

Joy, the Beauty of Consecration: Towards Reawakening the Joy and Enhancing the Beauty of Consecrated Life Today

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Introduction

The concept of beauty is connected to words like, attraction, seduction, rapture, fascination etc. Beauty attracts one to the object/person and when one feels attracted to the object/person, one desire to get closer and stay with the object/person, or to possess ‘the beautiful object/person’. We know how Eve was drawn to the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden which was good for food and delight to the eye (Gen 3: 6). We have evidences of how King David was seduced by the beauty of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11: 2) and how the beauty of the Susanna attracted the two elders (Dan 13: 1-14). Moses was drawn to the great sight of the burning bush (Ex 3: 3) and the three disciples were fascinated by the transfigured face of Jesus on the high mountain (Tabor) and desired to pitch three tents there. (Lk 9: 28-35).

The concept of ‘beauty’ is to be seen as something that attracts or draws the subject to that which is perceived as “beautiful”. At the start of the year of consecrated life, Pope Francis drew our attention to consecrated life and said ‘joy’ is the ‘beauty of consecration.’ How can we understand joy as ‘the beauty of consecration’ when we see many shadows in consecrated life today? There is no doubt that consecrated life in many parts of the world is going through a crisis because of the lack of vocation, and a loss of fire and zest. Many of us wonder as to ‘why’ the young people of today not feel so attracted to consecrated life? Do they not see any beauty in it? Is there still any attracting element in it? Is joy of consecration perceivable to the young? Or are there failures in witnessing to the joy, the beauty of consecration from the part of those living it for years?

All of us are aware of the great fall in the number of vocations to consecrated life in the Church, especially in the first world countries and in places which enjoyed the favour of being seed beds of missionary vocations in the past. This paper attempts to give an understanding of consecrated life and stresses the need to experience the joy of being called and loved by God and also to experience “the joy of bringing God’s consolation to all.” (Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, *Rejoice*, 3).

1. Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice: (Ps: 103:5)

The word of God presents joy as the fruit of a ‘seeking’ which leads to an encounter. Yes, the hearts of those who seek the Lord experiences joy and they rejoice. It is when one finds the Lord that one experiences joy and radiates beauty which in turn attracts others to taste the love, goodness and mercy of the Lord. Therefore without entering into sophisticated theological or dogmatic enquiries on consecrated life, I would like to first of all look at consecration from the perspective of three important and interconnected words: seeking, finding and sharing.

1.1. Consecrated life and the dynamism of a twofold seeking

Consecrated life bears within it the mystery of a twofold seeking process. On the one hand there is a personal God who gets totally involved in the lives of those whom he has called to a new and everlasting covenant, constantly seeking to encounter them, while on the other hand there is the human

person in constant quest for the Ultimate Good, namely God. Vocation to consecrated life is one of the primary meeting points of this mutual seeking. It is a point of convergence between God's seeking for us and our seeking for God. The dynamism of this mutual seeking continues till the end of one's life, for it is in death that the union is complete and our hearts are finally at rest in Him for whom we were created. The Holy Father Pope Francis reminds us of a great truth with regard to this quest for God in human hearts in the following words: "Yes, in this quest to seek and find God in all things there is still an area of uncertainty. There must be. If a person says that he met God with total certainty and is not touched by a margin of uncertainty, then this is not good. For me, this is an important key. If one has the answer to all the questions—that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble. There is uncertainty in every true discernment that is open to finding confirmation in spiritual consolation." (Pope Francis).

