



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS
FOR THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 14TH DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Tuesday, 2 February 2010

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple we are celebrating a mystery of Christ's life linked to the precept of Mosaic Law which prescribed that 40 days after the birth of their first-born child parents should go to the Temple of Jerusalem to offer the infant to the Lord and for the ritual purification of the mother (cf. Ex 13:1-2, 11-16; Lv 12:1-8). Mary and Joseph also fulfilled this rite, offering to comply with the law a couple of turtle doves or pigeons. In giving a deeper interpretation to these things we understand that at this moment it is God himself who is presenting his Only-Begotten Son to humanity through the words of the elderly Simeon and the Prophetess Anna. Simeon, in fact, proclaimed Jesus as the "salvation" of humanity, a "light" for all the nations and a "sign that is spoken against", because he would reveal the thoughts of hearts (cf. Lk 2:29-35). In the East this Feast was called *Hypapante*, a feast of *encounter*. In fact, Simeon and Anna, who met Jesus in the Temple and recognized him as the Messiah so long awaited, represent humanity that encounters its Lord in the Church. Subsequently, this Feast also spread to the West, where above all the symbol of light and the procession with candles which gave rise to the term "Candlemas" developed. This visible sign is intended to mean that the Church encounters in faith the One who is "the light of men" and in order to bring this "light" into the world, receives him with the full dynamism of her faith.

In conjunction with this Liturgical Feast, as from 1997, Venerable John Paul II decreed that a special Day of Consecrated Life be celebrated in the whole Church. In fact, the sacrifice of the Son

of God symbolized by his presentation in the Temple is the model for every man and woman who consecrate their life totally to the Lord. The purpose of this Day is threefold: first of all to praise and thank the Lord for the gift of consecrated life; secondly to promote knowledge and appreciation of it among the whole People of God and lastly to invite all those who have dedicated their life totally to the cause of the Gospel to celebrate the marvels that the Lord has worked in them. As I thank you for coming here in such numbers, on this Day dedicated particularly to you I would like to greet each one of you with great affection men and women religious and consecrated people and to express to you my cordial closeness and heartfelt appreciation for the good you do at the service of the People of God.

The brief Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews that has just been proclaimed, successfully combines the motives at the origin of this significant and beautiful event and gives us some ideas for reflection. This text—basically two verses, but they are heavily charged with meaning—opens the second part of the Letter to the Hebrews, introducing the central theme of Christ, the High Priest. One should really consider as well the verse immediately preceding them, that says: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" of faith (Heb 4:14). This verse shows Jesus who ascends to the Father; while the verse that follows presents him descending towards human beings. Christ is presented as *the* Mediator: he is true God and true man and for this reason truly belongs to both the divine and human worlds.

In fact, it is precisely and only on the bases of this *faith*, on this profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the only and definitive Mediator, that consecrated life, a life consecrated to God *through* Christ has meaning in the Church. It has meaning only if he is *truly* the mediator between God and us; otherwise it would merely be a form of sublimation or of escape. If Christ were not truly God and at the same time fully man, the foundation of Christian life as such would be lacking as, in quite a significant way, would the foundation of every Christian consecration of man and woman. The consecrated life, in fact, "powerfully" witnesses and expresses the reciprocal seeking of God and man, the love that attracts them to each other. The very fact of being consecrated makes the consecrated person, as it were, a "bridge" to God for all who encounter him or her a reminder, a reference point. And this is all by virtue of the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Consecrated One of the Father. He is the foundation! He who shared our weaknesses so that we might participate in his divine nature.

Rather than on faith our text insists on "trust", with which we may draw near to the "throne of grace", since our high priest was himself "put to the test in all things like ourselves". We may approach him to "receive mercy" and "find grace" and "help in time of need". It seems to me that these words contain a great truth and also a great comfort for us who have received the gift and commitment of special consecration in the Church.

I am thinking of you in particular, dear sisters and brothers. You have approached with total trust

the "throne of grace" that is Christ, his Cross, his Heart, his divine presence in the Eucharist. Each one of you has drawn close to him as the source of pure and faithful Love, a Love so great and beautiful as to deserve all things, indeed more than our all, for a whole life does not suffice to reciprocate what Christ is and what he has done for us. But you have come close to him and every day you come close to him, so as to be helped in time of need and in the hour of trial.

Consecrated people are called in a special way to be witnesses of this mercy of the Lord in which human beings find their salvation. They have a vivid experience of God's forgiveness, because they know that they are people saved, that they are great when they see themselves as small and feel renewed and enveloped by the holiness of God when they recognize their sins. For this reason, for contemporary men and women too, consecrated life remains a privileged school of "compunction of heart", of the humble recognition of one's poverty but it likewise remains a school of trust in God's mercy, in his love that never abandons us. Actually the closer we become to God, the closer we are to him, the more helpful we are to others. Consecrated people experience God's grace, mercy and forgiveness not only for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters since they are called to carry in their hearts and prayers the anxieties and expectations of human beings, especially those who are far from God. Cloistered communities in particular, with their specific commitment to fidelity in "being with the Lord", in "standing beneath the Cross", often carry out this vicarious role, united to the Christ of the Passion, taking upon themselves the suffering and trials of others and offering all with joy for the salvation of the world.

Lastly, dear friends, let us raise to the Lord a hymn of thanksgiving and praise for consecrated life itself. If it did not exist, how much poorer the world would be! Quite apart from the superficial assessments of its usefulness the consecrated life is important precisely because it is a sign of unbounded generosity and love, and this all the more so in a world that risks being suffocated in the vortex of the ephemeral and the useful (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [*Vita Consecrata*](#), n. 105). Instead the consecrated life witnesses to the superabundance of love that is an incentive to "lose" one's life in response to the superabundance of the love of the Lord who first "lost" his life for us.

At this moment I am thinking of the consecrated people who feel the burden of their daily effort in which there is little human gratification. I am thinking of elderly men and women religious, religious who are sick and all who find their apostolate arduous. None of them is useless, for the Lord associates them with his "throne of grace". On the contrary they are a precious gift for the Church and the world that is thirsting for God and for his word.

Full of trust and gratitude, let us therefore also renew the act of the total offering of ourselves, presenting ourselves in the Temple. May the [*Year for Priests*](#) be a further opportunity for religious who are priests to intensify their journey of sanctification and, for all consecrated men and women, may it be an encouragement to accompany and sustain their ministry with fervent prayer. This year of grace will have a crowning moment in Rome next June: the international meeting of priests to which I invite all who exercise the Sacred Ministry. Let us approach God who is thrice Holy to

offer our life and our mission, both personally and as a community of men and women consecrated to the Kingdom of God. Let us make this inner gesture in profound spiritual communion with the Virgin Mary. As we contemplate her in the act of presenting the Child Jesus in the Temple, let us venerate her as the first and perfect consecrated one, carried by the God whom she carries in her arms; Virgin, poor and obedient, totally dedicated to us because she belongs totally to Gods. At her school and with her motherly help let us renew our "here I am" and our "*fiat*". Amen.

© Copyright 2010 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana