The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
23rd WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

EUCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica
Saturday, 2 February 2019

[Multimedia]

Today's Liturgy shows *Jesus who goes out to meet his people*. It is the feast day of encounter: the newness of the Child encounters the tradition of the temple; the promise finds fulfillment; young Mary and Joseph encounter the elderly Simeon and Anna. Everything, therefore, meets as Jesus arrives.

What does this mean for us? Above all, that we too are called to welcome Jesus who comes to meet us. *To encounter him*: the God of life is to be encountered every day of our lives; not now and then, but every day. To follow Jesus is not a decision taken once and for all, it is a daily choice. And we do not meet the Lord virtually, but directly, we encounter him in our lives, in the concreteness of life. Otherwise, Jesus becomes only a nice memory of the past. When we welcome him as the Lord of life, however, as the centre and the beating heart of everything, then he is alive and lives anew in us. And what happened in the temple also happens to us: around him everything meets, and life becomes harmonious. With Jesus we find again the courage to carry on and the strength to remain firm. The encounter with the Lord is the source. It is important then to return to the source: to retrace in our mind the decisive moments of encounter with him, to renew our first love, perhaps writing down our love story with the Lord. This would be good for our consecrated life, so that it does not become a *time that passes by*, but rather a *time of encounter*.

If we call to mind our original meeting with the Lord, we become aware that it did not arise as something private between us and God. No, it blossomed in the context of a believing people, alongside many brothers and sisters, at precise times and places. The Gospel tells us this, showing how *the encounter takes place within the people of God*, in its concrete history, in its living traditions: in the temple, according to the law, in the context of prophecy, in young and old together (cf *Lk* 2:25-28, 34). It is like this too in the consecrated life: it blossoms and flourishes in the Church; if it is isolated, it withers. It matures when the young and elderly walk together, when the young rediscover their roots and the elderly welcome those fruits. When we walk alone, however, when we remain fixated on the past or jump ahead in trying to survive, then the consecrated life stagnates. Today, on the feast day of encounter, we ask for the grace to rediscover the living Lord amid a believing people, and to allow the charism we have received to encounter today's graces.

The Gospel also tells us that God's encounter with his people has both a starting point and a destination point. It begins with the *call* in the temple and arrives at the *vision* in the temple. It is a *call* that is twofold. There is a first call "*according to the law*" (v. 22). It is the call of Joseph and Mary, who go to the temple to fulfil what the law prescribes. The text emphasizes this almost as a refrain, even four times (cf. vv. 22, 23, 24, 27). This is not something forced: Jesus' parents are not constrained to go or merely to perform an external duty. They go in response to God's call. Then there is a second call, *according to the Spirit*. It is the call of Simeon and Anna. This too is stressed with insistence: three times, in the case of Simeon, it refers to the Holy Spirit (cf. vv. 25, 26, 27) and it concludes with Anna the prophetess, who was inspired to give thanks to God (cf. v. 38). Two young people run to the temple, called by the law; two elderly people moved by the Spirit. What does this twofold call, by the law and by the Spirit, mean for our spiritual life and our consecrated life? It means that we are all called to a *twofold obedience*: to the law – in the sense of what gives order to our lives – and to the Spirit, who does new things in our lives. And so the encounter with the Lord is born: the Spirit reveals the Lord, but to welcome him we need to persevere every day. Even the greatest charisms, if lacking an ordered life, cannot bear fruit. On the other hand, even the best rules are not sufficient without the freshness of the Spirit: the law and the Spirit go together.

To better understand this call, seen today in the temple in the first days of Jesus' life, we should move to the first days of his public ministry, at Cana, where he transforms water into wine. There too there is a call to obedience, with Mary, who says: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2:5). *Do whatever*. And Jesus asks for something particular; he does not suddenly do something new, does not produce the missing wine out of nothing – he could have done so – but he asks for something concrete and demanding. He asks them to fill six great stone water jars for the ritual purification, which recalls the law. That means pouring around six hundred litres of water from the well: time and effort, which seemed pointless, because what was missing was not water but wine! And yet, precisely from those jars filled "up to the brim" (v. 7), Jesus draws forth new wine. And so it is for us: God calls us to encounter him through faithfulness to concrete things – God is always

encountered in concrete things: daily prayer, Holy Mass, Confession, real charity, the daily word of God, closeness, especially to those most in need spiritually or physically. Concrete things, such as obedience to one's superior and to the rule in the consecrated life. If we put this law into practice with love – with love! – then the Spirit will come and bring God's surprise, just as in the temple and at Cana. Thus the water of daily life is transformed into the wine of newness, and our life, which seems to be more bound, in reality becomes more free. This reminds me now of a humble sister who really had the charism of being close to priests and seminarians. The other day the cause for her beatification was introduced here in the Diocese [of Rome]. She was a simple sister, not well known, but she had the virtue of obedience, of faithfulness and of not being afraid of new things. We ask the Lord, through the intercession of Sister Bernardetta, to give all of us the grace to walk on this path.

The encounter which is born of the call culminates in *vision*. Simeon says: "My eyes have seen your salvation" (*Lk* 2:30). He sees the Child and he sees salvation. He does not see the Messiah who works miracles, but a small child. He does not see something extraordinary, but Jesus with his parents, who bring a pair of turtledoves or two pigeons to the temple, which is the most humble offering (cf. v. 24). Simeon sees God's simplicity and welcomes his presence. He is not looking for anything else, is not asking or wanting for something more; it is enough to see the Child and take him in his arms: "*nunc dimittis*, now let me depart" (cf. v. 29). God, as he, is enough for him. In God he finds the ultimate meaning of his life. This is the vision of consecrated life, a vision that is simple and prophetic in its simplicity, where we keep the Lord before our eyes and between our hands, and not to serve anything else. *He* is our life, *he* is our hope, *he* is our future. Consecrated life consists in this prophetic vision in the Church: it is a *gaze* that sees God present in the world, even if many do not notice him; it is a *voice* that says: "God is enough, the rest passes away"; it is *praise* that gushes forth in spite of everything, as the prophetess Anna shows. She was a woman of great age, who had lived for many years as a widow, but was not gloomy, nostalgic or withdrawn into herself; on the contrary, she arises, she praises God and speaks only of him (cf. v. 38). I would like to think that this woman knew how to "talk in a good way", and she could be a good patroness to call us to conversion from the evil of gossip, because she went from one place to another saying only: "That's him! That's the baby! Go and see him!" I imagine her like this, the woman next door.

This then is the consecrated life: praise which gives joy to God's people, prophetic vision that reveals what counts. When it is like this, then it flowers and becomes a summons for all of us to counter mediocrity: to counter a devaluation of our spiritual life, to counter the temptation to reduce God's importance, to counter an accommodation to a comfortable and worldly life, to counter complaints – complaints! – dissatisfaction and self-pity, to counter a mentality of resignation and "we have always done it this way": this is not God's way. Consecrated life is not about survival, it is not about preparing ourselves for *ars bene moriendi*: this is the temptation of our days, in the face of declining vocations. No, it is not about survival, but new life. "But… there are only a few of us…" – it's about new life. It is a living *encounter* with the Lord in his people. It is a *call* to the

faithful obedience of daily life and to the unexpected surprises from the Spirit. It is a *vision* of what we need to embrace in order to experience joy: Jesus.

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