

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

June 2, 2011
Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

Volume 16, Issue 2

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

I look forward to visiting with consecrated virgins in July at your annual convocation, and again in early August at the informational conference. At this time, I recommend to you for your encouragement the text of the homily of the Most Reverend Salvatore Cordileone, entitled *Consecrated Virginity in the World: Witness to the Nuptial Mystery of Life in Christ*; delivered February 20, 2010, on the occasion of the consecration of Elizabeth Lam.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

The homily of Bishop Salvatore Cordileone, entitled "Consecrated Virginity in the World: Witness to the Nuptial Mystery of Life in Christ," February 20, 2010, at the consecration of Elizabeth Lam:

Introduction

In today's Mass we have the rare privilege of witnessing a rite not many Catholics have the opportunity to see: the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity in the World. This form of consecrated life is a revival in our time of an ancient order in the Church, going back, really, to the very beginning. The names of the early Christian virgins, many of them also martyrs, are familiar to us, as many have been entered into the ancient Roman Canon: Agnes, Agatha, Lucy, Cecilia, to name a few.

Consecrated Virginity and the Nuptial Mystery

This is a form of consecrated life lived out in the world, a *permanent, public* state in the Church; it is not a matter of taking vows characteristic of the consecrated life of religious, a consecration lived out in community life in a particular religious order, according to the rule of the order, and bound by the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Rather, this consecration is received through the hand of the diocesan bishop, and it establishes a particular important link to the local church – the consecrated virgin, like the diocesan priest, is given to the local church, she gives herself in prayer and sacrifice. One might ask, though: what meaning does this have for the life of the Church in our own time?

In 1996, following up on the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life, Pope John Paul II issued his Apostolic Exhortation – a sort of pastoral plan for the universal Church – entitled, simply, *Vita Consecrata*. He describes there the witness of the life of consecrated

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Something Ancient . . . Something New *Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman*

Virginal Elegance...the countenance of a sacred woman in the Church

“The custom of consecrating women to a life of virginity flourished even in the early Church. It led to the formation of a solemn rite constituting the candidate a *sacred person*, 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.” (#1 Prænotanda, Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity). The consecrated virgin is a *sacred person*, and it is this sacred nature that led the Fathers of the Church to leave us specific teachings concerning the manner in which the virgin must appear, a manner described by Vizmanos as *virginal elegance*. Virginal elegance is characterized by the virtue of modesty and the grace of integrity, expressed in dress, in personal command of verbal and nonverbal expressions – in the virgin’s entire demeanor.

Virginal elegance comes naturally and joyfully to the virgin consecrated as bride of Christ. She receives grace for this life at her consecration, but before the consecratory prayer is said over her by the Bishop, the virgin herself takes the step of offering her “propositum,” an act of free will, to remain a virgin forever. The very oldest liturgical text available about the words used by a virgin when speaking her propositum were the words spoken in the year 353 A.D. by Marcellina, the sister of Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, at the time of the imposition of the veil during the Rite conducted by Pope Liberius. (Cfr. Vizmanos, op.cit pages 185-186: propositum of vow of perpetual Virginity)

It appears that these early formula’s for the propositum included both a positive aspect, that is, the direct offering of one’s virginity, and a negative aspect, an oath of renunciation. In both the East as well as the West, the understanding of the propositum included this negative aspect of selflessness, as well as the positive aspect - the offering of herself in her virginity. According to Vizmanos (cf, page 186), the virgin spoke these words in her propositum: “I renounce your works, oh Satan! I renounce the pomp of this century and its seductions; I promise to lessen my fleshly bondage, and I swear that, even when offered any human enticement, which I declare I don’t desire, I will remain uncontaminated and virgin, bride of Christ forever.” (Vizmanos, op.cit., page 186).

With her propositum (her firm resolution), the virgin agrees to give the totality of her being to Christ. It is this totality which is described as “virginal elegance” by Vizmanos (Op. cit para 281), and described by Saint Cyprian and Saint Ambrose as encompassing her joyful demeanor of modesty, discretion, and subtlety.

After the virgin renews her propositum, the Bishop prays over her the prayer of consecration, and she receives a new and distinct grace. It is the Rite itself which “effects the consecration of the virgin who presents herself and, thereby, constitutes her a sacred person in the Church. Once consecrated, once constituted a sacred person, the virgin has *the grace* of manifesting the love of the Church, the Bride, for her Bridegroom, Christ, and the grace of foreshadowing the heavenly wedding feast of Christ and the Church. The virgin does not consecrate herself as the religious does through the profession of the evangelical counsels. Rather, she presents herself to be consecrated by the Church.” (Raymond L. Cardinal Burke, 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins, #9)

We are familiar with the words of the prayer of consecration in today’s Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity. Let us take a moment to consider how words in an ancient consecratory prayer – the prayer of Pope Liberius in the year 353 A.D. at the consecration of Marcelina, the sister of Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan – present a visual meaning of “virginal elegance.” In this early consecratory prayer, the Pope prays that the virgin be sheltered by the grace of virginity that she might appear before the altar of God offering the saintly veil of her virginal consecration as the meaning of one who belongs totally to Christ. He prays that she be dressed in the attire of holy virginity – with the beautiful ornaments of a pious and diligent life, and he prays that simplicity be generated in heart, that she be modest in her words and affection, that she persevere in doing good, flee from even the appearance of evil, and assist the dying and the helpless widow. He prays that Christ shine in her feelings and all of her works, that she be filled with knowledge of His law and truth, that she can be a holy instrument of His glory. (cf. Vizmanos, 1949, op cit., page 186 Quoting St. Ambrose De Institutione virginis, c. 17: PL 16, 330-334).

The virgin must not be content to be a virgin only in the physical reality. She must also present herself to others in the totality of her virginal elegance: “May her integrity shine in all her being and not be an external adornment to discredit the purity of her spirit.” (Saint Cyprian, 248-258, De Habitu Virginum, no. 5:PL 4,445 quoted by Vizmanos, page 281). A century later, Saint Ambrose spoke in a similar way regarding the modesty of virgins: “The presence of a virgin must be recognized by her gravity, spontaneous modesty, her way of being, her passing courtesies, and her modest face. These signals must be heralds announcing the integrity of her purity. In the virgin, modesty is an ornament of her young age, and discretion in speech, the guarantee of her modesty. (De virginibus, book III, c. 3, no. 13: PL 16, 222- 223 quoted in Vizmanos, 1949).

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Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2010 – 2012; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large, 2010 – 2012 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2012); Archdiocese of Miami

Nicole Bettini, Treasurer, 2011-2013, Archdiocese of St. Paul / Minneapolis

Shalina Stilley, Member-at-large, 2009-2011 (appointed **Secretary** through 2011) Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large, 2011-2013, Diocese of Steubenville

Upcoming events:

2011 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins:

July 26—31, 2011

Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center

Chicago area

See article

2011 National Information Conference:

August 2—6, 2011

St. Francis Retreat Center

DeWitt, Michigan

Lansing area

See article



Team Announcements:

Kateri Team: Florence Sundberg writes: We have received requests for prayers from those struggling through tough economic situations. We do assure them of our prayers and availability in these times of particular need.

Candidate Care Team: Barbara Swieciak: Please contact Barbara at 149 S. 24th Street, La Crosse, WI 54601, if you have consecration invitations, programs, or other memorabilia that you would like to add to our travelling collection. Also contact Barb if you are planning a consecration and would like to peruse the collection.

Membership Team: Shalina Stilley:

USACV membership renewal letters have been mailed and emailed to consecrated virgins and many have responded. If you did not receive the package, or need another copy, visit our web site at

www.consecratedvirgins.org

or contact Shalina at

shalinastilley@hotmail.com.

Formation Resource Development Team: Mary Kay Lacke I am working toward a September goal to have the publication of Selections from the USACV Information Conferences on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World. The plan is for this publication to be part one of a three-part series. The process of putting this together has been slow but continuous. God-willing, we will soon see the fruit of our labor!

