



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

XX WORLD OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Tuesday, 2 February 2016

[Multimedia]

Before our eyes is a simple, humble and great fact: Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple of Jerusalem. He is a child like so many, like all, but he is unique: he is the Only Begotten who came for all. This Child has brought us the mercy and tenderness of God: Jesus is the face of the Father's mercy. This is the icon that the Gospel offers us at the end of the Year of Consecrated Life, a year lived out with so much enthusiasm. Like a river, it is now flowing into the sea of mercy, in this immense mystery of love that we are experiencing with the Extraordinary Jubilee.

Today's celebration, especially in the East, is called the *feast of the encounter*. Essentially, in the Gospel that has been proclaimed, we see various encounters (cf. Lk 2:22-40). In the temple *Jesus comes to meet us and we go to meet him*. We contemplate the encounter with the elderly Simeon, who represents Israel's faithful anticipation and the heartfelt jubilation for the fulfillment of the ancient promises. We also admire the encounter with the elderly prophetess Anna who, in seeing the Child, exults in joy and praises God. Simeon and Anna are *the anticipation and the prophecy*, Jesus is the novelty and the fulfillment: he is presented to us as the perennial surprise of God; concentrated in this Child born for all is *the past*, made of memory and of promise, and *the future*, full of hope.

We can see in this the beginning of consecrated life. *Consecrated men and women are called first and foremost to be men and women of encounter*. Indeed, the vocation does not originate from a plan we have designed "on the drawing board", but from a grace of the Lord which touches us, through a life-changing encounter. Those who truly encounter Jesus cannot remain the same as before. He is the novelty that makes all things new. Those who experience this encounter become witnesses and make the encounter possible for others; they also promote the culture of encounter,

avoiding the self-referentiality that makes us stay closed off within ourselves.

The passage of the Letter to the Hebrews which we heard reminds us that in order to encounter us, Jesus did not hesitate to share our human condition: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature” (2:14). Jesus did not save us “from the outside”, he did not remain outside of our drama, but wanted to share our life. Consecrated men and women are called to be a tangible and prophetic sign of this *closeness of God*, of this sharing in the condition of frailty, of sin and of the wounds of today’s mankind.

All forms of consecrated life, each according to its characteristics, are called to be in a permanent state of mission, sharing “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). The Gospel also tells us that “his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him” (Lk 2:33). Joseph and Mary safeguard the astonishment over this encounter full of light and hope for all peoples. We too, as Christians and as consecrated people, are *guardians of astonishment*. An astonishment which requires ongoing renewal; woe to routine in spiritual life; woe to the crystallization of our charisms in an abstract document: the founders’ charisms — as I have said at other times — are not to be sealed in a bottle, they are not museum pieces. Our founders were moved by the Spirit and were not afraid to soil their hands with everyday life, with the problems of the people, courageously moving along the geographical and existential peripheries. They did not halt in the face of obstacles and the misunderstandings of others, because they kept in their heart the astonishment over the encounter with Christ. They did not tame the grace of the Gospel; they always had in their heart a healthy apprehension for the Lord, a heartrending desire to bring him to others, as Mary and Joseph did in the temple. We too are called today to make prophetic and courageous choices.

Lastly, through the encounter with Jesus and through the gift of the vocation to consecrated life we learn from today’s celebration to experience *gratitude*. Thanking, giving thanks: *the Eucharist*. How beautiful it is when we encounter the happy faces of consecrated people, perhaps already advanced in years like Simeon or Anna, content and full of gratitude for their own vocation. This is a word that can summarize all that we have experienced in this Year of Consecrated Life: gratitude for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who always enlivens the Church through various charisms.

The Gospel concludes with this expression: “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him” (v. 40). May the Lord Jesus, through the maternal intercession of Mary, grow in us, and increase in each person the desire for encounter, the safekeeping of the astonishment and the joy of gratitude. Then others will be attracted by his light, and they will be able to encounter the Father’s mercy.

At the end of Mass, the Pope went to St Peter’s Square to greet the faithful gathered outside:

Dear Consecrated Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you so much! You partook in the Eucharist while a bit chilly, but the heart is aflame!

Thank you for ending this Year of Consecrated Life in this way, everyone together. Go forth! Each of us has a role, has a job in the Church. Please, do not forget the first vocation, the first call. Remember! And with the love with which you were called, today the Lord continues to call you. Do not downplay, never downplay the beauty, the wonder of the first call. And then keep working. It's beautiful! Continue. There is always something to do. The main thing is to pray. The "marrow" of consecrated life is prayer: pray! And grow old, but age like fine wine!

I'll tell you something. I so enjoy when I come across those elderly women and men religious with eyes that shine, because they have the flame of spiritual life alight. It hasn't gone out, that flame has not gone out! Go forth today, each day, and keep working and look to tomorrow with hope, always ask the Lord to send us new vocations, so our work of consecration can go forward. Memory: do not forget the first call! Daily work and then the hope of going forward and sowing well, so that the others who come after us can receive the legacy that we shall leave them.

Now let us pray to Our Lady....

[Blessing]

Have a good evening and pray for me!