

YEAR FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

The Joy that the Holy Spirit Gives Us!

“I want to say one word to you and this word is *joy*.” These are the words [spoken by Pope Francis](#) when, in July of 2013, he set aside his prepared speech to speak *cor ad cor* (heart to heart) with those preparing for priesthood, religious life and others in the process of discerning their vocations. As the young people responded with applause, the Holy Father continued, “Wherever there are consecrated people—seminarians, women and men religious, young people—there is joy, there is always joy! It is the joy of freshness; it’s the joy of following Jesus; the joy that the Holy Spirit gives us!”

I would like to clarify what I think Pope Francis has in mind for the Year of Consecrated Life. The central point for the Holy Father’s intentions is contained in the word “joy.” What does this joy look like in the lives of consecrated men and women? What is the source of this joy? In what ways might this joy be placed in our minds and hearts throughout the Year of Consecrated Life?

In my role with the Clerics of St. Viator, I witness instances of the joy of consecrated life on a regular basis. I see the joy of a religious brother sharing a meal with undocumented women and men, the joy of a religious priest engaging young people in conversation over pizza and the joy of the community gathering to celebrate the Eucharist. The joy I witness is attractive. It is a joy that calls out through laughter, expressions of ongoing concern for these individuals, their families and their hopes and difficulties. The attractiveness that they radiate is a joy, a way of being and interacting with others that draws people into a deeper relationship.

Religious people are joy-filled people and this joy is contagious. The reason why this is so can be found in the words—spoken heart to heart—by Pope Francis:

Some will say: joy is born from possessions, so they go in quest of the latest model of the smartphone, the fastest scooter, the showy car.... We know that all this can satisfy some desires or create some emotions, but in the end it is a joy that stays on the surface, it does not sink to the depths, it is not an intimate joy.

Considering the daily accounts of sadness and dissatisfaction that afflicts most people living in affluent societies, we are well aware that the life of consumption is unable to satisfy our human longing. If consuming more and more objects is unable to produce joy, what are we missing?

Pope Francis responds:

True joy does not come from things or from possessing, no! ... Joy is born from the gratuitousness of an encounter! It is hearing someone say, but not necessarily with words: ‘You are important to me.’ This is beautiful.... And it is these very words that God makes us understand. In calling you God says to you: ‘You are important to me, I love you, I am counting on you.’ Jesus says this to each one of us! Joy is born from that, the joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me.

Understanding and hearing this is the secret of our joy. Feeling loved by God, feeling that for him we are not numbers but people; and hearing him calling us.

Joy, in short, is discovered through union with Jesus. True joy is discovered as we accept God's grace being poured out through the life of Jesus Christ. True joy is discovered as we learn to depend on the leading of the Holy Spirit and learn to experience God's grace in all areas of our lives.

The fruits of this encounter are evident as the Holy Spirit impels us to move out to share this joy. Pope Francis continues:

Good spreads. And joy also spreads. Do not be afraid to show the joy of having answered the Lord's call, of having responded to his choice of love and of bearing witness to his Gospel in service to the Church. And joy, true joy, is contagious; it is infectious... it impels one forward.

He adds:

I would like to tell you: Come out of yourselves to proclaim the Gospel, but to do this you must come out of yourselves to encounter Jesus. There are two ways out: one towards the encounter with Jesus, towards transcendence; the other towards others in order to proclaim Jesus. These two go hand in hand... Be both contemplatives and missionaries.

This is, for Pope Francis, the path of joy: encountering God's love in Jesus and proclaiming the Good News to our families, our neighbors and everyone we meet. Throughout their lives, consecrated people, cloistered or missionary, contemplative or active, help all Christians in orientating our lives in this direction. In calling on the Church to recognize and celebrate Consecrated Life, Pope Francis' call extends—heart to heart—to all the Church: “On we go, with joy, with consistence, always with the courage to tell the truth, the courage to step out of ourselves to meet Jesus in prayer and to step out of ourselves to encounter others and give the Gospel to them.”

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