

## Preparation for and Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity

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Please remember to pray for the Consecrated Virgins in the Diocese of La Crosse  
Barbara Swieciak September 8, 1984 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Pat Murray June 8, 1995  
Cheri Bowe, March 25, 2000 Solemnity of the Annunciation

*Be wise: make ready your lamps.  
Behold, the Bridegroom comes go out to me*



Calling of the Candidate  
Rite of Consecration of Virgins

## Reflections on a Year of Jubilee

\*\*\*A **jubilee** is the celebration of the anniversary of a special event, or it's the anniversary itself. ... Here's something you might not know: the word **jubilee** comes from the Hebrew word yobel, which **means** "ram's horn trumpet."

\*\* From the Vatican Web Site for the Jubilee Year \*\*\*

*Theological-Historical Commission*

*THE JUBILEE YEAR IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE* by Albert Vanhoye

For the preparation of the Great Jubilee particular importance must surely be given to the passage in the Gospel of Saint Luke which tells us about Jesus' preaching in Nazareth (*Lk* 4,16-30). The passage in fact is the only one in the whole of the New Testament which mentions a jubilee year, giving it great importance. Therefore, it would seem opportune to offer some reflection on this subject.

1. Saint Luke is not the only evangelist who records Jesus' visit to Nazareth "where he had been brought up" (*Lk* 4,16). Saint Mark and Saint Matthew also refer to this episode, although without mentioning the name of the town, referred to simply as "his home town" (*Mk* 6,1; *Mt* 13,54). There are however several differences between the story told by Luke and those of Mark and Matthew. We have already implicitly indicated one, when we observed that Luke is the only one who gives the contents of Jesus' preaching. The other two evangelists limit themselves to saying that Jesus "began to teach in the synagogue" (*Mk* 6,2; Cf *Mt* 13,54); but they do not say what he taught. Luke, on the other hand, tells how Jesus "stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me ...!" (*Lk* 4,16-18; *Is* 61,1). Very significantly the last line of Isaiah read by Jesus says: "to proclaim the *Lord's year of favour*" (*Lk* 4,19; *Is* 61,2), and immediately afterwards, Jesus' message was a declaration that precisely "this text" was being fulfilled on that day. The expression of Isaiah 61,2 "year of the Lord's favour" clearly refers to the prescriptions in the Book of Leviticus on the *jubilee year* (*Lev* 25,10-13). Therefore at Nazareth Jesus was proclaiming a Jubilee year.

*Excerpt from THE JUBILEE IN THE BIBLE* by Luciano Pacomio

## The Prophet

After the bitter experience of the Babylonian exile, in which the people of God had the experience of being deprived of their own land, of the temple, of their own consistency as a people; a horizon of hope, of liberation, opened up. Prophecy interprets that which has been experienced. And prophecy is the precious service that a man gives to his own brothers, to his own people, interpreting, with the power of God and with the wisdom given by God, the historical events and happenings in which one was involved.

«The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit» (*Isaiah* 61, 1-3a).

The prophet heralds a year of the Lord's favor and not on his own personal initiative, but by means of an unction worked by the Spirit of the Lord: it is a divine gift. And this year expresses itself in two vital, highly positive directions: liberation and consolation. Liberation is from physical evils, from interior lacerations, from the condition of slavery; consolation is a transformation of the way one feels, of the way one exists: from mourning one passes to joy.

City, countryside, experiences of rural work and sheep farming are tied up in a novelty of life more human and more constructive. Time is marked by the Lord's gift

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## Consolation

There is a fundamental expression and proposal of experiences in the jubilee year: rest. A rest carrying gift and relationship with God: everything is his gift and we are able to refer everything to him. The culture of the "Saturday" changes the quality of life; it leads one back to one's own roots, to the reasons for one's own existence; and can open to the happiness possible in history.

«A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; in it you shall neither sow, nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat what it yields out of the field» (*Leviticus* 25, 11-12).

This consolation will resound in an unforeseeable and complete way in the relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord, thanks to whom it is possible to live rest and restoration; to have the experience of consolation in the face of every desolation.

«Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light» (*Matthew* 11, 28-30).

The letter to the Hebrews, taking departure from *Psalms* 95, verse 11 «he swore in his anger that they should not enter his rest» and referring to the forty years of pilgrimage of the ancient people of Israel in the exodus, makes one meditate in a stupendous way on Christian rest.

«Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, 'Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience» (*Hebrews* 4, 6-11).

#### A Look Toward the Future

The late Old Testament biblical literature in a vision on the eschatological future announces in typical apocalyptic language the final and definitive liberation of God's people. It is the prophecy of Daniel (9,24) of the seventy weeks, i.e., of a conventional calculation of ten jubilee periods.

«Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place».

It falls on every generation to revive the expectation and search for the Lord, of the gift which gives itself, of a novelty of life where liberation, consolation and rest, which, from time immemorial and forever is the design of mercy and of goodness which God has for every person and every people.

### Scripture References to the Year of Jubilee

You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth **year** and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a **jubilee** for you (Leviticus 25:1-4, 8-10, NASB).

CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM*  
SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI ON DECEMBER 4, 1963  
#80. The rite for the consecration of virgins at present found in the Roman Pontifical is to be revised.

**Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship**  
**Decree promulgating the new rite for the consecration of a virgin,**  
**31 May 1970, AAS 62 (1970) p. 650**

The rite for the consecration of virgins belongs to the treasures of Roman liturgy. Jesus Christ left holy virginity as a legacy to His bride, one of His most precious gifts. Because of it, since the times of the Apostles, virgins consecrated their chastity to God, embellishing the mystical body of Christ and enriching it with admirable fecundity. Provident Mother Church, since the earliest times – as witnessed by the holy Fathers – used to confirm the pious and difficult vows of the virgins with a solemn prayer. As the centuries went on, other sacred ceremonies were added to this prayer that clearly show that the virgins were an image of the Church wedded to Christ and was thus introduced into the Roman Pontifical. Vatican II also determined that the rite of consecration of virgins be revised (cf. Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” art 80). In obeying this order, the Concilium ad Exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia” prepared this rite which His Holiness Pope Paul VI approved with his Apostolic Authority and had it published. For this reason, the Holy Congregation for Divine Worship, under personally expressed orders from His Holiness, promulgated it. It also determined that it would be adapted, if necessary, and that it would become effective beginning January 6, 1971, for those nuns that use it as decreed. The popular version prepared by the Episcopal Conferences, and the adaptations of the ritual, should be sent to this Holy Congregation for approval as soon as possible. Without objections.

At the site of the Holy Congregation for Divine Worship, May 31, 1970,  
Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Signed: Beno Cardinal Gut, Prefect and A. Bugini, *Secretary*

**From the Roman Pontifical - 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.

## **Code of Canon Law Can. 604**

§1 The order of virgins is also to be added to these forms of consecrated life. Through their pledge to follow Christ more closely, virgins are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church, when the diocesan Bishop consecrates them according to the approved liturgical rite.

§2 Virgins can be associated together to fulfill their pledge more faithfully, and to assist each other to serve the Church in a way that befits their state

## **Vita Consecrata Pope John Paul II**

n.7

It is a source of joy and hope to witness in our time a new flowering of the ancient Order of Virgins, known in Christian communities ever since apostolic times.

Consecrated by the diocesan Bishop, these women acquire a particular link with the Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come, when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom.

### ***Commitment to initial formation***

65. To say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. One's whole life must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit, traveling the road of formation with generosity, and accepting in faith the means of grace offered by the Lord and the Church. Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God. Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his *total self-giving*, this must also be the principal objective of formation. Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father. If this is the purpose of the consecrated life, the manner of preparing for it should include and express *the character of wholeness*. Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behavior and intentions. Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that *the commitment to formation never ends*.

For formation to be complete, it must include every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects. Sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation, understood as a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity — from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral. In the case of those studying for the priesthood, this initial formation coincides with and fits well into a specific course of studies, as part of a broader formation program.

### ***The work of those responsible for formation***

66. God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator *par excellence* of those who consecrate themselves to him. But in this work he makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls. Formation then is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women. Those in charge of formation must therefore be very familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be able to accompany others on this journey. Sensitive to the action of grace, they will also be able to point out those obstacles which are less obvious. But above all they will disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished. They will combine the illumination of spiritual wisdom with the light shed by human means, which can be a help both in discerning the call and in forming the new man or woman, until they are genuinely free.

The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly and with a certain frequency.

### ***The need for a complete and updated "ratio"***

68. Formation is a dynamic process by means of which individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities. At a time when religious values are increasingly being ignored by society, this plan of formation is doubly important: as a result of it, consecrated persons will not only continue to "see" God with the eyes of faith in a world which ignores his presence, but will also be effective in making his presence in some way "perceptible" through the witness of their charism.

### ***Continuing formation***

69. As mentioned above, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely brought to life the "new creature" who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ. *Initial* formation, then, should be closely connected with *continuing* formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives.

The chief purpose of this plan is to provide all consecrated persons with a program which encompasses their whole life.

At no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness; just as there is no age at which a person has completely achieved maturity.

### ***In a constant search for faithfulness***

70. There is a youthfulness of spirit which lasts through time; it arises from the fact that at every stage of life a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfill, a particular way of being, of serving and of loving.

It is important that young consecrated persons be supported and accompanied by a brother or sister who helps them to live to the full the freshness of their love and enthusiasm for Christ. The next stage can present *the risk of routine*, and the subsequent temptation to give in to disappointment because of meager results. Middle-aged consecrated persons must therefore be helped, in the light of the Gospel and the charism of their Institute, to renew their original decision, and not confuse the

completeness of their dedication with the degree of good results. This will enable them to give a fresh impulse and new motivations to their decision. This is the time to search for what is essential. *The stage of maturity*, while it brings personal growth, can also bring *the danger of a certain individualism*, accompanied either by a fear of not being in line with the times, or by forms of inflexibility, self-centeredness or diminished enthusiasm. At this point continuing formation is aimed at helping not only to bring back a higher level of spiritual and apostolic life, but also at discovering the special characteristics of this stage of life. For at this time, after refining certain features of the personality, the gift of self is made to God more genuinely and with greater generosity; it extends to others with greater serenity and wisdom, as well as with greater simplicity and richness of grace. This is the gift and experience of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood.

*Advanced age* poses new problems, which can be prepared for by a discerning program of spiritual support. The gradual withdrawal from activity, sometimes caused by sickness or forced immobility, can be a very formative experience. Often a time of suffering, advanced age nonetheless offers to elderly consecrated persons the chance to be transformed by the Paschal experience, by being configured to the Crucified Christ who fulfills the Father's will in all things and abandons himself into the Father's hands, even to the surrendering of his spirit to him.

When *the moment finally comes for uniting oneself to the supreme hour of the Lord's Passion*, the consecrated person knows that the Father is now bringing to completion the mysterious process of formation which began many years before. Death will then be awaited and prepared for as the supreme act of love and self-offering. . It should be added that, independently of the different stages of life, any period can present critical situations due to external factors — such as a change of place or assignment, difficulties in work or lack of success in the apostolate, misunderstandings and feelings of alienation — or resulting from more directly personal factors such as physical or mental illness, spiritual aridity, deaths, difficulties in interpersonal relations, strong temptations, crises of faith or identity, or feelings of uselessness. When fidelity becomes more difficult, the individual must be offered the support of greater trust and deeper love, at both the personal and community levels. At such times, the sensitive closeness of the Superior is most essential. Great comfort can also come from the valuable help of a brother or sister, whose concerned and caring presence can lead to a rediscovery of the meaning of the covenant which God originally established, and which he has no intention of breaking. The person undergoing such a trial will then accept purification and hardship as essential to the following of Christ Crucified. The trial itself will appear as a providential means of being formed by the Father's hands, and as a struggle which

is not only *psychological*, carried out by the "I" in relation to itself and its weaknesses, but also *religious*, touched each day by the presence of God and the power of the Cross!

### ***Dimensions of continuing formation***

71. If the subject of formation is the individual at every stage of life, the object of formation is the whole person, called to seek and love God "with all one's heart, and with all one's soul, and with all one's might" (cf. *Dt* 6:5), and one's neighbor as oneself (cf. *Lev* 19:18; *Mt* 22:37-39). Love of God and of the brethren is a powerful force which can ceaselessly inspire the process of growth and fidelity. *Life in the Spirit* is clearly of primary importance. Living in the Spirit, consecrated persons discover their own identity and find profound peace; they grow more attentive to the daily challenges of the word of God, and they allow themselves to be guided by the original inspiration of their Institute. Under the action of the Spirit, they resolutely keep times for prayer, silence and solitude, and they never cease to ask the Almighty for the gift of wisdom in the struggles of everyday life (cf. *Wis* 9:10).

*The human and fraternal dimensions* of the consecrated life call for self-knowledge and the awareness of personal limitations, so as to offer its members the inspiration and support needed on the path towards perfect freedom.

*The apostolic dimension* opens the hearts and minds of consecrated persons and prepares them for constant effort in the apostolate, as the sign that it is the love of Christ which urges them on (cf. *2 Cor* 5:14).

*The cultural and professional dimensions*, based upon a solid theological training which provides the means for wise discernment, involve continual updating and special interest in the different areas to which each charism is directed.

Finally, all these elements are united *in the dimension of the charism* proper to each Institute, as it were in a synthesis which calls for a constant deepening of one's own special consecration in all its aspects, not only apostolic but also ascetical and mystical. This means that each member should study diligently the spirit, history and mission of the Institute to which he or she belongs, in order to advance the personal and communal assimilation of its charism.

## **1988 Homily from Mass of the Consecration of a Virgin**

“The day of the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Mary is the origin of Christian virginity: it is born in the moment of the “Yes” of the Virgin to the divine maternity. Contrary to this affirmation one could say: but there already existed at least attempts at a virginal life motivated by religious ideas. Even at the time of the birth of Jesus there was being formed a virginal monastic life for men and women in the locality of Qumran, that religious movement which John the Baptist was probably close to. And we also find these mysterious words on the lips of the Virgin Mary: “How is it possible? I do not know man.” (Luke 1, 34)

All this is true and one could say that the development of a virginal life in the bosom of a chosen people precisely in the messianic time was an inclination of the soul of Israel towards the Lord, a sign of the fullness of time.

But it is also true that it did not yet have to do with Christian virginity. We don't know with certainty what the true significance is of the statement of Mary: “I don't know man.” In any case, such a declaration of the Virgin appears in that moment incompatible with the will of the Father which is, for Mary, divine motherhood. And her words even seem, at first glance, to be an obstacle rather than adherence to the Will of God.

