



A Reflection on Consecrated Life

Homiletic Reflection for Pastors

For the Weekend of November 22/23

He is the unblemished flower,
who sprang from the root of the Virgin
and declared the pure of heart blessed,
teaching by his way of life the surpassing worth of chastity.
He chose always to hold fast to what is pleasing to you
and, becoming obedient for our sake even until death,
he willingly offered himself to you
as a perfect and a fragrant sacrifice.
He consecrated to a fuller service of your majesty
those who for love of you leave all earthly things
and promised they would find treasure in heaven.

*Preface for the Mass
of Religious Profession,
Roman Missal*

While growing up at home, my father was always instructing my brother and I of the need to remember duty, obligation and responsibility. One could say this was his "hallmark" advice to us throughout our childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. Duty, obligation and responsibility, whether it was making your bed in the morning, hanging up your towels, feeding the dog, doing your chores, cutting the grass and putting the yard tools away properly, washing your dishes after eating, saying thank you to mom for cooking the meal, following through on any projects, doing our best in school or any activity, being punctual for appointments, or saying our morning and night prayers. After many years now, and looking back, my father prepared my brother and I well to be mature, respectful, dutiful and responsible

people ready to give an account for our actions. In our present culture, often being described as an era of "irresponsibility" I often find myself frustrated and questioning the apathy of people, or their lack of following through on projects or promises in their lives. There seems to be a total lack of accountability for anything, and absence of living out and being aware of duty, obligation and responsibility. It is almost as if the practice of these virtues has been lulled to sleep.

For the Solemnity of Christ the King, the prophet Ezekiel gives an explanation of the Lord's intention to not only shepherd his people Israel, but to give them rest, seek out the lost, build up the weak, care for the sick and to destroy the strong and sleek. Similar language is found in the account the final judgment in St. Matthew's Gospel. This is



powerful imagery and there is no question that God's people will have to render an account based upon the care, compassion and kindness shown to the weak and needy in the world.

In both Old Testament and New Testament accounts we have the image of sheep being separated from the goats and to each a proper reckoning. The message is simple. All who belong to the household of the Lord, the

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holiness in the world: family life; grocery shopping; at work; in the marketplace etc. There are some members of the church who are called to more intense, radicalized holiness through the profession of the evangelical counsels. These counsels are vows made before God; chastity, poverty and obedience. Those men and women called by God in a mysterious manner, live the counsels in the context of a religious family which the church calls "religious institutes" which are orders or congregations of men and women who profess these vows, following a particular divine charism in the church. This universal organization as such is known as "consecrated life" or "religious life". Its members are known as sisters, nuns, brothers, friars, monks and some are priests. These men and women are called and graced to live "more" than radical holiness of the ordinary Christian. Those consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels are called to give prophetic witness to those same acts of corporal and spiritual mercy lived out by our savior and continued in and through his church. The evangelical counsels bear witness, in this life, to the life of the Kingdom of God, the life of the saints in heaven.

baptized, are called to radical holiness, living out in this life the same loving action of our Lord, practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

The vocation of each soul is rooted in Baptism. At that moment, the seed of one's vocation is planted and sanctifying grace is given to care and nurture that calling whether the priesthood, married life or consecrated life. Every baptized member of the Body of Christ, the Church, is called to holiness and to manifest this

Those living the consecrated life know it is the Lord whom they serve. Such service does not negate the individual persons served, but rather enhances and elevates them, seeing them as true brothers and sisters of Christ. Their dignity is preserved and the kingdom of God is further spread. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us that the consecrated "should be men and women who are able to 'wake up' the world." The pope continues, "Such



prophetic witness is charged with meaning for individuals themselves in the consecrated life, for their respective communities and for the church in general." The consecrated person wakes up the world by being that example of living the spiritual and/or corporal works of mercy; following the inspiration and example of the founder or foundress of the religious congregation.

