



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 2 February 2001

V Day of Consecrated Life

1. *"Come, Lord, to your holy temple" (Response of the Responsorial Psalm, Italian Lectionary).*

With this invocation, which we sang in the Responsorial Psalm, the Church, on the day when she recalls the Presentation of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, expresses the desire to be able to welcome him again at this present moment in her history. The Presentation is an evocative liturgical feast, fixed since ancient times on the 40th day after Christmas, following what Jewish law had prescribed for the birth of all first-born males (cf. *Ex 13: 2*). Mary and Joseph observed it faithfully, as the Gospel account tells us.

Christian traditions of the East and West have been interwoven, enriching the liturgy of this feast with a special procession in which the light of candles both large and small is a symbol of Christ, the true Light who came to illumine his people and all peoples. Today's feast is thus connected with the Nativity and Epiphany of the Lord. However, it also serves as a bridge to Easter by recalling the prophecy of the elderly Simeon, who on that occasion foretold the dramatic destiny of the Messiah and his Mother.

The Evangelist has even recorded the details of this event: Simeon and Anna, two elderly persons filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, received Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. They personify the "remnant of Israel", watchful in expectation and ready to meet the Lord, as the shepherds did on the night of his birth in Bethlehem.

2. In the opening prayer of today's liturgy, we asked that we too might be presented to the Lord with our hearts free from sin, following the example of Jesus, the first-born of many brethren. You, *men and women religious and consecrated lay people*, are called in a particular way to share in this *mystery of the Saviour*. It is a mystery of *sacrifice*, in which glory and the cross are indissolubly joined according to the paschal character of Christian life. It is a mystery of light and suffering; *a Marian mystery*, in which the martyrdom of her soul is foretold to the Mother, blessed along with her Son.

We could say that today a *special "offertory"* is celebrated throughout the Church, one in which consecrated men and women spiritually renew the gift of themselves. By doing so, they help the Ecclesial Communities to grow in the sacrificial dimension that constitutes them inwardly, builds them up and spurs them along the world's highways.

I greet you with great affection, dear brothers and sisters who belong to many families of consecrated life and gladden St Peter's Basilica with your presence. In particular I greet Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, who is presiding at today's Eucharistic celebration.

3. We are celebrating this feast with hearts still filled with the emotions we felt during the Jubilee period just ended. We have continued on our way, guided by Christ's words to Simon: "*Duc in altum - Put out into the deep*" (Lk 5: 4). The Church expects your contribution, too, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, in order to travel on this new stage of our journey according to the guidelines I gave in my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte: to contemplate* the face of Christ, *to set out anew* from him and *to bear witness* to his love. This is a contribution that you are called to make each day, above all through *fidelity to your vocation* as individuals who are totally consecrated to Christ.

Your first task, then, must be *contemplation*. Every reality of consecrated life is born and each day reborn in ceaseless contemplation of Christ's face. The Church herself draws her energy from daily beholding the immortal beauty of the face of Christ, her Bridegroom.

If every Christian is a believer who *contemplates the face of God in Jesus Christ*, you are so in a special way. You must never tire, then, of pausing to meditate on *Sacred Scripture* and on the holy *Gospels* in particular, so that the features of the Incarnate Word are impressed upon you.

4. *Setting out anew from Christ*, the centre of every personal and community project: this is your task! Meet him, dear friends, and contemplate him in a most special way in the *Eucharist*, celebrated and adored each day as the source and summit of life and apostolic action.

And *walk with Christ*: this is the way of Gospel perfection, the *holiness* to which every baptized person is called. *Holiness* is precisely one of the essential points - indeed, the first - in the programme I outlined for the beginning of the new millennium (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, nn. 30-31).

We have just heard the elderly Simeon's words: Christ "*is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ... that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed*" (Lk 2: 34). Like him, and to the extent that they are conformed to him, consecrated persons also become a "*sign of contradiction*"; that is, they become for others a salutary encouragement to take a position regarding Jesus, who - thanks to the engaging mediation of the "*witness*" - does not remain just a historical figure or abstract ideal, but presents himself as a living person to follow without compromise. Does this not seem to you an indispensable service that the Church expects of you in this era, marked by profound social and cultural changes? Only if you persevere in faithfully following Christ will you be *credible witnesses to his love*.

5. "*A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel*" (Lk 2: 32). The consecrated life is called to reflect Christ's light in an exceptional way. As I look at you, dear brothers and sisters, I think of the *hosts of men and*

women of every nation, language and culture who are consecrated to Christ by vows of poverty, virginity and obedience. This thought fills me with consolation, for you are like a "*leaven*" of hope for humanity. You are "salt" and "light" for the men and women of today, who through your witness can glimpse the kingdom of God and the way of the Gospel "Beatitudes".

Like Simeon and Anna, take Jesus from the arms of his most holy Mother and, filled with joy for the gift of your vocation, bring him to everyone. Christ is salvation and hope for every person! Proclaim him by your life dedicated entirely to the kingdom of God and the world's salvation. Proclaim him with that uncompromising fidelity which, even recently, has led some of your brothers and sisters in various parts of the world to martyrdom.

Be light and comfort to everyone you meet. *Like lighted candles*, burn with the love of Christ. Spend yourselves for him, spreading the Gospel of his love everywhere. Through your witness the eyes of many men and women of our time will also be able to see the salvation prepared by God "in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel".