



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

XIX WORLD OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 2 February 2015

[Multimedia]

Before our eyes we can picture Mother Mary as she walks, carrying the Baby Jesus in her arms. She brings him to the Temple; she presents him to the people; she brings him to meet his people.

The arms of Mother Mary are like the “ladder” on which the Son of God comes down to us, *the ladder of God’s condescension*. This is what we heard in the first reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews: Christ became “like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (*Heb 2:17*). This is the twofold path taken by Jesus: he *descended*, he became like us, in order then to *ascend* with us to the Father, making us like himself.

In our heart we can contemplate this double movement by imagining the Gospel scene of Mary who enters the Temple holding the Child in her arms. The Mother walks, yet it is the Child who *goes before her*. She carries him, yet *he is leading her* along the path of the God who comes to us so that we might go to him.

Jesus walked the same path as we do, and shows us the new way, the “new and living way” (cf. *Heb 10:20*) which is he himself. For us, consecrated men and women, this is the one way which, concretely and without alternatives, we must continue to tread with joy and perseverance.

Fully five times the Gospel speaks to us of *Mary and Joseph’s obedience to the “law of the Lord”* (cf. *Lk 2:22-24,27,39*). Jesus came not to do his own will, but the will of the Father. This way – he tells us – was his “food” (cf. *Jn 4:34*). In the same way, all those who follow Jesus must set out on the path of obedience, imitating as it were the Lord’s “condescension” by humbling themselves

and making their own the will of the Father, even to self-emptying and abasement (cf. *Phil* 2:7-8). For a religious, to advance on the path of obedience means to abase oneself in service, that is, to take the same path as Jesus, who “did not deem equality with God a thing to be grasped” (*Phil* 2:6). By emptying himself he made himself a servant in order to serve.

For us, as consecrated persons, this path takes *the form of the rule*, marked by *the charism of the founder*. For all of us, the essential rule remains the Gospel, yet the Holy Spirit, in his infinite creativity, also gives it expression in the various rules of the consecrated life which are born of the *sequela Christi*, and thus from this journey of abasing oneself by serving.

Through this “law” which is the rule, consecrated persons are able to attain *wisdom*, not something abstract, but a work and gift of the Holy Spirit. An evident sign of such wisdom is joy. The evangelical happiness of a religious is the fruit of self-abasement in union with Christ... And, when we are sad, we would do well to ask ourselves, “How are we living this *kenosis*?”

In the account of Jesus’ Presentation in the Temple, wisdom is represented by *two elderly persons*, Simeon and Anna: persons *docile to the Holy Spirit*, led by him, inspired by him. The Lord granted them wisdom as the fruit of a long journey along the path of obedience to his law, an obedience which likewise humbles and abases, but which also lifts up and protects hope, making them creative, for they are filled with the Holy Spirit. They even enact a kind of liturgy around the Child as he comes to the Temple. Simeon praises the Lord and Anna “proclaims” salvation (cf. *Lk* 2:28-32, 38). As with Mary, the elderly man holds the Child, but in fact it is the Child who guides the elderly man. The liturgy of First Vespers of today’s feast puts this clearly and beautifully: “*senex puerum portabat, puer autem senem regebat*”. Mary, the young mother, and Simeon, the kindly old man, hold the Child in their arms, yet it is the Child himself who guides them both.

Here it is not young people who are creative: the young, like Mary and Joseph, follow the law of the Lord, the path of obedience. The elderly, like Simeon and Anna, see in the Child the fulfilment of the Law and the promises of God. And they are able to celebrate: they are creative in joy and wisdom. And the Lord *turns obedience into wisdom* by the working of his Holy Spirit.

At times God can grant the gift of wisdom to a young person, but always as the fruit of obedience and docility to the Spirit. This obedience and docility is not something theoretical; it too is subject to the economy of the incarnation of the Word: docility and obedience to a founder, docility and obedience to a specific rule, docility and obedience to one’s superior, docility and obedience to the Church. It is always docility and obedience in the concrete.

In persevering along the path of obedience, personal and communal wisdom matures, and thus it also becomes possible *to adapt rules to the times*. For true “*aggiornamento*” is the fruit of wisdom forged in docility and obedience.

The *strengthening* and *renewal* of consecrated life are the result of *great love for the rule*, and also the ability to *look to and heed the elders* of one's congregation. In this way, the "deposit", the charism of each religious family, is *preserved by obedience and by wisdom*, working together. By means of this journey, we are preserved from living our consecration in "lightly", in an unincarnate manner, as if it were some sort of *gnosis* which would ultimately reduce religious life to caricature, a caricature in which there is following without renunciation, prayer without encounter, fraternal life without communion, obedience without trust, and charity without transcendence.

Today we too, like Mary and Simeon, want to take Jesus into our arms, to bring him to his people. Surely we will be able to do so if we enter into the mystery in which Jesus himself is our guide. Let us bring others to Jesus, but let us also allow ourselves to be led by him. This is what we should be: guides who themselves are guided.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Mary our Mother, Saint Joseph and Saints Simeon and Anna, grant to all of us what we sought in today's opening prayer: to "be presented [to him] fully renewed in spirit". Amen.