



CANDLEMAS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, February 2nd, 2024)

(Mal 3:1-4)
(Lk 2:22-32)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

ON FEBRUARY 2nd, 1997, took place on the initiative of St. John Paul II the first World Day for Consecrated Life, in the wake notably of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, published on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, of the previous year. The Polish Pope had assigned to this day a threefold aim:

— to praise the Lord and to thank Him for the great gift of consecrated life, which enriches and gladdens the Church;

— to promote a knowledge of and esteem for this life, a special and living memory of His being Son, who makes of His Father His only love;

— to invite the consecrated persons to celebrate the marvels which the Lord has accomplished in them, to discover by a more illumined faith the rays of divine beauty spread by the Spirit in their way of life, and to acquire a more vivid consciousness of their irreplaceable mission in the Church and in the world.

By choosing this day, the holy pope merely institutionalized a usage already several decades old: male and female religious

gathering around the pope and the bishops on this day. Let us quote somewhat at length the pope's message on the occasion of the first World Day:

This Gospel scene reveals the mystery of Jesus, the One consecrated by the Father, come into the world to carry out His will faithfully.¹ Simeon points to Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles"² and by a prophetic word foretells the supreme offering of Jesus to the Father and His final victory.³

In this way the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is an eloquent icon of the total offering of one's life for all those who are called to show forth in the Church and in the world, by means of the evangelical counsels "the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient One."⁴

Mary is associated with the presentation of Christ.

The Virgin Mother, who carries Jesus to the temple so that He can be offered to the Father, expresses very well the figure of the Church who continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with the one oblation of Christ, cause and model of all consecration in the Church.⁴

In the Holy Father's thought, consecrated persons live their lives in the image of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father. They entrust themselves into the hands of the Church, who then offers these lives to the Father and associates them to the one oblation of Christ.

Today's feast refers us to the Annunciation day, to the *Fiat* the Blessed Virgin pronounced, which is the icon of each of our own *Fiats*. In a world where struggle seems to be the best means to affirm one's existence, it is not that easy to consent to a freedom-giving "Yes", to a "Yes" that opens to communion with Him who is the source of true life. Elizabeth's words to Mary then shine with a new light:

And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.^b

The first action of a consecrated person is to believe and consent to God's plan on his life, and to accept to give it in a radical way.

1. *Hb* 10:5-7.

2. *Lk* 2:32.

3. *Lk* 2:32-35.

4. *Vita consecrata*,
n. 1.

a. Message,
Jan. 6, 1997.

b. *Lk* 1:45.

From Mary's offered heart stems a canticle that the Church has kept, and repeats everyday at the end of Vespers, the *Magnificat*. Indeed, God has regard for each offered life, and does great things for each of His servants.

Taken as a whole, the episode of the Presentation in the Temple cannot but confirm that. As Joseph and Mary go to the Temple to carry out the custom of the law, an old man named Simeon and a prophetess, Anna, come and meet them; an unlikely encounter among a milling crowd of anonymous persons, yet an encounter necessary for a promise to be accomplished. Simeon indeed "had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord."^a God is always faithful.

a. *Lk* 2:26.

At a moment when our country is preparing to make new laws on abortion and euthanasia, let us emphasise how God has regard for two elderly persons who have consecrated their lives in the service of the Temple, the place where God can be encountered, the place of offering and blessing. Don't let us forget that it is a child who convokes them in that place. No life whatsoever is too frail, too meaningless, to be ignored in its Creator's and Redeemer's plan of salvation.

But what is the first great thing God does for a consecrated person, if not give him the gift of His own life, the gift of the Spirit? Thus, the Angel Gabriel first foretells to Zachary concerning John the Baptist: "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."^b Then he hails Mary as "Full of grace", and acknowledges that "the Lord is with thee." To Mary's question concerning how she will conceive, he answers: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."^c During the Visitation Elizabeth, too, is filled with the Holy Spirit after the child has leapt in her womb.^d And Zachary utters the prophetic words of the *Benedictus* filled with the Holy Spirit.^e

b. *Lk* 1:15.

c. *Lk* 1:35.

d. *Lk* 1:41.

e. *Lk* 1:67.

Simeon was among these persons. He was "waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him."^f Guided by the same Holy Spirit, he came to the Temple.^g Last, he was moved by the Spirit to prophesy:

f. *Lk* 2:25.

g. *Lk* 2:27.

Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.^a

a. *Lk 2:34-35.*

Anna also prophesies, giving thanks to God, and speaking of the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.^b

b. *Lk 2:38.*

But today, the calling received by Simeon and Anna to come and encounter the Lord is not meant for religious men and women solely. Each person, and especially each baptised person, is called to set off towards his Lord. No one can escape unchanged from encountering and receiving his Lord.

Let us beseech, through Mary's intercession, the gift of vocations for the religious communities. Let us ask the Lord to grant consecrated persons the grace of perseverance in faithfulness, so that the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* may keep resounding through totally given lives, and the grace of God may shine upon the world.

Amen.

