



+ Ave Maria!

Consecrated Life in Light of the Witness of the Faith of the Apostles

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In this Year of Faith, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has called us to “keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ” and in Him to see more clearly the examples of faith who have gone before us (*Porta Fidei*, 13). One such example is found in the witness of the Apostles, those chosen men, “who left everything to follow their Master (Mk. 10:28).” As *Porta Fidei* 13 mentions, they went out to the whole world, following the command to bring the Gospel to all creation,” and “fearlessly proclaimed to all the joy of the resurrection.” Consecrated religious, by their fidelity to the vocation to which they are called continue to live this apostolic witness in the world through their vows, common life, and apostolates. Their joy-filled life serves as an eschatological sign for all.

Since the Year of Faith marks the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, it is appropriate to look to the documents of the Council and their explanation of the Apostles’ witness. Likewise, the teachings of *Vita Consecrata* are important to review when pondering the nature of religious life. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* Chapter 6 states that the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience were “commanded by the Apostles.” Religious by their vows live as the Apostles commanded in offering themselves completely to the Lord and living in common. Consecrated religious are espoused to the Lord. They are exclusively His. *Vita Consecrata* points to the Upper Room, where Mary and the Apostles gathered at Pentecost. Here is “a vivid image of the Church as Bride, fully attentive to her Bridegroom and ready to accept His gift” (*Vita Consecrata*, 34). Religious share all they have and are for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the salvation of souls. “Through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society” (*Vita Consecrata*, 1).

Society is renewed especially by the charity manifested in the common life of religious communities. Jesus “commanded His Apostles to preach to all peoples the Gospel’s message that the human race was to become the Family of God, in which the fullness of the Law would be love” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 32). “After the Ascension, as a result of the gift of the Spirit, a fraternal community formed around the Apostles gathered in the praise of God and in a concrete experience of communion” (*Vita Consecrata* 41). Members of religious communities strive to be of one mind and one heart in the Lord and in loving obedience to the successors of the Apostles. As they keep the mind of the Church, they grow in union with each other and the whole Body of Christ. Their life of prayer, especially daily participation in the Holy Eucharist, sustains their communion with Christ and the Church. This communion is a vibrant sign of the communion of the three divine Persons of the Most Holy Trinity (see *Vita Consecrata*, 41).

Love by its nature is to be shared. One who loves strives to serve the good of others, to go out, to be creative. The Apostles knew the love of Christ and therefore “by faith, they went out to the whole world, following the command to bring the Gospel to all creation, and they fearlessly proclaimed to all the joy of the resurrection” (*Porta Fidei*, 13). So also, consecrated religious by their prayer and apostolic works serve God and His people by faith and in love. Their joyful witness serves as a reminder of the happiness yet to be found fully in eternal life. “When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come” (*Lumen Gentium*, 50). May this Year of Faith draw consecrated religious and all members of the Church closer to the divine Bridegroom, who calls us to live with Him for all eternity.