More Team announcements on page 6

Announcements

Upcoming issues of *The Lamp*:
September 8, 2011 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary;

December 12, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe;

February 2, 2012 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life;

June 3, 2012 Trinity Sunday.

Please send any articles you have in electronic format at least 10 days in advance of the issuance date.

We warmly invite virgins celebrating 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, or more years of consecration in 2011 to write reflections on their consecrations for the September 8 or December 12, 2011 issue of *The Lamp*. Please send reflections to

president@consecratedvirgins.org.

The next **Symposium for Consecrated Virgins**, sponsored by the Office of Consecrated Life of the Diocese of La Crosse, will be the St. Agatha Celebration, to be held October 15, 2011 at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 9 AM to 3 PM.

In the Roman Canon, Saint Agatha is the first virgin listed. Through the use of the antiphons taken from her feast day, February 5th, we are invited to ponder more deeply the mysteries and graces held out to us through this virgin and martyr, for our own journey of faith. Participants in the symposium are invited to bring along any written works, hymns, poems, prayers, images of Saint Agatha, and reflections on the Rite of consecration, to share with the others present.

This is an opportunity to learn from each other the riches we share in this vocation and the lives of these virgin saints. Please contact Barb Swieciak if you have any questions by email (bswieciak@dioceseoflacrosse.com).

More announcements on page 6

from the President's journal . . .

Since our February issue of The Lamp, our Divine Spouse has helped me through another very busy income tax season, and has probably used the season to help those about me grow in patience, as I found myself once again with little time for anything other than the professional demands of my life. I'm glad for all of this, as it is a time to entrust all to Him even as I am dedicated to many hours of hard work and pray with the psalmist, "May the Lord bless the work of our hands."

As I write this column, Magalis Aguilera and I have just returned from an extraordinary visit with consecrated virgins in Costa Rica. We were invited by His Excellency José Francisco ULLOA Rojas, Bishop of the Diocese of Cartago, to give a conference on the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. The conference was most ably publicized and coordinated by consecrated virgin Lisandra Chavez, and fifty people attended, including consecrated virgins, women interested in the vocation of consecrated virginity, a religious sister and group of young novices, and a number of priests and married persons with responsibility for promoting vocations in their parishes. They all came to deepen in an understanding of this distinct form of Consecrated Life, and how it fits into the broader picture of Consecrated Life in the Church. For the glory of our Divine Spouse, our sister Magalis was the star during these days as she could communicate so freely in her native Spanish, and she delivered the key presentation of the day – "The Rite of Consecration in the History of the Order of Virgins," a presentation based on the conference given by Cardinal Burke during the Rome 2008 International Congress in Rome.

Other presentations for the day included my Vocation Tree presentation, The Fundamentals of the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity, our information conference talk Love and Virginity, and a newly developed presentation entitled, The Order of Virgins and Associations of Consecrated Virgins. Bishop Ulloa was present for part of the day and available for answering questions particularly about the role of the Bishop in the life of the consecrated virgin, and he closed the day with Mass. It was a pleasure for me to hear him speak during his homily about "El Árbol de las Vocaciones" (The Vocation Tree), and I listened carefully as Magalis, Maria Luisa Meza (consecrated virgin from El Salvador), and Lisandra, often whispered an English translation in my ear.

The days in Costa Rica included interviews with Catholic radio and newspapers, a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Angels in this 375th anniversary year, a holy year for the Diocese of Cartago, private meetings with Bishop Ulloa and Bishop Pierre Nguyen Van Tot, the apostolic nuncio to Costa Rica, and the company of Fr. Mario Zúñiga, who works with seminarians in the diocese. We were invited to visit the Colegio Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, a school operated by two consecrated virgins of Costa Rica. We visited the volcano, Volcán Poas, and enjoyed interesting tours through old towns of the central valley of the country. The acclaimed Costa Rican hospitality was evident among all that we met, but I will mention in particular Fr. Juan Catalán, pastor of Lisandra's parish, who opened the parish house for our meetings, arranged for our stay in a local convent, and kept firmly in mind the celebration of Magalis' 25th anniversary of consecration. I'll leave it to each of you to personally ask Magalis to explain how Fr. Catalán celebrated her consecration – truly it was an enjoyable surprise!

