning stage. We have received some welcome help from one of the participants in the 2013 USACV Information Conference who is translating into English some excerpts from key historical French sources to be used as references in the writing of Volume Four. Magalis Aguilera also has access to key Spanish sources which, together with the French sources, will enable us to develop a helpful tool in understanding the esteem of the Church for the vocation of consecrated virginity from Apostolic times until now.

Upcoming events:

2014 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins

July 28-August 1, 2014

Malvern Retreat House

Malvern, PA

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

See announcement for more information,; program details to follow!

2014 National Information Conference

August 5-August 8, 2014

Malvern Retreat House

Malvern, PA

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

2014 Convocation Announcement to all Consecrated Virgins

- from Carolyn Blaszczyk, 2014 Convocation Host Team Leader

Please plan to join us at the Malvern Retreat Center, Malvern, Pennsylvania, for our annual United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins. Arrival time is from 3:00PM on Monday, July 28 and we will be departing at 2:00PM on Friday, August 1, 2014. Anne Gishpert will again be coordinating details for our Convocation and may be contacted regarding any special needs and/or interest in visiting nearby shrines. The convocation program schedule is being prepared by the USACV Council, and details will be forthcoming. Information about the retreat Center may be found online at: www.MalvernRetreat.com.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia looks forward to welcoming both the 2014 Convocation and the 2014 National Information Conference on the vocation of consecrated virginity.



Consecration Anniversary Reflections

Consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries are invited to offer a reflection on their years of living as a consecrated virgin. We're pleased to offer a few stories in this issue of "The Lamp," and will offer more in future issues.

20 years:

Judith Stegman, Diocese of Lansing, consecrated August 21, 1993

Rooted and grounded in His love

I was consecrated at age 37 in a celebration attended by my parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, professional colleagues, friends and parish family. It is hard to imagine a life other than that of consecration to Jesus as my Bridegroom, and looking back over the years I can see His hand preparing me at each juncture of life. I will use poetry to guide this reflection on twenty years as a consecrated virgin. My mother read AA Milne to me as a child, and as I sat in the middle of our staircase considering the meaning of my young life as a child of God with many siblings and activities, Milne's words circled round my mind:

Halfway Down – AA Milne

Halfway down the stairs

is a stair

where I sit.

there isn't any

other stair

quite like

it.

I'm not at the bottom,

I'm not at the top;

so this is the stair

where

I always

Stop.

Halfway up the stairs

Isn't up

And it isn't down.

It isn't in the nursery,

It isn't in the town.

And all sorts of funny thoughts

Run round my head.

It isn't really

Anywhere!

It's somewhere else

Instead!

My little heart loved this poem for it seemed to me that I could be content there in the middle of the stairway – there where I was alone with myself and with the Eucharistic Lord who often seemed even nearer than myself. Halfway up and halfway down was a place apart, and yet still close to school and younger siblings and parents and piano lessons and sewing and girl scouts.

As I grew older and attended high school, the choices grew more numerous and as the call crystallized in my heart to live a different life, of some sort, with Jesus, whom I had come to love so much, my heart repeated often the haunting words of Robert Frost's consideration of vocation:

The Road Not Taken – Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that, the passing there

Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood and I –

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

As so many of us consecrated virgins, I knew the call in my heart when I was a young teenager, but the paths were many and this ancient path of the Order of Virgins was still a path being cleared by the Church. In fact, I learned much later that it was the very same year the Rite was restored, in 1970, that I entered high school and had a profound experience of our Lord inviting me to go on a road less travelled. *Continue page 5*

from the President's journal . . .

Praised be Jesus Christ! These months since the September issue of *The Lamp* have brought new consecrations and a number of inquiries into the vocation of consecrated virginity. The USACV website continues to serve as a tool for many to access information about the vocation of consecrated virginity, and the launching of the ability to take credit cards through our website store has generated new interest in purchasing materials. Among other things, we need to work out details for taking credit cards from non-U.S. purchasers; your suggestions and comments on the website are always welcome.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Nicole Bettini for her service as treasurer over these past three years. Nicole's service has brought more than a competent eye for managing USACV funds; her eye for brochure design has served us well and the eye of her heart has kept us attuned to the needs of our sisters. On behalf of all of us, I also want to welcome Margaret Flipp to service as treasurer for the USACV beginning in January 2014, and I want to welcome Mary Kay Lacke to another term on the USACV Council; her voice is always a welcome note of wisdom. I very much want to thank all who showed their love for our vocation by putting forward their names to run as candidates in the fall 2013 USACV council elections. Thank you.

I offer a heartfelt word of gratitude also to Magalis Aguilera, who continues her term as USACV vice-president – the USACV, and I, would simply be unable to carry out our mission as we have done without her support in so many hidden ways. Thank you, Dr. Aguilera. Thanks also to Florence Sundberg for her faithful and ongoing work maintaining the USACV prayer request line and her other duties as a continuing member of the USACV Council. To all of the consecrated virgins involved in the ongoing work of our association and the vocation of consecrated virginity, I also offer words of appreciation as we end this year and move into a new year of service to our Divine Spouse.

A new point of interest in November for us was the invitation to the USACV president to participate in a meeting of the US Bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, immediately preceding the USCCB November meeting in Baltimore. The Bishops' Committee has shown interest in connecting more closely with the USACV as a way of understanding and offering support to the vocation of consecrated virginity as lived in the United States. I ask your prayers for this endeavor and growing relationship. May we follow the Lamb wherever He leads!

Judith Stegman

Reflections continued from page 4

I could see the beginning of the road, and in my heart I could see light shining upon the path, but where the path led and how to pursue it took many years to find. The story of my journey from childhood to consecration is a story of divine protection upon one who wanted only to give Him her love, as He cleared away brambles and thorns from the path to allow me the great privilege to be consecrated as His bride.

Life has changed dramatically for me in the past twenty years since my consecration as I have come to love Him as Bridegroom and, if I may distinguish the love, as my Divine Spouse. His faithfulness in every detail, even to sharing with me an intimate relationship with His Mother, my Mother, has brought me to the poem of David which introduces the Book of Psalms as the poem guiding my life with Him now:

Psalm One

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,

that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish.

The Vocation Tree image portrays the Church as this tree planted by streams of water that bears the fruit of virtue and gifts of the spirit in its season, according to the vocations of each member who delights in the law of the Lord. A small flowering of the branch of Consecrated Life is the vocation of the consecrated virgin living in the world.

It is a privilege and great joy to know and love Jesus Christ as a member of this Order of Virgins and to be open to the path upon which he guides each day - "the path less travelled" that is perhaps "somewhere else instead," but that remains firmly planted by the streams of living water flowing from His side upon His Bride, the Church. I am ever grateful for His precious gift of vocation as bride of Christ.

Life Corner

By Florence Sundberg

Advent is a time of joyous expectation of the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Let us pray that every woman, after conceiving her child, will be enabled to know the same joy and hope as Mary did when she conceived the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah and Savior of the world. Each child conceived belongs to God and to all of us, for we are all born of the same Father/Creator. Each child conceived brings to all of us blessings and gifts which can be accepted with gratitude or rejected and tossed away as having no value. Let us pray for and reach out to mothers who experience pregnancy as a burden and help them to bear what truly is, at times, a severe hardship. Let us see in each preborn baby the Face of God, as Pope Francis has urged us to do; and let us see in each mother the face of Mary tenderly nurturing her newborn Son as we offer support and nurturing to those mothers and mothers-to-be who feel lost and alone and see no other option than that of terminating the life of their unborn baby, which is a loss and tragedy for us all.



Consecration Announcements:

United States:

September 26, 2013, **Judy Peikert**, Diocese of Birmingham, at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert J. Baker.

