



May 29, 2016 Feast of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Note: In anticipation of the presence of His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke at our upcoming August convocation, following are some words he has previously addressed to consecrated virgins:

From the February 2, 2006 (Feast of the Presentation) issue of The Lamp:

Dear Members of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins,

I write to you to express heartfelt greetings of joy and peace in Our Lord, Who is the source and model of every consecrated vocation in the Church. As we celebrate the Day Dedicated to the Consecrated Life, I desire to encourage you in living out your consecration to virginity lived in the world. I thank you for the witness of the beauty of a life consecrated totally to God in Jesus Christ. I am most grateful for your service to the Church in the particular circumstances in which God has called you to live out your consecration. In the Prayer of Consecration of Virgins, the consecrating Bishop prays:

*Among your many gifts you give to some the grace of virginity.
 Yet the honor of marriage is in no way lessened.
 As it was in the beginning,
 your first blessing still remains upon this holy union.
 Yet your loving wisdom chooses those
 who make the sacrifice of marriage
 for the sake of the love of which it is the sign.
 (Prayer of Consecration)*

The consecrated virgin is called to give herself totally in love of Christ, she may be the sign of the faithful and enduring love to which the married called. She offers her gift of virginity for consecration, so that she may Christ in “perfect chastity.” To be the bride of Christ means being a sign all in the Church — of the love with which Christ loves the members of Church, love which is totally faithful and love which endures forever.

The Prayer of Consecration continues:

*Those who choose virginity have looked upon the face of Christ,
 its origin and inspiration.
 They give themselves wholly to Christ,
 the Son of the ever-virgin Mary,
 and the heavenly Bridegroom of those*

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who in his honor dedicate themselves to perpetual virginity.

(Prayer of Consecration)

As we celebrate this Day Dedicated to the Consecrated Life, be assured of my prayers for you, that you may know the immeasurable joy of this complete self-gift. May your life be a light to all those you meet, drawing them ever closer to Our Lord.

Asking God's blessing upon you and your consecration, I remain

Yours devotedly in Christ,



(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Archbishop of Saint Louis

From the June 23, 2006 (Solemnity of the Sacred Heart) issue of The Lamp:

Dear Sisters in Christ,

During the month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, you have been more frequently in my thoughts and prayers. The divine love poured forth into your souls from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus is the source of your spousal love, your total gift of self forever to our Lord Jesus Christ.

I recall for you words from the Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, "On Christian Love," issued on Christmas Day of last year by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI:

By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. Jn 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move (n. 12).

Your chaste virginal love is the fruit of your having first been loved unconditionally by Christ. In the pierced Heart of Jesus, you have discovered and discover always anew the path of your "life and love" as a consecrated virgin.

Your consecration is, therefore, one of the most eloquent signs of the reality of Christ's love for us all in the Church. In your consecration, we witness how Christ, alive for us in the Church, has called you to be His brides and has given you the grace of total oblation of self for the sake of Christ, your Bridegroom, and His Mystical Body, the Church.

Some years ago, we devoted a significant part of our time together, during the Annual Convocation, to reflection upon the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its altogether particular importance in the spiritual lives of consecrated virgins. It is my prayer that you continue to be fervent in your contemplation and love of the pierced Heart of Jesus. In the glorious Heart of Jesus, you will find an ever rich and never failing source of divine love.

Asking a remembrance in your prayers, I am

Yours devotedly in Christ,



(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Archbishop of Saint Louis

See more from Cardinal Burke on
page 8.

May 29th: Feast of Corpus Christi

By Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman

The life of a consecrated virgin is intimately identified with her Divine Spouse in the Most Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. The Divine Lord offered Himself in the mystery of His death on a Cross, where He consummated that which He announced to His disciples at the Last Supper. Our lives, in imitation of the life of our Blessed Mother, are lives of complete abandonment to our Divine Lord as we follow Him in whatever way of love the Eternal Father's will deigns for us. Our Divine Lord's real presence is in the Eucharistic celebration and we adore Him in the Sacred Tabernacle; He is truly present as well in our personal prayers of contemplation and in our meditation upon the Word of the Lord presented through the Holy Scriptures and the Magisterium of the Church. These are the holy ways that we receive the lovely news of His divine will upon us.

The virgins of the ancient Church paved this way of love in the will of the Lord with their martyrdoms and enriched it with their lives of mystical contemplation of the Spouse. The virgin received strength during her life as she learned from the Fathers of the Church a most profound practice of prayer and the reading of Holy Scripture. The Fathers of the Church taught her that when she prayed, she was talking with her Spouse, and when she read Scripture, her Spouse was talking to her. They recommended that she pray with the psalms in order to grow in mystical love for her Spouse in His real presence, and that in the book of the Proverbs of Solomon, she would find prudence. She should meditate on Ecclesiastes in order to learn about the vanities of this world, and on the book of Job to learn through his example about fortitude and patience. The virgins would learn the way of love from the Divine Spouse by reading the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the canonical Epistles. After all of these books, the virgins would continue to grow in the interior life through the historical books: the Heptateuch (the books of Moses, Joshua and Judges), the books of Kings, as well as the Paralipomena (Chronicles - books of things passed over that Saint Jerome considered to be the epitome of the Old Testament) and the volumes of Ezra (Esdras) and Esther (Cfr. Francisco de B. Vizmanos, *Las Virgenes Cristianas de la Iglesia Primitiva*, Chapter 13 "Intimacy in Prayer and Holy Scripture," pp. 341-345).