In order to become fully available, the decision of the Virgin Mary would need to be transformed. And it was transformed in the dialogue with the angel, to whom the Virgin responded: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1, 38) The Word was born in this way and only by means of this, Christian virginity; in fact, Christian virginity is to enter in this word, to participate in the mystery of this word, which is the mystery of the Incarnation of the divine Word, the Christological center of our faith. Because it is like this: Christian virginity is never just a private, personal, decision but a gift received in the Church from the hands of God- a consecration in which one's own will is accepted by God and transformed into His Will.

It is essential for consecrated virginity that it not be only and simply a private decision- it could become in this way an obstacle to the divine will, my will opposing His will. It is essential that my will comes to be offered abandoned, handed over into the hands of God; that virginity become complete availability to the Lord, letting ourselves be guided by Him, in the organism of His Mystical Body for the good of the entire Church. It is deduced from this that consecrated virginity is a state in the Church, a Marian state, not less necessary for the fecundity of the Church than the ministerial state of the Priesthood in the succession of the Apostles. The Church must always be Marian and Petrine in order to correspond to her original vocation.

With these reflections we have substantially responded to the question: What is the newness of Christian virginity born of the "Yes" of Mary to the Annunciation of the Lord? The essential point lies in the dialogical character of virginity: It is a matter of my "I" being a response to a divine proposal. Renunciation of marriage counts less; what is crucial is the renunciation of self-will in one's own life, of self-sufficiency of an "I" shut up in one's self. So it is not the "No" that is dominant – the renunciation of certain values; predominant is the "yes" to a higher value, to the divine "You". Virginity is not something negative, it is the most important thing in the world, a great "Yes": "Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me as you have said." Christian virginity is a dialogical "yes"; in other words, it is an act of love. In fact, the ancient liturgy illustrated the occurrence of that day with a wedding psalm (Psalm 45/44), characterized by the Hebraic tradition as a "canticle of love": "Listen, daughter, consider, incline your ear, forget your people and your father's house and the King will desire your beauty." Christian virginity is a spousal mystery, a quest for the true beauty which pleases Jesus the King.

A second element follows the first: dialogue with God is never a dialogue between two isolated individuals. God is Trinitarian love. God is the Creator; the Son is before all things and all subsist in Him. He is also the head of the body the Church; He is the beginning, the first born of those who have risen from the dead." To be in dialogue with God implies being open to all creatures. Dialogue with God is linked to the Body of Christ. Therefore, Christian virginity always has an ecclesial character. With her "yes" at the Annunciation, Mary became the first Church, because the Church, in her most fundamental nature, is no other than the "yes" of the creature to God. In this way one also understands how virginity and motherhood, virginity and fertility, are inseparable.

The virginity of Mary became Christian virginity at the same moment in which it became motherhood. It is here that the passage from the Old to the New Testament is realized. It is not possible for me to explicate right now all that flows from these assertions. I would like only to draw your attention towards what seems to me to be a fundamental aspect. By chance – but there is no "by chance" in Christian life – this year the Feast of the Annunciation coincides with that which at one time was the Friday of the Passion, dedicated in the popular tradition to the Sorrowful Virgin and, as such, was celebrated liturgically. The Annunciation is a joyful feast "Rejoice Mary", the Angel said to the Virgin. But the great, invincible joy was born in a definitive manner only from the Cross, in the Resurrection. The principle of the grain of wheat fallen to the earth, which brings forth fruit only by dying, is the fundamental image of Christian virginity. (John 12, 24) Only by letting go of ourselves do we find ourselves: "At Your word, I will let down the nets!"

Virginity is a radical act of faith and therefore is an intimate union with the crucified Lord in the sense of the word of St. Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer

I who live but Christ lives in me." I – but no longer I - I am dead and risen in communion with the Body of Christ – this is the transformation accomplished in the virginal consecration: to abandon oneself and to find oneself again in the hands of the Lord. The Marian mystery is a mystery of the Cross and for this reason it is a joyful mystery, in the glory of the Risen Lord. I and no longer I, cross and Resurrection, virginity and motherhood, is fulfilled in that Yes of the Madonna, which is the origin and permanent locale of the virginal state.

We thank God for this gift, for this powerful and concrete sign of His Presence in the world and we pray that the "Yes" given today by our sister be accomplished always by grace and by the divine blessing. Amen

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger



The principle of the grain of wheat fallen to the earth, which brings forth fruit only by dying, is the fundamental image of Christian virginity.  
(John 12, 24)





## *Angelus*

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.  
R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

*Hail Mary, etc.*

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.

*Hail Mary, etc.*

V. And the Word was made Flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

*Hail Mary, etc.*

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

LET US PRAY

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

## *Regina Coeli (Easter)*

Queen of heaven, rejoice. Alleluia.

For He whom thou didst deserve to bear, Alleluia.

Hath risen as He said, Alleluia.

Pray for us to God, Alleluia.

V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, Alleluia.

R. Because Our Lord is truly risen, Alleluia.

Let us pray

O God, who by the resurrection of Thy Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, hast vouchsafed to make glad the whole world, grant, we beseech Thee, that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may attain the joys of eternal life. Through the same Christ Our Lord.

Amen



**2<sup>nd</sup> June 1995**  
**25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Promulgation of Rite of Consecration**  
**International Conference of Consecrated Virgins**  
**Pope John Paul II**

*On 31 May 1970 the revised Ritual for the Consecration of Virgins was promulgated by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship. For the 25th anniversary of that promising event, an international convention of consecrated virgins was held in Rome and on Friday, 2 June, the participants were received in audience by the Holy Father.*

*The Pope spoke of the enduring value of consecrated virginity in the life of the Church and urged women faithfully to "persevere in your vocation with the help of the Blessed Virgin. Take as your example the holy Virgins who have enriched the Church's life in every age". Here is a translation of his address, which was given in Italian.*

Dear Sisters,

1. I am pleased to have this audience which offers me the opportunity to meet you on the occasion of the International Convention organized to celebrate the 25 anniversary of the promulgation, on 31 May 1970, of the revised Ritual for the Consecration of Virgins. I greet the Convention's organizers and all of you who have gathered here. It was the Second Vatican Council which decided that the rite of the Consecration of Virgins found in the Roman Pontifical should be revised (cf. Const. Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 80). It was not only a question of beginning a careful revision of the liturgical formulas and ritual gestures, but of restoring a rite "which for many centuries had fallen into disuse with regard to women who did not belong to institutes of consecrated life. Along with the rite there was also a restoration of the "Ordo virginum", which was to find its juridical expression, as distinct from that of institutes, in can. 599 of the new Code of Canon Law. A renewed rite, then, and an "Ordo" restored to the Church community: the Lord's twofold gift to his Church. You rejoice over this gift, you thank the Lord for it and on this occasion you wish to draw from it motivation and inspiration for renewing your fervor and commitment. Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her

2. For my part, I would like to speak to you with the warm affection expressed by Bishops of old when they addressed the virgins of their Churches: the warmth of Methodius of Olympus, the first to sing of Christian Virginity, of Athanasius of Alexandria and Cyprian of Carthage, who considered consecrated virgins to be the chosen portion of Christ's flock; of John Chrysostom, whose writings are rich in ideas for nourishing the spiritual life of virgins; of Ambrose of Milan, whose works testify to an extraordinary pastoral concern for consecrated virgins; of Augustine of Hippo, the astute, profound theologian of virginity

embraced for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 19:12); of the great and holy Pope Leo; who is most likely the author of the marvelous consecratory prayer *Deus castorum corporum*; of Leander of Seville, who wrote an exquisite letter to his sister, Florentina, on the occasion of her consecration as a virgin. It is an episcopal tradition with which I am pleased to be associated.

3. On this significant occasion, I would like to underscore several basic points that cannot fail to guide your unique vocation in the Church and in the world. Love Christ, the reason for your life. For the consecrated virgin, as St. Leander of Seville stated, Christ is everything: "bridegroom, brother, friend, inheritance, reward, God and Lord" (*Regula sancti Leandri, Intro.*). The mystery of the Incarnation was given a spousal reading by the holy Fathers, following the interpretation given by the Apostle Paul to the Lord's death: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:25). Even the Resurrection was seen as nuptial meeting between the Risen One and the new messianic community, for whom the Easter Vigil itself was celebrated as "the Church's wedding night" (St. Asterius of Amasea, *Homilia .XIX, in Psalmum V, oratio V*). Christ's entire life is thus marked by the sign of the mystery of his wedding with the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32) Dear sisters, you also belong to that mystery through the gift of the Spirit and by virtue of a "new spiritual anointing" (cf. *Pontificale Romanum: Ordo consecrationis virginum, n.16*). Consecrated virginity reflects Gospel radicalism

4. Return Christ's infinite love with your own total and exclusive love. Love him as he wants to be loved, in the concrete circumstances of life: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (In 14:15; cf. 14:21). Love him in the way that befits your spousal state; by adopting his sentiments (cf. Phil 2:5); by sharing his manner of life, a life of humility and gentleness, of love and mercy, of service and joyful availability, of tireless zeal for the Father's glory and salvation of the human race. The state of consecrated virginity enables you to praise Christ more spontaneously, to listen to his word more easily, to serve him more joyfully; it provides you with more frequent occasions to offer him the homage of your love. However, consecrated virginity is not a privilege, but a gift of God that implies a strong commitment to following him and to be his disciple. The following of the Lamb in heaven (cf. Rv. 14:4) begins on earth by taking the narrow way (cf. Mt 7:14). Your *sequela Christi* will be all the more radical, the more you love Christ and the more clearly you grasp the meaning of virginal consecration. In discussing the "evangelical ideal of virginity" in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* I recalled the "in [consecrated] virginity the radicalism of the Gospel finds expression: 'Leave everything and follow Christ'" (n.20). Your discipleship will be all the more intense, the more deeply you are convinced that Jesus is the one Teacher (cf. Mt.23:8 ), whose words are "spirit and life" (In 6:63). Dear sisters, remember that your place, like Mary of

Bethany's (cf. Lk. 10:39), is at the feet of Jesus, listening to the gracious words that proceed out of His mouth (cf. Lk4:22).

5. Love the Church: she is your mother. Through the solemn rite presided over by the diocesan Bishop (Ordo consecrationis virginum; Praenotanda, n.6, p.8), you have received from her the gift of consecration; you have been dedicated to her service. You must always feel closely bound to the Church. According to the teaching of the Fathers, virgins receive from the Lord the "consecration of virginity" and become a visible sign of the Church's virginity, a means of her fruitfulness, a witness of her fidelity to Christ. Virgins are also a reminder that the Church is oriented toward the good things to come and a warning to keep the eschatological tension alive. It is also the task of virgins to be the hard-working hands of the local Church's generosity, the voice of her prayer, the expression of her mercy, the relief of her poor, the comfort of her suffering sons and daughters, and the support of her orphans and widows. We could say; at the time of the fathers, the Church's pietas and caritas were largely expressed through the heart and hands of consecrated virgins. These forms of commitment are still valid today. I myself stressed the anthropological value of choosing virginity in the Church: it is a path on which the consecrated virgin "realizes her womanhood". By freely choosing virginity, women confirm themselves as persons, as beings whom the Creator from the beginning has willed for their own sake. At the same time, they realize the personal value of their own femininity" (Mulieris dignitatem, n.20). No less than the woman who follows the path of marriage, the consecrated virgin is able to live and express spousal love: "in this kind of Love" she becomes, in the Church, a gift for God, for Christ, the Redeemer, for every brother and sister. Mary is the perfect icon of the Church

6. Love the children of God Your total and exclusive love for Christ does not deter you from loving all men and women, your brothers and sisters, because the horizons of your charity precisely because you belong to the Lord-are Christ's own horizons. According to the Apostle, the virgin "is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit" (I Cor 7:34); she seeks the "things that are above, where Christ is seated at God's right hand" (Col 3: 1). But that does not make you strangers to the great values of creation and to the sufferings of humanity, nor to the suffering of the earthly city, to its conflicts and sorrows caused by war, hunger, disease, from the widespread "culture of death". Have a merciful heart and share in the sufferings of your brethren. Commit yourselves to the defense of life, to the advancement of women and to respect for their freedom and dignity. You know it: "You who are virgins for Christ" become "mothers in the spirit" (Ordo consecrationis virginum, n.16), by lovingly co-operating in the evangelization of man and in his advancement.

7. Love Mary of Nazareth, the first fruits of Christian virginity. Humble and poor, "betrothed to Joseph" (Mt 1:18), the just man "of the House of David" (Lk. 1:27), Mary, by a singular privilege and by her fidelity to the Lord's call, became the virgin mother of God's Son. Mary is thus the perfect icon of the Church as mystery of communion and love, of her being Church as Virgin, Bride and Mother. Mary is also as St. Leander of Seville noted, the "summit and prototype of virginity". In body and spirit she was fully what you long to be with all your strength: virgins in heart and body, spouses by your total and exclusive commitment to the love of Christ, mothers by the gift of the Spirit.

8. Dear sisters, Mary is your mother, sister, teacher. Learn from her to fulfill God's will and to welcome his saving plan; to keep his word and to face life's events with it; sing his praises for his "great works" on behalf of humanity; to share the mystery of pain; to bring Christ to men and women and to intercede for the needy. Be with Mary in the hall of the wedding feast where Christ reveals himself to his disciples as the messianic Bridegroom; be with Mary at the cross, where Christ offers his life for the Church; stay with her in the Upper Room, the house of the Spirit, who is poured forth as divine Love in the Church, the Bride. Faithfully persevere in your vocation with the help of the Blessed Virgin. Take as your example the holy Virgins who have enriched the Church's life in every age. May the assurance of my constant prayer go with you, as well as a special blessing.

Pope John Paul II

**"Take as your example the Virgin saints  
who have enriched the Church's life in every age"**

Pope John Paul II, 1995 International Conference for Consecrated Virgins, Rome



The following pages are from the Study Guide Workbooks Part II Section 3  
published by the Diocese of La Crosse.

**Saint Agatha, pray for us.**

**From The Liturgy of the Hours**

**Volume III February 5 Memorial**

*Agatha suffered martyrdom at Catania Sicily, probably during the persecution of Decius. From antiquity her cult spread throughout the Church; her name was therefore inserted into the Roman Canon.*

## **Office of Readings                      SECOND READINGS**

From a homily on Saint Agatha by Saint Methodius of Sicily, bishop

*The gift of God, the source of all goodness.*

My Fellow Christians, our annual celebration of a martyr's feast has brought us together. She achieved renown in the early Church for her noble victory; she is well known now as well, for she continues to triumph through her divine miracles, which occur daily and continue to bring glory to her name.