October 26, 2013, **Theresa Prosser**, Archdiocese of St. Louis, at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson. →

December 11, 2013, **Jennie Lucero**, Diocese of Gallup, at the hands of The Most Reverend James S. Wall.

Upcoming U.S. consecration:

December 28, 2013, **Marie Beccaloni**, 10 am at St. John Cantius Parish, Archdiocese of Chicago, at the hands of His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, OMI. RSVP to Marie at marie.beccaloni@hotmail.com.

France:

March 3, 2013, **Brigitte Maurice**, Diocese of Avignon.

April 20, 2013, **Annick Lequien**, Diocese of Toulon, at the hands of The Most Reverend Dominique Rey.

December 8, 2013, **Christine Durret**, Lausanne.

Mexico:

December 8, 2013, **Jessica Morales**, Archdiocese of Guadalajara.

Theresa writes that several virgins from the surrounding states of Illinois, Missouri and Kansas attended her consecration, and she was so pleased by their support as they shared dinner together the night before



Theresa with her two attendants, Sr. Kathleen Ronan and consecrated virgin Cathy Maley.

and a Holy Hour at her parish. She was blessed to also have prayerful support from friends, colleagues and parishioners – many from her parish were delighted to attend and to fill the St. Vincent de Paul chapel for her consecration. Theresa expresses her appreciation for the support of USACV members from her initial discernment through formation and consecration. (And USACV members express their happiness at having Theresa's participation in many ways, and in particular at convocations during her years of preparation for consecration!)



Consecrations continued page 10

Consecration Anniversary Reflections

10 Years:

Kathleen Danes, Archdiocese of Miami, consecrated June 22, 2003

(Note: It has been two years since Kathleen had a serious stroke. The following words are taken from a recorded conversation with Kathleen on her birthday in August, 2013.)

Since I was a young child I have wanted to give myself entirely to the Lord – my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole body – but I didn't learn of the consecration until I was older, in fact, until I read about it in our diocesan newspaper just a few years before I was consecrated. My parish priest helped me then to learn more about consecrated virginity and to approach Archbishop Favolora, who accepted me as a candidate for consecration. There is so little written and known about this vocation! And yet, I think there should be, because there are many people like me in the world, who want to give all to the Lord. This life isn't for everyone, but for those that it is for, it is beautiful.

The consecration made a huge difference in my life; I felt elevated, as if I belonged to a different element. I knew that I belonged with the Lord and that He was mine, and that this was where I belonged. I never felt alone; this is a beautiful way of life that always brings a closeness to the Lord. My family and good friends understand and accept my life of consecration, but I don't have other consecrated virgins living nearby. Magalis Aguilera is the closest consecrated virgin, and we certainly march to the same drum. When I hear her voice calling on the phone, it is music to my ears! She brings much joy to me.

There is something so special about having Jesus as Spouse – one thing is that you never have any fights! It is so good to have Him always at my side, and to have Him all my own. I love Him so much – He is mine and I am so happy to know that I will spend the rest of my life with Him. Mary has also been a guiding force for me. Growing up, Mom and Dad would pray the miraculous medal novena every Wednesday night with me, and I learned that anything you wanted, you would ask Mary to intercede to Jesus for. My parish, St. Paul the Apostle, continues to have this same novena every Wednesday night.

Two years ago I had a stroke. In my love for Him, I know that He allows this for a reason, and I accept it. He has made me aware of so much – it is because of Jesus that I am. I truly love Him so much. I recall when Judith and Magalis came and showed the Vocation Tree presentation to people in our parish and in my home – it got everyone thinking, and that's what we need, to let people know about the vocation of consecrated virginity.

