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## Keeping the World Awake After the Year of Consecrated Life

- Introduction
  - Pope Francis announced the Year of Consecrated Life to sustained applause at the end of a Nov. 29, 2013 meeting with the General Superiors of communities of religious men in which he said that consecrated persons are called in a special way to help the entire Church “wake up the world” through showing everyone that there is different, better, more radical and joy-filled way of thinking, acting and living — in short, a more Christ-like way of life — than most in the Church and in the world have adopted. In his Apostolic Letter to all consecrated persons at the beginning of this holy year, Pope Francis said that this Year has a triple aim of looking to the past with gratitude, living the present with passion, and embracing the future with hope.
  - We need this Year for Consecrated Life first to thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and for the vocations God has given to so many men and women throughout the centuries to build up the Church and call us to a greater following of God. Where would the Church be without Saints Augustine, Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Ignatius, Vincent de Paul, Alphonsus and John Bosco? Without Saints Scholastica, Clare, Bridget, Angela Merici, Teresa of Avila, Jane de Chantal, Louise de Marillac, Elizabeth Seton, Francis Cabrini, and Teresa of Calcutta? Without the ceaseless prayer and the educational, medicinal and charitable works of so many consecrated men and women in every generation including our own? We need this Year to show appreciation to all those who have said yes to God’s calling to dedicate themselves to him as contemplative monks and cloistered nuns, as religious brothers and sisters in education, health care and charity, as members of secular institutes living out their consecration in the midst of the world, as members of societies of apostolic life, as missionaries spreading the faith, as consecrated virgins, hermits, consecrated widows and widowers and in so many new expressions by which they make the life, virtues and values of Jesus more visible and point us from the superficial to the sacred and from the ephemeral to the eternal.
  - We also need this Year to bring about, in some areas, a passionate and much-needed renewal of consecrated life and a greater attentiveness to God’s calling others to embrace this way of life. Without this Pope Francis’ aim of “embracing the future with hope” would remain sterile, saccharine optimism. Many communities of consecrated men and women are suffering from diminished numbers and various other institutional concerns with regard to the direction of their communities, their internal and external identity as religious or consecrated men and women, and their important place in proclaiming the truth that sets us free and sustaining the apostolates in which they put the love of Christ into action. Just like every Christian is called to continual conversion, so every community is summoned literally to “turn-with” Christ, as he continues to strive to carry out his saving work through us. This conversion is the beginning of embracing the future with hope, which is one of the reasons why its fitting that the Year of Consecrated Life will lead the whole Church into the Jubilee of Mercy.
  - But we also need this year all of us to rediscover the essence of the Christian life and the meaning of our baptismal consecration. It is meant to startle us all from spiritual somnambulation so that we may in turn, together with those in consecrated life, wake up the world. St. John Paul II gave us in *Vita Consecrata*, his profound 1996 exhortation on the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world, the fundamental reason why this Year should be a real grace for everyone in the Church. It’s because the consecrated life “is not something isolated and marginal, but a reality that affects the whole Church,” he said. Rather, “the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse.” The consecrated life reveals, he accentuated, both the essence of the Christian vocation in this world and toward the next.

To understand the nature and purpose of the Christian life, to know the meaning of our baptismal consecration, discipleship and mission, and to enter and live in God's kingdom so as to live in it forever, we do well to turn to the consecrated life. Consecrated life reveals various paradigmatic elements that every Christian in whatever state of life is called to understand and embrace.

- And so in my second talk today I'd like to focus on ten aspects of the consecrated life that I think are part of this essential nature of the Christian calling. These are ten ways that all of us are meant to help wake up the Church and the world. These are ten ways how all of us can live our Catholic faith with passion in our day to day life. These are ten fruits for the renewal and reshaping of the Church moving forward.
- First, this year is meant to renew us in the understanding and living of our Consecration
  - The first element we need to examine in order to open ourselves to the graces of this year is what consecration means. The consecrated are called to wake up the world with regard to the meaning of the consecrated nature of the Christian life flowing from baptism.
  - What does it mean to be consecrated? It means to be given to God, to belong fully to God. It means to be literally "cut off" (*sacer*) from profane things in order to be "with" (*cum*) God and others. It means we've transferred "ownership," "control," the "title" of each of us to God and that we fully belong to him. Each of us was consecrated to God on the day of our baptism, but many Christians do not ponder deeply enough what this means in its practical consequences. Those in consecrated life make a special dedication of themselves to God within their baptismal consecration. They explicitly give their entire life over to God and seek to live in the manner of the Gospel in such a way that their self-giving to God can become a model for every believer. Their life is a summons to us to make intentional our own self-giving to the Lord no matter what our state of life. Their life evinces for us the primacy of God in a Christian's life, what it means to be cut off from spiritual worldliness in order to belong fully to God so that together with God we can carry out the work in his plan of salvation for which he's made us.
  - Pope Benedict XVI asked priests in 2009, "What does "consecrate" mean?" and he replied, "First of all it must be said that really only God is 'consecrated' or 'holy.' 'To consecrate' therefore means 'to transfer' a reality – a person or a thing – to become the property of God. And two complementary aspects are present in this: on the one hand, removing them from ordinary things, segregating, 'setting them apart' from the context of personal human life so that they may be totally given to God; and on the other, this segregation, this transferal into God's sphere, has the very meaning of 'sending,' of mission: precisely because he or she is given to God, the reality, the consecrated person, exists 'for' others, is given to others. Giving to God means no longer existing for oneself, but for everyone. Whoever, like Jesus, is segregated from the world and set apart for God with a view to a task is for this very reason fully available to all. For the disciples the task will be to continue Jesus' mission, to be given to God and thereby to be on mission for all. The Risen One, appearing to his disciples on Easter evening, was to say to them: 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'" (Jn 20:21) (Chrism Mass Homily, April 9, 2009). Being consecrated with Christ beings being separated from worldliness to be with him in such a way that we now together with him seek to fulfill his salvific mission.
  - This baptismal consecration is our insertion into Christ's consecration. During the Last Supper, Jesus said to the Father, "I consecrate myself for them," — for us! — "so that they also may be consecrated in truth" and he asked his Father, "Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth!" Jesus consecrated himself so that we might be consecrated, so that we might be separated, cut off from falsity, and always united together with each other in Him who is the Truth. The Letter to the Hebrews (10:14) says that Jesus "by one offering has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated."
  - Jesus' consecration was being lived when he came into the world, but it was symbolically made on the day of his presentation in the Temple. St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother brought Jesus to the temple in obedience to the law of the Lord that stipulates, "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord." The consecration of the first born son was a symbolic response of God's people to the Covenant God had made with them; just as God had totally committed himself to Israel, so his people were committing themselves faithfully to God, were consecrating themselves

totally to him and to their sacred family bond or covenant with him. So Mary and Joseph consecrated Jesus to God the Father.

- A fuller epiphany of Jesus' consecration happened at his baptism in the Jordan River. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that Jesus' "eternal messianic consecration was revealed during the time of his earthly life at the moment of his baptism by John, when 'God anointed [him] with the Holy Spirit and with power,' 'that he might be revealed to Israel' as its Messiah. His works and words will manifest him as 'the Holy One of God,'" in other words, "the Consecrated One of God." In the Old Testament the way people were consecrated was through sacred anointing; at Jesus' baptism, the Father publicly revealed Jesus as the Christ, literally the "anointed one," and sent the Holy Spirit down upon him in the form of a dove as an external sign of that consecratory anointing.
- Jesus took on our nature so that we might be able to enter into that consecration. St. John the Baptist describes that unlike the baptism he was performing, the One who would come after him would "baptize ... with the Holy Spirit" and "with fire" (Lk 3:16) precisely so that we could enter into His consecration and become, literally, little Christs, "little anointed ones," or Christians. Through our baptism, St. Paul tells us, we are entering into Jesus' own blood, his own baptism on Calvary, so that we could then enter fully into his risen life: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4). Through baptism we enter into Christ's death and life. We die in Christ and are buried with him, but we're also raised with him and experience a new life. We enter into Christ's own paschal consecration.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church stresses that through baptism we are consecrated to God the Father in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ," the Catechism says. "Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation" (CCC 1272). **Our consecration, in other words, is for life, for eternity; we belong at the level of our being to God and not even sin can erase that consecration (although it can obviously obscure it at a moral level).** The Catechism goes on to say that this indelible "sacramental character ... consecrates them for Christian religious worship. The baptismal seal enables and commits Christians to serve God by a vital participation in the holy liturgy of the Church and to exercise their baptismal priesthood by the witness of holy lives and practical charity" (CCC 1273, 1280). Our consecration through baptism into Christ's consecration allows and commits us to enter into Jesus' own prayer, allows and commits us to enter into Jesus' life of holiness, and allows and commits us to enter into Jesus' love of neighbor to the extreme. This is the consecrated nature of the Christian life: to be immersed in Jesus Christ.
- When parents bring their children to be baptized, they are consecrating them to God, they are bathing them in his Living Water not just on the outside but on the inside, they are submerging them in his love, dunking them permanently into his kingdom, steeping them in his Truth, plunging them into his passion, death and Resurrection. Baptism is not a sacrament we're supposed to "tow off." Rather it is a sacrament that touches the depth of our being and is meant to pervade the concrete reality of day-to-day life with the light of God, binding us to Christ and saturating us with his sanctity.
- Pope Benedict in 2012 followed up the thoughts we just heard on the transfer of ownership involved in consecration by asking priests another question that can just as easily apply to every believer. He asked, "Does our consecration extend to the daily reality of our lives – do we live as men of God in communion with Jesus Christ? ... Or to put it more specifically, this configuration to Christ, who came not to be served but to serve, who does not take, but rather gives: what form does it take in the often dramatic situation of the Church today?" Each of us ought to ask today what difference our consecration to Christ in baptism makes in our life. Do we seek to live according to our baptismal identity? Do we reflect on the fact that through baptism we are supposed to be and behave differently from the rest because, through our consecration, we no longer belong to ourselves but to God? As St. Paul said to the first Christians in Corinth, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not

your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20). The body, the soul, the heart, the strength of someone who belongs to God, who has been purchased by his blood, who lives out one’s consecration are all meant to give God glory.

- The consecrated life that we are celebrating this ecclesiastical holy year is based on this baptismal consecration. Consecrated men and women, conscious that they belong to God and filled with a sense of divine calling and love for Him, seek to live out their Christian consecration to the full in prayer, in community life and through the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. The Catechism tells us about religious life, which is the most common form of consecrated life: “The religious state is thus one way of experiencing a ‘more intimate’ consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ’s faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come” (CCC 916). It adds later that this consecration strengthens the entire Church to show to the world the consecrated nature of our correspondence to the Covenant God has made with us. “By this state of life consecrated to God,” the Catechism teaches, “the Church manifests Christ and shows us how the Holy Spirit acts so wonderfully in her. And so the first mission of those who profess the evangelical counsels is to live out their consecration” (CCC 931). In this Year for Consecrated Life, we thank God for the vocations of those who live out this “more intimate consecration” and we look to them for the example of how to live out our own baptismal consecration according to the vocations God has given each of us.
- Let’s look at a few realities of consecration we can see lived by those in consecrated life that are supposed to be lived by each of us.
  - The first is the reality of the “belonging to God” that is part of consecration. Every Christian believer is supposed to belong to God as much as a cloistered nun or a Franciscan priest. Do you live with this type of total identification with Christ? Is your indelible participation in Jesus Christ and his consecration the most defining reality of your life? Are you a full-time Catholic just like those in consecrated life who give their lives over to God or are you a part-time Catholic or an occasional Catholic? Once we ponder substantially the truth that we belong to God by baptism, so many aspects of our faith become easier. Prayer becomes easier because we grasp that all our time belongs to God and so making time to converse with God in prayer becomes straightforward. Obedience to God becomes easier, because we’re not trying to call the shots, but rather want God’s will to be done, knowing that by doing his will, we’re entrusting ourselves not to his arbitrary dictates but to his saving love. Generosity becomes easier, because we recognize all that we have belongs to God, so sacrificing for others, even living by a vow of poverty, is much easier because we’re not tempted any longer to scream “mine!” Living chastely becomes easier because we recognize our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit that belong to God and are not meant to be used as we please but for God’s glory, either in chaste marital love or in temporary or perpetual chaste continence for the Kingdom. And when we truly belong to God, we begin to recognize that whatever we sacrifice for God in the “transfer of ownership” involved in consecration is nothing compared to what we receive. As we live out our belonging to, we grasp much more profoundly that he lives out his consecration for us and open ourselves up to receive the gift of his own consecration: God gives us his own life, he gives us his name, he gives us his eternal love, he gives us heaven. The consecrated life is a mutual belonging between us and God, but it’s only those who live out their consecration who fully receive the fruit of God’s consecrating himself for us.
  - The second reality of our baptismal consecration that is highlighted by those in consecrated life is that through the consecration of baptism God calls us to nothing short of holiness. A synonym for consecration is sanctification. God doesn’t call us to mediocrity. He doesn’t want us to be average. He wants us, and told us many times that he wants us, to be holy as he is holy (Lev 19:2; Lev 20:7). At the beginning of this third Christian millennium, St. John Paul II wrote powerfully about God’s call for us to become saints and said that this call flows immediately from our baptism. “Since baptism,” he said, “is a true entry into the

holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). He went on to say, "This ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual." He mentioned the many Christians he had canonized, including "many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life," before concluding, "The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction."

- Once upon a time there was the heresy that to become holy, to live according to a "high standard of Christian living," one needed to become a priest or religious. It was thought that priests and consecrated were those who sought the A's in the gift of Christian life, whereas everyone else was on the pass/fail track with an almost guaranteed enrollment in *post mortem* purgatorial reform school. One of the reasons why this idea was popular was because of the discipline found in consecrated life. Novitiates, seminaries and religious communities were spiritual boot camps where no defect was left uncorrected. High expectations were given along with a thorough formation in the spiritual life to help meet those expectations. Everything existed to help people grow in holiness. St. John Paul II was forcefully reiterating that God is calling the entire Church community — our families, our parishes, the whole Church — to become like that novitiate, seminary, or religious community, helping people to become holy. He was calling the whole Church to the discipline that makes holy disciples. He was calling us all to the "high standard of ordinary Christian living." My entire work as a parish was to to propose or re-propose to you with all of my heart this high standard of the call to Christian holiness, the call not to give God "something" but our best, the summons to pray Mass with all we've got, to make time for him in prayer and adoration, to get to know the Bible as well as Protestants, to seek to become genuine Good Samaritans to all those who are in need, to come to daily Mass whenever we can not because we have to but because we want to, to go to Confession frequently to receive God's mercy and healing strength, in short to become more and more like God and learn how to imitate the love for God shown by the saints.
- The motivation for responding to God's call for us to become holy we see in the reality of baptism. God the Father says about Jesus, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased!" That's what God says of each of us in baptism at the level of our being. We become his children through spiritual adoption, we become sharers in his divine nature (CCC 1265) and God says to each of us, "You are my beloved Child; with *you* I am well pleased!" This fact fills us with joy. St. John would write in his first letter, "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. ... Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure" (1 John 3:1-3). Those of us who are aware of the Father's love seek, in other words, to respond to that love by making ourselves pure as God is pure, holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect. In response to him who loves us and is so pleased in us that he adopts as his own, we respond in love by seeking to please him in all things. And that's a summary of holiness: to live up to our divine filiation, our becoming sons and daughters of God in Christ's own sonship, and like Christ to please our Father in everything. This is what those in

consecrated life seek to do and this is what they ought to inspire all of us through our baptismal consecration likewise to do.

- The third reality of baptismal consecration we learn from those in consecrated life is that we're called to the mission. Belonging to God, seeking to please him in everything, means we begin to share his fatherly passion for the salvation of the world, beginning with everyone we know. Jesus Christ was born into the world in Bethlehem not so that we could have an annual expression of yuletide joviality and a season of mutual generosity, *but to save us*, because we needed saving. Likewise the world, and we, still need to make that salvation secure by entering or entering more deeply into Christ's salvation. Consecrated men and women spend their lives not only entering into this salvation but through various apostolates seeking to bring Christ's saving love to others. They teach the faith as missionaries in far distant lands and in Catholic schools and catechetical programs in places where the Church is established. They care for those who are sick, needy and abandoned in hospitals, clinics, food pantries and in so many other places. Even those who are cloistered contemplatives serve the whole world by praying for the needs of the world and the needs of all those on the front lines seeking to bring Christ's saving love to the world. Each of us, by baptism and the Sacrament that "seals" our baptismal graces, Confirmation, become part of that same mission. We're called to take it as seriously as those in consecrated life. Do we?
- There's a concrete application of this apostolic dimension when parents bring children to be baptized. Like with the consecration of Jesus in the temple, at his baptism and during his Passion, so each of us is likewise consecrated when we're presented in the Temple and enter through baptism into Jesus' Passion, death and resurrection. When families bring their newborns to be baptized, the deepest meaning of baptism is that it's a total consecration of that son or daughter to God in imitation of Jesus' consecration in the Temple. Just like in the redemption rite in the feast of the Presentation in which the first born male was given back in the Temple to the God who have given him to his parents, being sacrificed to God vicariously either through a lamb or a pair of turtle doves, so when a family brings a child for baptism, the parents and godparents and all other family members are making a public act saying that the child belongs first to God, that the son or daughter is a Christian even before a Smith, or a Jones, or a Landry or a Flanigan.
- We can see the nature of consecration in the one who fully cooperated with Jesus' consecration of himself so that we may be brought to perfection consecrated in the truth. Mary is the model of the consecrated life not only for all those who are monks, cloistered nuns, active religious sisters, brothers and priests, members of societies of apostolic life and secular institutes, consecrated virgins and widows and hermits, but also for all of us who have been consecrated to God by our baptism. St. John Paul II focused on how Mary's consecration is the type for every consecration in his beautiful 1996 exhortation on the Consecrated Life in which he wrote, "Mary is the one who, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, ... is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of *the primacy of God's initiative*. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the *model of the acceptance of grace* by human creatures. ... Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the "virginal and humble life" of Christ also means imitation of Mary's way of life. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, consecrated persons ... like John, are called to take the Blessed Virgin Mary to themselves (cf. *Jn 19:27*), loving her and imitating her in the radical manner that befits their vocation, and experiencing in return her special motherly love. The Blessed Virgin shares with them the love that enables them to offer their lives every day for Christ and to cooperate with him in the salvation of the world."
- Second, this year is supposed to renew us in our search for God
  - The consecrated life is defined precisely by the search for God. That's what distinguishes more than anything else the life of those who have said yes to vocations to follow God as religious or as consecrated men and women in the middle of the world. Back in 2008, the Vatican's Congregation

for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life summarized the consecrated life by the words of Psalm 27, “Your face, O Lord, I seek” (Ps 27:8), saying that the consecrated life “flourishes in the environment of this search for the face of the Lord and the ways that lead to him” (cf. *Jn* 14:4-6). It noted that the search is not easy, but rather is a “struggle, because God is God, and His ways and thoughts are not always our ways and thoughts” (cf. *Is* 55:8) and added that “the consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will, and for this chooses to use every means available that helps one to know it and sustain it while bringing it to fulfillment.” The consecrated life is about this search.