She is indeed a virgin, for she was born of the divine Word, God's only Son, who also experienced death for our sake. John, a master of God's word, speaks of this: *He gave the power to become children of God to everyone who received him.*

The woman who invites us to this banquet is both a wife and a virgin. To use the analogy of Paul, she is the bride who has been betrothed to one husband, Christ. A true virgin, she wore the glow of a pure conscience and the crimson of the Lamb's blood for her cosmetics. Again and again she meditated on the death of her eager lover. For her, Christ's death was recent, his blood was still moist. Her robe is the mark of her faithful witness to Christ. It bears the indelible marks of his crimson blood and the shining threads of her eloquence. She offers to all who come after her these treasures of her eloquent confession.

Agatha, the name means "good." She was truly good, for she lived as a child of God. She was also given as the gift of God, the source of all goodness to her bridegroom, Christ, and to us. For she grants us a share in her goodness.

What can give greater good than the Sovereign Good? Whom could anyone find more worthy of celebration with hymns of praise than Agatha?

Agatha, her goodness coincides with her name. She won a good name by her noble deeds. Agatha her mere name wins all men over to her company. She teaches them by her example to hasten with her to the true Good, God alone.

## **RESPONSORY**

But as for me, helped by the Lord, I shall stand firm in proclaiming his praises.

- He has become my salvation and my consoler.

In his mercy, the sinless Lord has consecrated his servant, for she remained pure in his sight.

- He has become my salvation and my consoler.

## **Morning Prayer**

### **CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH**

**Antiphon** With a festive spirit as though to a wedding banquet, Agatha went to prison; in prayer she offered her bitter suffering to God.

Prayer

Lord, let your forgiveness be won for us by the pleading of Saint Agatha, who found favor with you by her chastity and by her courage in suffering death for the gospel.

### CANTICLE OF MARY

**Antiphon** Lord Jesus Christ, my beloved Master, it is you who have given me victory in the midst of torments. Call me, Lord, to undying happiness with you.

### Prayer

May the Virgin Martyr Saint Agatha implore your compassion for us, O Lord, we pray, for she found favor with you by the courage of her martyrdom and the merit of her chastity.



### Going deeper into the heart of the matter. Suggested Materials to Read

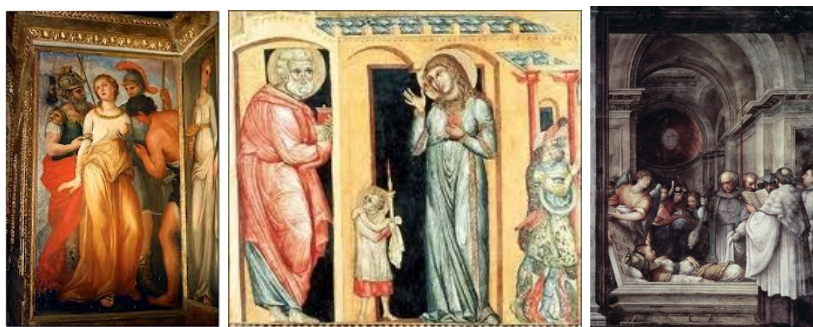
As one of the virgin saints listed in the Roman Canon, Saint Agatha's life will be important to know and ponder.

There are several web sites/you tubes to go to for an experience of the present day citizens of Catania express their gratitude for her intercession in protecting their city from an active volcano. It is a three-day celebration of her feast day in Catania, Sicily.

Using the "search" type in Catania, Sicily, Celebration, Santa Agata. There are many links with sights and sounds of the Mass, procession, devotional songs, history of the tribute to her intercession, views of the church, catacombs, etc.

The Golden Legend also has a fine account of her life.

For images of Saint Agatha, go to IMAGES, type in her name on the web search and you will find a variety of images of her life, passion, vision of St. Peter and healing in prison, burial, prayer cards, e day festival in Catania, Sicily.



Images from the 3 day festival of Saint Agatha, February 3<sup>rd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> Catania, Sicily



reliquary of St. Agatha



procession preparations



procession and front of the Church of St. Agatha



20. The cantors then sing the Litany. At the proper place they may add the names of other saints who are specially venerated by the people, or petitions suitable to the occasion.

**Saint Lucy,**

**pray for us.**

**From: Liturgy of the Hours Volume I December 13 Memorial**

*Lucy died at Syracuse, probably during the persecution of Diocletian. From antiquity her cult spread throughout the Church, and her name was therefore introduced into the Roman Canon.*

**Office of Readings Second Reading**

From the book *On Virginity* by Saint Ambrose, bishop *(abridged)*

***You light up your grace of body with your splendor of soul***

You are one of God's people, of God's family, a virgin among virgins; you light up your grace of body with your splendor of soul. More than others you can be compared with the Church. When you are in your room, then, at night, think always on Christ, and wait for his coming at every moment.

### **RESPONSORY**

The grace of the Lord gave her strength in the battle, and she was glorified before God and man. In the presence of the prince she spoke with wisdom,

- and therefore the Lord of heaven and earth has loved her.

She is a virgin who prepared a joyful home for God in her heart.

- And therefore the Lord of heaven and earth has loved her.

### **CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH**

**Antiphon** I am the Lord's poor servant; to him alone, the living God, I have offered all in sacrifice; I have nothing else to give; I offer him myself.

### **Prayer**

Lord, give us courage through the prayers of Saint Lucy. As we celebrate her entrance into eternal glory, we ask to share her happiness in the life to come.

### **CANTICLE OF MARY**



**Antiphon** Lucy, bride of Christ, by your suffering you have gained the mastery of your soul. You have despised worldly values and now you are glorious among the angels. With your own blood you have triumphed over the enemy.

Going deeper into the heart of the matter.

As with the life of Saint Agatha, Saint Lucy has a church in Sicily. This parish Church has a web site, with photos of the church, crypt, beautiful reflections on the life of Saint Lucy, of her virginity and charity, her visit with her mother for healing to the tomb of Saint Agatha and much more.

Her life from The Golden Legend is available in hard copy or on the internet.

St. Lucy DVD by Bob and Penny Lord

Wikipedia has a variety of links if you type in St. Lucy, St. Jeremiah Church, Venice.

There is also a beautiful image of Saint Agatha coming from her tomb, appearing to St. Lucy and her mother, St. Lucy before the judge and other images.



The two women, deeply touched, passionately prayed Saint Agatha to asked God for the grace of healing.

*"Oh mother, this dear Saint who suffered and died for Jesus, will help us, she will intercede for you. Touch her tomb with your hand and you will be healed..."*

Lucy whispered her heart full of hope and faith.

When the mass was over, the worshippers left; while Lucy and her mother remained kneeling in prayer in the dim light of the temple, next to the venerated sepulchre.

The girl was tired, and emotionally touched; her eyes slowly closed and she went into a

deep sleep. And then, right before her appeared Saint Agatha. Shining in pure light, surrounded by a host of angels, smiling she came close to Lucy and said:

*"Lucy, my sister, spouse of Jesus, why do you ask me, that which yourself alone can obtain for your mother? Eutichia is healed; your vivid faith has saved her: She is well now, and the merit is yours; you who have made a sanctuary of your heart for God, and has offered your pure soul to the Lord."*

Slowly the suave vision faded away and Lucy woke. She watched her mother still seep in prayer and smiling, softly called her:

*"Mother, Saint Agata has asked this grace from Jesus, and He has healed you."*

Radiant with joy, Eutichia felt her strength returning, and fell, prostrate in adoration

Her heart was full of love and gratitude. What would she not have done, at that wonderful moment for her God?

It struck the girl that she could finally reveal to her mother that she had consecrated her life to God and tell her that she could never accept an earthly spouse. Her Heavenly Spouse was, and would be forever, Jesus.