The experience had some of us beginning to talk about the possibility of considering a future American International Congress...for consecrated virgins of North, Central, and South America. We will see how our Divine Spouse leads. For now, I very much look forward to gathering with you all in Mundelein at the end of July, to deepen, together, in our work of prayer and our life of virtue. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Judith Stegman

Something Ancient, Something New *continued*

True in the days of St. Ambrose, and true today, the presence of a virgin is often enough to silence any attempt to lewdness in language. St. Ambrose advised the virgins to consciously use this power of presence by practicing a triple stroke of modesty – in gesture, look, and speech. A new way of being virginal had emerged in the early Church – a virginal elegance able to capture souls. The joy of the virgin of the early Church reflected a spontaneity and freshness in life. (Cfr Vizmanos, op.cit , page 289-290).



2011 Informational Conference

Announcement:

Mary Kay Lacke writes: August 2-5, 2011 is the date for the 2011 USACV Information Conference, and conference planning is going well.

The conference team has received a number of inquiries from bishops, priests, diocesan delegates for consecrated life, and women interested in the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world, not only inquiries from the United States, but also from Canada. Please refer to the February issue of *The Lamp* and specifically to the insert on the Information Conference for more information, if you desire to attend the conference or if you would like to invite others to attend the conference. A descriptive pamphlet and registration forms are also available on our website, www.consecratedvirgins.org.

We encourage you to spread the word!
Deadline for registration is July 11, 2011.

2011 Convocation Announcement:

In Praise of His Glory! – in our work of prayer and our life of virtue is the theme for the 2011 Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins, which will be held **July 26-31** at the Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center. All consecrated virgins are warmly invited to attend, including consecrated virgins from other countries. Virgins who have attended an Informational Conference and who have been accepted by their Bishops as candidates for the consecration, are also invited to attend. Convocation planning is going well.

Please refer to the February issue of *The Lamp* for more information about the convocation, or refer to the brochures which have been mailed to all consecrated virgins and are available on our website, www.consecratedvirgins.org.

The days together are invaluable in strengthening one another in living consecrated virginity in the world, in love with our Divine Spouse. Questions may be directed to convocation coordinator **Anne Gishpert**, at agishpert@st-therese-school.org or 719-546-1616, or to president@consecratedvirgins.org.



Life Corner

By Florence Sundberg

I was recently speaking with another consecrated virgin about the book, Unplanned, by Abby Johnson. Abby had been director of a Planned Parenthood clinic for years when, one day, she was asked to assist at an abortion by holding the ultra sound probe over the belly of the mother. She was reluctant but complied. When the image of the fetus appeared on the screen, Abby was stunned to see a perfectly formed baby, 13 weeks along. She watched as the cannula attached to the end of the suction tube was inserted into the uterus, close to the baby's side. Abby had been taught that the baby felt no pain, and she watched in horror as the baby began to struggle and turn away as the suction tube drew nearer, seeming to fight for its tiny life. Useless! The suction machine sucked the struggling baby out of the mother's womb, leaving it empty. This was the conversion point in Abby's life and she went from being staunchly pro-choice to staunchly pro-life. Most people will never see what Abby saw on that ultra sound machine, so we need to make the horrors of abortion known as often as we can, wherever we can. The Lord will present openings, opportunities for us to witness to the sacredness of life. There are times when I want to remain silent, to close my eyes and my ears because I cannot bear to see or hear anymore. But then I remember the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

Team Announcements continued:

USACV Website update report – Judith Stegman : Phase I of our website revision is up and running, and has received positive feedback. If you have comments or suggestions, please let us know. We have worked with the professionals at *Faith Catholic* on the development and maintenance of the site, and hope soon to begin work with them on Phase II. The plan for Phase II is to include implementation of a system to allow us the flexibility of managing site content ourselves. Plans for Phase II also include a members-only section, which may include discussion forums and private bulletin boards; Phase II plans also call for an on-line store to make more readily accessible our various printed, audio, and visual materials on the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. Check it out!

www.consecratedvirgins.org

Rest In Peace

We join in prayer with the family of **Teresa Hakanson**, and the consecrated virgins of the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, as we learn of Teresa's death on May 10, 2011. May she rest in peace with her Divine Spouse.

