

Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

World Day of Consecrated Life

St. Patrick's Church

2 February 2019

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

Introduction

On this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, his consecration to God, the Church celebrates the Day of Consecrated Life – lives which are a gift of God to the Church throughout the world, and a treasure to the People of God in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. Today we praise and thank the good Lord for the marvels that he has worked through you. If the consecrated life were not present in our Church, how much poorer we would all be! Quite apart from our gratitude for the fruitfulness of your apostolic works, your consecrated life is essential precisely because it is a sign to us of unbounded generosity and love, and this all the more so in a world that risks being suffocated in the vortex of the ephemeral and the useful.¹ The consecrated life is a true leaven of holiness in the Church.

In a very particular and heartfelt way, I wish to offer my prayerful best wishes to those of you who are celebrating significant anniversaries of your consecration this year, especially if you are marking your silver,

¹ Cf. St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 105.

golden or diamond jubilee. And I am very happy to welcome two new Institutes of consecrated life that have established a foundation this past year in our Archdiocese. At Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Surrey, three Daughters of Mary Help of Christians carry out the mission of St. John Bosco, reaching out to youth in the parish and at Holy Cross Regional Secondary School. In Richmond, St. Joseph the Worker Parish has welcomed four Franciscan priests and one brother of the Order of Friars Minor. I am delighted as well that a good number of young women and men from our families are answering the Lord's call to the consecrated life. To me this is a sign that the joyful witness of consecrated women and men here is bearing fruit. Thank you so much!

Radical Imitation of Christ

Whatever the particular form of the consecrated life – and there is remarkable variety and richness of charisms here in this regard – it always entails a radical imitation of Jesus, the following of him without compromise. The consecrated life is “deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord.”²

From the beginnings of monasticism in the desert to the “new communities” of our own time, every form of consecrated life has been

² St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 1.

born of the Spirit's call to follow Jesus as the Gospel teaches.³ Indeed, the Gospel must always be the absolute rule of the consecrated life; every other rule is merely a means of helping to live the Gospel to the full. Undoubtedly the Gospel is demanding: it demands to be lived radically and sincerely. It is not enough to read it, even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential. Nor is it enough to meditate on it, which we must also do. What Jesus asks is that we put the Gospel into effect in our daily life.⁴ And the result of your consecration will not be adulation from the world. Nor should it be. Like Jesus, we should expect to be “signs of contradiction” (cf. Lk 2:34), because the way of thinking and living of those who are consecrated is often in opposition to the logic of the world.

Following Christ in the consecrated life means taking on ever more fully his mind and his way of life. Listen to what St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). From the earliest days, the Church has discerned three striking features of Jesus' basic attitude or mind. These three features, called the “evangelical counsels,” have become the distinctive

³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

⁴ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014).

elements of a life committed to the radical following of the poor, chaste and obedient Jesus.⁵

When we who are consecrated live these counsels with integrity we remind all “the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel.”⁶ By doing so, our witness imbues the whole Church with a much-needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the teaching of Christ.⁷ When lived faithfully, the consecrated life is an “eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel.”⁸

Consecration

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5). These words of the Prophet Jeremiah forcefully recall that by Baptism all the faithful are “consecrated” or set apart for God. We are all dedicated to his service.

Nevertheless, the baptismal consecration is lived in a special way by those who, on account of their profession of vows, belong to God in a total and exclusive way. Because they are totally consecrated to God, they are, at the same time, totally dedicated to their brothers and sisters,

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers, Mariazell (8 September 2007).

⁶ St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 33.

⁷ Cf. St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 3.

⁸ St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 25.

bringing the light of Christ where the darkness reigns and spreading hope where discouragement prevails.⁹

Dear consecrated sisters and brothers: when you placed yourselves without reserve in the hands of Christ and the Church, you clearly announced in a language understandable to our contemporaries that God is alive and active in this world. As Pope Benedict once remarked, “consecrated persons are like watchmen among the People of God who perceive and proclaim the new life already present in our history.”¹⁰

Being set apart for God, presented and dedicated to him as Jesus was in the Temple, does not remove you from others. On the contrary, “Consecrated life should lead you to closeness with people; physical, spiritual proximity.”¹¹ Following Jesus in chastity, poverty and obedience means following the way he has already taken; that is, healing the wounded who cross your path every day; and likewise, “going forth” in search of the lost sheep. To be close to people is to share their joys and sorrows; to show, with your love, “the paternal face of God and the maternal caress of the Church. . . .The important thing is not living for

⁹ Cf. Francis, Angelus (2 February 2014).

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily (2 February 2006).

¹¹ Francis, Address for the Jubilee of the Consecrated Life (1 February 2016).

oneself, as Jesus did not live for himself, but for the Father and for us.”¹²

A couple of years ago, in his homily for today’s feast, the Holy Father addressed us in this way:

Putting Jesus in the midst of his people means having a contemplative heart, one capable of discerning how God is walking through the streets of our cities, our towns and our neighbourhoods. Putting Jesus in the midst of his people means taking up and carrying the crosses of our brothers and sisters. It means wanting to touch the wounds of Jesus in the wounds of a world in pain, which longs and cries out for healing.¹³

Communion

If consecration is a key word for today, so, too, is communion. Our world – both secular and even, tragically, ecclesial – is fractured in so many ways. People are divided – and often ruthlessly so. Lack of charity in speech is justified as righteous anger and opinions contrary to one’s own are mocked and ridiculed. In this world, and it is *our* world, consecrated persons have a unique role to play. By your consecration,

¹² Francis, Address for the Jubilee of the Consecrated Life (1 February 2016).

¹³ Francis, Homily (2 February 2017).

you are committed to the cultivation of a sincere life of communion not only within your individual communities but also within the whole Church, and society.¹⁴

Firmly rooted in personal communion with God, whom you have chosen as your heart's desire, be tireless builders of fraternity. Demonstrate that universal fraternity is not a utopian ideal but Jesus' very dream for the whole of humanity.¹⁵ So, be witnesses and architects of God's design of unity for humankind. In a polarized society, where different cultures often experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, and where inequality abounds, consecrated men and women are called to offer a model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing their respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.

Conclusion

Let us now proceed to renew our commitment to God, made by all of us at Baptism and strengthened by vows and promises by those who

¹⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15.

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

are consecrated. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, be at our side to guide us on the path to the Heart of her Son.

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