- Pope Benedict XVI would stress in his powerful address to representatives of the world of culture in Paris in 2008 — many of whom were atheists — that this service of consecrated men and women seeking God’s face helps everyone rediscover the proper coordinates of life. He said that the essential goal of consecrated life, the way of life that inspired the first monks to live “civilization” behind and go into the desert, was “*quaerere Deum*,” to seek God. “Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent,” Pope Benedict said, “they wanted to do the essential — to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God, ... they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional. *Quaerere Deum*: because they were Christians, this was not an expedition into a trackless wilderness, a search leading them into total darkness. God himself had provided signposts, indeed he had marked out a path which was theirs to find and to follow.” Pope Benedict would say that in our own day, when “God has truly become for many the great unknown” this *quaerere Deum* — this seeking God and letting oneself be found by him — is “no less necessary than in former times.”
- And when we seek God in this way, it’s not that we stop loving anyone else around us. Rather, as we see in the lives of so many religious and consecrated men and women, this search for God also spurs them on to search for God’s lost sheep and draw near as Good Samaritans to so many others in need. St. John Paul II wrote in his 1996 exhortation on the consecrated life, “The fact that consecrated persons fix their gaze on the Lord's countenance does not diminish their commitment on behalf of humanity; on the contrary, it strengthens this commitment, enabling it to have an impact on history, in order to free history from all that disfigures it. The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors, the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given a warm welcome, the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life.” That’s yet another reason why this *quaerere Deum*, this seeking the face of the Lord, is just as important today as it ever was.
- Throughout this Year for Consecrated Life, therefore, all of us should focus on the search for God, the seeking his face, especially in prayer, in adoration, in the elevation of the Sacred Host at Mass, in the Sacrament of his Mercy, speaking to us in his word, crying out to us for help in the needy and in so many other ways. He’s wanting us to imitate consecrated men and women in putting other things on hold to come to seek him, to find him, to be found by him, and to enter into deeper communion with him and others.
- Third, this year is supposed to renew us and the Church with regard to the primacy of prayer
  - The consecrated are called to wake up the world with regard to the primacy of prayer. Consecrated men and women are meant to be distinguished above all by the art, quality and quantity of their prayer. They’re called to be experts in prayer. St. John Paul II wrote in 1996: “The call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only *in the silence of adoration* before the infinite transcendence of God: We must confess that we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored. ... All believers ... need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words. In practice this involves great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises.”
  - Ratzinger: At the “heart of the new evangelization” must be the kingdom of God, which is “not a thing.” “The Kingdom of God is God. Kingdom of God means: God exists. God is alive. God is

present and acts in the world, in our – in my life. God is not a faraway "ultimate cause", God is not the "great architect" of deism, who created the machine of the world and is no longer part of it – on the contrary: God is the most present and decisive reality in each and every act of my life, in each and every moment of history. ... Unfortunately, we Christians also often live as if God did not exist... Therefore, evangelization must, first of all, speak about God, proclaim the only true God. Here too we must keep the practical aspect in mind. God cannot be made known with words alone. One does not really know a person if one knows about this person second handedly. **To proclaim God is to introduce to the relation with God: to teach how to pray. Prayer is faith in action. And only by experiencing life with God does the evidence of His existence appear.** ... Speaking about God and speaking with God must always go together. The proclamation of God is the guide to communion with God in fraternal communion, founded and vivified by Christ. This is why the liturgy (the sacraments) are not a secondary theme next to the preaching of the living God, but the realization of our relationship with God.”

- Novo Millennio Ineunte.
  - This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer. ... We well know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ that makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life. Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life, but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity.
  - Christians who have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life are of course called to prayer in a particular way: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation, and it is important that they should cultivate it with special care. But it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions. It is therefore essential that education in prayer should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning.
- Mary was a model of a life of consecrated prayer. There's a reason why the apostles, awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, huddled around Mary in prayer for nine days, because she is the icon of someone totally dedicated to God in prayer. She is the one who sought always to listen to God in prayer. She is the one whom St. Luke told us on three occasions would ponder and treasure the words and actions of God in her heart. She is the one who burst out with praise and thanksgiving to God in her *Magnificat*. She is the one who prayerfully interceded with her Son for the newlyweds of Cana. She is the one who was still praying, devoutly, at the foot of the Cross when most had abandoned Jesus. Consecrated men and women are distinguished above all by making prayer the great priority in life. All of us are called to imitate them and imitate Mary in consecrating ourselves to God in prayer, not only by making the time to pray, but by going into prayer seeking to respond with our whole heart to what the Lord himself says and gives to us.
- Fourth, this year is meant to renew us in the importance of Community Life
  - The consecrated are called to wake up the world with regard to the focus on the Christian life as a life in communion. Pope Francis wrote in his letter at the beginning of this Year of Consecrated Life that consecrated men and women are called to be “experts in communion”, “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.” In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, [consecrated men and

women] are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters. So,” he concluded, “**be men and women of communion!**” We’re all called as Catholics to be men and women of communion, to be experts in communion.

- One of the great struggles that can happen today when young people are discerning vocations to the consecrated or religious life is that they want to come in and give themselves to a life of prayer, but they don’t really give themselves to each other. Many of those in consecrated life prioritize prayer and their apostolic works but community life takes a back seat. That’s one of the things that hopefully can be remedied this year wherever such problems exist. But this is a lesson all of us need to learn Just like consecrated persons are called to live a family life together in community, so are all of us, in our own families of origin, and especially in our parishes, need to learn how to live better in community. Even if we’re worshipping at the same time, we often don’t join our hearts and soul; we don’t allow God to make us “one body, one spirit in Christ,” because frequently don’t really want the commitment that comes in community life, we don’t really want to become our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.
- Christ came to save us not individually but as a people. He came to form a Church. He came to call us to communion with God and with each other. We’re supposed to become more and more people of communion. We see the model of this in the early Church. They prayed together, went to the Temple together, ate together and had all things in common. With regard to Christ’s second coming, they waited together and strengthened each other to persevere in their waiting by the contagious expectations of each other. We need to be strengthened in the same way.
- Pope Francis didn’t want to leave this call to communion for consecrated communities or for the rest of us at the level of generalities. He described what can sabotage communion and asked all of us to make a commitment not to engage in such destructive behavior: “I would ask you to think about my frequent comments about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have no place in our houses.” Some of the people in our communities and parishes have doctoral degrees in gossip, constantly speaking of others in a negative way. We’ll never have communion that way. One of the important resolutions the Pope wants each of us to make is to refuse to gossip, to refuse to be possessed by envy, since these things that can harm any community. Instead we can learn how to say praise behind each other’s backs. This is the second thing we can learn from consecrated life that can help us to live out this new liturgical year well.
- Authentic community life is supposed to be a model for consecrated families, like the Holy Family, seeks to model itself on the Blessed Trinity, which is a loving communion of persons. A family is not meant to be a bunch of isolated individuals who have the same address, but people who really seek the others’ good even above their own. Many families, we know, have a genuine community life without a consecration, but consecrated families must really live it. When a family is consecrated to God, the members also consecrated themselves in love to each other, because they recognize in each other the image of God calling them to a communion of love. To understand the community life to which a Christian family is called, we can learn from the early Church, which was formed into a Holy Family by the Holy Spirit and by the prayers and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the members of the primitive Church saw themselves as family members and prayed together, ate together, went on pilgrimages together, and even put all their possessions in common. That’s what consecrated families do. We’ve already talked about prayer, but the other three are likewise important to consider. We’re called to eat together. As the Italians say, *mangiano soli soltanto i cani*, “Only dogs eat alone!” In a consecrated family, the members of the family make extra effort to eat their meals together, sacrificing other things to grow together as a family over the table rather than sacrificing family meals regularly for other less important things. Consecrated families try to make pilgrimage together and vacation together, strengthening each other on the pilgrimage of life and making it more fun. Consecrated families genuinely pool their resources for the good of all, because they genuinely love each other. To make or renew a family’s consecration to the Holy Family is to commit oneself to this type of community life that is a distinctive trait of communities of consecrated men and women and ought to be a trait of truly Christian homes.

