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Consecrated Life: Living the Present with Passion

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Editorial

"Living the present with passion means becoming 'experts in communion', witnesses and architects of the 'plan for unity' which is the crowning point of human history in God's design". Pope Francis

Amidst the divisions of races, religions, castes, tribes, communities, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, bringing unity and togetherness at all levels of human strata is a great need and a challenge. "Consecrated persons are called to become leaven of communions at the service of the mission of the universal Church by the very fact that the manifold Charisms of the their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the entire Mystical Body," said St. John Paul II. By the very nature of consecration, consecrated persons offer themselves fully to God (Acts 4:32). Through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), they experience an interior call to share everything in common. The daily self-offering they make leads them to be united with the Lord. This daily commitment is coupled with St. Ignatius' Suscipe: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and all I own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will is an act of consecration."

The constant and inner union with the Lord gives joy and empowers persons to work for unity, building the Kingdom of God and building communion among communities. The Catholic Church in the Code of Canon Law defines consecrated life as "a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honor, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God…" (Can. 573: 1).

Consecrated persons are to make their consecration to God fruitful and meaningful through their prayer life and community life. The daily prayer is central to the consecrated life; it is in the daily encountering of the Lord in prayer and meditation of the Word of God that one deepens the experience of being loved. While prayer and service are essential, it is community that holds the consecrated life together. Through their communion in communities, consecrated persons can become the witnesses, giving hope to build a better world. One of the goals of the year of consecrated life is to live the present moments with passion. It is an invitation to remain grateful and to find meaning in all situations of life.

This issue of the journal attempts to shed light on the present day challenges of religious and gives emphasis on the invitation of Pope Francis to live the present with passion. The articles focus on defining the meaning of consecration, explain the prophetic call of every religious and underline their indispensable role in establishing the Kingdom of God among people.

Sr. Christine Mynsong
General Councilor for Evangelization



Superior General's Message

As God leads us to the culmination of the "Year of Consecrated Life," mother Church offers yet another opportunity by inviting us to the "Extraordinary year of Mercy" to experience mercy of the triune God so that we may share it with the entire humanity. God is blessing all of us and He continues to journey with us till we reach the shores of holiness as consecrated persons.

Consecrated Life is the fruit of a mystical vision of the glorious love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Consecrated Persons experience an irresistible fascination for divine things. Religious consecration is a response to the invitation of God. It is a total self-oblation to Christ who followed the Father's will completely and to all humanity. Thus consecration is expressed in two ways: dedication to God and to others. This dedication to others is expressed in the apostolate or mission of each Institute.

The core identity of a religious is to belong to God, to be known as a man or woman of God. Our primary task is to be seekers of God. Often we are recognized by the roles we play such as teachers, doctors, nurses, directors, managers, etc. It is through these roles, and by the activities we manifest that we are people who belong to God, who are called, chosen and set apart to worship, praise and serve Him.

The need of the time is to wake up the world through the celebration of life in the consecrated way. Pope Francis urges the consecrated people to be mystics in the modern world. For Pope Francis, the mystic has three essential characteristics. First, the mystic is optimistic; able to find hope in hopeless situations, and meaning in meaniglessness. Secondly, the mystic is enthusiastic, because s/he lives in God. Thirdly, the mystic is dynamic because of the indwelling of the Spirit. The creative and renewing Spirit of God enables a consecrated person to make positive changes in the world, to wake up the world from its slumber! Pope Francis has pointed out to the consecrated people a path of attraction, of contagion, the path for the growth of the Church, the path of new evangelization. He said, "The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world. It is this witness I expect from you" (*Rejoice*, 10). Once we are charged with the strength of our communion with the Lord we will have the power to move forward with zeal, to ignite the hearts of those in slumber. May the unfolding of the Year of Mercy make us a little more like the Father whom Jesus the Consecrate One par excellence came to manifest. Let us wake up the world!

Sr. Philomena Mathew
Superior General

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CONSECRATED LIFE: LIVING THE PRESENT WITH PROPHETIC AND MISSIONARY PASSION

Fr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS

The Second Vatican Council teaches that Jesus' life and example provide the foundation for the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. These counsels are ideals of life, and therefore they constitute a gift of God [charism] received by the Church from her Lord. Consecrated life is a form of life to which some Christians, both clerical and lay, are called by God (LG 43). One makes profession of the evangelical counsels in order to be set free from hindrances to loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly, and following the Lord in a more thoroughgoing way through service. They have the duty of working for the implanting and strengthening of the kingdom of Christ in souls and spreading it to the four corners of the earth. It also constitutes a closer imitation of Christ (LG 44). The Council's Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*, acknowledges varieties of gifts from the Spirit given to various institutes of consecrated life. "In the Church there are very many institutes, clerical and lay, engaged in different kinds of apostolic work and endowed with gifts which vary according to the grace that is given to them. Administrators are given the gift of administration, the teacher the gift of doctrine, the preacher persuasiveness. Liberality is given to those who give to others, and cheerfulness to those who perform works of mercy....(PC 8). Vita Consecrata called consecrated life "a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the people of God since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission" (VC 3). *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Vita Consecrata* are in full agreement with each other in explaining the core meaning of consecrated life and missionary life, in showing the inseparable relation between charism and mission, charismatic life and missionary life.

In this Paper, a humble attempt is made to understand the core meaning of consecrated life. Here, we begin with our consecrated life as charismatic life.[1]

1. Our Consecrated Life as Charismatic Life

Various factors such as "progress in biblical studies, growth in psychological awareness, attention to the role of personal and communitarian experience in religious living, extraordinary responses to the challenges Christian vocation and ministry face in our day, rediscovery of the root inspiration of founders of religious movements and communities, appreciation of the distinctiveness in every good person's life, Pentecostalism in its various forms, tensions between Spirit and structure, tradition and innovation, authority and the governed"[2] have contributed towards a renewed presence of charisms in the Church.

1. Certain sections of this Paper were presented by the author at the Annual Pastoral Conference held at the Social Forum, Guwahati, from September 7 to 10, 2015.
2. Edward J. Malatesta, "Charism" in *The New Dictionary of Spirituality,* Edited by Michael Downey (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003), pp. 140-143.