Having been trained by the experiences of life over the years, the Holy Father insists on 'humility' which makes us trust little in our human certainties and trust more in God who alone has the power to transform our uncertainties into certainties with his love. Here we can recall what happened to the enthusiastic certainty of Peter who vehemently proclaimed "though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you" (Mt 26: 33). His certainty failed before the servant girl who said to him: "You also were with Jesus the Galilean" (Mt 26: 69) He denied it downright saying: "I do not know what you are talking about" (Mt 26: 69). The certainty of Peter had a great fall which gave way to humility and trust in His master who sought to meet him and heal the wound of his denial when he asked him by the sea of Tiberias "Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you, Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs". A second time he said to him, "Simon Son of John do you love me? He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him the third time, "Do you love me? And he said to him, "Lord you know everything, you know that I love you." (Jh 21: 15-19). In this experience of Peter we see the change of stress from human certainty to true humility and total trust in God: 'I will never desert you', to 'you know everything'. The focus is changed from 'self-centered certainty' to a 'total confidence in God and surrender to his love'.

The Holy Father Pope Francis warns us of the danger of limiting God to our measure and he puts forward the correct attitude that we need to assume in our search for God: "the correct attitude is that of St. Augustine: seek God to find him, and find God to keep searching for God forever ... Our life is not given to us like an opera libretto (an opera booklet), in which all is written down; but it means going, walking, doing, searching, seeing.... We must enter into the adventure of the quest for meeting God; we must let God search and encounter us." (Pope Francis)

Our vocation to consecrated life certainly is the best venue for this adventure and when we are fully into this adventure there will surely be joy and beauty in our consecration. Therefore the first challenge before us is to be totally aware of the primacy of God in our lives, for it is the primacy of God that gives full meaning and joy to human lives, because men and women are made for God, and their hearts are restless until they rest in Him. (Cfr. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 27, see also *Rejoice*, 1). "Religious life/consecrated life is organized around the single-minded God-quest, the affective concentration of the whole of one's life on the "one thing necessary" which is union with God". (Sandra M. Schneiders, *Religious life in a new millennium, finding the treasure*, New Jersey: Pauline Publications, 2008)

1.2. Consecrated life and the joy of ‘mutual finding’

The mystery of God and the mystery of the human person in constant dialogue with God, fascinate every thinking mind. It is this fascination that enables the human heart to seek God to find Him, and find God to keep searching for Him. It is a mutual searching and finding. God searches for the human person like the woman who sought after the lost coin (Lk 15: 8-10), like the shepherd looking for the lost sheep (Lk 15: 1-7) and when found, he rejoices for having found the lost. Man searches for love, meaning and fulfillment at times in wrong places and in a disguised manner like the Samaritan woman (Jh 4). But there is greater joy when God finds the lost person or the person in search of life and happiness. When man learns to find God in the daily events of life with the eyes of faith, and lives the mysticism of everyday life, he experiences ecstatic joy and fullness of life. Yes, the main tasks of religious life today are to be mystics and prophets and the call to be mystics and prophets is an essential element of consecrated life.

Mysticism is a spirituality that surrenders completely and explicitly to the Divine and to the work of God who is love. God loves by creating and creates by loving. Mystics surrender to this *opus dei*, this work of God, the divine project. They surrender their own lives to the work of God’s creative love... Religious life is deliberately and explicitly oriented to nurturing and fostering this life of the spirit through prayer, spirituality, vows, community, and mission. Each of this dimension contributes to making the life what it is, a life that always points beyond itself, just as the human spirit always points beyond itself. Religious life has a fundamental orientation to prayer and attention to the sacred. Spirituality is attending to the sacred and understanding its dynamics; it is articulating and sharing the experiences of the sacred. (Amy Hereford, *Religious life at the cross roads*, Bangalore, Theological publications of India, 2014) 189-190.

It is important to note that our God is not merely confined to shrines or tied to set times of formal prayer. He is found everywhere, particularly in his word, in spirit and in truth, and when we discover this truth we are set free by this same truth. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (Jh 8: 31-32). The consecrated person, who keeps this search for God, finds him everywhere for he lives, moves, and has his being in God, totally infused by the presence of God and thus he is a mystic.

It is essential to bear in mind that we seek God because he first sought us. This is always the right order. We seek the Lord and his strength, which is another way of saying that “salvation is from the Lord” (Ps 3:8) we do not seek the Lord in the power of our strength, but by trusting in the power of his might.