The role of a prophet is to speak the word of God to people. It is both a word of challenge and a word of comfort, a word of wakefulness and a word of encouragement. The very works of mercy; spiritual and/or corporal, serve as the criteria for human salvation and condemnation. They are works attentive to human needs: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. They are simply human acts of charity and kindness. These acts are not done simply as "social work" although they may often resemble such. These acts are done intentionally in the name of Jesus. Those men and women in consecrated life, are called to not only live as Jesus did, but to behave as Jesus himself; uplifting everything and everyone to the sphere of evangelical prophecy. What exactly does this mean? Pope Francis relates the 'prophecy' of consecrated persons as 'making noise, an uproar, some say a mess. But in reality, the charism of religious people is like yeast; prophecy announces the spirit of the Gospel.' Hence, men and women, consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels, have the grace, the freedom, the time and availability that many other members of the church, for example married couples with children, do not have. This 'freedom' of the vows

enables the religious to do, to be, to go and live as yeast among the faithful. Religious are not 'supermen or women', but they are enabled by God, to go beyond the normal means, to work for the edification of and proclaim the kingdom; to make a noise when needed and continually 'wake up the world'.

The religious person, dedicated to Christ and the church by a special consecration of the vows, is also challenged to live a life of contemplation. Not necessarily contemplation in a cloister or monastery although there are religious orders and congregations that do have this structure. However a life of contemplation that invites the religious to look at the light of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ; a daily sense of 'self-forgetfulness' and always striving to see the hand of God in everything and everyone. In a world in which human advancement is high on the daily agenda, and the world is anxious, busy, competitive and controlling, the consecrated religious, is called to be the prophet, living in the midst of the world and not being of the world; to daily discern how to live one's life with the complexities around us, fulfilling one's duty, whether it be in a classroom, office, hospital, clinic, convent or nursing facility; to do and to be while never losing sight of what the true expectation of humanity is about.

Therefore, this year dedicated to consecrated life is a time of grace for the universal church and our local church in the Diocese of Cleveland. It is an opportunity for all of us to grow in appreciation for what the many thousands of religious have accomplished for the good of the kingdom here in the diocese and around the world.



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A part of this year's celebration in our diocese we will be having pilgrimages organized throughout the diocese to various religious houses, headquarters and parishes. There will also be the opportunity of religious men and women who will come to speak at the parishes about consecrated life and the diocese will be producing a DVD about the many religious congregations and various works done here in the Cleveland area. It is a year for us to reflect on the important reality that consecrated life is not so much about doing, as it is about meaning. Religious men and women have been and are indeed doers, but doers with a difference. They have not nor do they do things to build their own empires or to make others dependent on them. They have done and continue to do things in a unique manner which enables hope to spring forth in people's lives and replace that sense of emptiness and that feeling of not being of worth, which haunts so many men and women of all ages, today.

The religious life is a call to a real and prophetic commitment. It reflects that zeal for the things of God. The commitment of religious can never be limited to a nine-to-five commitment. The challenge about religious life and about ministry in the Church is not about the declining numbers of vocations entering the convent or monastery but rather the mediocrity with which so many of us end up being satisfied with. We all need to restore our commitment to and confidence in our calling and the ability to recognize and set aside that which is marginal and distracting and much more that which we have built around ourselves just for our comfort and false security. This

year dedicated to consecrated life, 2014-2015, is in preparation for the fiftieth anniversary of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, promulgated by Blessed Pope Paul VI 1965 toward the end of the Second Vatican Council. This decree was an invitation to all religious to renew and refocus; to rediscover and return to the original inspiration of their founders and foundress. An invitation for religious to have a renewed spirit so as to 'renew' the world, so as to 'wake up the world' in our own times! Saint John XXIII when he opened the Second Vatican Council said: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia; Our Mother the Church rejoices!* The same is true in our own time as we celebrate this Year of Consecrated Life. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia; Our Mother the Church rejoices* in the millions of consecrated men and women who have been and continue to be an example, a prophet, a doer, a presence for us in the Church. Each religious in living his or her consecration to the Lord, whether it be the monastic life, cloistered or active life, has been and is a reminder, as yeast, a noise, a 'wake up' to each person they serve and have contact with, reminding us of our calling to live our Christian dignity with duty, obligation and responsibility. The prophetic role and example of the consecrated life in the church universal and here in our own diocese is and remains an example and leader in living the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the hallmark of living the gospel, continually 'waking' us up so as to be ready to render account to the king when he comes.

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