Recordings of talks from the 2010 Convocation and 2010 Informational Conference are available for order through Magalis Aguilera. Order forms may be obtained from our website or by emailing info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Announcements continued

The **USACV leadership council** “meets” quarterly by conference call to discuss ongoing projects and activities of our association. The Council will meet in person on July 26, 2011, and on July 27, immediately preceding the convocation, we will also hold our annual council meeting with our Episcopal Moderator, the Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing. Members are invited to submit agenda matters for discussion at these meetings, or at the general membership meeting, which will be held on Saturday, July 29, 2011. Please send discussion items to **Judith Stegman** at president@consecratedvirgins.org.

A few people have expressed interest in forming a **team to host a future convocation** in the Eastern part of the United States. During our leadership council meeting this summer, we will develop a proposal format for consecrated virgins to use to submit a proposal to host the convocation. We expect to announce details in the September newsletter. The idea is that the Council, as the elected leadership of the USACV, would continue to be responsible for planning the entire program (speakers, theme, agenda) of the convocation. A local convocation team would serve as hostesses to welcome those travelers to their region of the country, and to serve as primary liaison with the conference facility. Conference facilities must be booked several years in advance, so any such planning is necessarily long-term!

A new **Vocation Tree DVD** entitled “Fundamentals of the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World” is also available for order through our website. The DVD includes the presentation in both English and Espagnol, and is an excellent introductory presentation on the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world.

Also newly available are two other Vocation Tree DVD's – visit www.vocationtree.org or contact **Judith Stegman** at president@consecratedvirgins.org.

✦ “What about Me?” is a presentation for high school students which guides them to explore the truly personal meaning of the call by God the Father to each individual.

✦ “You Follow Me” is a presentation for a general adult audience (RCIA, parish groups, Serra Clubs) as a primer on vocational choices in the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Burke Releases New Book

Readers of *The Lamp* may be interested to know that Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, has released the revised edition of his book *The Enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*. This book provides a summary of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. It is a step-by-step guide to enthroning the Sacred Heart of Jesus in homes, parishes and other settings. The book is available from the Marian Catechist Apostolate (608-782-0011, or email Bookstore@MarianCatechist.com). Cardinal Burke reminds us that if the company of Christ is cultivated in our homes, His company will be cultivated in every sector of life for the transformation of our society and our world into a civilization of love.

The three consecrated virgins of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston have been working together on an article for *The Texas Catholic Herald*. We're pleased to print [Rosie M. Capalad's](#) contribution, an account of her consecrated life:

I live out my consecration as a Bride of Christ in the midst of my family, friends, obligations, and the pressures of the world. To live as a consecrated virgin in the world is not easy – it is difficult to maintain a balance and yet through God's grace and mysterious ways, I am renewed each day and love grows within me. It is a wonderful life, a life lived for the Lord where our relationship brings me in constant intimate conversation with Him, where He teaches and guides me. With immense gratitude, I acknowledge the gift of consecrated life; therefore, I give thanks always and everywhere.

I find the strength to be true and faithful to my vocation by a simple act of love through contemplation morning & evening – a simple gaze in which I abandon myself to the Lord. It is here that I fully experience God, letting Him do as He desires; loving, praising and thanking Him. I live my prayer life through the daily mass, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, which find me so restful and free when I am with Him, talking or resting with Him. I also pray the Office of Readings because of the richness of the sermons and writings of the Fathers of the Church and the changing seasons as in Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and special feast days, which are often the source of my meditation. I pray the Angelus as well as the Night Prayer. Prayers at various intervals of the day and night come naturally to me in a lot of different ways. Penance and private devotions are also part of my prayer life.