Consecrated life is one of the best places where one can deeply experience the joy of being sought and found by God, and the pleasure and pain of seeking and finding Him. For the Lord tells us that he will reveal himself to the one who seeks him with a sincere heart. Consecrated persons are called to be sincere seekers of God round the clock. During this year of consecrated life it is good to ask ourselves this question whom do I seek or what do my heart seeks from dawn to dusk? Is God my priority in my relentless and restless searching process? Have I found him and do I continue my onward searching? Or Am I complacent and stagnant? Or have I deviated my searching and mistaken the finding? These are some of the questions that we as individuals and as congregations could ask ourselves daily.

1.3. Consecrated life, a call to share the treasure found

Consecrated persons are those who having found the treasure of their lives commit themselves with single-minded devotion to possess this treasure, and who have sold everything to hold this treasure as their own. Once having found the treasure and having been found by this treasure (Jesus), they give themselves unreservedly to share this treasure with others. This is the mission of all the baptized and especially of those who commit themselves to a closer following of Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsils of chastity, poverty and obedience. The joy of finding the treasure and possessing it and being possessed by it is so contagious that it makes them bubble with enthusiasm to share it with others. This enthusiastic and experienced based sharing of the treasure found is precisely what we call evangelization. Preaching of God's word without a personal encounter with the 'word incarnate' will end up in a mere practice of rhetoric. For the Holy Father rightly tells about it in the following words:

It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it and not the same to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to do so. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. (Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n.266 as quoted in *Rejoice*, 5)

This is possible when we are conscious of having the treasure and value it on a daily basis. It is essential to maintain the newness and vitality of our encounter with the person of Christ and it is possible only by an ongoing renewal of our commitment to Him. Yes, we need to sing a new song to Him every day and guard against the temptation to succumb to the monotony of habituation, and be liberated from "our narrowness and self-absorption" (*Rejoice*, 6)

Having been gripped by the love of God and immersed in the divine love, the treasure of our life, we live the mysticism of ordinary lives and move out as prophets, surrendering ourselves to the project of God within our own lives and in the world around us. Captured by the heart of the Divine, we are totally captured by the loving God who goes out in love and gentleness, healing and tenderness to everyone and everything that exists. Surrendering ourselves to the divine projects also means that the gospel becomes our own story, and we tell it not as the words of an ancient itinerant prophet, but as a story about divine love that resonates in our own hearts and thus we feel within an impelling need to tell this story of love to the whole world and the words of St. Paul become our own deepest truth "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel" (1 Cor 9: 16).

When all of us and every single consecrated person live in this manner there will surely be joy in the deepest level of our lives and it will surely be reflected in everything we are and in everything, and when joy is there, there is beauty and it will attract many more young people to form part of the band of disciples, the pay heed to the loving invitation of the master, to be captivated by His capturing look and gentle invitation "come and see".

At this juncture it is essential to bear in mind that true joy is the gift of the Holy Spirit and only true joy adds beauty to our consecration. Fading joys that come from the so called "apparent good" such as worldly glory, name, fame, wealth and power, social status or approval, identification with or adherence to great spiritual traditions of the past, are like the lilies of the fields which are there today, but disappear tomorrow. These might give us momentary joy and pleasure because they are incomplete joys.

We need constantly to listen to our master and receive the joy that he gives to complete our joy and make our joy true and lasting. “May my joy be in you and your joy be complete” (Jh 15: 11).

