



The Holy See

**FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
13th WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE
ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
AFTER THE HOLY MASS**

Vatican Basilica
Monday, 2 February 2009

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I meet you with great joy at the end of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, on this liturgical Feast which for 13 years now has gathered men and women religious for the Day for Consecrated Life. I cordially greet Cardinal Franc Rodé, with special gratitude to him and to his collaborators at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for their service to the Holy See and to what I would call the "cosmos" of consecrated life. I greet with affection the men and women Superiors General present here and all of you, brothers and sisters who, with your witness as consecrated persons modelled on the Virgin Mary, carry Christ's light in the Church and in the world. In this Pauline Year, I make my own the Apostle's words: "I give thanks to my God every time I think of you which is constantly, in every prayer I utter rejoicing, as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day" (Phil 1: 3-5). In this greeting addressed to the Christian community of Philippi, Paul expresses the affectionate remembrance he cherishes of all who live the Gospel personally and toil to pass it on, combining the care of their interior life with the effort of the apostolic mission.

In the Church's tradition, St Paul has always been recognized as father and teacher of those, called by the Lord, who have chosen unconditional dedication to him and to his Gospel. Various religious Institutes are named after St Paul and draw from him a specific charismatic inspiration. One can say that he repeats to all consecrated men and women a forthright and affectionate

invitation: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11: 1). What in fact is consecrated life other than a radical imitation of Jesus, a total "sequela" of him? (cf. Mt 19: 27-28). Well, in all this Paul represents a sound pedagogical mediation: imitating him in the following of Jesus, dear friends, is the privileged way to correspond fully to your vocation of special consecration in the Church.

Indeed, from his own voice we can recognize a lifestyle that expresses the substance of consecrated life inspired by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. He sees the life of *poverty* as the guarantee of a Gospel proclamation carried out totally gratuitously (cf. 1 Cor 9: 1-23) while at the same time he expresses concrete solidarity to his brethren in need. In this regard we all know of Paul's decision to support himself with the work of his hands and of his commitment to collecting offerings for the poor of Jerusalem (cf. 1 Thes 2: 9; 2 Cor 8-9). Paul is also an apostle who, in accepting God's call to *chastity*, gave his heart to the Lord in an undivided manner to be able to serve his brethren with even greater freedom and dedication (cf. 1 Cor 7: 7; 2 Cor 11: 1-2). Furthermore, in a world in which the values of Christian chastity were far from widespread (cf. 1 Cor 6: 12-20) he offered a reliable reference for conduct. Then concerning *obedience* it suffices to note that doing God's will and the "daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor 11: 28) motivated, shaped and consummated his existence, rendered a sacrifice that found favour with God. All this brought him to proclaim, as he wrote to the Philippians: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1: 21).

Another fundamental aspect of Paul's consecrated life is the *mission*.

He belongs wholly to Jesus in order, like Jesus, to belong to all; indeed, to be Jesus for all: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9: 22). In him, so closely united to the person of Christ, we recognize a profound capacity for combining spiritual life and missionary action. In him the two dimensions refer to each other reciprocally. And thus we can say that he belongs to the ranks of those "mystical builders" whose existence is both contemplative and active, open to God and to the brethren, in order to carry out an effective service to the Gospel. In this mystic and apostolic tension, I would like to remark on the Apostle's courage as he faced the sacrifice of confronting terrible trials, even to the point of martyrdom (cf. 2 Cor 11: 16-33) and on his steadfast faith based on the words of his Lord: "my grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection" (2 Cor 12: 9-10). His spiritual experience thus appears to us as a lived-out expression of the Paschal Mystery, which he investigated intensely and proclaimed as a form of Christian life. Paul lives *for, with and in* Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ", he writes, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2: 20); and again: "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1: 21).

This explains why he does not tire of urging us to behave in such a way that Christ's word may dwell within us in its richness (cf. Col 3: 16). This brings to mind the invitation addressed to you in the recent [Instruction on *The Service of Authority and Obedience*](#), to seek "every morning... a

living and faithful contact with the Word which is proclaimed that day, meditating on it and holding it in [your] heart as a treasure, making of it the root of every action and the primary criterion of each choice". I therefore hope that the Pauline Year will nourish still more in you the determination to accept the testimony of St Paul, meditating every day upon the word of God with the faithful practice of *lectio divina*, praying with "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness..." (Col 3: 16). May he also help you to carry out your apostolic service in and with the Church with a spirit of communion without reservation, making a gift of your own charisms to others (cf. 1 Cor 14: 12), and witnessing in the first place to the greatest charism which is charity (cf. 1 Cor 13).

Dear brothers and sisters, today's liturgy urges us to look at the Virgin Mary, the "consecrated one" par excellence. Paul speaks of her with concise but effective words that describe her greatness and her task: she is the "woman" from whom, in the fullness of time, the Son of God was born (cf. Gal 4: 4). Mary is the Mother who today presents her Son to the Father at the Temple, also continuing in this action the "yes" she spoke at the moment of the Annunciation. May she once again be the mother who accompanies and sustains us, God's children and her children, in carrying out a generous service to God and to the brethren. To this end, I invoke her heavenly intercession as I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to your respective religious families.

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