In some ways, my vocation revolves around my ministries, at my home parish, Notre Dame Catholic Church, as an extraordinary minister

of Holy Communion, bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. It is expressed in facilitating scriptural rosary, propagating rosary devotion, prayer for vocations, and prayer for priests. It is also expressed in hospital visitation as pastoral assistant. Contemplative prayer group is also a help to be able to share and support each other. I share, support and inspire others to give themselves to God according to the demands of their way of life, especially praying with the elderly at the nursing homes, both sacramentally & devotionally. Attending Bible study twice a month helps me a lot and as member of the Adult Faith formation group we have faith sharing class, family movies, retreats, distributing literatures and many other form of evangelization. In all of these, I am so grateful for the love and support that my parish family has been given me especially the Notre Dame staff and the parishioners.

I have more time now since retirement for reading the lives of the saints as my models. It helps and inspires me to live a life of contemplation and prayer and to serve the Lord in the midst of the world. In addition, for my spiritual growth, I listen to tapes and read spiritual books and a lot of good materials provided by the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins. I have regular spiritual direction and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a month. I also take a lot of retreats at the parish level as well as archdiocesan level and once a year I do a weekend retreat.

In order to be an effective spouse of Christ, I must have a balanced life of prayer, work, rest and recreation. It is difficult to take on more work sometimes but I hope it will be understood that my vocation is in itself a witness and a ministry to them. And as the Cloud of Unknowing book says, "It is not where I breathe but where I love I live." - [Rosie M. Capalad](#), consecrated September 29, 2007.

Homily continued virgins: “They constitute a special eschatological image of the heavenly bride and of the life to come when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the bridegroom.” What he means is that the ultimate, eternal destiny of every Christian is union with Christ, a union very much like that of marriage, in which the two become one: our union with Christ is the union of spouses, as he is the Bridegroom and we are members of his Bride, the Church.

The modern vocation of consecrated virginity lived *in* the world, then, is a vocation which bears witness to this nuptial reality that lies *beyond* this world. In this sense, the consecrated virgin is an icon of the Church, and so becomes a bride of Christ. However, unlike religious consecration which is lived apart from the world in some way – apostolic as well as cloistered – the consecrated virgin stands in the midst of a myopic culture as a living witness of the future life of God’s Kingdom, a life in which there will be no giving or taking in marriage, but a life of intimacy with God for all eternity.

All of the various forms of consecrated life in the Church, though, stand as a witness and inspiration to all of the faithful to heed the basic command our Lord utters to every believer: “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” The numerous commands and exhortations we hear from God in both Old and New Testaments all have the purpose of helping us respond to this one basic commandment. This call to holiness stands in stark contrast – indeed, as a direct reversal – of the pagan religions in the ancient world. The

pagan people worshipped gods *they* made in *their* own likeness; we worship the God Who made *us* in *His* likeness.

The Call to Holiness and the Sacramental World View

In today’s gospel, our Lord explains fully what such holiness looks like: it is a life that goes beyond minimum observance; it is the imitation of his perfect love for us in his death on the Cross. On the Cross most especially he practices what he preaches: “pray for those who persecute you” – “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” To claim to be a Christian means that our lives must be visibly different from non-believers. “Do not the pagans do the same?” is a very sobering prompting of the conscience. If our lives are not visibly different, going way beyond the minimal ethical conduct generally expected, then our faith is in vain.

This is the essence of our Lord’s teaching here and all throughout the Sermon on the Mount. And it is this essential moral teaching of our Lord which has become the moral foundation of Western Civilization, established and built upon by the Church for two millennia. The values enshrined in this moral teaching continue to be held in esteem and cherished by all down to our own time, values such as non-violence, selfless generosity, mercy and forgiveness.