- Fifth, this year is supposed to renew us in the practice of Charity
  - The consecrated are called to wake up the world with regard to Charity. Pope Francis wrote in his letter on Nov. 29, “Like Jesus, who compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so [the] founders and foundresses [of various forms of consecrated life] sought in different ways to be the service of all those to whom the Spirit sent them. They did so by their prayers of intercession, their preaching of the Gospel, their works of catechesis, education, their service to the poor and the infirm... The creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find countless new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society.” Just as the charity of those in consecrated life built Catholics hospitals, schools, food pantries and radiated through mission work, the priesthood, counseling and so many other areas, so every believer is called to a similar creativity and perfection in charity according to our conditions in life.
  - Last year, in the same get together with religious superiors in which Pope Francis announced the Year for Consecrated Life, he said that the consecrated are called to “wake up the world” with their charity. They’re supposed to sound an alarm clock with regard to the needs that are out there and respond to it like firemen to a fire alarm. Pope Francis said, “The witness that can really attract is that associated with attitudes that are uncommon: generosity, detachment, sacrifice, self-forgetfulness in order to care for others. This is the witness, the ‘martyrdom’ of religious life. It ‘sounds an alarm’ for people. Religious [are] witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world.”
  - Greatest in the kingdom those who observe and teach, those who serve all the rest.
  - Pope Francis:
    - (Syria Vigil, Sept 7, 2013) God’s world is a world where everyone feels responsible for the other, for the good of the other. This evening, in reflection, fasting and prayer, each of us deep down should ask ourselves: Is this really the world that I desire? Is this really the world that we all carry in our hearts? But then we wonder: Is this the world in which we are living?... When man thinks only of himself, of his own interests and places himself in the center, when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God’s place, then all relationships are broken and everything is ruined; then the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict. This is precisely what the passage in the Book of Genesis seeks to teach us in the story of the Fall. It is exactly in this chaos that God asks man’s conscience: “Where is Abel your brother?” and Cain responds: “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). We too are asked this question, it would be good for us to ask ourselves as well: Am I really my brother’s keeper? Yes, you are your brother’s keeper! To be human means to care for one another! But when harmony is broken, a metamorphosis occurs: the brother who is to be cared for and loved becomes an adversary to fight, to kill.
    - (Nov 27, 2013 Catechesis ) Against this horizon we understand Jesus’ invitation to be ever ready, watchful, knowing that life in this world is given to us also in order to prepare us for the afterlife, for life with the heavenly Father. And for this there is a sure path: preparing oneself well for death, staying close to Jesus. This is surety: I prepare myself for death by staying close to Jesus. And how do we stay close to Jesus? Through prayer, in the Sacraments and also in the exercise of charity. Let us remember that he is present in the weakest and the most needy. He identified himself with them, in the well known parable of the Last Judgment, in which he says: “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”” (Mt 25:35-36, 40). Therefore, a sure path comes by recovering the meaning of Christian charity and fraternal sharing, by caring for the bodily and spiritual wounds of our neighbor. Solidarity in sharing sorrow and infusing hope is a premise and condition for receiving as an inheritance that Kingdom which has been prepared for us. The one who practices mercy does not fear death. Think well on this: the one who practices mercy does not fear death! Do you agree? Shall we say it

together so as not to forget it? The one who practices mercy does not fear death. And why does he not fear it? Because he looks death in the face in the wounds of his brothers and sisters, and he overcomes it with the love of Jesus Christ. If we will open the door of our lives and hearts to our littlest brothers and sisters, then even our own death will become a door that introduces us to heaven, to the blessed homeland, toward which we are directed, longing to dwell forever with God our Father, with Jesus, with Our Lady and with the Saints.

- Sixth, this year is meant to renew us in the spirit of poverty
  - Consecrated men and women are called to awaken the whole world to the importance of spiritual poverty.
  - “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”
  - By the evangelical counsels as a whole, the consecrated are called to show the world true wealth, true love and true freedom through the evangelical counsels in the midst of a world that is often so enslaved by materialism, hedonism, and radical autonomy and individualism. St. John Paul II wrote in 1996, “By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world,” imitating through chastity Christ’s own pure love of the Father and others, through poverty Christ’s own self-emptying to proclaim and obtain the imperishable treasure of the kingdom, and through obedience Christ’s own delight in doing the Father’s will in all things. These prophetic choices constitute a compelling response, respectively, to the hedonism, materialism and autonomous individualism of the modern age that undermine the life of faith and life with others. Through living the evangelical counsels with joy, consecrated men and women, on the other hand, become an abiding reenactment of Christ’s own choices for the kingdom, a powerful affirmation of the primacy of God and eternal life, and a rich manifestation of the path to rediscover the values of fraternal communion that reigned in the apostolic Church.
  - During this year we can resolve to imitate consecrated men and women in their sharing of Christ’s spiritual poverty so that we may make God our true treasure and become rich in his riches.
  - St. John Paul II wrote in 1996 about the addiction caused by a materialism that “craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources.” We don’t own our possessions any more, but they own us. We become obsessed with mammon, or to use Pope Francis’ oft-repeated remarks, we “worship the ancient golden calf” and engage in the “ferocious idolatry of money.” To prove just how addicted our culture is to mammon, we can ponder how full this Butler Center would be today if someone were here giving out a million dollars to everyone who showed. We know it would be standing room only! We see this same addiction in the way people approach Christmas, seeking to show they love each other fundamentally through material possessions. Without question God approves of our generosity to others, but not that we would fundamentally seek to show our generosity through material things rather than by giving ourselves.
  - We know that Jesus came to cure us of this addiction to the things of this world. He was born in a borrow cave, placed in an ancient animal dish for a crib, was redeemed by two turtle doves because Joseph and Mary couldn’t afford a lamb, didn’t have a place to lay his head during public ministry, and was buried in someone else’s grave. But he was at the same time both the happiest man who ever lived and the man richest in what matters most. Consecrated men and women show us through their sharing Christ’s poverty the antidote to the addiction to stuff.
  - The first thing distinctive about the consecrated life is evangelical poverty. Even though he was rich he became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). When he finally began his public ministry he called us all to become rich in his kingdom through poverty in any and every earthly kingdom, telling us in the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” He showed us that life doesn’t consist in possessions but in a life in which one is rich in God.
  - Consecrated men and women seek to unite themselves to Jesus’ poverty so that they may be rich in him and show us all the path to true wealth. Even though many religious brothers and sisters, priests