The Greek word charisma is a verbal noun from the verb charidzomai, "to bestow a gift or favour," and means a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace (charis). The word charisma, given a religious meaning by Paul, refers to a variety of gifts. They include the Holy Spirit itself in some specific manifestations, changes in physical conditions and/or emotional states and dispositions, 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' talents. Such gifts may be quite temporary, or they may last for a recipient's whole life. It indicates the total gift of salvation received by all believers (Rom 5:15-16; 6:23: "… the charisma of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"). The Spirit is the primal blessing, dwells in us, but is not owned by us. In addition, each person has received a particular gift from God (1 Cor 7:7, 17; 12:7), which should be used for the benefit of others "so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 pet 4:10-11). St Paul sums up the gifts as prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, extraordinary faith, discernment, healing and the working of miracles, speaking in tongues and its interpretation, helping, administration, service, teaching, exhortation, mercy, evangelizing, pasturing.[3]

But it was not until the second Vatican Council that the Magisterium gave extensive treatment to the presence of charismatic gifts as a normal aspect of the Church that concerned each of the faithful. "These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church" (LG 12). "From the reception of these charisms or gifts…. There arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the church and in the world for the good of humankind and for the up building of the Church. In so doing, believers need to enjoy the freedom of the Holy Spirit…"(AA 3).

In the light of the teaching of Scripture and Vatican II, we can conclude that the charisms are not a thing of the past, but eminently contemporary and actual; they do not hover in the periphery of the Church, but are eminently central and essential to it. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a continued outpouring of the spirit with ever new forms of consecrated life, witness, and service. However, to distinguish authentic gifts from illusory ones and to use charisms well, individuals and communities in the Church need to exercise discernment. But we can be confident that the same Spirit who generously bestows the charisms to the consecrated will at the same time grant the wisdom necessary to use them wisely for the building up of the body of the Church and for the effectiveness of its mission to the world.[4] The effectiveness of religious consecration depends on the way the consecrated understands their vows and live them in the Church. Each vow throws a specific challenge to the consecrated. The consecrated need to be more innovative in their religious living and consensual in their decision-making process if their religious living is expected to bear abundant fruit.

2. Living the Present with Passion

2.1. Living the Present with Prophetic Passion

The English words 'prophet' and 'prophecy' have their origin in the Greek term 'prophetes.' The term means 'a spokesman, clearly authorized by God, who preaches the law of God, harshly condemns

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

violations of it, and prophesies future events which God is going to bring about for the salvation of men and women, or for their doom.' Theological tradition is largely accustomed to equate 'prophet' with the Hebrew term *'nabi,'*[5] which probably means 'entrusted with a message.'[6] Broadly speaking, prophetism begins with the historical Moses and continues without prolonged interruption in the persons of distinguished succession through both the Old and the New Testaments. 'Prophetism may be defined as that understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, and divine participation.' More narrowly defined, prophetism is peculiarly the doctrine (preaching and teaching[7]) and activity of a concentrated succession of men - notably Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and second Isaiah. These prophets appeared in a brief span of about two centuries. They were preceded by a hundred years or more and even anticipated by the marvelously vigorous prophet Elijah, and were followed by a fading succession of "lesser lights" or minor prophets.[8] Prophetism is identified as one of the three pillars of the society of Israel.[9]

2.1.1. Prophetism in Israel: A Synoptic Approach

2.1.1. 1. Pre-prophetism

It is clear from the stories in Genesis that there is no evidence at all for any mantics[10] in the pre-Mosaic period. Even figures such as seers only turn up sporadically before the time of the monarchy and do not seem to have played any decisive part in Israel's life. When God reveals something special to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), he does so in a dream (Gen 28), or through the rustling of a tree (Gen 18:1), or through an angel, *malðk* (Gen 16:7).[11]

In the first centuries after the immigration into Palestine, the priesthood took over the task of discovering the future through technical oracles. In addition, there was a tent of meeting, where an authorized person enquired into the will of God using a sacred garment, an ephod, which could be hung round an image of God and could also be worn by a priest. In the latter case the priest was enabled with the help of urim and tummim (two stones used for casting lots) to obtain oracles which declared the divine 'yes' or 'no' in response to a clear and direct enquiry. For example, before David

5. The term '*nabi*'is already found in Syrian Ebla in the twenty-third century BC, but in Israel it turns up relatively late – only at the beginning of the period of the monarchy. The term was then probably taken over from the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine, the Canaanites. Cf. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I (London: SCM Press, 1982), p. 16.
6. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I (London: SCM Press, 1982), pp. 15-16.
7. By 'prophecy,' Paul understands intelligible preaching that builds up the church in faith (Rom 12:6), explains mysteries, and imparts knowledge (I Cor 13:2). It was one of God's greatest gifts to his church for edification (I Cor 14). In I Pet 1:10, the prophet's concern is the searching of the scriptures for the testimony of Christ. Cf. B. D. Napier, "Prophet in the NT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Eds. George Arthur Buttrick et al., Vol.3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 919.
8. B. D. Napier, "Prophet, Prophetism," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Eds. George Arthur Buttrick et al., Vol.3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 896.
9. The three pillars are kingship, priesthood, and prophetism. The prophetic office, in the strict sense of the word, is not an institution like the kingship and priesthood. For Israel on its own initiative can make a king, but it cannot create a prophet. Prophetic vocation is a pure gift of God. One senses this in the period when prophecy is interrupted. Cf. Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Tr. P. Joseph Cahill (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 468-469.
10. The word 'mantic' comes from the Greek root *mantikos*, which means the one who has the power of divination.
11. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, p. 17.

goes into battle, he calls the priest Abiathar who appeals to God in the following way: 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' (I Sam 23). Abiathar gets the 'yes' stone which he interprets as follows: 'Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.'[12]

Besides these technical, priestly methods of discovering the future, particular persons were marked out by their capacity for having premonitions. This is true especially of the heroes of the Book of Judges, the sopetim, who were really charismatic leaders led by the spirit (ruah) of Yahweh. They put themselves at the head of the army in times when the people were in danger.[13]

There were also people who went about the country offering their skill as soothsayers, called seers (roeh). We have actual evidence for the title only in the case of Samuel, although we read rather more often about a man of God, is haelohim (Judge 13; I Sam 2:37; I Kings 13). Samuel, who played a decisive role in the transition from the pre-national stage to the monarchy, appears in the ranks of these men of God. I Samuel 9 describes how a peasant farmer went to a man of God, a seer, because his asses had run away. The seer was able to tell where the animals were wandering. However, with the rise of the monarchy and the setting up of the great sanctuaries, we do not find any longer the priests seeking for oracles by technical means, even though the priesthood now assumed a much firmer position than before in the life of the people. Similarly, seers are no longer mentioned. The capacity of any Israelite at all for hearing the voice of God directly disappears. Under the kings, the nabis have almost a monopoly when it is a matter of asking the deity about the future, especially in discerning who is to be the king, or how a war should be conducted. The more the nabis become accepted the more the other kinds of soothsaying are pushed into the background and suppressed.[14]

2.1.1. 2. Emergence of Prophetism and Role of Nabis

Nabis[15] - along with it some of the pre-prophetic titles remained: seer, clairvoyant, man of God[16] - are first mentioned in Israel[17] round about the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the tenth century BC, during the rise of the monarchy. Both institutions - the nabi and the monarchy - emerged after Yahwistic religion had long become established in Palestine. We hear of the first ecstatic nabi groups in connection with the first king, Saul (I Sam 10). At the court of the king David, Nathan is the first Nabi of whose name we have adequate historical evidence. What distinguishes the nabi from the seer and the man of God of earlier generations is his language. Nathan appears as the king's conscience. When the king commits sin, Nathan dooms him to death. The kind of

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 18.
14. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
15. David L. Petersen identifies six characteristics of a nabi or prophet: 1. The prophet is a person who has had a special sort of religious experience and / or a special sort of relationship to the deity. 2. The prophet is a person who speaks or writes in a distinctive way. 3. The prophet is a person who acts as a prophet in a particular social setting. 4. The prophet is a person who possesses distinctive personal qualities, namely, charisma. 5. The prophet is an intermediary between the divine and human worlds. 6. The prophet is a person who has a distinctive message. Cf. David L. Petersen, "Introduction: Ways of Thinking about Israel's Prophets," in *Prophecy in Israel*, Ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 10-17.
16. Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Tr. P. Joseph Cahill (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 468.
17. Israelite prophecy demonstrates that Israel was very much a part of the life and culture of the ancient world, and thus the Israelites were not alone in possessing the phenomenon of prophecy. Cf. Anthony R. Ceresko, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Bombay: St Pauls, 1993), p. 225.

language used can be seen in the Bathsheba episode (II Sam 11ff). The literary genre illuminates the way in which nabi thinking was built up and developed. Although the saying is based on divine inspiration, its construction is subject to the rules of art. Down to the period of the exile, all prophecies are couched in Hebrew poetic terms. This poetry depends on a thought-rhyme in which a statement in the first half-line is further developed by a similar statement in the second. The two statements correspond in length but are not identical in the wording. What is especially noticeable in prophecy as a genre is the sharp dividing line between present and future, between what has been hitherto and what is to come. The indication of situation does not merely describe what is actually present, but it covers events belonging to the remotest past. Either the whole saying, or the part of it is introduced by the phrase: 'Thus says Yahweh.' It is a phrase taken up later by almost all the literary prophets. It is a 'messenger formula' since the nabi is the authorized mouthpiece of God. The same could also be a 'proclamation formula' since it not only stresses the content of the following statement as coming from God, but also declares it to be valid for the future and avoidable only to limited degree. It is to be noted that in giving form to their prophecy, the nabis do not borrow cultic types of text but adopt the language of diplomats. For, 'Thus says so-and-so' is the phrase with which ancient oriental kings or dignitaries legitimate themselves when sending verbal messages (I Kings 23:3). But royal messages do not have a poetic form, and are without any stress on the distinction between what has been and what is going to be. To this degree the prophecy of nabis is different from a herald's message.[18]

The books of Samuel and Kings give us information about the nabis and the pre-literary prophets in general. These books are part of the Deuteronomic history which came into existence in the sixth century B.C. Certain prophetic figures - Nathan and Elijah - are given prominence in the Deuteronomic history while others are not mentioned at all. All the literary prophets except Isaiah are missing. Silence about their prophecy is one of the riddles of the Deuteronomic history. In contrast to the kings, the nabi stands as true leader of the people. The prominence given to individual nabis as lonely and independent figures has led to a widespread conception of the prophet as a great religious champion, a charismatic figure[19] who is at war with institutionalization, who has given up every institutional security for the sake of his inner call, and who utters his message whether anyone listens or not. This view of Max Weber was questioned by Sigmund Mowinckel.[20] Mowinckel showed that the picture of the individual prophet is hardly ever appropriate for the nabis. Whenever they protest against nabis, the literary prophets are attacking

18. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I., pp. 19-23.
19. Max Weber defines 'prophet' in the following way: "We shall understand 'prophet' to mean a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment. Cf. Max Weber, "The Prophet," in *Prophecy in Israel*, Ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 99.
20. Mowinckel understands prophetic mission as essentially communitarian: "I understand a 'prophet' here as one who, by appointment of society as well as by the divinity, provides the community with necessary information in religious things directly from a divine source by virtue of an extraordinary supply of power, one who definitely knows about divine things, either because he is inspired or capable of receiving revelation or because technical means are available to him through which he can mediate the will and instructions of the divinity and can convey the same to the community as an answer to a question or to a prayer. In this sense of the word the prophet is altogether not a private person who coincidentally appears. He is an employee of the society, an institutional link between the two members of the covenant, the community and the deity." Cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, "Cult and Prophecy," in *Prophecy in Israel*, Ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 75.

what were apparently self-contained groups (Isa 28:7-13). In addition, individual psalms and the prophetic liturgies presuppose that the nabis were also active in cultic affairs. For example, after an official hymn of lament, they proclaim an oracle of assurance, expressing confidence that Yahweh has heard. Although this oracle was spontaneous, it was expressed within the framework laid down for it. The Chronicler puts the nabis among the Levites and Temple singers. On closer examination we can find that even the Deuteronomic History indicates that nabis generally lived together in groups. The nabis who lived during the period of Saul enter the scene as a group (I Sam10;19). There are supposed to have been 400-450 prophets at the North Israelite court, and they appeared together in order to prophesy (I Kings 18:22). The disciples of Elisha gathered round and listened to the instructive discourses of their master (II Kings 2-6).[21]

All this means that in pre-exilic times the expression 'nabi' is the term used for a cultic prophet who, like a priest, performed particular tasks laid down for him at the sanctuary besides being charismatic. They also took meals together and practiced a kind of community life with a 'father' over them, like Elisha. Hence, we do not find any contradiction between charisma and institution in the life and ministry of prophets.[22]

Because of his vocation - it is the divine call which constitutes one a prophet[23]- a nabi was cut off from normal civil life. Anyone who had once been a nabi could wander through the countryside with only a tenuous connection with an order, and turning up here or there and crying out a divine message. Elijah and Micaiah ben Imlah (I Kings 22), the greatest of the pre-literary prophets, lived a life of this kind. Nevertheless, most of the nabis seem to have lived round about the king's court or the main sanctuaries.[24]

The great moments came about when Yahweh's ruahseized hold of the people. *Ruah* is generally translated 'the spirit of the Lord,' but what the expression really means is a gusty, stormy wind, a squall. It also means the breath in the living being, what bursts out dynamically in intermittent starts. So in pre-exilic times, *ruah* means "a power which seizes on the self, transporting it into ecstacy, enthusiasm, frenzy, making a person capable of psychological and physical acts which would seem inconceivable in a normal state." If a nabi is seized by the ruah, he may be swept away by it (I Kings 18:12; II Kings 2:16). But if it lays hold on a whole collection of prophets, then they shout and dance until they tear the clothes from their bodies and lie naked all night under the stars (I Sam. 19:23ff). In such a state, a nabi may see what is taking place hundreds of miles away, or what the king of Aram said in his bedroom (II Kings 6:12). Out of the ecstasy[25] , there finally emerges the prophecy directed to the people, bringing them a dabar, a word of Yahweh.[26]

However, the ordinary Israelites often reacted to the gushing of the spirit with shy reverence and mocking contempt. On the one hand, the people needed the nabi for matters concerning one's future.

21. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, pp. 23-25.
22. Ibid., p. 25.
23. Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 469.
24. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, p. 25.
25. Hermann Gunkel maintained that the prophets had had certain peculiar, usually private or inner, divine experiences, which Gunkel called ecstasy. Cf. David L. Petersen, "Introduction: Ways of Thinking about Israel's Prophets," in *Prophecy in Israel*, Ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 11.
26. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, Vol.I, pp. 25-26.

On the other hand, one found him unpleasant and uncomfortable because of his fanatical zeal and impolite ways of behaviour. The fanatic nabis were occasionally imprisoned at the royal court. In Jeremiah's time there was still a priest at the temple in Jerusalem as overseer with the power to arrest and imprison the 'mad' nabis who behaved too wildly.[27]

Surprisingly, the literary prophets of the earlier period (beginning with Amos) never appealed to the ruah. It is a matter of dispute whether they rejected the ecstatic manner of receiving revelation, or whether they did not stress the power that inspired them to the public, or whether they did not belong to the ranks of the nabis at all.[28]

2. 1.1.3. Exilic Prophetism (587-539)

Besides Jeremiah, the three important exilic prophets are Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, and Zephaniah. In considering the common element in the prophetism of these prophets, we must remember that they belong to a time when people had become even more detached than before from the ties of religion. The prophets of the period make use of large-scale allegorical compositions (Ezek 16:23), theological excursus (Ezek 18), dialogues of the prophet with God, long soliloquies of lament, etc. In their prophetism, they are more self-dependent than were their predecessors. They are also much more free not only in their choice of expression and in the forms in which they clothe their message, but also in their whole dealings with Yahweh. They could sometimes even turn on Yahweh with complaints and reproaches. Since their audience was largely critical, if not positively skeptical, their endeavours are directed even more than their predecessors towards being clearly understood by their hearers. They try to correct misconceptions and they take care that their arguments are cogent. These efforts reach their climax in Deutero-Isaiah's doctrinal or theological reflections. His statements on the word of Yahweh are demonstrably those of a theoretical theologian. He divides the empirical world into two realms: the world of flesh - and the transience of everything in it - and the word of Yahweh, the only thing creative and productive of blessing (Isa 40:6-8; 45:10f).[29]

Another important element of their prophetism was God's 'justice,' i.e., the question of how Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant was made effective. It was a question which had not only become a source of serious perplexity to the people of the day, but also to the prophets themselves who were no longer able to answer in the same way as Israel had hitherto done. Jeremiah answered this question with the message of the new covenant and Ezekiel with that of the new heart.[30]

The Deuteronomic history, the splendidly conceived theology of history, does not deal particularly with the problem of the covenant, but it works out that it was on Yahweh and his commandments alone that Israel came to grief. At first sight Deutero-Isaiah seems to agree with the Deuteronomic history with his blunt contrast of the 'former things' and 'the new things.' But in fact, according to his prophecies, the new things will follow the pattern of the old - a new Exodus, a new covenant, a new David, etc. The old is renewed and is present in the new, in the enigmatic dialectic of valid and obsolete. The new will definitely overtake and surpass the old.[31] "The new covenant will be better

27. Ibid., p. 26.
28. Ibid.,, p. 27.
29. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, Tr. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), pp. 229-232.
30. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, pp. 232-234.
31. Ibid., pp. 234-239.

than the first, the new Exodus more glorious, and the suffering of the eschatological servant greater and, and just because of this, also more effectual, than that of Moses."[32]

The prophets of this period deal in a remarkable way with the ideas associated with the Messiah. The prophets saw Davidic monarchy disappear from the historical scene. For Yahweh himself had delegated the rule of the world to Nebuchadnezzar, and even the people of Judah had to submit to him (Jer 27:6). Deutero-Isaiah reinterpreted the messianic tradition completely by transferring the promises of the Davidic covenant to the people. Jeremiah and Ezekiel adopted a different course as they not only believed that Davidic dynasty was coming to an end, but they also attacked all hopes pinned on existing possibilities. Despite this, Jeremiah, and more particularly Ezekiel, spoke of a messianic future - a messianic expectation for the distant future as opposed to the imminent coming contemplated by the eighth-century prophets.[33]

Finally, we are brought face to face with Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy concerning the suffering servant. For God himself is to bear witness before the whole world 'that he bore the sins of the many, and espoused the cause of the transgressors' (Is 53:12). There are five points that distinguish the prophecy of Is 53 from the current ideas of the time. According to Gerhard von Rad, they are the following:[34] 1. What is said about the depth and comprehensiveness of this prophetic suffering far surpasses all that had ever been said before. 2. Where, however, the Servant songs go especially far beyond all that had been said before them is their description of the Servant's readiness to suffer and of his paradoxical confidence of his safety in God. 3. Isa 53 foretells the Servant's advance into a realm beyond suffering where he is glorified before the whole world. 4. In Isa 53 the people for whom the Servant suffered overcome their initial blindness and acknowledge him. Their actual words are given. 5. The songs speak of the Servant as having a significance which reaches far beyond Israel. He confronts all nations of the world. Kings are to shut their mouths before this Servant of God (Isa 52:15).

2. 1.1.4. Postexilic Prophetism (539 onwards)

With the fall of Babylon before the Persian forces of Cyrus II in 539, a new chapter in Israelite history begins, with the formation of a new community which looks to the past in an effort to understand itself in order to have a better future. The popular picture of a wholesale displacement of all or most of the Jews in Babylon back to Jerusalem and Judah is a mistaken notion. For most of the Jews in Babylon had been born there and had never seen Jerusalem. They were well-established and content where they were, and were not much interested in returning.[35] Prophetism is largely silent. We hear of the preaching of Malachi around 460. Of course, the prophet is being judged by Torah. His position is subservient to the Levitical priest, and his hopes centre around the Temple. The same evaluation applies to Haggai and Zechariah. Although Zechariah condemned social abuses, he relied upon the priesthood to gain a hearing (Zech 3-5). In the post-exilic age, preaching was no longer for promoting personal goodness and social justice, but for the orderly conduct of liturgy.