This foundation of civilization is reflected in the teaching of St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, which we heard proclaimed in the second reading for our Mass today: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of

God dwells in you?” Everyone in the ancient world knew that the temple was the dwelling place of God. Thus, St. Paul is telling us that God dwells within us, and so our body is holy. The respect and reverence that is due to a church building, as the dwelling place of God, is also due to our bodies. This explains the profound respect the Church has always had for the body, and for all of human life, as witnessed to by the good works to which she has always selflessly dedicated her resources: health care, education, orphanages, homeless shelters, and so many other forms of outreach to the poor. Even the traditional prohibition against cremation is explained by this profound respect for the body. While the discipline has now been relaxed and cremation is allowed, the teaching has not changed, and so the Rite of Christian Burial requires that the cremated remains be treated in the same way and with the same respect as the body.

Our call to holiness, then, must be lived out *in our bodies*. Paganism was characterized by dualism, a separation between body and spirit: the body, as pertaining to the realm of the material, was seen as evil, or at least as inconsequential. All that mattered was the spirit, a consideration independent of the body. The Christian way of viewing the world is not dualistic, but sacramental: the physical world is the means through which God reveals the hidden, spiritual world of His Kingdom, the world for which He created us. This sacramental understanding of the created order engenders a profound sense of the sacred: in our worship, in our relationships, toward our bodies, and most especially with regard to marriage as the primary, 

privileged institution by which God reveals the mystery of His life in us. This is that higher wisdom of which St. Paul speaks: “the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.”

It is a curious irony that, in this post-modern age, the old pagan idea is popular once again: what one does with one’s body has nothing to do with what it means to live in Christ. This is for sure that ancient pagan dualism, and the consequences are all around us, perhaps affecting even believers in subtle ways: a loss of the sense of the sacred, often even within the temple in the sense of the church building, characterized by a loss of the respect and reverence owed to the house of God. Even more so, it is characterized by a disregard for human life in a whole variety of ways, and disregard even of marriage. What is meant to be a lesson in self-oblation, of giving oneself to another, has become inverted and is now seen as a relationship that is all about me: what *I* get out of it, what makes *me* happy, and so a relationship worth staying in as long as *I* derive some benefit from it.

Sadly, this way of thinking leaves innumerable victims in its wake: not only children deprived of growing up with both parents, but also those spouses who are committed to working out their marital difficulties but to whom the law gives no special claim over their husband or wife who cares only about their own immediate benefit. This is the culture we live in, it’s all around us and in the air we breathe and so, again, affects even people of good will. That is why sometimes even when both spouses want to work through their difficulties, they do not find the support and wherewithal to do so. The now popular idea of marriage as an arrangement for the satisfac-

tion of the adults who enter into it and who define it as they will is the ultimate profanation of the sacred, the banalization of the most precious, sublime gift that God has given us for the common good and for the good of our salvation.

Such thinking is that wisdom of this world which is “foolishness in the eyes of God.” It is completely earth-bound, a way of living in which one is closed in on oneself and closed off from the transcendent dimension of our being created in God’s image. This is the mentality that sees the pursuit of a religious vocation – be it one of the various forms of Consecrated Life, or the vocation of Priesthood – as “a waste.” It sees only the material, and cannot see the spiritual dimension. It therefore fails to understand the sacramental meaning of the body in such a vocation. Notice that, while there are many male religious orders of consecrated life, there is no rite of consecration to a life of virginity lived in the world for a man. This is not because men are not called to the same purity; rather, it is because only a woman’s body can convey what it means to be a bride, and thus serve as an icon of the Church, the Bride of Christ. In the same way, only a man’s body can convey what it means to be a bridegroom, and so only a man can be an icon of Christ, the Bridegroom, in the sacramental order of the Priesthood.

Those who lack a sacramental understanding of the world see these states of life not as vocations, but as jobs, no different from a number of any other jobs in the Church. This, though, is just one consequence of looking at the world this way. So, for example, instead of understanding our worship as a participation in the heavenly worship joined in the communion of saints and as a form of ritual which is given to us by the Church for us to appropriate to

ourselves, they see it as an action of the community, by the community and for the community to change and adapt as we will for our own self-affirmation. Ultimately, the very sense of vocation is undermined: it is not the commitment and very identity to which God calls me to persevere, in good times and in bad, for the sake of my salvation, but a way of life to which I give myself as I deem fit and for as long as it makes me happy.