Pope Francis says that joy is born from our calling. Speaking to the seminarians and novices in Rome he told this to them: “In calling you God says to you: “You are important to me, I love you, I am counting on you.” (*Rejoice*, 4) We are called to renew and perpetuate the joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at us and loved us and called us to be with him and to be sent out as messengers of his love, healing and transformation. Yes, we need to be constantly aware of our calling which will definitely make us aware of God’s initiative in choosing us while we were still ignorant of how this love story of ours with Him would unfold in time and space. He simply attracted us to himself through a myriad of ways and each of us blindly followed him and we have walked with him thus far, and we continue to walk with him being certain of only one thing, that he who has called us walks with us, holds our hands and he is ever faithful even though we may fall short of our faithfulness. (Cfr. 2 Tim 2: 13). He keeps on assuring us of his constant presence saying to us “you did not choose me but I chose you” (Jh 15:16).

Having tried to understand the secret and the source of the joy of consecration and the beauty that it radiates, I would like to turn my attention to few elements that block the joy of consecration, dimming it of its radiance and beauty.

1. The killers of the joy and beauty of consecrated life

Here we shall examine a few factors that suspend or obstruct the joy of our life of consecration and destroy or tarnish its real beauty, thus making it sterile and stagnant, without signs of life, vitality and growth. These factors may belong to various categories and sectors but here I do not intend to make a systematic presentation, but a random presentation of them. It is basically done in the light of the document “rejoice” and on the basis of some of the outstanding characteristics of the postmodern era in which we find ourselves. I do not in any way pretend to have the competence or the experience to make a systematic analysis of the topic, but I just desire to raise my feeble voice and join it with yours and that of many consecrated persons who desire to contribute their share towards enhancing and reawakening the joy and beauty of consecrated life.

1.1. A culture of gloom, fear and sadness

One of the outstanding factors that steal us of the joy and beauty of consecration is our over identification with wide spread culture of gloom, fear and sadness. Often this gloom, fear and sadness are caused by a number of factors like, personal and collective inner wounds and human brokenness, unforgiveness, broken relationships, fragmented vision of self, world and God, excessive dependence of personal accomplishments that fades, inability to trust God, unfulfilled psychological needs, lack of a faith-based life vision, negative impact of media, lack of silence, solitude and personal intimacy with God etc. “There is no holiness in sadness” says Pope Francis. In the world there is often lack of joy because of these and many other factors that seem to control human hearts, and it is this world that we are called to wake up with our life of witness, a witness of joy.

1.2. The emergence of the restless part of self

A culture of gloom, fear and sadness leads to the emergence of those weak points in one’s history which were not processed in the light of faith and integrated well, but kept hidden, denied, or repressed. They reappear as a restlessness which leads to drastically reducing the ideals of consecration and mission and giving one’s life for them. They emerge especially, when ones’ personal illusions and expectations about

one's vocation, and the pastoral illusion of being able to amass great successes seem to fall apart and when one encounters the inevitable disappointments over the aridity and sterility of one's donation. At times the repressed shadows of the persons emerges when he/she is tossed about by the temptation to see immediate results of one's hard work and when one feels that his/her efforts go unnoticed. When such things happen some become disinterested, withdrawn and seem to adapt ambiguous behaviors, often of a compensatory affective nature. Besides due to the lack of a solid and authentic rootedness and a sense of belonging to the person of Jesus, there is the permanence of serious personal immaturity never taken seriously or faced adequately, or silenced with various cover-ups. (Cf. Beppe M. Roggia, *Challenges of religious to consecrated life*, 3)

1.3. Ever growing infidelity and lack of depth in living out the values of consecration

“Anyone who has met the Lord and follows him faithfully is a messenger of the joy of the Spirit. Thanks solely to the encounter or renewed encounter with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship; we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption” (*Rejoice*, 6). The growing number of the loss of vocation can be due to our inability to recognize the depth of our call and our failure to nurture it on a consistent basis. When we fail to adhere to the love that is hidden within the call, consciously and consistently and lose sight of the one who has called us in love, we tend to be self-focused and self-absorbed. Then our lives will be marked by discontentment and bitterness that encloses us in remorse, thus we will be tempted to long for unexplored paths, unfulfilled dreams which will gradually lead us to abandon our vocation. (Cfr. *Rejoice*, 6)

