

FEAST OF PRESENTATION OF THE LORD, DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

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VATICAN CITY, 3 FEB 2012 (VIS) -

At 5.30 p.m. yesterday, Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the Day of Consecrated Life, the Pope presided at second Vespers in the Vatican Basilica, in the presence of numerous members of institutes for consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. In the course of the ceremony, which began with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and concluded with the Eucharistic blessing, the Holy Father pronounced a homily.

Benedict XVI recalled the fact that the Feast of the Presentation commemorates the visit by Mary and Joseph to the Temple to present their firstborn to the Lord, in accordance with Mosaic law. There they met Simeon and the Prophet Anna who, the Pope explained, "recognised that Child as the Messiah announced by the prophets. In the meeting between the elderly Simeon and the young mother Mary, the Old and the New Testaments came together to give thanks for the gift of Light, which shines in the shadows and prevents the victory of darkness: Christ the Lord, a light to illuminate the Gentiles and a glory for His people Israel".

The Day of Consecrated Life coincides with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple because that evangelical episode "is an important symbol of the gift of life made by people who, through the evangelical counsels, are called to demonstrate before the Church and the world the characteristic traits of Jesus: virgin, poor, obedient, consecrated in the Father. What we celebrate in today's feast, then, is the mystery of consecration: the consecration of Christ, the consecration of Mary, the consecration of all those who follow Jesus for love of God's Kingdom".

The Day of Consecrated Life was instituted by John Paul II in 1997 with a threefold purpose. Firstly, to thank God "for the gift of this way of living, which is part of the sanctity of the Church". Today the entire community invokes this gift with faith, and prays for all consecrated people. Moreover, the Day aims "to promote knowledge of and respect for consecrated life among the people of God", expressing appreciation for the witness of people who have chosen to follow Christ by practising the evangelical counsels. Thirdly, for consecrated people themselves the Day is "an important opportunity to renew the intentions and feelings which inspired their gift" of

self to the Lord. "This is what we wish to do today, this is the task you are called to carry out every day of your lives", Benedict XVI told consecrated people.

The Year of Faith, due to begin in October, will be another favourable moment for interior renewal. During that time consecrated people "will be called to intensify their relationship with God. The evangelical counsels, accepted as an authentic rule for life, reinforce the faith, hope and charity which unite us to God", the Holy Father said. "Intense vicinity to the Lord - which must characterise your entire existence - will lead you to a renewed adherence to Him and have a positive influence on the particular form of your presence and apostolate among the People of God. This will make you - through the contribution of your charisms and remaining faithful to the Magisterium - witnesses of faith and grace; credible witnesses for the Church and the world today". Benedict XVI also made it clear that consecrated people should participate enthusiastically in new evangelisation.

In conclusion he quoted some words of Blessed John Paul II, calling on the Virgin Mary to intercede with the Lord, so that "all who have received the gift of following Him in consecrated life may be enabled to bear witness to that gift by their transfigured lives, as they joyfully make their way with all their brothers and sisters towards our heavenly homeland and the light which will never grow dim".