

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

## **World Day of Consecrated Life**

Holy Name of Jesus

2 February 2015

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

### ***Introduction: Feast of the Presentation***

In this evening's Gospel, we can picture before our eyes the young couple of Mary and Joseph carrying the Child Jesus to the Temple. In obedience to the Law (cf. Lk 2:22-24,27,39), which they loved, they are bringing him to be offered to God. They bring him to meet his people represented by the pious and wise Simeon and Anna, who are enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The newlyweds carry him, yet he is leading them. He is leading them along the path of the God who comes to us, so that we all might go to meet him.<sup>1</sup> It is Jesus, even as an Infant, who draws all of us to his Father's house. Some of us, by God's inscrutable Providence, are drawn to his house through living the consecrated life.

### **Consecrated Life**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (2 February 2015).

This year our celebration of the Day of Consecrated Life is taking place within the Year of Consecrated Life proclaimed by Pope Francis and which began on the First Sunday of Advent last year. In a particular it commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of Vatican II's decree on the renewal of Religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. The Holy Father wrote to consecrated women and men why he wished to mark this anniversary:

I wanted first of all to propose again to the Church as a whole the beauty and value of this special form of *sequela Christi* [the following of Christ], represented by all of you who have chosen to leave everything to imitate Christ more closely through the profession of the evangelical counsels.<sup>2</sup>

This Year, then, is meant to be for the whole Church – and not just consecrated women and men – a year of gratitude and grace, a year of renewal and hope.

Now, for my part and on behalf of the whole Archdiocese of Vancouver, I wish to express my gratitude to the Lord, the giver of all gifts, for the presence and apostolates in the Archdiocese of those living the consecrated life: the Dominican nuns and Poor Clares, the monks of Westminster Abbey, the brothers and sisters from many different

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, Message for the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (30 November 2014).

congregations of active Religious, those who are members of societies of apostolic life and those who are consecrated and living in the world. You are, each and every one of you and the communities to which you belong, a beautiful gift to the Church.

Your consecrated life is a leaven in our local Church, a leaven that enables us to grow to full maturity in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13). Indeed, you are at the heart of our Church, and for this we – the priests and lay faithful – are all enormously grateful. Thank you for the witness of your consecration, of your single-minded dedication to the Lord Jesus and to his Body. Thank you for your ministry of prayer on our behalf and for your dedicated service to our brothers and sisters in all your various works.

But rest on our laurels rightfully garnered from the past we cannot. Not only must we gratefully remember our history, we must also forge bravely ahead into the future. Indeed, the grateful remembrance of our history should lead us, to “listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), I:2.

In preparing for tonight’s homily, I have tried to read all of what Pope Francis has said in the last two years about the consecrated life – and it is considerable but not yet unmanageable in volume – and I have picked from this material three themes. Of course, I have made a selection, one which undoubtedly expresses concerns that I think are crucial to the continued vibrancy of the consecrated life in our local Church.

And so, I address you now directly, dear brothers and sisters with whom I share the consecrated life.

### ***1. Christ at the Centre: Jesus as Our First Love***

First and above all, put Christ at the centre of your existence. The fundamental norm of our life is “the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels.”<sup>4</sup> The consecrated life essentially consists in personal adherence to Jesus as our first and exclusive love. Hence our commitment to live the vow or promise of chastity.

Seek Christ constantly. Seek his Face, set him at the heart of your life, so as to be transformed into “a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living”.<sup>5</sup> Like the Apostle Paul, let yourselves be captivated by him. “Let yourselves be touched by his hand, led by his voice, sustained by his grace.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Francis, Video-Message for the Vigil of Prayer at St. Mary Major on the Occasion

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of the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (29 November 2014).

Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.<sup>7</sup>

## ***2. Infect Others with the Joy of the Gospel***

Secondly, infect others with the joy of the Gospel. This joy “is born from feeling accepted, understood and loved, and from accepting, from understanding and from loving. . . . It is hearing someone say, but not necessarily with words: ‘You are important to me’.” In calling you – first at Baptism and then through your consecration – the Lord is saying this: “You are important to me; I love you; I am counting on you.” That is the cause and secret of our joy.<sup>8</sup>

Each of us was called to the consecrated life, hearing something – or, rather, Someone – within us which moved us to answer, however haltingly, “yes.” It is in prayer that the Lord gradually leads us to understand this call and this love more deeply, but it is also through the many signs that we can read in our life and in the many people he sets on

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), I:2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Francis, Address, Meeting with Seminarians and Novices (6 July 2013).

our path.

If authentic, the joy of this encounter with him and with his call does not lead to closing in on ourselves but to opening ourselves for service in the Church. Interior joy spreads to become exterior, visible joy. True joy is contagious.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, I urge you to show that your following of Christ in the consecrated life fills you with happiness. Infect those who are near you with this joy; and then many people will ask you for the reason and feel the desire to share with you your Gospel adventure.<sup>10</sup>

### ***3. Live on the Frontiers as Contemplative Missionaries***

Lastly, and I take these words right from the Holy Father, “Leave your nest and head for the margins of humanity today!”<sup>11</sup> He couldn’t be more direct!

The genuine experience of encountering Jesus Christ inevitably inspires us to encounter him in others and leads us to the marginalized and poorest on the fringes of society who so desperately need of the light of the Gospel.<sup>12</sup> And let me cite the Holy Father again :

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Francis, Address, Meeting with Seminarians and Novices (6 July 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Francis, Message for the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (30 November 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Francis, Video-Message for the Vigil of Prayer at St. Mary Major on the Occasion of the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (29 November 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 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” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24).<sup>13</sup>

“Go into all the world.” These were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to all of us today (cf. Mk 16:15) – and particularly to consecrated men and women. A vast and needy world awaits us: people on the edge of despair, families in crisis, the uneducated, abandoned and abused children, young people hoping for a better world, the elderly, sick and abandoned, the homeless and the incarcerated, those who are rich in the world’s goods but interiorly impoverished, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for God but without knowing where and how to find him.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Francis, Video-Message for the Vigil of Prayer at St. Mary Major on the Occasion of the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (29 November 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), II:4.

With the power of the Holy Spirit that accompanies you, dear brothers and sisters, go out into the streets of this world as your founders and foundresses did, and bring with you the life-giving power of the Gospel which, when put into practice, can also work wonders in our own day for the good of the Church and of humanity.<sup>15</sup> Let me assure you: “You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.”<sup>16</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Remember always that others must be able to read the Gospel in your life! The apostolic fruitfulness of the consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. Rather, “it depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.”<sup>17</sup>

Today we too, like Mary and Joseph, and Simeon and Anna, want to take Jesus into our arms and bring him to his people. Let us lead others to Jesus, but let us first allow ourselves to be led by him. “This is what we [consecrated persons] should be: guides who themselves are

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Francis, Message for the Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life (30 November 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), II:4.

<sup>17</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014), II:1.

guided.”<sup>18</sup>

Let us pray for this now as we continue our Eucharist.

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<sup>18</sup> Francis, Homily (2 February 2015).

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