and virgins, hermits and widows, members of secular institutes and societies of apostolic life could make a fortune in the world, they give it all up to depend on God's providence, and they're for that reason a sign for all of us that the path to happiness, holiness and heaven happens not through addition of stuff but through subtraction, through emptying ourselves so that God becomes more and more our treasure. Each of us is called to go to God the best we have. If we're rich, then we're called to impoverish ourselves and give him our precious gold, frankincense and myrrh. But that's not the gift he really wants. The gift he wishes most from us is to arrive before him with empty hands and give him all that we are. The gift he most desires is the gift of himself, our very lives, so that decreasing so that he might increase he might make us truly rich by his poverty.

- Seventh, this year is meant to renew us in the practice of religious obedience
  - During this Year we can resolve to imitate consecrated men and women in their entering into Christ's obedience to the Father so that we may learn with them how really to listen to the Lord and follow him fully. This is the means by which they wake up the world with regard to true freedom.
  - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," to be right with God, to be keeping their end of the covenant. "They shall be satisfied!" Everyone else in this world will never be satisfied, to sing with Mick Jagger "I can't get no satisfaction!" because they're seeking their happiness in things that can't deliver what their restless hearts are made for, even if they get what they're seeking.
  - St. John Paul II wrote about the challenge that comes "from those notions of freedom that separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to moral norms." People are addicted to playing God, to being in charge, to calling the shots. So many live with a radical autonomy or individualism. If we don't like something that God teaches us, we want to tell him, with a closed fist, that he's wrong.
  - The remedy to this addiction in the consecrated life is by entering into Christ's obedience as the consecrated do. "In an especially vigorous way," St. John Paul II wrote, "this obedience re-proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and, taking this mystery as its point of departure, testifies that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will, and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom. It is precisely this mystery that consecrated persons wish to acknowledge by this particular vow. By obedience they intend to show their awareness of being children of the Father, as a result of which they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps 18:2). Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, remaining in touch with the source of their existence and therefore offering this most consoling message: "The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble" (Ps 118:165).
  - Obedience comes from the Latin word *ob-audire*, which means to listen intensively, to eavesdrop. The Year for Consecrated Life is a call for all of us to tune our whole lives to God's voice and freely to follow what God commands. In Hebrew, the word "to hear" is indistinguishable from the verb "to obey," because for a faithful Jew to hear God's voice was to act on what he said. We're all called to imitate Jesus' listening, to imitate his putting the Father's word, the Father's will, into practice. Jesus entered our world precisely so that he could say to us not simply "Do what I say," but rather, "Come, follow me!" We Christians are meant to be distinguished by our obedience to God. But we have to admit that this virtue runs counter to our age and to every age. We like to be in charge. We like to call the shots. We essentially want to be God rather than to obey God. Jesus comes to teach us that the real way to happiness is through obeying God, that the exercise of authentic freedom is shown in loving God and loving others, not in doing whatever we want, however we want, whenever, to and with whomever we want.
  - There's a lot of talk today in surveys about those who are "spiritual" and those who are "religious," and this really highlights the importance of obedience if we're every going to be on right terms with God. Those who are spiritual are good people who for the most part genuinely believe in God, who try to pray, who try to do good to their neighbors and avoid evil. But, basically, what defines those who are "spiritual" is that basically they worship the Lord the way they think is best, the way they want to, the way that accords with their preferences and their judgments and prejudices. The

difference with a religious person is that a religious person seeks to worship the Lord not according to his or her human whims, but according to what they believe God has revealed as his preferences. If God says, "Love one another as I have loved you," that's what they seek to do. If God says, referring to the Mass, "Do *this* in memory of me," they come. If he sets up a means by which to forgive our sins, that's the means they employ. Jesus came into our world to show us the way to love God with all our mind, heart, soul and strength, and to love our neighbor as he has loved them and that's what the truly religious, helped by God, try to do, in the way that the divine Beloved indicates he wishes us to love.

- Many times we're afraid of obedience. We're afraid that if we really follow God all the way, we'll miss out on so many good things that others receive. St. John Paul II picked this up in his first homily as Pope and it was repeated almost exactly 27 years later by Pope Benedict in his inaugural homily. The latter said, "Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again [Pope John Paul II] said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life." In overcoming our fears in order to say yes to what God is asking, we can learn so much from St. Joseph. He was at first afraid of this great mystery. He didn't feel worthy of it. He only half believed that what Mary was saying could be true. But God sent his angel to appear to him in a dream and say to him, "Don't be afraid, Joseph, to take Mary your wife into your home." When he awoke, St. Matthew tells us, "he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him." St. Joseph's holy obedience is a great thing for all of us to ponder on this Christmas. It's the obedience of consecrated men and women. It's the obedience of Christ. To be united with God-with-us means that we are one with his holy listening to God the Father and his putting the Father's word into practice. This obedience takes nothing away, but leads us to receive everything God wants to give us, a hundred fold in this life and eternal life in the next.
- Eighth, this year is meant to reawaken us to the importance of chastity
  - During this Year we ought to resolve to imitate consecrated men and women in their living out Christ's chastity, in order to learn how to love as Christ loves. This is the path to true love in response to the world's addiction to pleasure.
  - Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Chastity begins with seeing God in others. Then it leads to reverencing Christ. Chastity is tied to purity and piety.
  - St. John Paul II wrote that there is so much selfishness in the world because we're addicted to pleasure, especially to sexual pleasure. He described today's "hedonistic culture that separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good and, with the complicity of the means of social communication, justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The consequences of this are before everyone's eyes: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families."
  - We know well what he's talking about. Our love has been corrupted. Christ told us what real love is on Holy Thursday and acted on it the following day when he said, "No one has any greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" and called us to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12-13). We're made in the image and likeness of God who is love, but in order to grow in that likeness, we need to love like God, and the devil isn't stupid. He knows that to desecrate the image of God we are, the easiest way is to **corrupt our love through sin.** He corrupted the love of Adam and Eve in the beginning. He's sought to corrupt love, sex, marriage and family ever since. Many people now believe that love is just a feeling, sometimes even a lustful feeling; rather than a sacrifice of oneself for the other's true good, it becomes a sacrifice of another for one's own

gratification. Many of us have come to believe that sex is just a contact sport designed for the pleasure of the participants, not something that is supposed to be the joyful expression of a total commitment of life, of a one-flesh union ordained and brought about by God. We believe that marriage no longer is supposed to be holy, that it no longer has any purpose given to it by God, but is just a public sanction of the feelings of adults, even adults of the same sex. And family is no longer a school of love but just an arrangement in which fathers can forsake their responsibility for their pleasure, in which kids can forsake their responsibility as a rite of passage, and in which sometimes even mothers can use families for their own psychological or financial needs.

