

## THE BLESSINGS OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Consecrated life is a charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Like every spiritual gift, consecrated life is given, as St. Paul tells us, “for some benefit” (1 Cor. 12:7). A “benefit” shared by all charisms is the building up of the Body of Christ. In addition, every spiritual gift has its own specific “benefit.” What is the purpose of the charism of consecrated life?

If we consider the history of the Church and of consecrated life, it is not an exaggeration to say that consecrated life is meant to enable the Church *to be Church*, that is, according to the mission entrusted to it, to grow to the fullness intended for all things created, to “sum up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). At the same time, consecrated life exists *in* and *because of* the Church. One is necessary to the other, although many forms of life similar to consecrated life exist both within the Church and beyond it, even beyond Christianity.

In a unique way, the “benefit” of consecrated life for the Body of Christ enables the Church to be a community of faith and love, of worship and service. This is so because consecrated life calls its members to witness to a life of faith, to Gospel love, to dedicated worship of God in, with and through Christ. Finally, consecrated life calls its members to live as a community marked by services that have existed from its beginning, along with new responses to the “cry of the poor,”

which has taken unprecedented forms in this, as in every, age.

By their personal and community prayer, women and men called to consecrated life inspire and encourage the Church to be a community of faith. Through spiritual companioning, retreats and other programs, consecrated religious lead the laity to deepen their faith and discover the graces of a life centered on and sustained by God.

Women and men called to consecrated life are able to open the eyes of their lay sisters and brothers to the value of those persons considered unlovable or worthless by the world, and to reach out to embrace all people in hearts blessed by self-giving devotedness in a community of Gospel love.

As a leaven at the heart of the world, consecrated religious become the voice of all created beings, visible and invisible, inviting the Church as a community of praise to sing the glory of a gracious God who is Creator and Redeemer, the giver of “every perfect gift” (James 1:17) and ever-faithful, merciful Father.

Consecrated life is not the only source of services available to the poor and the needy, the abandoned and oppressed of our world. Services assured by members of the consecrated life, however, flow from a life inspired and sustained by the Gospel. They continue the mission of Jesus and are transformed by the Holy Spirit into ministries that are, in their turn, so many more spiritual gifts poured out on the Church. Thus, consecrated life inspires the Church to be a community of spiritual services.

Perhaps, today, more than ever before, consecrated life is at the cutting edge of discerning new ways to call all members of the Church to be a community of faith and love, of worship and service. New forms of oppression, exploitation and occasions of “man’s inhumanity

to man” meet us on every side.

Consecrated women and men need the collaboration and assistance of their lay brothers and sisters in action for justice and peace. Lay members of the Body of Christ are encouraged to look to consecrated religious for guidance, affirmation and unity in their efforts to give renewed life in our times to the beautiful doctrine of the communion of saints.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is not a building or a movement. It consists of women and men, laity and consecrated religious, who seek and strive together to bring the kingdom of God among us. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think of consecrated life as a better way to live the Gospel more perfectly. Our faith teaches us that, through baptism, every member of the Church is “consecrated” in a unique way through sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ. Consecrated life and the life of the laity are necessary, one to the other. Each has been given a particular gift from God (1 Cor 7:7). Together, they share in the mission of the Church and contribute together to the coming of the kingdom of God on earth.

As we celebrate the charism of consecrated life in the coming year, let us pray that all members of the Church – clergy, consecrated and laity – grow together, with Christ and his

Mother, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God the Father.



The Year of Consecrated Life was announced earlier this year by Pope Francis. It began on Nov. 30 and will end on Feb. 2, 2016, the World Day of Consecrated Life. In the months ahead, the magazine will include stories on men and women religious as a way to celebrate the year.

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