Eutichia was so happy that she did not regret her daughter's decisions.



Every year, in May, the religious feast of Saint Lucy of quails takes place in Syracuse (Sicily). A silver statue of Saint Lucy and a reliquary with her bones are taken from the Cathedral to the church of Santa Lucia alla Badia. Devotees of Saint Lucy wear green hats. A historical cortege with ancient coaches, tambours, flags and baroque actors walks through the streets. At 12 o'clock a lot of quails are freed to celebrate the arrival of Saint Lucy in her church.



**Saint Agnes,**

**pray for us.**

**From The Liturgy of the Hours Volume III January 21 Memorial**

*Saint Agnes died a martyr at Rome during either the second half of the third century, or more probably, at the beginning of the fourth century. Pope Damasus adorned her tomb with sacred poetry, and many Fathers of the Church, following Saint Ambrose, have honored her in their writings.*

### **Office of Readings**

#### **SECOND READING**

From a treatise On Virgins by Saint Ambrose, bishop

*Too young to be punished, yet old enough for a martyr's crown.*

Today is the birthday of a virgin; let us imitate her purity. It is the birthday of a martyr; let us offer ourselves in sacrifice. It is the birthday of Saint Agnes, who is said to have suffered martyrdom at the age of twelve. The cruelty that did not spare her youth shows all the more clearly the power of faith in finding one so young to bear it witness.

There was little or no room in that small body for a wound. Though she could scarcely receive the blow, she could rise superior to it. Girls of her age cannot bear even their parents' frowns and, pricked by a needle, weep as for a serious wound. yet she shows no fear of the blood stained hands of her executioners. She stands undaunted by heavy, clanking chains. She offers her whole body to be put to the sword by fierce soldiers. She is too young to know of death, yet is ready to face it. Dragged against her will to the altars, she stretches out her hands to the Lord in the midst of the flames, making the triumphant sign of Christ the victor on the altars of sacrilege. She puts her neck and hands in iron chains, but no chain can hold fast her tiny limbs.

A new kind of martyrdom! Too young to be punished, yet old enough for a martyr's crown; unfitted for the contest, yet effortless in victory, she shows herself a master in valor despite the handicap of youth. As a bride she would not be hastening to join her husband with the same joy she shows as a virgin on her way to punishment, crowned not with flowers but with holiness of life, adorned not with braided hair but with Christ himself.

In the midst of tears, she sheds no tears for herself. The crowds marvel at her recklessness in throwing away her life untasted, as if she had already lived life to the full. All are amazed that one not yet of legal age can give her testimony to God. So she succeeds in convincing others of her testimony about God, though her testimony in human affairs could not yet be accepted. What is beyond the power of nature, they argue, must come from its creator.

What menaces there were from the executioner, to frighten her; what promises made, to win her over; what influential people desired her in marriage! She answered: "To hope that any other will please me does wrong to my Spouse. I will be his who first chose me for himself. Executioner, why do you delay? If eyes that I do not want can desire this body, then let it perish." She stood still, she prayed, she offered her neck.

You could see fear in the eyes of the executioner, as if he were the one condemned; his right hand trembled, his face grew pale as he saw the girl's peril, while she had no fear for herself. One victim, but a twin martyrdom, to modesty and to religion; Agnes preserved her virginity, and gained a martyr's crown.

### RESPONSORY

Let us keep the feast of Saint Agnes by recalling all that she suffered.

- While still so young, she overcame death and found true life.
- For the giver of life was her only love,
- While still so young, she overcame death and found true life.

### Morning Prayer

**Antiphon 1** My Lord Jesus Christ has espoused me with his ring; he has crowned me like a bride.

**Antiphon 2** I am espoused to him whom the angels serve; sun and moon stand in wonder at his beauty.

**Antiphon 3** Rejoice with me, and be glad, for I have taken my place with all the saints in the kingdom of light.

### CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

**Antiphon** What I long for, I now see; what I hoped for I now possess; in heaven I am espoused to him whom on earth I loved with all my heart.

**Prayer** Almighty, eternal God, you choose what the world considers weak to put the worldly power to shame. May we who celebrate the birth of Saint Agnes into eternal joy be loyal to the faith she professed.

### Evening Prayer

**Antiphon 1** Christ's virgin could not be broken by any terror, nor won over by false allurements.

**Antiphon 2** To him alone I pledge my trust; to him alone I give my undivided love.

**Antiphon 3** I give thanks to you, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, for through him you have made your servant victorious.

### CANTICLE OF MARY

**Antiphon** Saint Agnes raised her hands and prayed: Holy Father, hear me. I am coming to you whom I have loved, whom I have sought and desired.

### From the Roman Missal      January 21      Collect

Almighty ever-living God, who choose what is weak in the world to confound the strong, mercifully grant, that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of your Martyr Saint Agnes, may follow her constancy in faith.



**Going deeper into the heart of the matter.  
Suggested Materials to Read**

Two Churches in Rome, Italy are places of importance in the life of Saint Agnes.

Sant'Agnese fuori le mura ( Saint Agnes outside the wall)

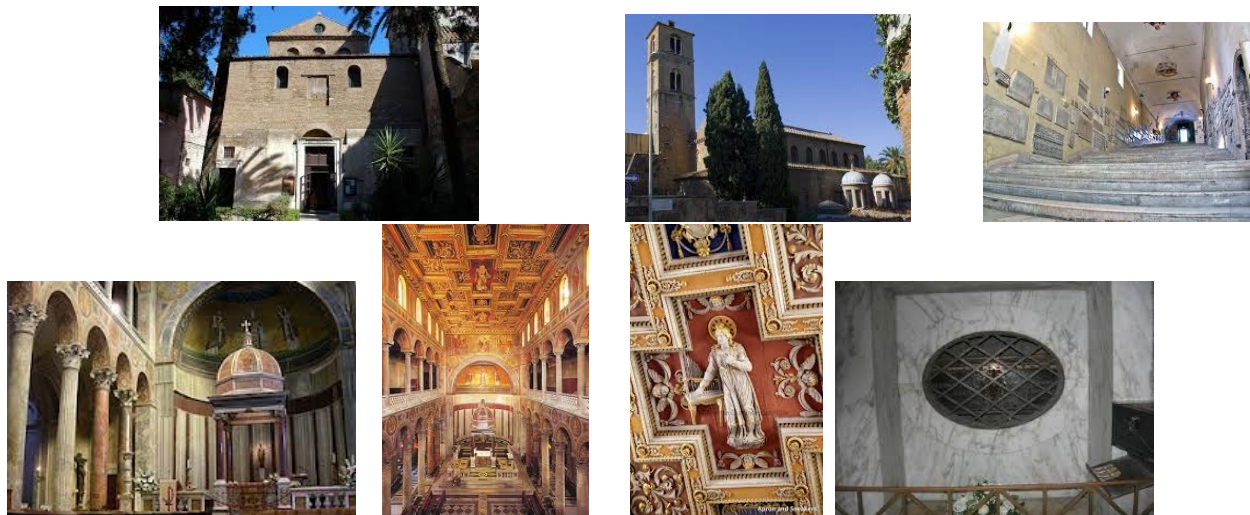
Santa Agnese in agone (Saint Agnes in Agony)

Type in either name and there will be pages to view not only the churches but also the catacombs below the churches and the surrounding areas.

