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Message of the Holy Father Francis on the fiftieth anniversary of the Promulgation of the Rite of Consecration of Virgins

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father to the Sisters consecrated in the *Ordo Virginum* on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Rite of Consecration of virgins:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear Sisters!

1. Fifty years ago, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, by mandate of Saint Paul VI, promulgated the new *Rite of Consecration of Virgins*. The current pandemic made it necessary to postpone the international meeting organised by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to mark this important anniversary. Nevertheless, I wish to join you in giving thanks for what Saint John Paul II, addressing you on the twenty-fifth anniversary, referred to as a “twofold gift of the Lord to his Church”: the renewed Rite and an *Ordo fidelium* “restored to the ecclesial community” (*Address to Participants in the International Conference on the Ordo Virginum*, 2 June 1995).

Your form of life has its primary source in the Rite and its juridical configuration in Canon 604 of the Code of Canon Law, and, since 2018, in the Instruction *Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago*. Your vocation is a sign of the inexhaustible and manifold richness of the gifts of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, who makes all things new (cf. *Rev* 21:5). It is likewise a sign of hope, pointing to the fidelity of the Father, who even today awakens in the hearts of some women the desire to be consecrated to the Lord in virginity, lived out in a concrete social and cultural setting, rooted in a particular Church, and expressed in a way of life that is ancient, yet modern and ever new.

Accompanied by your Bishops, you have become increasingly conscious of the distinctive nature of your form of consecrated life and have come to realise that your consecration makes you a particular *Ordo fidelium* in the Church. Continue along this path of cooperation with the Bishops in the development of sound programmes of vocational discernment and of initial and ongoing formation. The gift of your vocation finds expression within the

symphonic unity of the Church, which is built up when she can see in you women capable of living the gift of sisterhood.

2. Fifty years after the renewal of the *Rite*, I would say this to you: do not extinguish the prophetic nature of your vocation! You have been called, not because of your own merits, but by God's mercy, to make your lives a reflection of the face of the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Church is a virgin because, albeit composed of sinners, she continues to preserve the faith intact, to bring forth new life and to foster the growth of a new humanity.

In union with the Spirit and together with the entire Church and all those who hear the word of God, you are called to surrender yourselves to Christ and to say to him: "Come!" (*Rev* 22:17). In this way, you will experience the strength born of hearing his response: "Surely, I am coming soon!" (*Rev* 22:20). The coming of the Bridegroom is the horizon and goal of your ecclesial journey, a promise to be welcomed each day anew. By living in this way, "you will be stars to guide the world on its journey" (BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Participants in the Ordo Virginum Congress*, 15 May 2008).

I encourage you to reread and meditate on those texts of the *Rite* that speak of the meaning of your vocation. You are called to experience yourselves, and then to testify to others, that God, in his Son, loved us first, that his love is for all, and that it has the power to change sinners into saints. For "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (*Eph* 5:25-26). Your lives will reveal the eschatological tension that enlivens the whole of creation, drives the whole of history, and is born of the Risen Lord's invitation: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (*Song* 2:10; cf. ORIGEN, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* II:12).

3. The Homily proposed for the *Rite of Consecration* exhorts you to "Love everyone, especially those in need" (no. 16). Your consecration dedicates you to God without separating you from the setting in which you live and in which you are called to bear personal witness by a lifestyle of evangelical closeness (cf. *Ecclesiae Sponsae Imago*, 37-38). By such closeness to the men and women of our times, your virginal consecration helps the Church to love the poor, to discern forms of material and spiritual poverty, to help those who are weak and vulnerable, those suffering from physical and mental illness, the young and the elderly, and all those in danger of being marginalized or discarded.

Be women of mercy, experts in humanity. Women who believe in the "revolutionary nature of love and tenderness" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 288). The pandemic is teaching us that "the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family!" (*Homily at Mass for Divine Mercy Sunday*, 19 April 2020). Let everything that is happening all around us disturb you: do not close your eyes to it and do not flee from it. Be present and sensitive to pain and suffering. Persevere in proclaiming the Gospel, which promises fullness of life for all.

The Prayer of Consecration, in invoking upon you the manifold gifts of the Spirit, asks that you be enabled to live in *casta libertas* (*Rite of Consecration of Virgins*, 24). Let this "chaste freedom" be your way of relating to others, so that you can be a sign of the spousal love uniting Christ to the Church, virgin and mother, sister and friend of all. By your gentleness (cf. *Phil* 4:5), weave a web of authentic relationships that can help to make the neighbourhoods of our cities less lonely and anonymous. Be forthright, capable of *parrhesia*, but avoid the temptation to chatter and gossip. Have the wisdom, the resourcefulness, and the authority of charity, in order to stand up to arrogance and to prevent abuses of power.

4. On this Solemnity of Pentecost, I bless each of you, all those women preparing to receive this consecration, and all those who will receive it in the future. "The Holy Spirit is given to the Church as the inexhaustible principle of her joy as the Bride of the glorified Christ" (SAINT PAUL VI, *Gaudete in Domino*). As signs of the Church as Bride, may you always be women of joy, following the example of Mary of Nazareth, woman of the *Magnificat*, Mother of the living Gospel.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 31 May 2020, Solemnity of Pentecost

