



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Opening of Year of Consecrated Life November 30, 2014

Today, we begin a new liturgical year and also mark the opening of the Year for Consecrated Life in communion with our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and Catholic communities of faith throughout the world. Advent is a very special time to renew our trust in the Lord's faithfulness to us, a season of increased awareness of the great need to wait actively and expectantly for the Lord's coming.

My dear sisters and brothers in consecrated life – men and women religious – I make St. Paul's words to the Corinthians my own:

I continually thank my God for you because of the favor he has bestowed on you in Christ Jesus. He will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of this entire Archdiocese and in my own name, I thank God for each of you – for your dedication, your commitment, your service to God's people within the Church and in the world.

We also pray in the words of the book of Isaiah: "O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter; we are all the work

of your hands." This very beautiful image of clay in a loving potter's hand is an apt expression for the Lord's care for us, his people. This implies of course, that we are not yet finished products! God is still shaping each of our lives to bring them into conformity with the gospel message, to bring us into deeper encounter and intimacy with God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we look at the world in which we live – marked by so much violence, hatred, greed – we also pray to God with the prophet: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!" There is an urgency to our prayer and it finds echoes in today's gospel about remaining alert for the coming of the Lord, for the full establishment of God's kingdom of mercy, justice, peace, harmony, and unity.

Jesus' words today are very striking. His purpose is to strengthen our discipleship today! Not to focus only on the future – or the past! The gospel message

sustains us in whatever difficulties we face. It motivates us to proclaim the message of God's love, mercy, and compassion to all whom we encounter. It gives special meaning to the little things we do in our daily lives – as long as we keep our focus on the Lord Jesus and his gospel.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has issued a letter to women and men religious – a message based on the teachings of Pope Francis. I urge you to read it and to reflect upon it in your individual lives and communities. The letter has three parts: (1) joy and gladness, (2) comfort of God's people, and (3) questions for our reflection.

Quoting the Holy Father's Apostolic Exhortation, the letter opens with "the joy of the gospel fills the heart and lives of all who encounter Jesus. With Jesus Christ joy is constantly born anew" (*E.G.*, 1). The Holy Father says that evangelical radicalness – rooting our lives in the gospel – is demanded of all of us, not only consecrated women and men. "But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way...Religious should be men and women able to wake the world up." If we are full of the joy of the gospel, we will become "splendid witnesses, effective proclaimers, companions and neighbors for the women and men with whom [we] share a common history and who want to find their Father's house in the Church."

The second section of the letter from the Congregation points out that "the men and women of our time are waiting for words of consolation, the availability of forgiveness and true joy. We are called to bring to everyone the embrace of God, who bends with a mother's tenderness over us – consecrated women and men, signs of the fullness of humanity, facilitators and not controllers of grace, stooped down in a gesture of consolation."

The third section of the letter includes such questions for reflection as:

- God awaits you, he seeks you; how do you respond to him? Are you aware of the situation of your soul? Or have you nodded off? (Awake!)
- Do I retain the force of restlessness for God, for his Word that makes me "step out" of myself towards others?
- Do we know how to wait for God's tomorrow? Or do we want it today?
- An authentic faith always involves a profound desire to change the world. . . Do we have great vision and impetus? Are we also daring? Do our dreams fly high? Does zeal consume us? Or are we mediocre and satisfied with our [uncreative, one-size-fits-all] apostolic programs?

This special Year of Consecrated Life is both a time for gratitude for the gift of religious life and also a time of recommitment of us women and men religious to our vocation, our mission, our ministry, our witness, our service. It is not enough to call God to rend the heavens and come down! God needs our hands and feet, our minds and hearts, our attitudes and gifts to establish more fully his kingdom on earth. Jesus calls us as disciples even though we are not yet fully formed or living in full compliance with the gospel. God the loving potter is at work in our lives, shaping

us. Let us allow him to shape us into something authentic, good, and beautiful for the sake of the gospel.

Let us draw near to Our Lady, the Mother of the Church. “Rejoice, full of grace” – the greeting of the angel to Mary is an invitation to a deep joy, announcing the end of sadness. She is the servant of the Lord who throws open the doors of her heart, carries in her womb the God of joy, and runs enthusiastically to help Elizabeth and all in need. She stands in steadfast faith at the foot of the Cross in union with the suffering people of the world – the New Eve who always says YES to God!