



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
12th WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Vatican Basilica
Saturday, 2 February 2008*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very pleased to meet you on the occasion of the World Day of Consecrated Life, a traditional gathering whose significance is enhanced by the liturgical context of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. I thank Cardinal Franc Rodé, who has celebrated the Eucharist for you, and with him the Secretary and the other collaborators of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. With great affection I greet the Superiors General present and all of you who form this unique assembly, an expression of the varied richness of the Consecrated Life in the Church.

In his account of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, at least three times the Evangelist Luke emphasizes that Mary and Joseph acted in accordance with "the Law of the Lord" (cf. Lk 2: 22, 23, 39), moreover they always appear to be listening attentively to the Word of God. This attitude is an eloquent example for you, men and women religious; and for you, members of Secular Institutes and of other forms of Consecrated Life. The next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be dedicated to *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*: dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to make your contribution to this ecclesial commitment, witnessing to the importance, especially for those who like you, the Lord calls to a more intimate "sequela", of placing the Word of God at the centre of all things. In fact, the Consecrated Life is rooted in the Gospel. Down the centuries, the Gospel - as it were, its supreme rule - has continued to inspire it and the Consecrated Life is called to refer constantly to the Gospel, to remain alive and fertile, bearing fruit for the salvation of souls.

At the root of the different expressions of Consecrated Life there is always a strong Gospel inspiration. I think of St Anthony Abbot who was moved by listening to Christ's words: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19: 21) (cf. *Vita Antonii*, 2, 4). Anthony listened to these words as if they were addressed to him personally by the Lord. St Francis of Assisi in his turn affirmed that it was God who revealed to him that he should live according to the form of the holy Gospel (*Testament*, 17; *Franciscan Omnibus* 116). "Francis", wrote Thomas of Celano, "who heard that Christ's disciples were supposed to possess neither gold, nor silver, nor money, nor purse; were to have neither bread nor staff, were to have neither shoes nor two tunics... rejoicing in the Holy Spirit said: "This is what I want! This is what I ask! This is what I want to do from the bottom of my heart!" (I Celano 83; *Franciscan Omnibus* 670, 672).

The Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ* recalls: "It was the Holy Spirit who sparked 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" (n. 24). And indeed, the Holy Spirit attracts some people to live the Gospel in a radical way and translate it into a style of more generous following. So it is that a work, a religious family, is born which with its very presence becomes in turn a living "exegesis" of the Word of God. The *Second Vatican Council* says that the succession of charisms in the Consecrated Life can therefore be read as an unfolding of Christ down the ages, as a living Gospel that is actualized in ever new forms (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 46). The mystery of Christ is reflected in the works of Foundresses and Founders, a word of his, an illuminating ray of his radiant Face, the splendour of the Father (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 16).

In the course of the centuries the proposal of the following of Christ without compromise, as it is presented to us in the Gospel, has therefore constituted the ultimate and supreme rule for religious life (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 2). In his *Rule* St Benedict refers to Scripture as the "most exact rule of human life" (n. 73: 2-5). St Dominic, whose words and works proclaimed him a man of the Gospel at all times (cf. *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 104: in P. Lippini, *San Domenico visto dai suoi contemporanei*, Ed. Studio Dom., Bologna, 1982, 110) desired his brother preachers also to be "men of the Gospel" (*First Constitutions or Consuetudines*, 31). St Clare of Assisi imitated Francis' experience to the full: "The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters", she wrote, "is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rule*, I, 1-2; *Franciscan Omnibus*, n. 2750). St Vincent Pallotti said: "Since the life of Jesus Christ is the fundamental rule of our small Congregation... we must aim at what is most perfect always and in everything" (cf. *Complete Works*, II, 541-546; VIII, 63, 67, 253, 254, 466). And St Luigi Orione wrote: "Our first Rule and life is to observe the holy Gospel, in great humility and in loving sweetness and on fire with God" (*Letters of Don Orione*, Rome, 1969, Vol. II, 278).

This rich tradition attests that Consecrated Life is "deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 1) and can be compared to "a plant with many branches

which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life" (*ibid.*, n. 5). Its mission is to recall that all Christians are brought together by the Word, to live of the Word and to remain under its lordship. It is therefore the special duty of men and women religious "to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 33). By so doing their witness imbues the Church with "a much-needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 3) and indeed, we might say, is an "eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 25). This is why, in [my two Encyclicals](#) as on other occasions, I have not failed to cite the example set by Saints and Blesseds belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life.

Dear brothers and sisters, nourish your day with prayer, meditation and listening to the Word of God. May you, who are familiar with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, help the faithful to appreciate it in their daily lives too. And may you know how to express what the Word suggests, letting yourself be formed by it so that you bring forth abundant fruit, like a seed that has fallen into good soil. Thus, you will be ever docile to the Spirit and you will grow in union with God, you will cultivate fraternal communion among yourselves and will be ready to serve your brethren generously, especially those in need. May people see your good works, a fruit of the Word of God that lives in you, and glorify your Heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5: 16)! In entrusting these reflections to you, I thank you for the precious service you render to the Church and, as I invoke the protection of Mary and of the Saints and Blesseds, Founders of your Institutes, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to your respective religious families, with a special thought for the young men and women in formation and for your brothers and sisters who are sick, elderly or in difficulty. To all, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer.