



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS
FOR THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 15th DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Wednesday, 2 February 2011

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On today's Feast we contemplate the Lord Jesus, whom Mary and Joseph bring to the Temple "to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22). This Gospel scene reveals the mystery of the Son of the Virgin, the consecrated One of the Father who came into the world to do his will faithfully (*cf.* Heb 10:5-7).

Simeon identifies him as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32) and announces with prophetic words his supreme offering to God and his final victory (*cf.* Lk 2:32-35). This is the meeting point of the two Testaments, Old and New. Jesus enters the ancient temple; he who is the new Temple of God: he comes to visit his people, thus bringing to fulfilment obedience to the Law and ushering in the last times of salvation.

It is interesting to take a close look at this entrance of the Child Jesus into the solemnity of the temple, in the great comings and goings of many people, busy with their work: priests and Levites taking turns to be on duty, the numerous devout people and pilgrims anxious to encounter the Holy God of Israel. Yet none of them noticed anything. Jesus was a child like the others, a first-born son of very simple parents.

Even the priests proved incapable of recognizing the signs of the new and special presence of the Messiah and Saviour. Alone two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, discover this great newness. Led by the Holy Spirit, in this Child they find the fulfilment of their long waiting and watchfulness. They both contemplate the light of God that comes to illuminate the world and their prophetic gaze is opened to the future in the proclamation of the Messiah: "*Lumen ad revelationem gentium!*" (Lk 2:32). The prophetic attitude of the two elderly people contains the entire Old Covenant which expresses the joy of the encounter with the Redeemer. Upon seeing the Child, Simeon and Anna understood that he was the Awaited One.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is an eloquent image of the total gift of one's life for all those, men and women, who are called to represent "*the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one*" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 1) in the Church and in the world, through the evangelical counsels. For this reason Venerable John Paul II chose today's Feast to celebrate the Annual World Day of Consecrated Life.

In this context, I would like to offer a cordial and appreciative greeting to Archbishop João Braz de Aviz, whom I recently appointed Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, along with the Secretary and the co-workers. I also greet with affection the Superiors General present and all the consecrated people.

I would like to suggest three brief thoughts for reflection on this Feast. The first: the evangelical image of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple contains the fundamental symbol of light; the light that comes from Christ and shines on Mary and Joseph, on Simeon and Anna, and through them, on everyone. The Fathers of the Church connected this radiance with the spiritual journey. The consecrated life expresses this journey, in a special way, as "*philokalia*", love of the divine beauty, a reflection of God's divine goodness (*cf. ibid.*, n. 19). On Christ's Face the light of such beauty shines forth.

"The Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at his disfigured face on the Cross.... she is the Bride before her Spouse, sharing in his mystery and surrounded by his light. This light shines on all the Church's children.... But those who are called to the consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world" (*ibid.*, n. 15).

Secondly, the evangelical image portrays the prophecy, a gift of the Holy Spirit. In contemplating the Child Jesus, Simeon and Anna foresee his destiny of death and Resurrection for the salvation of all peoples and they proclaim this mystery as universal salvation.

The consecrated life is called to bear this prophetic witness, linked to its two-fold contemplative

and active approach. Indeed consecrated men and women are granted to show the primacy of God, passion for the Gospel practised as a form of life and proclaimed to the poor and the lowliest of the earth.

“Because of this pre-eminence nothing can come before personal love of Christ and of the poor in whom he lives.... True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history” (*ibid.*, n. 84).

In this way the consecrated life in its daily experience on the roads of humanity, displays the Gospel and the Kingdom, already present and active.

Thirdly, the evangelical image of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple demonstrates the wisdom of Simeon and Anna, the wisdom of a life completely dedicated to the search for God’s Face, for his signs, for his will; a life dedicated to listening to and proclaiming his word. “*Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*: ‘Your face, Lord, do I seek’ (Ps 27 [26]:8).... Consecrated life in the world and in the Church is a visible sign of this search for the face of the Lord and of the ways that lead to the Lord (*cf.* Jn 14:8) The consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will” (*cf.* Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* [2008], n. 1).

Dear brothers and sisters, may you be assiduous listeners to the word, because all wisdom concerning life comes from the word of the Lord! May you seek the word, through *lectio divina*, since consecrated life “is born from hearing the word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life. A life devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience thus becomes a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word. The Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines the word of God with new light for the Founders and Foundresses. Every charism and every Rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, n. 83).

Today, especially in the more developed societies, we live in a condition often marked by a radical plurality, by the progressive marginalization of religion in the public sphere and by relativism which touches the fundamental values. This demands that our Christian witness be luminous and consistent and that our educational effort be ever more attentive and generous.

May your apostolic action, in particular, dear brothers and sisters, become a commitment of life that with persevering enthusiasm attains to Wisdom as truth and as beauty, the “splendour of the truth”. May you, with the wisdom of your life and with trust in the inexhaustible possibilities of true education, guide the minds and hearts of the men and women of our time towards a “good life according to the Gospel”.

At this moment, my thoughts turn with special affection to all of the consecrated men and women throughout the world and I entrust them to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

O, Mary, Mother of the Church,
I entrust all consecrated people to you,
that you may obtain for them the fullness of divine light:
may they live in listening to the Word of God,
in the humility of following Jesus, your Son and our Lord,
in the acceptance of the visit of the Holy Spirit,
in the daily joy of the *Magnificat*,
so that the Church may be edified by the holy lives of these sons and daughters of yours,
in the commandment of love. Amen.

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