- That's why the world so much needs the example of the chaste love of those in consecrated life, which shows that God can be loved above all other loves, that God is more important than sexual pleasure, and that one can live happily without giving into the sexual appetites. Since only the pure of heart can see God (Mt 5:8), chastity is essential for us to be able to see God in this world and forever (1 Thes 4:3-4).
- St. John Paul II wrote that chastity is a “witness to the power of God's love manifested in the weakness of the human condition. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord's grace, possible and truly liberating. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God! This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. It is offered to everyone — young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families — in order to show that *the power of God's love can accomplish great things* precisely within the context of human love. ... The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity. Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ. Precisely because they are immersed in this mystery, consecrated persons feel themselves capable of a radical and universal love, which gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline necessary in order not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience. Enlightened by faith in the Risen Lord and by the prospect of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Rev 21:1), it offers a priceless incentive in the task of educating to that chastity which corresponds to other states of life as well.”
- The virtue of chastity that consecrated men and women take is an external witness of Christ's total love for us and at the same time a personal commitment of total love back to God. As Christians, we're called to love God first and above all. Real love is not selfish. It sacrifices oneself for the beloved rather than sacrifices the beloved for oneself. Jesus described real love when he said that no one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). St. Paul called all of us to this love when he said, “Husbands love your wives just like Christ loved the Church and laid down his life to make her holy” (Eph 5:25-26). The chastity of consecrated men and women is an incredible sign of this. Many people are fascinated by the celibate chastity of priests and religious. In a world obsessed about sexuality, they are blown away that someone could give up the great goods of marriage and familial life. But many times people see only the cost; they don't see the gain, that Jesus is the pearl of great price worth selling everything to obtain (Mt 13:46). Every Christian by baptism is called to love Jesus with a preferential love; if he's calling us to serve him as priests and religious, then he'll help us to give up even the great goods of certain types of human love to live totally in his love. The reason why many people find the sacrifice of chastity heroic is because they give God relatively very little. They only give him a little of their time in prayer. They give him only a little of their attention on Sunday. They give him only a little of their money, of their talents, of their life, in exchange for God's giving them everything. To give God everything seems so foreign. But this year for Consecrated Life is a chance for each of us to ponder what gift we really make of ourselves to God and to recommit ourselves to his love. As one of the great Christian hymns says, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, 'twas an offering far too small, for love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.” Jesus comes into the world to save us by this love, to teach us how to love like this, and to help us to love God preferentially, so that in that love we can love others with the

same love with which he loves them. To unite ourselves with God-with-us is to unite ourselves to this type of transformative life.

- Ninth, this year is supposed to renew us in living eschatologically, living for God's kingdom, and serving for others as Eschatological Signs
  - The consecrated are called to wake up the world as eschatological signs with regard to the kingdom of heaven. Consecrated men and women by their life choice for the kingdom of God point us all to heaven. They help us all to live in anticipation of Christ's second coming. St. John Paul II wrote in 1996: "It is particularly opportune to draw attention ... to the *eschatological nature of the consecrated life.* 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Mt 6:21). The unique treasure of the Kingdom gives rise to desire, anticipation, commitment and witness. In the early Church, the expectation of the Lord's coming was lived in a particularly intense way. With the passing of the centuries, the Church has not ceased to foster this attitude of hope: she has continued to invite the faithful to look to the salvation that is waiting to be revealed, 'for the form of this world is passing away' (1 Cor 7:31; cf. 1 Pet 1:3-6). It is in this perspective that we can understand more clearly the role of consecrated life as an *eschatological sign.* In fact it has constantly been taught that the consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom. ... Immersed in the things of the Lord, the consecrated person remembers that 'here we have no lasting city' (Heb 13:14), for 'our commonwealth is in heaven' (Phil 3:20). The one thing necessary is to seek God's 'Kingdom and his righteousness' (Mt 6:33), with unceasing prayer for the Lord's coming." They help us all to long for heaven. Ten Bridesmaids.
  - I think a beautiful illustration of this happened in December with the death of Jesuit Father T.J. Martinez, the President of Cristo Rey High School in Houston, died. He was close to Jesuit author Fr. James Martin, the "chaplain" to the "Colbert Report," who is a Facebook friend of mine. Fr. Martin shared some beautiful reflections on his friendship with Fr. Martinez, who suffered for several years with stomach cancer. Fr. Martin asked him whether he was afraid to die. Fr. Martinez replied, "Well, Jim, I'm a Jesuit, right? And Jesuits are always given a mission. So if my mission from Jesus right now is to be sick, then I accept it. And if my mission is to die, then I accept that mission, too." In his last communication, Fr. Martinez said, "The last six years of my life have been my best assignment ever," he said. "But my next one will be even better." That's authentic consecrated life. That's what it means to be an eschatological sign.
  - All of us are supposed to be in our own lives not those anchoring people to the here and now, to the things of this world, but those who have thrown their anchors beyond the clouds. The consecrated wake us up. They show us how to remain "vigilant and alert," ready to embrace Christ at every moment and in every moment. All of life is an Advent for something more than eye can see. All of life is a Lent awaiting an eternal Easter. It is a time for us to resolve to be more and more like the consecrating in living in the real, real world so that we can become signposts for the world pointing toward the stuff that is eternal.
  - This type of eschatological living must influence our homes. Our families ought to be consecrated to God and live for the kingdom. It's beneficial for us to examine the eschatological nature of the Holy Family. The Holy Family lived for the kingdom. When St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother found Jesus in the Temple after three days of looking for him, Jesus said to them, "Did you not know that I needed to be doing my Father's business?" Jesus was living for the Kingdom of his Father. They doubtless prayed together the words Jesus would teach us all, "Thy kingdom come!" They were not living for this world alone but for the world that would know no end, and they strove toward helping each other reach that same finish line. That work of the Holy Family continues in the family of the Church. Jesus is our Savior who opened wide the gates to paradise. Mary is the gate of heaven. Joseph is the patron of a happy, a good death. They're all striving to help us to live for God, for his Kingdom, for eternity, and to inspire each other to come to that eternal holy family of the saints in the House of the Father. This retreat is an occasion in which we can all ask ourselves whether we're living and genuinely inspiring others to live for God's kingdom or for this world and our own or others' kingdoms. Many times, like nursing moms who aren't ready to wean their children or overprotective parents who don't want their kids to follow their dreams and go to college away from home, we prefer to keep our loved ones — whether they're

one or 101 — with them in this world, in their own comfortable kingdom, rather than let them go to God. They make it hard for people truly to go to God, to live out the fulfillment of consecration. There's another way.