Theresa Howard, Diocese of Springfield, consecrated May 4, 2003

As I look back at my childhood, I can see God at work through my mother who taught me about Jesus and Mary. By her words and actions she taught me how to pray and how to live my life for God. As a child and even in my teen years, I had no idea that God had a beautiful vocation set aside for me. In my early 20's was the first time that I heard God calling me to give myself totally to Him. For many years I searched and discerned where God was calling me to serve Him. My heart and soul ached for Him and there were times that I would cry out what do you want me to do and where do you want me to serve you? For many years I heard nothing but silence and yet I knew he wanted me to give my life to Him.

I visited religious communities and in the late 80's after spending time for about a year with one community, the vocation director told me that they would like for me to enter that August 1st upon completion of the psychological testing and a physical. On my way home, I was in a near fatal accident and ended up in the hospital on life support. When I woke up I asked God what he was trying to tell me. Was he telling me no to this community? Was he telling me no to religious life? Was he telling me no for now? I was so confused and told the vocation director that I needed more time for discernment and would not be entering the community. Also, due to my internal injuries and learning how to walk it took me a year to recuperate. After my recovery, I continued my search as to where God was calling me. I served as a Lay Dominican Associate for one year. I then started preparation to the Secular Franciscan Order (my profession ceremony was January 1997). The evening before I professed as a Secular Franciscan, I felt that God was asking more of me.

In 1998, I joined St. Mary's Parish in Alton, IL. In October of that year my new spiritual director mentioned the vocation of Consecrated Virgins. I pushed this aside until sometime later when another priest asked me if I had ever looked into the vocation. As I was driving home that day, I thought why would God call me to that life? Upon arriving home I heard God say, check it out. With the assistance of my spiritual director, I studied and prepared for my Consecration. Bishop George Lucas (the Bishop of our Diocese at the time) gave us guidance, I had meetings with a Franciscan Religious with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr Saint George in Alton, and Carol Lankford, a Consecrated Virgin in Mexico, MO, was my mentor.

Bishop Lucas suggested that my Consecration take place at St. Mary's because it would be a great witness to the people of my parish and the surrounding area. I was the first Consecrated Virgin in my Diocese. On the day of my Consecration, I woke up to thunder, lightning, and pouring down rain. Although it was a cold dark day on the outside, *continued page 11*

Anniversary Reflections continued

it was a beautiful day inside St. Mary's. I had told Carol Lankford and my friends that I would be so nervous that day. However, the moment I put on my wedding dress, a great joy came over me and all of the nervousness melted away. Moments before Mass began; sunshine came pouring through the stained glass windows. To me that was God whispering to me. What a beautiful day it was and I experienced peace, joy and a freedom that I had never experienced in my life. Since my Consecration people have asked why I didn't enter the convent or why I chose this vocation. I simply smile and tell them that God wanted me to serve Him in the world. Also, God chose me to be His bride.

I can't believe that this year marks my tenth anniversary as a Consecrated Virgin. There have been many challenges and opportunities to grow closer to the Lord these last ten years. He never told us that it would be easy to say yes and pick up our cross and follow Him. However, my faith and trust in Him has grown over these past ten years. He has picked me up through the storms of life and held me in His arms. All of those years that I spent searching for God's will in my life were not wasted. All of my unanswered questions and prayers were answered on May 4, 2003. The joy, peace and freedom that I experienced on my wedding day have grown these past ten year. What a beautiful life it is to be a bride of Christ!

Rita Malone, Archdiocese of Boston, consecrated April 9, 2003

God has blessed me with my vocation in the evening of my life. I am so grateful for this great gift of His Love and for the mercy He has shown me throughout the years. My ministry is one of prayer and presence. The primary context in which I live my call is within the apartment complex in which I reside. The elderly and the disabled dwell here. Too, people from many different nations now all it their home.

I see the apartment complex as a microcosm of the world. It is here Jesus bids me to bring Him to others. It is here I receive Jesus from others. My neighbor Teresa, from Italy, died suddenly on November 2nd, the Feast Day of All Souls. I attended her funeral Mass with Yuniya, from Guyana, who is a Protestant Minister. Yuniya also teaches piano lessons to some of the residents. Yuniya played 'Ave Maria' for us on the Feast Day of the Assumption in honor of the Blessed Mother.