Here are a few images of the Churches in Rome from the web sites  
Sant' Agnese on Agone



Sant'Agnese Fuori Le Mura Rome



## **Saint Philomena, pray for us**

**From The from the National Shrine in Briggsville, WI web site**

What follows is a summary of the story of Saint Philomena...

On May 24th, 1802, cleaning and clearing work was in progress in the most ancient of all the catacombs in Rome, the St. Priscilla catacombs, which dated almost from apostolic times. One

of the workers, while digging in one of the ancient tunnels, by accident found a shelf-tomb that had never been opened. (Most of the graves in this cemetery had been opened, and their relics removed for safety.) The tomb was clearly the tomb of a martyr, with rough inscriptions including arrows, a lance, an anchor, a lily or flame, and the words:

L U M E N A P A X T E C U M F I



The three terracotta tiles bearing the inscriptions had been misplaced, either due to the tombs hasty construction, the darkness, or by a workman that could not read. The first tile should actually have been the third, in which case the writing would read:

P A X T E C U M F I L U M E N A

"Peace be to you, Philomena."

On May 25th, the tiles were removed and the tomb opened. It contained some small bones, unbroken, and a fractured skull, proving it beyond question to be the tomb of a martyr. Also embedded in the concrete which had closed the tomb was a broken phial still containing a substance which was tested and proved to be dried blood.

The doctors and surgeons convened to give their opinion stated that the relics were those of a girl not more than fourteen years of age. Archaeologists said that, from various indications, they were satisfied that the tomb dated from not later than 160 AD, and might be earlier. The relics were those of a girl-martyr who had received the Faith from those who had known the apostles.

\* *"Visits" to Virgin /Martyr Churches*

\**"Visits" to the Virgin and Virgin/martyr Churches in Rome*

***International Congress-Pilgrimage Of The Ordo Virginum***

Thursday, 15 May 2008

*Very Dear Sisters,*

I greet and welcome with joy each one of you, consecrated with the "*solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (*Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World [RCV]*, n. 17), on the occasion of the International Pilgrimage and Congress of the *Ordo Virginum*, for which you are gathered in Rome during these days. In particular, I greet and thank Cardinal Franc Rodé for his cordial greeting and his dedication to this initiative, while I address my heartfelt thanks to the Organizing Committee. In choosing the theme for these days you were inspired by one of my affirmations which sums up what I have already had the opportunity to say concerning your state as women who live consecrated virginity in the world: *A gift in the Church and for the Church*. In this light I would like to strengthen you in your vocation and invite you to develop, from day to day, your understanding of a charism that is as luminous and fruitful in the eyes of the faith as it is obscure and futile in those of the world.

*"Imitate the Mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord"* (*RCV*, n. 16). The Order of Virgins is a special expression of consecrated life that blossomed anew in the Church after the Second Vatican Council (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 7). Its roots, however, are ancient; they date back to the dawn of apostolic times when, with unheard of daring, certain women began to open their hearts to the desire for consecrated virginity, in other words, to the desire to give the whole of their being to God, which had had its first extraordinary fulfilment in the Virgin of Nazareth and her "yes". In the thought of the Fathers Mary was the prototype of Christian virgins and their perception highlighted the newness of this new state of life, to which a free choice of love gave access.

*"They have chosen you [Lord] above all things; may they find all things in possessing you"* (cf. *RCV*, n. 24). Your charism must reflect the intensity but also the freshness of its origins. It is founded on the simple Gospel invitation: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19: 12), and on St Paul's recommendations of virginity for the Kingdom (I Cor 7: 25-35). Yet the whole of the Christian mystery shines out in it. When your charism came into being it did not take shape in accordance with specific ways of life. Rather, it was institutionalized little by little until it became a true and proper solemn, public consecration, conferred by the Bishop in an evocative liturgical rite which made the consecrated woman the *sponsa Christi*, an image of the Church as Bride.

Dearest friends, your vocation is deeply rooted in the particular Church to which you belong: it is your Bishops' task to recognize the charism of virginity in you, to consecrate you and, possibly, to encourage you on your way, in order *to teach you fear of the Lord*, as they commitment themselves to do during the solemn liturgy of consecration

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From the sphere of the Diocese with its traditions, its Saints, its values, its limits and its problems you broaden your horizons to the universal Church, sharing above all in her liturgical prayer, which is also entrusted to you so that "*the praise of our heavenly Father be always on your lips; pray without ceasing*", (RCV, n. 28). In this way your prayerful "I" will gradually be enlarged, until there is no longer anything except a great "we" in the prayer. This is ecclesial prayer and the true liturgy. May you open yourselves in your dialogue with God to a dialogue with all creatures, for whom you will find you are mothers, mothers of the children of God (cf. RCV, n. 28).

However, your ideal, truly lofty in itself, demands no special external change. Each consecrated person normally remains in her own life context. It is a way that seems to lack the specific characteristics of religious life, and above all that of obedience. For you, however, love becomes the *sequela*: your charism entails a total gift to Christ, an assimilation of the Bridegroom who implicitly asks for the observance of the evangelical counsels in order to keep your fidelity to him unstained (cf. RCV, n. 26). Being with Christ demands interiority, but at the same time opens a person to communicating with the brethren: your mission is grafted on this. An essential "rule of life" defines the commitment that each one of you assumes, with the Bishop's consent, at both the spiritual and existential levels. These are personal journeys. There are among you different approaches and different ways of living the gift of consecrated virginity and this becomes much more obvious in the course of an international meeting such as this, which has gathered you together during these days. I urge you to go beyond external appearances, experiencing the mystery of God's tenderness which each one of you bears in herself and recognizing one another as sisters, even in your diversity.

"*That your whole life may be a faithful witness of God's love and a convincing sign of the kingdom of heaven*" (RCV, n. 17). Take care always to radiate the dignity of being a bride of Christ, expressing the newness of Christian existence and the serene expectation of future life. Thus, with your own upright life you will be stars to guide the world on its journey. The choice of virginal life, in fact, is a reference to the transient nature of earthly things and an anticipation of future rewards. Be witnesses of attentive and lively expectation, of joy and of the peace that characterizes those who abandon themselves to God's love. May you be present in the world, yet pilgrims bound for the Kingdom. Indeed, the consecrated virgin is identified with that bride who, in unison with the Spirit, invokes the coming of the Lord: "*The Spirit and the Bride say "Come"*" (Rv 22: 17).

*As I take my leave of you I entrust you to Mary; and I make my own the words of St Ambrose, who sang the praises of Christian virginity, addressing them to you: "May ... be in each one the soul of Mary to magnify the Lord; may there be in each one the*

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*of Mary to exult in God. If there is only one Mother of Christ according to the flesh, Christ on the other hand, according to the faith, is the fruit of all, since every soul receives the Word of God so that, immaculate and immune to vice, she may preserve her chastity with irreproachable modesty" (Comment on St Luke, 2, 26: PL 15, 1642).*

With this heartfelt wish, I bless you.

Pope Benedict XVI

## **Consecrated Virginity - a Contradiction in the World? by Most Reverend William Callahan, OFM Conv.**

Bishop of La Crosse, Wisconsin  
Catholic Times March 7, 2013

Faith is a gift. For many of us this gift was given to us at our infant baptism.

Others received it as they grew in wisdom and knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ through the Sacred Scriptures or an encounter with the lives of Catholics on fire with the love of Christ, faithful witnesses of the world to come.