- One of the greatest examples of the eschatological nature of familial consecration I've ever encountered I've seen in the Japanese martyrs. Between 1597-1639, over 35,000 of the 300,000 Japanese Catholics were killed for our faith. Parents prepared children from the earliest ages with a knowledge and love of heaven far greater than fear of death and suffering. Kids learned that when they made the Sign of the Cross, they were expressing their unity with Christ on the Cross and preparing themselves to pick up their crosses and follow him first to death and then to Resurrection. They understood that the Eucharist was not just a liturgical rite, but a true participation in Christ's passion, death and Resurrection. When they prayed the mysteries of the Rosary, they saw that before they could share in the glorious mysteries, they first needed to enter into the sorrowful ones. The preparation extended to practical instruction as well. Mothers trained their kids how to be faithful at the supreme hour. They taught them how to uncover their necks, fold their hands and look to heaven, as well as what to pray when their own hour came. They breast-fed them the stories of the heroic deaths of the apostles, the early Christian martyrs, and the Japanese martyrs before of them, and inspired them to strive for similar greatness. And we see that in action. One mother, Tecla Hashimoto, pregnant with her seventh child, was crucified together with her three year-old daughter, Luisa. A pile of wood at the bottom of their joint cross was set on fire to increase their agony, as her other children were suffering the same fate nearby. "Lord Jesus," she prayed aloud, "receive these children." When her eldest daughter cried out that she could no longer see her on account of the flames engulfing them, Tecla answered joyfully, "Don't worry! In a little while you will see everything clearly." Such accounts of the martyrdom of children are the most moving of all. After watching his father be beheaded, five year-old Peter Hatori ran over to his father's lifeless body, removed his kimono, knelt down, joined his hands in prayer and presented his uncovered neck to the executioners. The Samurai were so stunned by the boy's actions that they misfired on their intended lethal blow, instead cutting through the boy's shoulder and sending him to the ground. Without complaining about what must have been enormous pain, Peter just lifted himself up on his knees and continued praying. He extended his neck once again and was killed, while calling on the names of Jesus and Mary. How did such holy audacity ever become so routine among even the youngest generations of Japanese Catholics? It was because, from the beginning, they lived for the kingdom and knew that they might need to suffer violence to enter into it, just as Jesus had suffered to inaugurate it. Consecrated families truly live this desire for heaven.

• Tenth, this year is supposed to renew us in joy

- But perhaps the area on which the consecrated are urgently called to wake up the world most is with regard to living and spreading the faith **with joy, attracting** people to embrace the Gospel, going outside of our comfort zones to share the **gift** of the faith with others. Pope Francis stressed in his letter to the consecrated, "**The old saying will always be true: 'Where there are religious, there is joy.'** We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that the authentic fraternity found in our communities increases our joy; and that our total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfillment."
- Pope Francis said in that Nov. 29 letter that this Year for Consecrated Life is not just supposed to be for contemplative monks and cloistered nuns, for religious brothers and sisters for members of secular institutes or societies of apostolic life, for consecrated virgins, hermits, consecrated widows and widowers and other newer expressions of consecration that the Holy Spirit has inspired. Rather, the Holy Father called on all the faithful, "to live this Year for Consecrated Life as a grace" because, he emphasized, it "concerns not only consecrated persons, but the entire Church." **Ultimately, by our following the example of consecrated persons, Pope Francis wants to be able to say, "Where there are Christians there is joy."**
- Since his election, Pope Francis has been focused on joy. His apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" sought to help the whole Church to live and proclaim better the "Good News," because

he said often we live the faith as if it were “bad news,” as if we were constantly returning from a funeral, as if every day were Good Friday. And he says that one way we’re supposed to see the Good News and experience the joy of the faith is in consecrated men and women.

- We are called to announce what we do at the Christmas Midnight Mass when the whole Church throughout the world is supposed to burst out with the hymn “Joy to the World!” not just with choirs and organs but with men and women, boys and girls. We’re supposed to become what we proclaim on Easter in the “Exsulset,” our exultation at Christ’s resurrection, that the strife is over, the battle done, now is victor’s triumph one.” We’re supposed to heed St. Paul’s words, to rejoice always, render constant thanks: this is Christ’s will for us in Christ Jesus.” Consecrated men and women show us the source of joy in the love of God and love of others. It’s an example we ought all to seek to imitate.
- Conclusion
  - Ten ways the consecrated wake up the world and ten ways we’re all called to do so:
    - Consecrated total belonging to God, so that we can receive all the graces of his total consecration for us
    - Searching for God, because the one who seeks finds, the one who hungers will be filled.
    - Prayer, because prayer is faith in action, it shows that God exists, is worth our time, and sustains us in everything. We’re called to be experts in prayer.
    - Communion, modeled on the Trinity, modeled on the Holy Family, modeled on the Church, fulfilling Christ’s prayer in the upper room, and becoming the attractive source that can bring others to know that Christ is God’s son and loves us like he loves Christ.
    - Charity, as we becoming living icons of Christ the Good Samaritan, loving others as he has loved us first, and becoming ultimately people for others.
    - Poverty, so that we might really place of faith, hope and love in God rather than in mammon, come to live for the kingdom by selling everything else for the pearl of great price, experience true wealth and learn how to let go to all the clutter that will prevent our squeezing through the eye of the needle
    - Obedience, so that we may attune ourselves to God’s voice, find true freedom in communion with the God who gave us that gift, let our whole life develop according to God’s word, find our food in doing the Father’s will, and gain the self-mastery to follow Christ along the path of the Covenant all the way home to the Father’s embrace.
    - Chastity so that we may experience true love for God and others by keeping our love pure and pious, seeing God in others and reverencing them, and learning how to make a gift of ourselves unselfishly so that we may experience the truth that there is so much more joy in giving than receiving, in loving like Christ loves.
    - In eschatological living, seeking first the kingdom of God and his holiness confident that everything else will be given us besides and making our whole life a commentary on the words “Thy kingdom come!”
    - Finally, joy, which is the characteristic mark of the people who live conscious that Jesus Christ has entered our world, walks by us side by side, risen from the dead, triumphed over evil, and wants to give us the greatest gift ever, himself.
  - This is what all of us can learn from this year of consecrated life and we thank our consecrated brothers and sisters for their becoming our professors and icons in this school of Jesus the poor, chaste and obedient Master!. Together with them, with Pope Francis, and with the whole Church, let’s respond to God’s graces to wake up the world!