



Archdiocese of San Antonio  
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## Homily for Celebration of Consecrated Life February 9, 2014

Last Sunday, speaking before the Angelus in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "What would happen if there were no nuns? No nuns in hospitals, in missions, in charitable institutions, in schools... Can you even imagine a Church without nuns...? No, it is unthinkable!"

I agree. I would also add that it is unthinkable to imagine a Church without women **or men** in consecrated life! As you can see, we have a Pope who understands consecrated life – and you have an Archbishop who also knows it intimately! A Jesuit. A Missionary of the Holy Spirit.

But our celebration today is much more than a Super Bowl of religious life. It is a call to constant conversion, commitment, consecration! The Holy Father has announced that next year, 2015, will be an entire Year for Consecrated Life.

Last Sunday, the Holy Father celebrated the 18<sup>th</sup> World Day for Consecrated Life on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem, an ancient feast sometimes known as the Feast of the Meeting or the Feast of the Encounter. In his homily the Holy Father emphasized the meeting of the Old Testament with the New Testament – Simeon and Anna meeting Mary and Joseph and the Child Jesus . It is also a meeting between the young and the old -- a "meeting between young people who are full of joy in observing the Law of the Lord, and the elderly who are filled with joy for the action of the Holy Spirit." Pope Francis added that it is "a unique encounter between observance and prophecy, where young people are the observers and the elderly are prophetic."

The Holy Father then invites us to look upon consecrated life “as an encounter with Christ: it is he who comes to us, led by Mary and Joseph, and we go towards Him guided by the Holy Spirit.” But Jesus is the center. “He moves everything, he draws us to the Temple, to the Church, where we can meet him, recognize him, welcome him, embrace him.” The Lord comes to us in the Church through the foundational charism of our institute, of our founder and/or foundress.

The Pope points out that “in the consecrated life we live the encounter between the young and the old, between observation and prophecy.” “Let’s not see these,” he quickly added, “as two opposing realities! It is good for the elderly to communicate their wisdom to the young; and it is good for the young people to gather this wealth of experience and wisdom, and to carry it forward, not so as to store it in a museum, but to bring it forward addressing the challenges of life!”

So, look around you. We are old and young and a few “in between.” Yes, there are more older religious but that means more wisdom is gathered here. And the young religious and aspirants/novices make up for the fewer numbers by their youth and enthusiasm for consecrated life – and their creativity in addressing the challenges of today’s world. Yes, my dear sisters and brothers, we are mightily blessed.

Consider the reading from the Book of Genesis that we just heard. When we are first introduced to Abraham and Sarah, they are elderly and barren. They were not able to have children and approach the end of their lives without anyone to support them – no children, no grandchildren. They are unproductive, infertile, seemingly without a future.

But then God enters their life. He makes a threefold promise to them: “Go forth from the land of your kinfolk to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.” The promised land. A great nation. A blessing for all the communities of the earth – which were scattered after the Tower of Babel and their languages scrambled! Some scholars call these verses the “Gospel Beforehand.” The rest of the Scriptures recount how God has fulfilled these promises – for example, with the birth of the Messiah, the death and

resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Pentecost (when people heard in their own language what the Galilean disciples were saying) – the Holy Spirit sent by the heavenly Father on the disciples of his Beloved Son.

Nothing is impossible with God! Nothing! It is impossible to imagine the Church without the risen Lord, without the love and mercy of the Father, without the energy and guidance of the Holy Spirit – and without consecrated women and men. God is with us at this very moment and at every moment of our lives. That is what we witness in our lives – a witness we share with others. God has blessed us, called us to walk in his ways, called us to be a great community dedicated to God, a people who live to serve others – and thereby be a blessing to all the nations – all the communities – of the earth – like Abraham and Sarah, like Anna and Simeon, like Mary and Joseph – like our foundresses and founders and those who have gone before us in our religious communities.

At a unique moment in the history of this American continent God intervened through the Virgin Mary – Our Lady of Guadalupe -- to open up the possibilities for the eventual unity of all peoples. Our Lady is at one with all people, she is the Mother of us all. She promises to be with us, her people, telling us not to fear the darkness, the violence, the hatred that is so much a part of our world. She is the protector and liberator of the poor, the downtrodden, the neglected, the detained and deported, and especially the children.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, *la Morenita*, teach us, by her image and her example, true Christian witness and authentic discipleship! It is impossible to think of the Church without Our Lady!