
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2: DAY DEDICATED TO CONSECRATED LIFE



Pope John Paul II has set aside Saturday, February 2, 2002 as the World Day of Consecrated Life. This gesture reveals the Pope's concern for consecrated life which he defines "a living memory of the way of life and action of Jesus the Word made flesh, in relation to his Father and his brothers and sisters." Priests and religious brothers and sisters in consecrated life, and people associated to them will be celebrating a Mass of thanksgiving presided by Bishop Claude Frikart, C.J.M., the Triduum preacher, at the Hôtel-Dieu of St. Joseph in St. Basile. Since there is to be a continental convention on vocations to ordained ministry and to consecrated life, in Montreal in April, I would like to read with you a few excerpts from the convention working paper.

THREE QUESTIONS

Before we begin I recommend that individually or in small groups, you answer three questions asked in the working paper; you could share your answers with members of the pastoral team working in your milieu.

1. "When you consider consecrated life in North America, what do you see there that is a sign of hope?"
2. "In North America today, what according to you are obstacles to choosing the consecrated life? What keeps you from encouraging someone in that direction?"
3. "It is your responsibility to encourage vocations to consecrated life: name three ideas you would like to have carried through, or three things you could do."

IN THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COLONY

"Consecrated life in North America goes back to the first days of the colony when the apostolic zeal of exceptional religious men and women helped the Church bring to this continent the fruits of Redemption. There are many men and women religious among our pioneers. They brought Catholic education, opening in this way the great systems of education that go from primary to university education. They developed a remarkable network of health services by the many health establishments they founded. They played an important role in the establishment of social services. Working for the causes of justice, love, and peace, they helped build a social order grounded on the Gospel, to guide each succeeding generation to Christian maturity. Their lives of prayer and their generous service to others witnessed to the primacy of the love of Christ."

TRUE WITNESSES

"The world and the Church are looking for 'true witnesses of Christ' in the men and women who are called to consecrated life. The fullness of religious consecration requires that the Gospel witness be publicly manifested in the witness's whole life. Those called to religious life answer a call to a disinterested service of witness to Christ by their lives, their works, and their words. This they do by living out their founder's charism in such a way that they become living witnesses of Christ's love in the community, the Church, and the world

they serve. Members of religious life faithfully profess the evangelical counsels: in this manner they dedicate themselves in a special way to the Lord, by following the poor and chaste Christ who, through obedience unto death on the cross, redeemed and sanctified humankind. Urged on this journey by the love which the Holy Spirit gives them, their lives are more fully dedicated to Christ and his Body which is the Church.”

CONSECRATION AND MISSION

“The vows of chastity, poverty and obedience are not the only expressions of consecrated life. Those who live a consecrated life and a specific vocation from God also accept dedication in the Church which is expressed in the stable form of community life, fidelity to the charism of the institute and authentic traditions, sharing in Christ’s mission through community apostolate, personal and liturgical prayer, public witness, and life-long formation. Every person called by God to consecrated life receives a special gift for carrying out the will of God, reconciliation, and the salvation of humankind. It is an essential element of religious life to attest that God is not limited to choosing someone to set him or her aside for His exclusive service, but that He associates this person to His divine task. Consecration necessarily implies mission, commitment to the mission of Christ.”

A ROLE FOR THE FUTURE

“In its diversity, consecrated life involves priests, brothers, sisters, those in consecrated lay life, and consecrated virgins, whether in apostolic or contemplative life in community or in solitude. We also find all over North America and the world new or renewed forms of consecrated life, signs that the gifts of the Spirit are given in abundance. Consecrated life has not played a supportive and helping role in the Church only in the past, but it is still a precious and necessary gift for both the present and the future of God’s people, since it belongs in a very intimate way to the Church’s life, holiness, and mission. Thanks to the institutes and orders which train and guide them, those called to consecrated life welcome the Kingdom of God in their lives, and place their lives in service of this Kingdom through the agency of the Church.” On behalf of the Church of Edmundston and in my own name I express my deepest gratitude to all those who have answered the Lord’s call and through their consecrated life are in their milieu authentic witnesses of Christ by their mission and ceaseless commitment.



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« From A Bishop’s Journal » (421) (30 January 2002)