31. Ibid., pp. 234-239.
32. Ibid., p. 239.
33. Ibid., pp. 239-240.
34. Ibid., p. 244.
35. Anthony R. Ceresko, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Bombay: St Pauls, 1993), p. 221.

Formerly, the prophets braved the wrath of priests, but now prophecy is subjected to the Torah and is judged by the priests. Biblical scholars apply the term "apocalyptic" to the distinctly new religious movement. Part of the prophetic mantle fell upon the wise men who rushed in to fill the gap.[36] "When a new edition of Proverb appeared, the editor seems very conscious that the wise man was not only continuing the prophetic office but even correcting its present abuses and excesses."[37] What has happened to prophecy is evident in Joel, composed around 400 as a temple sermon. Joel expected sincerity from his compatriots (Joel 2:13), but he did not implement this demand as the earlier prophets had done through summons to social justice, marriage fidelity, and simple living. On the other hand, he is concerned with fasting, sackcloth, sacrifices, oblations, and prayers. The setting of his proclamation is a temple ceremony where the leaders are not prophets but elders and priests. He unifies his sermon around the great and awesome day of the Lord, when "the earth trembles and the heavens shake," when "I will pour out my spirit on all mankind" (Joel 2:10,27; 3:1). Joel is an optimist as he pictures a divinely triumphant eschatological day when all barriers - geographical, social and nationalistic - will be eliminated.[38]

The postexilic prophetism is characterized by eschatology for the following reasons :[39] 1. Instead of foretelling the immediate consequences of national sin, prophets now come to be interested in a longer sweep of history, i. e., they started to think that God has a detailed plan for the history of all nations. 2. Eschatology of postexilic prophetism points not only to the long term plan of God for all, but also to the transcendent character of divine action in history. The prophets stress that what happens in human history is divine action, the coming to fruition of a divine purpose accomplished through more than human means. God breaks into the progression of human history and takes control of it in a direct and uncompromising way. This is seen in Zechariah 14 where God stands in person on the Mount of Olives and causes it to be split in two. 3. Some scholars hold that the failure of prophetic predictions to materialize led to their being projected into the remote (eschatological) future as a way of retaining their infallible authority, i.e., that the prophecies would never be falsified by immediate events. Of course, such a view may not of the prophets themselves, but of their disciples who interpreted the oracles. In general the evolution of prophetism is all consistent with the suggestion that prophecy gradually turned from a spoken into a written phenomenon. 'Just as the Persian period saw the codification of the Torah, so at about the same time collections of prophetic oracles began to take on the character of sacred writings. At first, these writings were revered by particular groups, but in due course they became part of the shared heritage of all Jews,'[40] finally of humankind. Matters are complicated further when one remembers that, by the New Testament period, it was widely believed that the gift of authentic prophecy had died out in Israel. John Barton disagrees with this view:[41]

There is, however, little evidence that prophecy did in fact die out, if by 'prophecy' we mean the phenomenon of inspiration such as existed in the 8th century. Indeed, theories such as those of Hanson have made it seem probable that the postexilic age saw jus as active a prophetic movement

36. Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Post-exilic Period: Spirit, Apocalyptic," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, pp. 340-341.
37. Ibid., p. 341.
38. Ibid.
39. John Barton, "Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, pp. 491-494.
40. John Barton, "Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 494.

as the preexilic. But the forms of expression did change significantly, and postexilic prophets often expressed their oracles as additions to existing collections, or even as whole new works falsely attributed to figures from the past, rather than speaking in their own persons as earlier prophets had done.

2.2. Living the Present with Missionary Passion

In Lumen Gentium (LG),the Church is described as universal sacrament of salvation which offers its saving message to all peoples and all cultures. This sacramental character of the Church implies the demand of a universal mission. Ever disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith with all one's abilities (LG 17). Such a perspective has profound implications for the renewal of missionary activity. Thus, the universal sacramentality of the Church provides the background for specific attention to its missionary dimension in Ad Gentes (AG), which focuses on the missionary vocation of the Church.

The Church, by its very nature, is missionary since it has its origin in the mission (sending) of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Son flows from the love of God the Father (AG 2). In order to establish a relationship of peace and communion with himself and with all humans, the Father sent his own Son in human flesh (AG 3). To accomplish this, Christ sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Throughout all ages, the Holy Spirit makes the entire Church one in communion and in ministering. He equips her with various gifts of a hierarchical and charismatic nature (AG 4). From the very beginning, the Lord Jesus called the Apostles to be his close followers, the beginning of the sacred hierarchy. Before he was taken up into heaven (cf. Acts 1:11), Jesus founded His Church as the sacrament of salvation and sent His Apostles into all the world just as He Himself had been sent by His Father. Whence the duty that lies on the Church of spreading the faith and the salvation of Christ, not only in virtue of the express command which was inherited from the Apostles by the order of bishops, assisted by the priests, together with the successor of Peter and supreme shepherd of the Church, but also in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into His members. The mission of the Church is to lead all humans to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ through the preaching of the Gospel and by walking the path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice (AG 5). This duty has to be fulfilled by the order of bishops, under the successor of Peter and with the prayers and help of the whole Church. "Missions" is the term given to those apostolates by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. These undertakings are brought to completion by missionary activity, whose proper purpose is evangelization. In this missionary activity of the Church various stages are found: first, that of the beginning or planting, then that of newness or youth. When these have passed, the Church's missionary activity does not cease, but there lies upon the particular churches the duty of continuing this activity and of preaching the Gospel to those still outside. Thus it is clear that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving faith. This missionary activity among the nations differs from pastoral activity exercised among the faithful as well as from undertakings aimed at restoring unity among Christians. And yet these two ends are most closely connected with missionary zeal (AG 6).

This missionary activity derives its reason from the will of God who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The members of the Church are impelled to carry on such

missionary activity by reason of the love with which they love God and by which they desire to share with all humans the spiritual goods. By means of this missionary activity, God is fully glorified. In this way and by this means, the plan of God is fulfilled when all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and beholding the glory of God, will be able to say with one accord: "Our Father." (AG 7). Missionary activity is closely bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations. For by manifesting Christ the Church reveals to humans the real truth about their condition and their whole calling, since Christ is the source and model of that redeemed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which they all aspire. Christ and the Church transcend every peculiarity of race or nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody. All stand in need of Christ. The Gospel has truly been a leaven of liberty and progress in human history, and always proves itself a leaven of unity and of peace (AG 8). Missionary activity is nothing less than an epiphany, a manifesting of God's decree. By the preaching of the word and by the celebration of the sacraments, the Church brings about the presence of Christ, the author of salvation (AG 9). The Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all humans is aware that there still remains a gigantic missionary task for her to accomplish (AG 10).