Lack of depth in living the values of consecration is a massive killer of the joy and the beauty of consecrated life. There can be members who are merely ‘nesters’ who make comfortable nests in religious houses and live as parasites, contributing very little or nothing to the joy, holiness, fraternal life and mission of the community but completely buried in narcissistic self-care and self-preservation. They are persons who are highly indifferent to struggles and surprises of life. They are emotionally flat and do not witness to the joy of a personal encounter with Christ, the joy of having found the treasure. It is therefore essential to live the values of our consecration with purposefulness and enthusiasm so as to be joyful witnesses who will manifest the beauty of consecrated life.

1.4. Temptation to live without embracing the cross

Horror of suffering and cross is the tool the supreme deceiver uses to keep consecrated persons under his control. When we sincerely examine our lives we might find an ever growing tendency in us to get rid of even the smallest of pains, crosses or sufferings. We all wish to live a life without cross. But it is essential to remember that when we walk without the cross, when we build without the cross and when we profess a Christ without the cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, but worldly – no matter who we are, and what position we hold, or what role we play. (Cfr. *Rejoice*, 6) “Persevering up to Golgotha, experiencing doubts, denials, betrayals and eventually enjoying the wonder and amazement of Easter - all these are stages of a joyous faith. It is “from the cross, the supreme act of mercy and love, we are reborn as a *new creature* (Gal 6.15)” (*Rejoice*, 6).

1.5. The Loss of the sense of sacred and the lack of interior space for God

Today, like Martha in the Gospel of Luke, we keep ourselves busy and remain worried about many things (Cf. Luke 10:41). Since we move from one schedule to another at a highly accelerated speed, at times we ignore and overlook certain priorities of our consecration and run the risk of being like

machines that keep performing programmed actions till the fuel fails or technical errors occur. Sometimes we keep a watertight separation between 'the sacred and the secular', our being and our doing, to the point of a fragmented existence, without having a core reference that unifies our actions. The core that can unite our fragmented existence is none other than 'the sacred space', (that space in the heart where every person is called to union with the Lord) that we give to God through silence, prayer and contemplation, without which we will continue to be fragmented persons, tired and sad disciples incapable of living the ideals of our consecration.

It is essential to understand that as consecrated persons we are disciples of Jesus, and for a disciple the first thing is to be with the Master, to hear and learn from him. This is possible only if we give ourselves some quality time for prayer, silence and contemplation of the master. If the warmth of God is not in our hearts we miss God's own love and tenderness. Then how can we poor sinners, inflame the hearts of others? The Lord is the only God of our life, and He invites us to rid ourselves of many idols and worship Him alone. The Holy Father identifies prayer as the source of fruitfulness of the mission, because being with Jesus forms in us a contemplative view of history, enabling us to see and hear in everything the presence of the Spirit, and His special guidance so as to live in time as God's time. (Cf. *Rejoice*, 6).

2.6. Excessive emphasis on the present moment with little or no reference to the future

Another factor that seems to destroy the joy and beauty of consecrated life is the growing tendency to live the present without prospects of hope of what lies ahead, because of the lack of faith vision of life, and the tendency to look for proofs and certainties. For some faith life is marginal, immature and some even lack a true moral conscience. Prayer is scarce and "routine"; as a result there is a strong sense of inner emptiness that one tends to fill it with external things and/or giving ever greater importance to secular values and other interests in respect to religious ones, in order to try to give an acceptable and justifying response to what one is living. There is a growing tendency towards unhealthy competition and shallow imitation, anxious seeking for recognition and approval, especially in the line of educational or professional titles; craze for accumulation of academic titles, and the tendency to perpetuate youthful appearance and cling to ambitious career and positions. The permanent vocational values tend to be side lined for the sake of immediate gratification of psychological needs. The vocation in its total and definitive commitment appears absurd, so one feels out of place and frequently confused. In fact, the vocation is increasingly seen as a strictly private affair, which isn't able to go beyond strictly immediate moods/soul-states and so such a confused existence devoid of reference to permanent values make our life a mere joyless and arid existence with very little beauty to attract any well motivated followers. (Cf. Beppe M. Roggia, *Challenges of religious to consecrated life*, 3)