Judy, an amputee, leads the exercise group with me on Wednesday mornings. Judy is always active in any new endeavor.

Effie is a Muslim and a refugee from Iran. She shows good will toward all she meets. My attempts to teach Effie English have not proven very successful but I believe the language of love has developed among the residents through our various attempts at communication.

Prayer is the lifeblood of my day. The morning Consecration followed by quiet time with the Blessed Trinity anchors me for each day's events. The Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary, together with intercessory prayer, are intertwined among the events of the day. Spontaneous prayer to Jesus and Mary are also a basic part of each day.

Jesus has sustained me through the various transitions of these years. He has taught me that trustful adherence to His will should always be my primary task. With it, all is gain. Now, as I embark into the future, I trust that Jesus' merciful love will lead me home.

Jeanne Ouellette, Diocese of Portland (ME), consecrated March 2, 2003

It does not seem possible that it has already been a decade since I walked down the aisle to become Jesus' bride, officially in the eyes of the Church. It truly was the grandest day of my life. I was filled with immense joy and peace. My consecration began a new path for me. It has brought me to deeper understanding of the Scriptures, and to an increase of Faith, Hope, and especially Love, and to more of an acceptance of whatever God gives me. Fiat!

The graces and blessings have been numerous like the stars in the heavens. I have been given fortitude and perseverance for the trials, crosses, and challenges of life, that I might continue in a path to holiness and to follow Jesus wherever he leads me.

Human weaknesses are always with me. But, my focus is to depend on God my Loving Father, Jesus my Spouse to lead me, the Holy Spirit to guide me, and the Blessed Mother to help me to imitate her as much as I can, and always to have a greater love of her Son Jesus, my Beloved. Only God knows where I would be if He had not been there to hold this poor soul of mine.

A great gift was given to me in 2010 for my birthday and my 18th anniversary of my private vow of chastity. I moved to my current residence. We have a chapel with daily Masses and rosaries, televised for St. Mary's residence and the nursing home for those unable to go to the chapel. I live in Jesus' house! (An answered prayer of so many years ago.) My private prayers, adoration, Yes!, sometimes during the night. I am in Jesus' presence in my apartment, and Jesus does take very good care of me not only spiritually, but in the practicalities of life.

Great things were being prepared for me even before I was born and great things are being prepared for me for all eternity. I end my reflection with my first two words I spoke as written in my baby book: "Beau Jesus"! (Beautiful Jesus)

More reflections page 10

A Very Special Letter from Theresita Polzin consecrated February 11, 1999

I am now 98 years old and living in Mullen Nursing Home in Denver.

My desire for virginity, as far as I can remember, dates back to thoughts I had when I was about five years of age. There were seven of us siblings, with the middle of the group as my spot. The three before me and the three after me were all spaced one and a half years apart, but my sister before me was almost four before I was born and I was almost six before the one after me was born. That may have made some difference in the way we were treated.

I was born on August 12, 1915, the first year of the First World War, which broke out in Europe. We lived on a farm in southwestern Illinois, part of a Homestead my paternal grandfather acquired just 15 years after the Civil War finished in the US. My grandparents on both sides came from Poland in 1880. My Dad was the fourth child born into the family, their first one on American soil. Three brothers preceded him in Poland.

Work was hard on the land because it was still forest requiring clearing before any farming. By the time I was born, some 30 years after the acquisition of the Homestead, Dad had a small farm producing grain, but every able-bodied person helped, including children. My mother had been in the field during her pregnancy and when it was time for me to be born, she labored for hours from ten in the evening until ten in the morning before this tiny baby could be coaxed by the doctor to come into the heat of a mid-harvest summer, and then, Oh, horror! the baby was not only unusually small, but also blue and cold!

