

HOMILY OR ADDRESS

16 The Bishop then gives a short Homily to the candidates and the people on the gift of virginity and its role in the sanctification of those called to virginity and the welfare of the whole Church. He does so in these or similar words:

Dear brothers and sisters, today the Church consecrates these candidates to a life of virginity. They come from God's holy people, from your own families. They are your daughters, your sisters, your relatives, joined by the ties of family or friendship.

God has called them to be more closely united to himself and to be dedicated to the service of the Church and of mankind. Their consecration is a call to greater fervor in spreading the kingdom of God and in giving to the world the spirit of Christ. Think of the good they will accomplish by their prayers and good works, and the abundant blessings they will obtain from God for holy Church, for human society, and for your families.

He then addresses the candidates:

And now we speak to you, dear daughters. Our words are not words of command but encouragement from the heart. The life you seek to follow has its home in heaven. God himself is its source. It is he, infinitely pure and holy, who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom he gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all-holy God.

When the fullness of time had come, the almighty Father showed, in the mystery of the Incarnation, his love for this great virtue. In the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word was made flesh, in a marriage covenant uniting two natures, human and divine.

Our Lord himself taught us the high calling of such a life, consecrated to God and chosen for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven . By his whole life, and especially by his labors, his preaching, and, above all, by his Paschal Mystery, he brought his Church into being. He desired it to be a virgin, a bride, and a mother: a virgin, to keep the faith whole and entire; a bride, to be one with him forever; and a mother, to raise up the family of the Church.

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, through Baptism has already made you temples of God's glory and children of the Father. Today through our ministry he anoints you with a new

grace and consecrates you to God by a new title. He gives each one of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ and binds you to the Son of God in a covenant to last forever.

The Church is the Bride of Christ. This title of the Church was given by the fathers and doctors of the Church to those like you who speak to us of the world to come, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage. You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church.

Make your whole life reflect your vocation and your dignity. Our holy mother the Church sees in you a chosen company within the flock of Christ. Through you the Church's motherhood of grace bears its abundant fruit. Imitate the Mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord. Preserve the fullness of your faith, the steadfastness of your hope, the single-heartedness of your love. Be prudent and watch: keep the glory of your virginity uncorrupted by pride. Nourish your love of God by feeding on the body of Christ; strengthen it by self-denial; build it up by study of the Scriptures, by untiring prayer, by works of mercy. Let your thoughts be on the things of God. Let your life be hidden with Christ in God. Make it your concern to pray fervently for the spread of the Christian faith and for the unity of all Christians. Pray earnestly to God for the welfare of the married. Remember also those who have forgotten their Father's goodness and have abandoned his love, so that God's mercy may forgive where his justice must condemn.

Never forget that you are given over entirely to the service of the Church and of all your brothers and sisters. You are apostles in the Church and in the world, in the things of the Spirit and in the things of the world. Let your light then shine before men and women, that your Father in heaven may be glorified, and his plan of making all things one in Christ come to perfection. Love everyone, especially those in need. Help the poor, care for the weak, teach the ignorant, protect the young, minister to the old, bring strength and comfort to widows and all in adversity.

You have renounced marriage for the sake of Christ. Your motherhood will be motherhood of the spirit, as you do the will of your Father and work with others in a spirit of charity, so that a great family of children may be born, or reborn, to the life of grace.

Your joy and your crown, even here on earth, will be Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will call you to his presence and into his Kingdom, where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever he leads you.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

24 After the renewal of intention, the candidates return to their places in the sanctuary and kneel. The Bishop extends his hands over them, and sings or says the prayer of consecration. The words in brackets may be omitted.

Loving Father,
chaste bodies are your temple;
you delight in sinless hearts.
Our nature was corrupted
when the devil deceived our first parents,
but you have restored it in Christ.
He is your Word, through whom all things were made.
He has made our nature whole again,
and made it possible for mortal people to reflect the life of Angels.

Lord,
look with favor on your handmaids.
They place in your hands their resolve to live in chastity.
You prompt them in this, their intention;
now they give you their hearts.

[Only you can kindle this flame of love, and feed its brightness,
giving strength and perseverance to our will.
Without you our flesh is weak,
bound by the law of nature,
free with false freedom,
imprisoned by habit,
softened by the spirit of the age.]

You have poured out your grace upon all peoples.
You have adopted as heirs of the new covenant
sons and daughters from every nation under heaven,
countless as the stars.
Your children are born, not of human birth,
nor of man's desire,
but of your Spirit.
Among your many gifts
you give to some the grace of virginity.
Yet the honor of marriage is in no way lessened.

As it was in the beginning,
your first blessing still remains upon this holy union.
Yet your loving wisdom chooses those
who make sacrifice of marriage for the sake of the love of which it is the sign.
They renounce the joys of human marriage,
but cherish all that it foreshadows.

[Those who choose chastity have looked upon the face of Christ,
its origin and inspiration.
They give themselves wholly to Christ,
the Son of the ever-virgin Mary,
and the heavenly Bridegroom of those
who in his honor dedicate themselves to lasting virginity.]

Lord,
protect those who seek your help.
They desire to be strengthened by your blessing and consecration.
Defend them from the cunning and deceit of the enemy.
Keep them vigilant and on their guard;
may nothing tarnish the glory of perfect virginity,
or the vocation of purity
which is shared by those who are married.

Through the gift of your Spirit, Lord,
give them modesty with right judgment,
kindness with true wisdom,
gentleness with strength of character,
freedom with the grace of chastity.
Give them the warmth of love,
to love you above all others.
Make their lives deserve our praise,
without seeking to be praised.
May they give you glory
by holiness of action and purity of heart.
May they love you and fear you;
may they love you and serve you.

Be yourself their glory, their joy, their whole desire.
Be their comfort in sorrow,

their wisdom in perplexity,
their protection in the midst of injustice,
their patience in adversity,
their riches in poverty,
their food in fasting,
their remedy in time of sickness.

They have chosen you above all things;
may they find all things in possessing you.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

All:

Amen.