



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

11th WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CONSECRATED MEN AND WOMEN**

Vatican Basilica

Friday, 2 February 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to meet you at the end of the Eucharistic Celebration that has gathered you in this Basilica this year too, on an occasion so meaningful for you who belong to Congregations, Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life and New Forms of Consecrated Life; you constitute a particularly important element of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Today's liturgy recalls the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, the feast chosen by my venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, as the "Day of Consecrated Life".

With great pleasure I address my cordial greetings to each one of you present here, beginning with Cardinal Franc Rodé, Prefect of your Dicastery, to whom I am grateful for his kind words on your behalf. I then greet the Secretary and all the members of the Congregation which looks after a vital sector of the Church. Today's celebration is especially appropriate for asking the Lord for the gift of an ever more consistent and incisive presence of men and women religious and consecrated persons in the Church journeying along the roads of the world.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Feast day we are celebrating reminds us that your Gospel witness, to be truly effective, must stem from a response without reserve to the initiative of God who has consecrated you to him with a special act of love.

Just as the elderly Simeon and Anna longed to see the Messiah before they died and spoke of him

"to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (cf. Lk 2: 26,38) so also in our time, especially among young people, there is a widespread need to encounter God.

Those who are chosen by God for the consecrated life make this spiritual longing their own in a definitive way. In it, in fact, they have one expectation: the Kingdom of God: that God reign in our will, in our hearts, in the world. In them burns a unique thirst for love which can be quenched by the Eternal One alone.

By their example they proclaim to a world which is often bewildered but, in fact, increasingly in search of meaning, that God is the Lord of life and that his "steadfast love is better than life" (Ps 63[62]: 4[3]).

By choosing obedience, poverty and chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven, they demonstrate that any attachment or love for people and things is incapable of definitively satisfying the heart; that earthly existence is a longer or shorter period of waiting for the "face-to-face" encounter with the divine Bridegroom, an expectation to be lived with an ever vigilant heart, to be ready to recognize and welcome him when he comes.

Consecrated life, therefore, is by its nature a total and definitive, unconditional and passionate response to God (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 17). And so, when one renounces everything to follow Christ, when one gives to him all that one holds most dear, braving every sacrifice as did the divine Teacher, the consecrated person who follows in Christ's footsteps necessarily also becomes "a sign of contradiction", because his/her way of thinking and living is often in opposition to the logic of the world, as it is almost always presented in the media.

Indeed, in choosing Christ we let ourselves be "conquered" by him without reserve. How many people thirsting for the truth are struck by this courage and attracted by those who do not hesitate to give their life, their own life, for their belief.

Is not this the radical evangelical fidelity to which every consecrated person is called in our time too? Let us give thanks to the Lord so that many Religious men and women in all the corners of the earth may continue to offer a supreme and faithful witness of love to God and to the brethren, a witness that is often marked by the blood of martyrdom. Let us also thank God so that these examples may continue to inspire in the souls of many young people the desire to follow Christ always in an intimate and total way.

Dear brothers and sisters, never forget that the consecrated life is a divine gift and that it is the Lord in the first place who ensures its success in accordance with his plans. This certainty that the Lord leads us to a successful conclusion despite our weakness; this certainty must be a comfort to you, protecting you from the temptation of discouragement in the face of the inevitable difficulties of life and the many challenges of the modern epoch. Indeed, in the difficult period in which we live

many Institutes may feel a sense of dismay at the failings they discover within them and the many obstacles they encounter in carrying out their mission.

Today that Child Jesus who is presented at the Temple is alive among us and invisibly supports us so that we may cooperate faithfully with him in the work of salvation, and he does not abandon us.

Today's liturgy is particularly evocative because it is marked by the symbol of light. The solemn procession with candles which you made at the beginning of the celebration points to Christ, the true light of the world who shines in the night of history and illumines every seeker of the truth. Dear consecrated men and women, burn with this flame and make it radiant with your life so that a gleam of the brightness that shone from Jesus, the splendour of the truth, may shine everywhere.

By dedicating yourselves exclusively to him (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 15), you witness to the fascination of the truth of Christ and the joy that derives from love for him. In contemplation and in activity, in solitude and in fraternity, in service to the poor and the lowly, in personal guidance and in the modern areopaghi, be ready to proclaim and to witness that God is Love and that to love him is sweet.

May Mary, the *Tota Pulchra*, teach you to transmit to men and women today this divine fascination that must transpire from your words and actions. As I express to you my grateful appreciation for the service you render to the Church, I assure you of my constant remembrance in prayer and I warmly bless you all.

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