My mother, I am told, was not going to have this child die without Baptism! The horses were out of the barn, hitched to the wagon (We had no buggy), the baby wrapped in a blanket, the nearest neighbor summoned by a foot-runner to come immediately to be the God-mother, and away they sped to the church to have the priest baptize the apparently dying child, because in those days as today, emergency Baptism was the very last resort.

Three hours later, the unbaptized baby was home, still alive, and given emergency Baptism as that was the last chance of saving that little soul, the priest being away in Chicago for a few days before the Feast of the Assumption, on Sunday that year. In spite of this, my mother was still worried that this was invalid because the man who did the ceremony had poured the water with his left hand! But the child survived, and was actually baptized on the very day of her birth, a grace not one of the other children in the family received. That was on Thursday. On Sunday the priest filled in the rest of the ceremony.

My next related memory is of age five, standing alone in my parents' bedroom, looking at the large picture on the wall above the head of the bed, of a beautiful Mary and Joseph, with about a twelve year old Jesus standing between them. My little mind was trying to figure out how any woman could love God "with her whole heart" as I knew she should, and still fall in love with a man, as was at present the case with one of my older sisters, and I presumed had been with my mother before she married. That puzzle I could NOT crack-- either at that time or later when I continued to try to find an answer.

I never discussed this with anybody because I thought they would not want to reveal such a personal thing to a "little kid" like me, but I thought about it many times. Could I still love God with my whole heart if I fell in love with a man? To me "falling in love" meant total absorption of self in the other. I finally decided that if God wanted people to marry, that it was OK for them, but not for me. I could not ever fall in love with a man, and must be careful not to look at boys any more than I had to. *To be continued next issue.*

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A VIRGIN

Is ready to go

wherever she can serve,

ready to be used

In any way

her Groom chooses,

for her roots

are planted in Eternity

and her Home

is in GOD.

Attributed to Theresita Polzin

More Anniversary Reflections

5 years:

Carolyn Blaszczyk, Diocese of Harrisburg, consecrated April 29, 2008

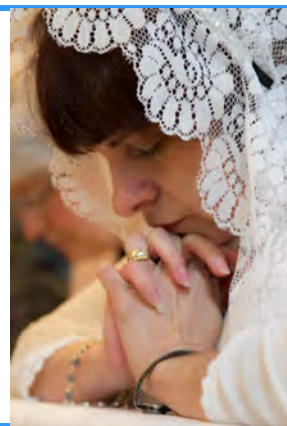
Curious about the vocation of consecrated virginity, a friend asked me what it was that we do. Explaining that it's not so much what we do as who we are, I could see I left her perplexed and not very satisfied with my response. I frequently recall a line from a poem written by Karol Wojtyła – in a line from the poem, Jesus says, “ku tobie idę, i nie mówię przybądź, ale po prostu bądź.” It's a play on words in Polish, so it loses something in translation, but its meaning to me touched me deeply and captures for me the essence of my call to our vocation. While we are certainly called to follow Jesus, he comes to us, first and foremost, to call us into being. He is who is, and Mary, as The Virgin of Revelation at Tre Fontaine, (in one translation) calls herself, “I am who am in the Trinity.”

The greatest gift God gives us is not just life but our life in Him, being in Him. While confirmation by others of my talents, skills and accomplishments encourages me to share these gifts, I've come to see that my gifts don't define me. I've been discovering that as I allow myself to be, to simply look on Him who is and has called me to be, I can free others to be as well. I can release others from my expectations of them, accept them for who they are and not what they do - or fail to do, and help them to accept themselves for who they are.

Consecrated Virginity is a call to love, to be in Love, and this is what truly makes us spiritual mothers. I have been loved into being, not just into existence, and that love flowing through me - however imperfectly, can call others into being too.

Consecrations continued:

Puerto Rico:
September 17, 2013,
Maria M. Torres-Arroyo,
Archdiocese of San Juan,
at the hands of His Excellency Roberto González.



O Come, O Come Emmanuel!