



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
24th WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

**EUCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE
INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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“My eyes have seen your salvation” (*Lk* 2:30). These are the words of Simeon, whom the Gospel presents as a simple man: “righteous and devout”, says the text (v. 25). But among all at the temple that day, he alone saw Jesus as the Saviour. What did he see? A child: a small, vulnerable, simple child. But in him he saw salvation, for the Holy Spirit allowed him to recognize in that tender newborn “the Lord’s Christ” (v. 26). Taking him in his arms, he sensed by faith that in him God was bringing his promises to fulfilment. And that he, Simeon, could now go in peace: he had seen the grace that was worth more than life (cf. *Ps* 63:4), and there was nothing further to wait for.

You too, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, you are simple men and women who caught sight of the treasure worth more than any worldly good. And so you left behind precious things, such as possessions, such as making a family for yourselves. Why did you do this? Because you fell in love with Jesus, you saw everything in him, and enraptured by his gaze, you left the rest behind. Religious life is this *vision*. It means seeing what really matters in life. It means welcoming the Lord’s gift with open arms, as Simeon did. This is what the eyes of consecrated men and women behold: the grace of God poured into their hands. The consecrated person is one who every day

looks at himself or herself and says: “Everything is gift, all is grace”. Dear brothers and sisters, we did not deserve religious life; it is a gift of love that we have received.

My eyes have seen your salvation. These are the words we repeat each evening at Night Prayer. With them, we bring our day to an end, saying: “Lord, *my* salvation comes from *you*, my hands are not empty, but are full of your grace”. *Knowing how to see grace* is the starting point. Looking back, rereading one’s own history and seeing there God’s faithful gift: not only in life’s grand moments, but also in our fragility and weakness, in our insignificance. The tempter, the devil focuses on our “poverty”, our empty hands: “In all these years you haven’t got any better, you haven’t achieved what you could have, they haven’t let you do what you were meant to do, you haven’t always been faithful, you are not capable...”and so on. Each of us knows this story and these words very well. We see this is true in part, and so we go back to thoughts and feelings that disorient us. Thus we risk losing our bearings, the gratuitous love of God. For God loves us always, and gives himself to us, even in our poverty. Saint Jerome offered much to the Lord and the Lord asked for more. He said to the Lord: “But Lord, I have given you everything, everything, what else is lacking?” “Your sins, your poverty, offer me your poverty”. When we keep our gaze fixed on him, we open ourselves to his forgiveness that renews us, and we are reassured by his faithfulness. We can ask ourselves today: “To whom do I turn my gaze: to the Lord, or to myself?” Whoever experiences God’s grace above all else can discover the antidote to distrust and to looking at things in a worldly way.

There is a temptation that looms over religious life: seeing things in a worldly way. This entails no longer seeing God’s grace as the driving force in life, then going off in search of something to substitute for it: a bit of fame, a consoling affection, finally getting to do what I want. But when a consecrated life no longer revolves around God’s grace, it turns in upon itself. It loses its passion, it grows slack, becomes stagnant. And we know what happens then: we start to demand our own space, our own rights, we let ourselves get dragged into gossip and slander, we take offence at every small thing that does not go our way, and we pour forth litanies of lamentation – lamentation, “Father Lamentation”, “Sister Lamentation” – about our brothers, our sisters, our communities, the Church, society. We no longer see the Lord in everything, but only the dynamics of the world, and our hearts grow numb. Then we become creatures of habit, pragmatic, while inside us sadness and distrust grow, that turn into resignation. This is what a worldly gaze leads to. The Great Saint Teresa once said to the sisters: “woe to the sister who repeats these words, ‘they have treated me unjustly’, woe to her!”

To have the right kind of view on life, we ask to be able to perceive God’s grace for us, like Simeon. The Gospel says three times that he was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, who was upon him, inspired him, roused him (cf. v. 25-27). He was intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, with the love of God. If consecrated life remains steadfast in love for the Lord, it perceives beauty. It sees that poverty is not some colossal effort, but rather a higher freedom that God gives to us and others as real wealth. It sees that chastity is not austere sterility, but the way to love

without possessing. It sees that obedience is not a discipline, but is victory over our own chaos, in the way of Jesus. In one of the regions affected by earthquake in Italy – speaking of poverty and community life – there was a Benedictine monastery that was destroyed and another monastery that invited the Sisters to come and stay with them. But they were only there for a short while: they were not happy, they were thinking about their monastery, about the people there. In the end, they decided to go back to their monastery, which is now two caravans. Instead of staying in this big, comfortable monastery; they were like flies there, all of them together, but happy in their poverty. This happened just last year. It is a beautiful thing!

My eyes have seen your salvation. Simeon sees Jesus as small, humble, the one who has come to serve, not to be served, and defines himself as *servant*. Indeed he says: “Lord, now let your *servant* depart in peace” (v. 29). Those who see things as Jesus does, learn how to live in order to serve. They do not wait for others to take the initiative, but themselves go out in search of their neighbour, as did Simeon who sought out Jesus in the temple. Where is one’s neighbour to be found in the consecrated life? This is the question: Where is one’s neighbour to be found? First of all in one’s own community. The grace must be sought *to know how to seek out Jesus in the brothers and sisters* we have been given. And that is precisely where we can begin to put charity into practice: in the place where you live, by welcoming brothers and sisters in their poverty, as Simeon welcomed Jesus meek and poor. Today, so many see in other people only hindrances and complications. We need to have a gaze that seeks out our neighbour, that brings those who are far-off closer. Men and women religious, who live to imitate Jesus, are called to bring their own gaze into the world, a gaze of compassion, a gaze that goes in search of those far-off; a gaze that does not condemn, but encourages, frees, consoles; a gaze of compassion. That repeated phrase in the Gospel, which, speaking about Jesus, says: “He had compassion”. This is the stooping down of Jesus towards each one of us.

My eyes have seen your salvation. The eyes of Simeon saw salvation because they were expecting it (cf. v. 25). They were eyes that were waiting, full of hope. They were looking for the light and then saw the light of the nations (cf. v. 32). They were aged eyes, but burning with hope. The gaze of consecrated men and women can only be one of hope. *Knowing how to hope.* Looking around, it is easy to lose hope: things that don’t work, the decline in vocations... There is always the temptation to have a worldly gaze, one devoid of hope. But let us look to the Gospel and see Simeon and Anna: they were elderly, alone, yet they had not lost hope, because they remained in communion with the Lord. Anna “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (v. 37). Here is the secret: never to alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope. We become blind if we do not look to the Lord every day, if we do not adore him. To adore the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to *see grace*, how to *look for one’s neighbour*, how to *hope*. Then our eyes too will see salvation.

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