3. 7. A fragmented community life

As disciples of Jesus we are set apart to witnesses of communion in community. Community is the first and most believable gospel that we can preach... Joy is strengthened by the experience of fraternity, where each one is responsible for their fidelity to the Gospel and the growth of all. A community that gathers around Jesus is guided by his word and fed, nurtured and strengthened by His Body and Blood and when we are united with him in the Eucharist, we become one with him, and thus we are made capable of true communion. (Cf. *Rejoice*, 9).

A joyless community is a dying community and the joy of community life is destroyed by the spirit of fragmentation justified by excessive sense of individualism. At this juncture we are invited to humanize our relations and to foster communion of heart and soul in light of the Gospel. Without a reference to Christ and without faith in the unifying power of his love community life can be a 'purgatory'. There is a growing tendency to give excessive focus on work or apostolate and side-line persons especially those that may call for special attention due to various reasons. Many with unfulfilled affective needs seem to depend excessively on the community to meet all their needs and when they do not find what they consciously or unconsciously look for they turn bitter and withdrawn, often playing the role of a victim. Another factor that kills the joy of fraternal life is unbridled gossip culture that mercilessly tarnish the good name of others thus breeding suspicion and mistrust in the community.

2. Steps to reawaken the joy of consecration today

Joy is the beauty of consecration and beauty born of deep interior joy attracts young people to embrace the challenge of radical love through the profession of the evangelical councils. Therefore in the light of the questions from Pope Francis (*Rejoice*, 12), the following are the possible steps that could be followed to reawaken joy and thereby enhance the beauty of consecrated life so as to bring it out of the present crisis, more strengthened and refreshed to face the new challenges with renewed life, hope and enthusiasm.

2.1. A personal commitment to a life of prayer

The joy of freshness, the joy of following Jesus can be sustained most of all through a deep and persevering commitment to prayer, where in one opens oneself wholly and totally to the love of the Father who gives His Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Lk 11: 13). It is the Holy Spirit who fills us with deep interior joy which nothing and no one in this world can give us. Joy can be reawakened when our hearts are set on fire by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who melts, moulds and makes us His own, capable of living our consecration with deep interior joy and radiating the joy of freshness and beauty of consecration even when our steps grow slow and eyes grow dim with advancing age, and wrinkles multiply on our faces with every passing day. We can think of the inner beauty that Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta radiated in spite of her feeble and double bent physical structure and multiple wrinkles on her faces. We recall the joy and beauty of consecration we could see on the face of St. John Paul II despite being a helpless victim of Parkinson disease. The same is seen on the faces of the valiant missionaries and spiritual leaders sitting before me...

2.2. Sustain great desires in the heart and preserve its restlessness

It is of paramount importance to keep our hearts attuned to God and higher values of life, to preserve its restlessness of seeking. All its seeking is to be illumined by its seeking for God and the deeper, higher and nobler realities of life. If this does not happen, our hearts will soon be hardened and lulled to sleep by its inclination to attachment and clinging. Therefore we need to allow God to remove the heart of stone from us and give us a heart of flesh instead, a heart that longs to be united to God, a heart that yearns for God like the deer that yearns for running stream, a heart that is sensitive to the touch of God's love and the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, and a heart like that of Mary, capable of pondering on the mysteries of God's promises.