For, all Christians are bound to show forth, by the example of their lives and by the witness of the word, that new human put on at baptism. Thus other humans, observing their good works, can glorify the Father and can perceive more fully the real meaning of human life and the universal bond of the community. Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of humans, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth (AG 11). Christian charity truly extends to all, without distinction of race, creed, or social condition. For as God loved us with an unselfish love, so also the faithful should in their charity care for the human persons. Let Christians collaborate with others in rightly regulating the affairs of social and economic life. Let them devote themselves to the education of children and young people by means of different kinds of schools, which should be considered not only as the most excellent means of forming and developing Christian youth, but also as a valuable public service, especially in the developing nations, working toward the uplifting of human dignity, and toward better living conditions. Furthermore, let them take part in the strivings of those peoples who, waging war on famine, ignorance, and disease, are struggling to better their way of life and to secure peace in the world (AG 12). The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith. By the same token, she also strongly insists that no one be frightened away from the Faith by unjust vexations on the part of others (AG 13). Therefore, let the missionaries raise up congregations of the faithful in such a way that they can exercise the priestly, prophetic, and royal office which God has entrusted to them. In this way, the Christian community will be a sign of God's presence in the world. Now, in order to plant the Church and to make the Christian community grow, various ministries are needed, which are raised up by divine calling from the midst of the faithful congregations. Among these are the offices of priests, of deacons, and of catechists, and Catholic action. Religious men and women likewise play an indispensable role in rooting and strengthening the Kingdom of Christ in souls, and in causing it to be spread (AG 15).

Joyfully the Church gives thanks for the priceless gift of the priestly calling which God has granted to so many youths. For the Church drives deeper roots in any given sector of the human family when the various faithful communities all have, from among their members, their own ministers in the order of bishops, priests, and deacons (AG 16). Likewise worthy of praise are the ranks of men and women catechists. Imbued with the apostolic spirit, they labour much to make an outstanding contribution to the spread of the Faith and of the Church. In our time, when there are so few clerics to preach the Gospel the position of catechists is of great importance. Therefore their training must be so accomplished and so adapted to advances on the cultural level that as reliable co-workers of the priestly order, they may perform their task well (AG 17). The religious not only offers precious and absolutely necessary assistance to missionary activity, but by a more inward consecration made to God in the Church, they also clearly manifest and signify the inner nature of the Christian calling. Various forms of religious life are to be cultivated in the young churches, in order that they may display various aspects of the mission of Christ and of the life of the Church, and may devote themselves to various pastoral works (AG 18).

The work of planting the Church in a given human community reaches a certain goal when the faithful already rooted in social life and somewhat conformed to the local culture, enjoys a certain firmness and stability (AG 19). By the life witness of each one of the faithful and of the whole community, let the particular church be a sign which points out Christ to others. Furthermore, there is need of the ministry of the word, so that the Gospel may reach all. The bishops should be first and foremost heralds of the Faith, who lead new disciples to Christ. In order that they may properly fulfill this noble task, let them thoroughly study both the conditions of the flock, and the private opinions of their fellow-citizens concerning God, taking careful note also of those changes which urbanization, migrations, and religious indifferentism have introduced. In order that this missionary work of the particular church may be performed, there is need of qualified ministers, who are to be prepared in due time, suited to the conditions of each church (AG 20). The church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among humans, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot be deeply grounded in the life and work of any people without the active presence of laity. Therefore, great attention is to be paid to establishing a mature, Christian laity (AG 21).

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations. They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the proclamation of the Gospel (AG 22). For such an exalted task, the future missionary is to be prepared by a special spiritual and moral training. For one must have the spirit of initiative in beginning, as well as that of constancy in carrying through. One must be persevering in difficulties, patient and strong of heart in bearing with solitude, fatigue, and fruitless labour (AG 25). Those who are sent to different nations in order to be good ministers of Christ should he nourished with the words of faith and with good doctrine which they should draw principally from the Sacred Scriptures. Therefore, all missionaries should be prepared and trained, lest they be found unequal to the demands of their future work (AG 26). All these things can scarcely be attained to in reality by individual

missionaries. Since even mission work itself cannot be accomplished by lone individuals, a common calling has gathered these individuals together into institutes, in which they are properly trained and might carry out this work in the name of the Church and under the direction of the hierarchy (AG 27).

Since the charge of proclaiming the Gospel in the whole world falls primarily on the body of bishops, they should give special consideration to missionary activity, which is the greatest and holiest task of the Church. For all missions and for the whole of missionary activity there should be only one competent office, namely that of the "Propagation of the Faith," which should direct and coordinate, throughout the world, both missionary work itself and missionary cooperation (AG 29). The institutes engaged in missionary activity in the same territory should find ways and means of coordinating their work. Therefore, it will be very useful to have conferences of Religious in which institutes of the same country or region should take part. These conferences should ask what things can be done by combined efforts, and they should work in close collaboration with the Episcopal Conferences (AG 33). Since the right and methodical exercise of missionary activity requires that those who labor for the Gospel should be scientifically prepared for their task, and especially for dialogue with non - Christian religions and cultures, it is desired that there should be fraternal and generous collaboration on the part of scientific institutes which specialize in missiology and in other arts and disciplines useful for the missions (AG 34). As members of the living Christ, incorporated into Him and made like unto Him through baptism and through confirmation and the Eucharist, all the faithful are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and spreading out of His Body (AG 36). But since the People of God lives in communities, especially in dioceses and parishes, and becomes somehow visible in them, it is also up to these to witness Christ before the nations. The grace of renewal cannot grow in communities unless each of these extends the range of its charity to the ends of the earth. Thus the whole community prays, works together, and exercises its activity among the nations through those of its sons and daughters whom God has chosen for this most excellent task (AG 37). All bishops are consecrated not just for some one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world. The mandate of Christ to preach the Gospel to every creature primarily and immediately concerns them, with Peter and under Peter. Whence there arises that communion and cooperation of churches which is necessary for carrying on the work of evangelization. In virtue of this communion, the individual churches bear the burden of care for them all (AG 38).

Religious institutes of the contemplative and of the active life have so far played the main role in the evangelization of the world. This sacred synod gladly exhorts them to go on untiringly in the work which they have begun. Institutes of the contemplative life, by their prayers, sufferings, and works of penance have a very great importance in the conversion of souls. Institutes of the active life should ask themselves sincerely whether they would not be able to extend their activity for the expansion of the Kingdom of God among the nations (AG 40). Lay persons cooperate in the Church's work of evangelization. As witnesses, they share in her saving mission. In those lands which are already Christian, lay persons cooperate in the work of evangelization by nurturing in themselves and in others a knowledge and love of the missions by stimulating vocations in their own family, in Catholic associations, and in the schools (AG 41).

Conclusion

Consecrated life is a form of life to which some are called by God. The consecrated make the profession of the evangelical counsels in order to set themselves free from hindrances to loving God ardently and worshipping him perfectly, and following the Lord in a more thoroughgoing way. In other words, it is a call to live the present with passion, in a charismatic way. There is an inseparable relation between charism and mission, charismatic life and prophetic life, and prophetic life and missionary life. Charisma is a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace (charis). The charisms are eminently central and essential to Church's life. However, to distinguish authentic gifts from illusory ones and to use charisms well, individuals and communities in the Church need to discern the will of God like a prophet and proclaim it to others as a missionary. Hence, charismatic persons are both prophetic and missionary. A prophet is a spokesperson, clearly authorized by God, who preaches the word of God, who has an intimate relationship with God. Theological tradition is largely accustomed to equate 'prophet' with the Hebrew term 'nabi,' which means 'entrusted with a message.' In pre-exilic times the expression 'nabi' is the term used for a cultic prophet who, like a priest, performed particular tasks laid down for him at the sanctuary besides being charismatic. They also took meals together and practiced a kind of community life. Hence, we do not find any contradiction between charism and institution in the life and ministry of prophets. The exilic prophets made use of large-scale allegorical compositions (Ezek 16:23), theological excursus (Ezek 18), dialogues of the prophet with God, long soliloquies of lament, etc. They are also much more free not only in their choice of expression and in the forms in which they clothed their message, but also in their whole dealings with Yahweh. In the post-exilic age, preaching was no longer for promoting personal goodness and social justice, but for the orderly conduct of liturgy. Formerly, the prophets braved the wrath of priests, but now prophecy is subjected to the Torah and is judged by the priests. Hence, all the prophets - pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic - were passionate missionaries who received their vocation as a gift, charism, from God for a particular mission entrusted to them by Yahweh. The prophets, by their very nature, were missionaries. Today, the consecrated persons, by their very nature, are also called to be both prophets and missionaries. The missionary zeal or passion of the consecrated flows from the very inner nature of the Church. The consecrated play an indispensable role in rooting and strengthening the Kingdom of Christ in persons, and in causing it to be spread, now and forever, through their passionate prophetic and missionary living.

HOUSE TOP
MSMHC Missionary Journal

CONSECRATED LIFE: A CALL TO PROPHETIC MISSION

Francis Gonsalves, SJ

1. Introduction: Chosen, Called and Consecrated

"Please tell every consecrated person whom you meet that they are specially chosen, called and consecrated for mission." These were words in a letter I received many years ago from Fr. Atmanand, OIC, of Bethany Ashram, Nalanchira, Kerala, when he read one of my earlier articles on Consecrated Life in the '*New Leader*' fortnightly. He explained: "Consecrated persons are not in religious life by mere chance; but, they must realize that they are specially chosen, called and consecrated by God. He added that every call is somewhat similar to that of prophets in the Bible.

In this article, beginning with a short analysis of the call of Prophet Jeremiah, I will show how the prophetic mission is relevant to our current times under the leadership of Pope Francis. I will then reflect upon how Pope Francis's advice can be translated by consecrated persons in today's world to live as prophetic missionaries.

2. Called from our Mother's Womb: Analysis of the Prophetic Call

The call of Prophet Jeremiah is somewhat similar to the call of most of us, religious. One sees that there are some five steps or stages. First, though we might think that it is we who have chosen God, the reality is the reverse: God chooses you and me! Jesus emphatically says: "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you" (Jn 15:16). God calls by name. Prophet Jeremiah is told, "Before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you … and made you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). Every call is unique, personal, most often unmerited and the person called is not necessarily the 'best' according to human standards. Second, the person hesitates and experiences some fear. Jeremiah says: "Lord, I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth" (Jer 1:6). Don't we often feel: Who am I that I should be chosen? Can't you choose someone else? How is this possible? I am useless!" Yet, third, God assures and promises Jeremiah: "Be not afraid of them, for I am with you" (1:8). Fourth, difficulties arise. There is always a 'cost of discipleship'—a price to be paid. Persecution, evil, tribulations, condemnation, feeling of forsakenness, and even death confront the person. Jesus warns of this in the Gospel according to St. John (15:18-20). Jeremiah was persecuted, abused, put into a well and then bound in stocks. He complains to God very bitterly and even curses the day of his birth (Jer 20:7-9). However, fifth and finally, God's plans prevail. Since it is God's work, God will ensure that the divine designs are accomplished. Indeed, the prophet is only an instrument for the spread of God's Kingdom.

3. Pope Francis Calls for Renewed and Relevant Consecrated Life

Pope Francis is calling religious wo/men, today, to be prophetic messengers of hope. In his 'Apostolic Letter' at the start of the 'Year of Consecrated Life' three 'aims' he suggests are significant: (a) Look to the past with gratitude; (b) Live the present with passion; and (c) Embrace

the future with hope. The founders of all religious congregations were pioneers in their own times. They were saints steeped in a spirituality that was relevant in serving God and reaching out to people. We must emulate them. To do this we must be wo/men who are passionate about our religious life. The word 'passion'—from the Latin '*patior*'—grammatically looks like a passive infinitive verb. However, it has very active and robust nuances of 'being passionate': fully alive, fully active. This verb is linked to '*com-passion*', which is a deep inner churning of the intestines—a gut level feeling of empathy and solidarity with those who suffer. This virtue is particularly important as we have entered into the 'year of mercy'. Religious who live life with passion and compassion will make a mark in the church and world, today. Finally, to embrace the future with hope, we must be loving, caring, and optimistic. Amidst the darkness we see around us, prophetic religious are 'lights'.

4. The Prophetic Call to 'Fore See'

'Prophet' derives from the Greek *prophētēs*, which is a noun made up of the stem -*phē*-, meaning, to say or to proclaim, and the prefix *pro*-, which means 'before' or 'in advance'. Prophets are those who give us a taste of the future already in the present. On the one hand, they bring heaven down on earth, while, on the other, they also warn people that they are creating hell for themselves if they do not repent and walk along the paths of righteousness. Pope Francis truly 'walks the talk'. He leads the church ahead not merely by his wise words, but also by his wondrous works and the witness of his life. In the same document we mentioned, he exhorts all religious wo/men to excel in four other areas of expertise: (i) to be joyful; (ii) to be prophetic; (iii) to be 'experts in communion'; and, (iv) to go out to the whole world. What do each of these areas imply?

First, the 'gospel' is good news and joyful tidings. However, many religious often go about with a 'castor oil' or 'Good Friday' face throughout the year. Such people give the message that religious life is truly a pain to be endured, without any happiness. A priest once said tongue-in-cheek: "If every religious smiles at least once a day, we would not have to go for 'vocation promotion' since people would automatically come to join religious congregations!" It is indeed essential that religious be joyful and happy people.

Second, being prophetic implies being the 'mouth' of God (Jer 15:19). A prophet-martyr of our times, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador said, "We are God's microphone!" It's not surprising that he was shot dead. To be a prophet one must announce that God's Kingdom has, indeed, come; and to denounce all the sin and evil that frustrates the fruition of God's Reign. Are we ready to take bold stand and speak out against evil, injustice, corruption, violence and exploitation of the weak members of society? The announcing and denouncing must go on ceaselessly in our lives and times.

Third, an 'expert in communion' is one who feels totally at home with oneself, with others, with all of creation, and with the Creator, God. Communion goes beyond community to embrace the inner, spiritual bonds that unite members of congregations. It means supporting, encouraging, energizing and building up others—especially those in need—to be active agents of their lives and contributors to the growth of society, at large.

Last, but not least, the prophet must "go out into the whole world" (see Mt 28:16-20). Christ is the

savior of the whole world and of all peoples. We cannot get stuck to our small institutions and our churches—for, in India, Christians account for only 2.35% of the total population. Thus, Pope Francis tirelessly cries out: "Go forth!" He writes: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." Are there not many religious wo/men who are mere managers and administrators—who have lost all their enthusiasm and zest for meeting people, touching lives and changing the world?

5. Conclusion: We 'are' Mission

Since I have commented upon the words and exhortations of Pope Francis quite extensively, I conclude with one of his short sentences in his '*Evangelii Gaudium*' (n. 273). He writes: "*I am a mission*"—mission is in my DNA, my being. Truly, *I am and You are a mission* on this earth. That's the reason why I am and You are here in this world. If every religious woman and man were to feel this at the very core of her/his being, we would have very vibrant religious communities who would be able to reach out to peoples in a very effective, Christ-like way. May the God (*Abba*) who called us, and our Lord (Jesus), in whose footsteps we follow keep us ever alive with the power of the Holy Spirit to be prophetic missionaries.

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

Sr. Jancy Joseph MSMHC

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 tends 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 certainly 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 councils 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 send 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.

2. 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.

2.1. 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.

2.2. 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)

2.3. 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.

2.4. 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).

2.5. 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)

2. 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.

3. 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.

3.1. 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…

3.2. 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 it 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.

3.3. 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).

3.4. 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.

3.5. 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.

3.6. 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 se 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.

YAC COLUMN

Correct Answers of July 2015

01. Tax Collector (Int)
02. The visit of the wise men (2:1-12)
03. Tamar. Rahab, Ruth and Mary (1:1-17)
04. David (1:6)
05. Fourteen (1:17)
06. Forty two (1:17)
07. Bethlehem of Judea (2:1)
08. Herod (2:1)
09. Gold, frankincense and myrrh (2:11)
10. Not to return to Herod (2:12)
11. To escape to Egypt with the child and his mother (2:13)
12. Because Herod was about to search for the child to destroy him (2:13)
13. When Herod died (2:19-20)
14. In Nazareth (2:23)
15. In the district of Galilee (2:22-23)
16. Because he was afraid to go to Judea as Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod (2: 22-23)
17. Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near (3:2)
18. Locusts and wild honey (3:4)
19. In the River Jordan by John the Baptist (3:13)
20. "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17)
21. Into the wilderness (4:1)
22. Three (4:3-10)
23. Capernaum (4:13)
24. "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near " (4:17)
25. Simon called Peter and Andrew, his brother (4:18)
26. Fishing (4:18)
27. Zebedee (4:21)
28. The poor in spirit (5:3)
29. The peacemakers (5:9)
30. Whoever breaks one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do the same (5:19)

WINNERS:

Shillong Province

01. Mawsynram St. Xavier Convent

First: Bakmenhunlang Skhemlon & Damaphilapynshai Shylla
Second: Ester Rose Twinkle Sngibon
Third: Jlin Mary Iangjuh, Wanhun Sawian, Wandorlin Marweiñ, Bandari Shisha Thongni

02. Aizawl:

First: Dorothy Biaktharmawii
Second: Esther Rintluangpuii
Third: Genevive

03. Tura William Nagar:
First: Sanchira G. Momin
Second: Silkame R. Sangma & Jacinta N. Sangma
Third: Rachina D. Chira

Tezpur Province
First: Thomas Bhengra
Second: Lucia Hemron
Third: Elinba Chill

Manipur
First: Taringangbou Lawrence
Second: St. Mary's Dibrugarh
Second: St. Mary's Bengtol

QUIZZ FOR THIS ISSUE December 2015:

01. Who will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven?
02. What would happen to anyone who is angry with a brother or sister?
03. What does Jesus say concerning retaliation?
04. How should we treat our enemies?
05. What does Jesus ask us to do when we pray?
06. Where should we store up our treasure?
07. Why does Jesus ask us to store up our treasure in heaven?
08. Citing the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, what does Jesus ask us not to do?
09. What example does Jesus give to expose the hypocrisy of the one who judges another?
10. What is the Golden Rule?
11. What type of fruit will a good tree bear?
12. According to Jesus, who will enter the kingdom of heaven?
13. What was special about the way Jesus taught the crowds?
14. When Jesus came down from the mountain who came to him and knelt before him?
15. Who came to Jesus when he entered Capernaum?
16. Whom did Jesus heal at Peter's house?
17. Who met Jesus when he came to the country of the Gadarenes?
18. What did the scribes say to themselves when Jesus said to the paralytic that his sins were forgiven?
19. What was Mathew doing when Jesus first met him?
20. According to Jesus, who are in need of a physician?
21. Who are the people Jesus cam to call?
22. “Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Who said this?
23. While Jesus was teaching about fasting, who came in and knelt before him?
24. What did Jesus ask the two blind men who followed him begging him to heal them?
25. Who was brought to Jesus after the healing of the two blind men?