

# **Presentation of the Lord in the Temple**

## **World Day of Consecrated Life**

St. Patrick's Church

2 February 2018

Dear brother priests, especially dear consecrated women and men, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

### ***Introduction***

I am very grateful this evening for you, the consecrated women and men whose presence in the Archdiocese of Vancouver is such a great gift. In a very special and heartfelt way, I wish to congratulate those of you who are celebrating significant anniversaries of your consecration this year, especially if you are marking your silver, golden or diamond jubilee.

I am also very pleased to welcome the newest community of consecrated women to the Archdiocese: the Daughters of the Queen of the Rosary from Indonesia; they are now engaged in pastoral ministry at Our Lady of Mercy Parish. It is also a pleasure to share the good news that this coming August three Salesian Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, will come to serve at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish. There they will share their charism, as followers of Don Bosco, of working with young people.

In the 30 communities of women and 24 of men in our local Church are found diverse charisms. You have different ways of living your vows, and different ways of witnessing to the poor, chaste and

obedient Jesus. Your many splendid apostolic initiatives and your fidelity to a life of prayer enrich all of us beyond measure.

### ***The Encounter between the Young and the Old***

In the Gospel of today's Feast, Mary and Joseph bring their 40-day old Child to the Temple in Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22). The Eastern Church celebrates the Feast of the Encounter. "In the temple Jesus comes to meet us, and we go to meet him."<sup>1</sup> It is also "the encounter between God, who became a child to bring newness to our world, and an expectant humanity, represented by the elderly man and woman in the Temple."<sup>2</sup>

Here the New Covenant, represented by Mary and Joseph, meets the Old Covenant, represented by Simeon and Anna. They live in expectation and hope, and so they prophesy. The Gospel presents the young being received by the old, and yet bringing something, Someone, new to the mature of age. "The old receive from the young, while the young draw upon the old."<sup>3</sup>

St. Luke underlines, more than once, that the elderly were guided by the Holy Spirit. Simeon was a righteous and devout man, awaiting

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2018).

the Messiah. “The Holy Spirit rested on him” (Lk 2:25) and he went to the Temple “guided by the Holy Spirit” (Lk 2:27). For her part, Anna was a “prophet” (Lk 2:36); that is, one filled with the Holy Spirit. In short, these two elders were full of life because they were animated by the Holy Spirit, obedient to his action.

In this encounter between the Holy Family and the two representatives of the people of God, Jesus is at the centre. It is he who moves everything, who attracts all of them to the Temple, the house of his Father.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Simeon and Anna and of all Israel.

The Gospel also presents a paradox in contrasting the couples. It is striking that, while the young Mary and Joseph faithfully observe the Law – the Gospel tells us this four times – and never speak, the elderly Simeon and Anna come running into the Temple and prophesy. It seems it should be the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, this meeting of Mary and Joseph with Simeon and Anna, I believe, reflects what happens in many communities, where the enthusiasm of the younger members meets the wisdom of the more

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (2 February 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (2 February 2018).

mature. But. As Pope Francis has written:

It's good for the elderly to communicate their wisdom to the young; and is good for the young people to gather this wealth of experience and wisdom, and to carry it forward, not so as to store it in a museum, but to bring it forward addressing the challenges of life, to carry it forward for the sake of respective religious orders and of the whole Church.<sup>6</sup>

While the young in a community are inclined by age to open new doors, new ways of living the consecrated life, the elderly still have the keys. "An institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young."<sup>7</sup>

Encounters between the young and the old, the newly professed and the golden jubilarian can, at times, lead to misunderstanding and even conflict, if either group takes their eyes off what unites them.

Just as Jesus linked the two couples together in the Temple, so is he the One who brings young and old together in mutual respect. Strong as the affective bonds may be that bind the consecrated, the ultimate foundation, the glue that holds every community together is – and has to

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2018).

be – Jesus Christ crucified and risen. Set him at the centre of your lives. Clearly show the beauty of following Christ, and radiate hope and joy.<sup>8</sup>

The passage of the Letter to the Hebrews which we heard proclaimed reminds us that in order to encounter us as we are in the frailty of our humanity, Jesus willingly shared our human condition (cf. Heb 2:14): he became “like his brothers and sisters in every respect” (Heb 2:17). This means that he did not save us “from the outside.” He did not remain on the outside of our drama, but shared our life completely.

Likewise, consecrated men and women are called to be visible signs of this closeness of God to his people, of this sharing in the condition of frailty, of sin. In this way they can heal the wounds of men and women and so can bring them the needed spiritual and physical healing.<sup>9</sup>

The consequence? “Leave your nest and head for the margins of humanity today!” This is the pressing appeal of the Holy Father to us consecrated men and women today. Then he adds:

To do this, let Christ meet you. The encounter with him will

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Francis, Address to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (28 January 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (2 February 2016).

inspire you to encounter others and will lead you toward the neediest, the poorest. Reach all the peripheries that are in need of the light of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 20). Live on the frontiers. This will ask of you vigilance to discern the novelties of the Spirit; lucidity in recognizing the complexity of the new frontiers; discernment in identifying the limits and the appropriate manner to proceed; and immersion in reality, “touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (*ibid*, n. 24).<sup>10</sup>

Because Jesus is “the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8), the Pope warns us, especially those of more advanced years, from falling into a survivalist mode. Such a mentality makes people fearful of the future, thinking only of the glory days – days that are past – rather than rekindling the prophetic creativity that marked their founders’ dreams. A survival mentality robs the original charism of power and original creative force and leads us to protect institutions and structures, rather than to encourage new initiatives proposed by the young. Admittedly, they might not do things the same way as their elders, but

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<sup>10</sup> Francis, Video Message for the Vigil of Prayer for the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (29 November 2014).

they too have received the Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Let's now return to the Gospel. Simeon bursts forth in a beautiful canticle when he takes the Child Jesus in his arms. It is the hymn of a devout believer who, at the end of his days, can exclaim: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace" (Lk 2:29). His song expressed profound hope, a hope in God that never disappoints us (cf. Rm 5:5). In their old age both Simeon and Anna broke out in praise of God. Their hope was rewarded when they encountered Jesus.

So also should it be for us: to encounter Jesus in friendship is to have our hopes fulfilled.

### ***Conclusion***

Let us, then, accompany Jesus as he goes forth to meet his people, as he did in the Temple with Simeon and Anna. Now he comes to meet us in the Eucharist – the mystery of his Death and Resurrection made present, here and now, for us and for our salvation.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (2 February 2017).