It cannot be that way with us. No, we must regulate our life according to the sacramental understanding of the created order, marked as it is by a profound sense of the sacred and sensitivity to the spiritual, transcendent dimension of our human nature. *This* is what must distinguish our life as different from those who do not believe, and we must manifest it in very concrete ways through our attitudes and behavior, respecting the sacredness of our bodies, of our worship, of all human life, of the gift of our vocation.

Conclusion

The commandments God gives us are to help us in the pursuit of holiness, so that we might be like him. For the true believer they are not burdensome, but are rather like instructions a bride receives on how to prepare for her wedding day. As members of the Church we are that bride, called to join ourselves as one in Christ. To live in this way requires wisdom from above, a wisdom which is folly to this world, but to those who believe, the wisdom that opens us to the divine grace that brings to perfection our life in Christ, so that we become perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

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The **USACV Prayer Request Network** is now being coordinated by Florence Sundberg - prayer requests should be sent by email to prayerrequests@consecratedvirgins.org.

Florence writes: "Our USACV prayer request network is a powerful instrument of intercessory prayer and I urge all our sisters in consecration to use this network for any prayer needs you are aware of, knowing that our Lord and Spouse will respond always with compassion. So many count on our prayers as a service of love! I want to thank all our sisters for holding in prayer those who are in need."

Upcoming U. S. Consecrations:

June 2, 2011, **Paula Willenbrink**, at 10:00 AM in the St. Louis Basilica Cathedral, at the hands of Archbishop Robert Carlson. All are invited to attend!

August 10, 2011, **Janet LeBlanc**, at 6:30 PM at Sacred Heart Church on Pleasant Street in Waterville, Maine, at the hands of the Bishop of Portland (Maine). Janet reminds us that August 10 is also the anniversary of the day that Saint Philomena was martyred for the sake of the Kingdom of God. All are invited to attend!

U.S. Consecrations

February 20, 2011, **Elizabeth Lam**, Diocese of Oakland, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Salvatore Cordileone, during a Sunday Mass at the Cathedral of Christ the Light. Bishop Cordileone's homily at Elizabeth's consecration is re-printed in this issue of *The Lamp*.

April 29, 2011, **Sabrina Schmidt**, Diocese of Springfield (Missouri), at the hands of His Excellency Bishop James Johnston. Sabrina writes that St. Catherine of Siena has been her model for this vocation, and she was ecstatic that April 29th worked out on her Bishop's calendar.

Welcome to the Order of Virgins,
Elizabeth and Sabrina!

Consecrations Other Countries

France:

May 14, 2011, **Véronique Maitrot**, Archdiocese of Lyon, at the hands of His Eminence Philippe Cardinal Barbarin.

October 23, 2010, **Anne Greffard**, Diocese of Angers
September 19, 2010, **Irène Cabaud** and **Laurence Monaque**, Diocese of Parigi

September 6, 2009, **Quyen Nguyen**, Bordeaux

December 13, 2009, **Anne-Céline Denis**, Puy-en-Velay

Italy:

October 2, 2010, **Marinella Pantaleoni**, Diocese of Carpi, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Elio Tinti
September 11, 2010, **Laura Bolzoni** and Sabrina Camozzi, Archdiocese of Milan, in the Basilica of Sant' Ambrogio, at the hands of His Eminence Dionigi Cardinal Tettamanzi

April 10, 2010, **Novella Baldini**, Diocese of Parma, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Enrico Solmi

April 10, 2010, **Diega Roberti**, **Ersilia Di Domenico**, **Maria Rosa Polci**, and **Giuseppina Tenerelli**, Diocese of Teramo-Atri, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Michele Seccia

December 26, 2009, **Pepice Anna**, Diocese of Melfi-Rapolla-Venosa, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Gianfranco Todisco

December 8, 2009, **Giusy Zinnarello**, Diocese of Reggio Calabria, at the hands of His Excellency Vittorio Luigi Mondello

September 12, 2009, **Carmela Celi** and **Arianna Falcone**, Archdiocese of Milan, at the hands of His Eminence Dionigi Cardinal Tettamanzi