From the earliest days of the Church there have been countless women who have followed the teachings and example of Jesus in a particular and unique way: to live their lives for the love of God and the sake of the Kingdom. They were given the grace, the insight, and the gift of offering their virginity for a deeper love and a greater good, the life of the world to come, that eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God.

The most profound example we have is, of course, Our Blessed Mother, who even before the invitation by the Archangel Gabriel to be the Mother of God, had made a resolve in her heart, soul, mind and will to offer her life to be for God alone. This self-offering freed her to be open for God's grace and the divine invitation to receive the Word of the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Her answer was: "Fiat." "Yes." "I am willing." "Be it done unto me..."

Each time we pray the first Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, the Roman Canon as it has been called, we recall the lives of early virgin and martyr saints, Agatha, Lucy and Agnes. These young virgins knew of our Blessed Mother's example. They learned from their families the teachings of Christ, the beauty and dignity of living for Him alone. They continued living in their midst of family and friends, praying, serving the needs of others, living the Gospel, living the faith they professed but more importantly, living

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with an undivided heart; that is, living with their eyes and hearts set on the Kingdom of God, that "pearl of great price."

Virginity is consecrated to God for the sake of the Kingdom. Consecrated virginity lives in the world as we know it today.

Our Holy Mother, the Church has established a rite to solemnly bless and consecrate this resolve that a virgin makes in her heart to live for Christ alone for the sake of the Kingdom. This strength and courage to live this life of virginity is indeed a gift – a unique grace. It is given to the soul at an early age. We may even say it is a gift from God at her baptism. But, nonetheless, it is a gift. Not all are called, as Our Blessed Lord Himself says, but to those to whom it has been given. We all know of those young souls who have that "specialness" about them seemingly to be "other worldly" with a profound love for Jesus and Mary. We have witnessed virgins in our diocese who serve the needs of others by their living out the Gospel in the world, by their prayer and joyful witness to the Love of Christ and His Church.

The Consecration for Virgins living in the world is not a religious order as we traditionally know, but is the way women gave their lives to Christ before founders of such orders like St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Benedict came on the scene. The diocesan bishop presides over the Mass of Consecration. It is a public celebration which sets the virgin aside as a sacred person. Her main job is to be a woman of prayer, praying for the needs of the Church and the praise of God all the while living in the midst of the people of God doing everything from teaching, to office work, to the many professions and occupations that women have in our busy society.

The Catechism Of the Catholic Church and the Code of Canon Law offer some further definition and information: "Virgins who, committed to the holy plan of following Christ more closely, are consecrated by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are betrothed mystically to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of Christ and His Church" (CCC #923; C.604#1).





In this Year of Faith, I am introducing a work in our diocese for those who are called to live out this ancient form of consecrated life in the Church.

It is a discernment and formation program for those virgins who are given the gift of the vocation to live in the world as the virgins did in the early Church, with their hearts set on the Kingdom of God. The Study Guide Workbook is a three-part program exploring the beauty of the Rite of Consecration given to us by Holy Mother Church. It invites the virgin along with her spiritual director to enter into the beauty of the rite which the Church holds out as a way for her to receive the graces to be that more faithful witness we are called to be in this Year of Faith particularly. Additional resources include "Reflections on the Rite," which could be described as the spirituality of the Rite of Consecration, "Additional References," which is a fourth volume containing the complete text of the references made in the Study Guide.

Other works being prepared are all based on the Rite of Consecration. They include "Meditations on Mary for the Consecrated Virgin; Seasons of Love" – reflections on the Liturgy of the Hours for the Church year and the Rite of Consecration; and "Uncommon Love" – passages from the common of virgins and the Blessed Virgin Mary paralleled with the Rite of Consecration for meditation and study. These resources will be not only part of the preparation of and continuing education of consecrated virgins but will serve as an aid for priests and spiritual directors who are helping women discern the gift of consecrated virginity lived in the world.

As all such works in the Church, this work needs some financial support to get to the printers. If you are interested in supporting this project, you will, of course, be remembered in our prayers; further you may choose to be acknowledged by having your name added to a page in the book, a page of signatures, of those who support this vocation, this gift to the Church.

As we respond the Holy Father's Year of Faith and enter more deeply into the history, the roots of our call to holiness, truly seeking the Face of Jesus, it is time to seriously consider the vocation and gift of consecrated virginity as a Divine call for women in the world.

**“Make you whole life reflect your dignity and your vocation”  
from Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, Homily**



**CANTICLE OF MARY**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly farmer's foot.

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children forever.

**Prayer Intentions from the Homily in the Rite of Consecration to be added when praying Morning and Evening Prayer:**

for the spread of the Christian faith  
for the unity of all Christians  
for the welfare of the married  
For those who have forgotten their Father's goodness and have abandoned his love



**Using the Rite of Consecration as an Examination of Conscience for the Sacrament of Confession**

1. Do I unite myself with God in whatever I do?
2. How have I served the Church and mankind with dedication today?
3. How have I lived my consecration and call in spreading the Kingdom of God
4. Do I give the Spirit of Christ to the world or am I self-centered?
5. Are my prayers and good works offered for the Mystical Body of Christ?
6. Have I seen Christ as my Teacher and used the Gospel as my guide?
7. Have I seen Heaven as my home?
8. Have I expressed my gratitude and thanks to God for the grace and gift of consecrated virginity?
9. Have I pondered the mystery of the Father's love for this way of life?
10. How have I seen my dignity as Christ's bride today?
11. Have my actions reflected this dignity, this sign of the world to come?
12. How have I been a spiritual mother of grace for the needs of Christ's flock?

13. How have I persevered in the fullness of my faith in times of temptation and doubt today?
14. How steadfast is my hope in times of trials today?
15. Is my love single-hearted or do I have "strange gods"?
16. Have I been prudent and watchful to keep from pride?
17. Have I been open to receive the spiritual nourishment of the Precious Body of Christ in the Eucharistic Sacrifice? Have I been prepared? Have I been grateful, thankful?
18. Is my self-denial strengthening my love of God?
19. Do I actively see my Scripture study as a way of building up my love of God and a true encounter with Christ, the Word Made flesh?
20. Is my prayer building up my love of God?
21. Are my corporal and spiritual works of mercy center on the love of God, done with a purity of intention?
22. Do I keep my thoughts on the things of God as I go about my daily work seeing His will in all?
23. Are my actions transparent that Christ is seen through them?
24. Do I remember to pray for the spread of the Christian faith and the unity of all Christians?
25. Do I pray for the welfare of the married?
26. Do I pray for those who have forgotten our Father's goodness and have abandoned His love?
27. Do I see my life as being poured out in service for all in charity?
28. Do I live as apostle in the Church bringing the Good News to others?
29. Does Christ's light shine through me to all?
30. How and who do I love?

Those in need?

31. Do I help the poor?
32. How do I care for the weak?
33. How did I teach the ignorant today?
34. How did I protect the young today?
35. What did I do to minister to the old?
36. How did I give strength and comfort to widows and others in adversity?
37. Do I work in the Spirit of charity doing the Father's will?

Jesus,  
be Yourself,  
my glory,  
my joy,  
my whole desire.  
Be my comfort in sorrow,  
my wisdom in perplexity,  
my protection in the midst of injustice,  
my patience in adversity,  
my riches in poverty,  
my food in fasting,  
my remedy in time of sickness.

*Pages yet to come...*

*\*Rosary Meditations ~ Seasons of Love*

*\*Rosary Meditations ~ Seasons of Love*

*\*Stations of the Cross* ♥

*\*Stations of the Cross*