2.3. Watchfulness against the culture of the temporary

Joy of consecration cannot be reawakened within us today unless we become truly vigilant so as not to perpetuate the culture of the temporary. The following statement of *Vita Cosecrata* sheds light upon this reality: “Since the demands of the apostolate today are increasingly urgent, and since involvement in temporal affairs risks becoming ever more absorbing, it is particularly opportune to draw attention once more to the eschatological nature of the consecrated life”(John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Cosecrata*, 26). As consecrated persons our life is to be lived as an *eschatological sign*, to be lived in the hope of meeting Him to whom we have dedicated our entire life. Therefore, our lives must reflect a constant yearning for the things that are above (Cf. Col 3:1) and not get caught up in the web of the affairs of this world that is passing away (Cf. 1 Cor 7:31, 1 Pet 1:3-6).

2.4. A solid commitment to consistency and authenticity in living what we have professed

We cannot perpetuate fakery in living our commitment, our masks will fall apart sooner or later and the young generation will discover the inconsistency that we tend to hide at times under the umbrella of our obsessive adherence of traditionalism, legalism, ritualism etc. It is time for us to wake up to the truth of our own personal inconsistencies and double lives and in humility commit ourselves to truth, authenticity and consistency in living what have professed and in living what we preach, teach and expect from those who look at us for inspiration, model and guidance. In spite of all our good desires and resolutions we fail, but the Lord tells us “take heart, it is I do not be afraid” (Mt 14: 27), we just need to allow Him to cleanse, purify and revive us so that the joy of our consecration may return to us.

2.5. Invigorate the missionary passion that once motivated our hearts

Pope Francis calls us out of our comfort zones, to set aside our personal interests and our tendency towards functionalism and careerism and be fired by the restlessness for God, his word, and the passion to share the treasure we have found. It is this positive restlessness and passion for God that will enable us to step out of ourselves and our petty concerns to others and the larger concerns of the suffering humanity. Joy of our consecration and consequently its beauty will return when we constantly nurture deep within our hearts the missionary passion, therefore let us pay heed to the clarion call of God that comes to us as a gift during this year dedicated to consecrated life.

2.6. Get rid of the poison of gossip

To reawaken the joy of our consecration it is fundamental that we stop talking badly of others. The Holy Father Francis reflecting on the need for Christians to refrain from all forms of slander said: “It’s so rotten, gossip. At the beginning, it seems to be something enjoyable and fun, like a piece of candy. But at the end, it fills the heart with bitterness and also poisons us,” (Pope Francis, Feb. 16, 2014). As consecrated persons, we are called to nurture and build persons and not to kill or destroy others. But careless talks, without awareness of what we speak and to whom we speak often lead individuals and communities to destruction and a heavy hearted and joyless living. So only a personal decision assisted by grace can save us from this personal and collective bad habit.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with a single quotation which has deeply inspired me: “In the different forms of life inspired by the Spirit throughout history, consecrated persons discover that the more they stand at the foot of the Cross of Christ, the more immediately and profoundly they experience the truth of God who is love. It is precisely on the Cross that the One who in death appears to human eyes as

disfigured and without beauty, so much so that the bystanders cover their faces (cf. Is 53:2-3), fully reveals the beauty and power of God's love. Saint Augustine says: "Beautiful is God, the Word with God ... He is beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth; beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents' arms, beautiful in his miracles, beautiful in his sufferings; beautiful in inviting to life, beautiful in not worrying about death, beautiful in giving up his life and beautiful in taking it up again; he is beautiful on the Cross, beautiful in the tomb, beautiful in heaven. Listen to the song with understanding, and let not the weakness of the flesh distract your eyes from the splendour of his beauty" (*Vita Consecrata*, 24). Yes, it was this beauty that Mary pondered in her heart, it was this beauty that attracted the saints who walked the path of suffering, pain and even martyrdom, and it was this beauty that filled them with joy in living their consecration to the full. It was this beauty that John the mystic contemplated, which enabled him to stand together with Mary at the foot of the cross in humility, love and surrender. May this same beauty of the one who conquered sin and death continue to fascinate all of us who have given our whole hearted "yes" to Him. May this everlasting beauty fill us with renewed hope, that one day we will see it face to face and be filled with the fullness of joy and totally engulfed by its surpassing beauty.

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