Only after completing all of this reading did the Fathers recommend that the virgins read the Song of Songs as a way of entering into the spiritual nuptials, to follow the Lord in the real presence of His Divinity (Cfr. *Metodio D'Olimpo, La Verginita, testi patristici*, Citta Nuova Editricie, 2000, pp. 37-44). They considered that the virgin needed first to know through the Holy Scriptures about the true nature of love; the Holy Scriptures would guide her and guard her from wrongly interpreting the Song of Songs in the context of the Greek classification of love as *Eros*.

Let us explore a bit further why it is that the Fathers recommended that the virgins read all the other books of Holy Scripture before reading the Song of Songs. It has to do with the definition of "love." The Greek language distinguishes four types of love: *phileō*, the love of companions; *agapē*, the noblest word for love, an unconditional love born from one's heart by the preciousness of the object that is loved; *storgē*, the natural affection or movement of the soul for husband, wife, child, or dog; and *eros*, the love of passion, an overmastering passion that seizes and absorbs itself into the mind, coming from an emotional involvement based on body chemistry (Cfr. Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 2nd ed. Boston: Saint Paul Books and Media, 1988). Only three of these words are used in the Holy Scripture. Scripture does not use the Greek word, *eros*, because "love" in Holy Scripture is always a manifestation of the true love that flows from the Holy Trinity.

Our Divine Lord and Spouse gives to the soul of the virgin espoused to Him a dimension of *mystical* love to help her fulfill her vocation as witness to the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ. The virgin's spousal love for Jesus Christ is built upon a solid foundation of mystical intimacy with Him, the grace for which is received at the moment of the consecratory prayer, when the virgin becomes a sacred woman in the Church. Although she lives in this mortal world, she belongs to the Spouse of the Church, the Eternal Bridegroom. Such a mystical love

is a far cry from *eros*.

How is it that we can follow Christ in mystical love, in the real presence of His divinity? We must ask Him for the wisdom to discover, in the midst of our daily living arrangement, the wisdom of an interior contemplation of His love. The virgin will discover that He gives to her soul in the integrity of her life, a life more of being than doing.

Jesus Christ Himself revealed the meaning of a vocation of mystical union with Him. Saint Augustine discussed the passage of the Holy Scriptures when Peter, referring to Saint John the Evangelist, asked our Lord "What about Him?" Jesus' response was meant to reveal the mystery of the constant union of the soul with the Lord. In the Gospel of Saint John we read that in the days following the resurrection, Jesus prepared breakfast for the Apostles. After the breakfast, Jesus initiated a dialogue with Peter in order to encourage and exhort him in regard to his upcoming responsibilities and even to prophecy the manner in which Peter would die. Jesus began by questioning Peter about His love for Him, and each time that Peter answered in the affirmative, Jesus followed up with the command for Peter to feed His sheep. If Peter were to truly love his Master, he was to shepherd and care for those who belong to Christ. Jesus' words revealed Peter's role as the leader of the new Church, the Body of Christ there in Jerusalem that would be responsible for spreading the Gospel after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

When we meditate on this dialogue between Jesus and Peter, recorded in John 21, it is interesting to note the different Greek words for love that were used. The first two times that Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (Jn. 21: 15-16), He used the Greek word *agapē* (unconditional love), and Peter's response "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you," used the Greek word *phileō* (a brotherly or friendship type of love. Jesus had named the apostles as His friends during the Last Supper as He let them know the Father's will for Him. It seems, therefore, that Jesus was trying to have Peter understand that he must love Jesus unconditionally in order to be the leader that the Eternal Father had again confirmed him to be. The third time Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" in John 21:17, He used the word *phileō*, and Peter again responded with "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love (*phileō*) you." The point in the use of different Greek words for "love" seemed to be that Jesus was asking Peter to go forward in a life of action as leader of the new Church; Saint Augustine distinguished this calling of Peter from the calling received by the Apostle John.

Saint Augustine explained further: Jesus Christ responded to Peter's question "What about him, Lord" by saying of Saint John: "If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you? Your duty is to follow me" (Jn. 21:21-22). With this answer, Jesus symbolically presented two ways of love to live His call in this world: Peter's way and John's way. The first way, that of the apostle Peter, is lived entirely in this world and comes to an end with this world. The second way, that of the apostle John, will be imperfectly lived until the end of this world, but it will have no end in the next world. Peter understood that the Church of the Lord is more than an image, but is a profound eternal mystery. Saint Augustine defined this mystery: "The Church recognizes two kinds of life as having been commended to her by God. One is a life of faith, the other a life of vision; one is a life passed on pilgrimage in time, the other in a dwelling place in eternity; one is a life of toil, the other of repose; one is spent on the road, the other in our homeland; one is active, involving labor, the other contemplative, the reward of labor." In summary, the first kind of life is symbolized by the apostle Peter, the second by John. All of the first life is lived in this world, and it will come to an end with this world. The second life will be imperfect till the end of this world, but it will have no end in the next world. And so Christ says to Peter: *Follow me*; but of John he says: *If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you? Your duty is to follow me*. (Saint Augustine, Office of Readings, Saturday of the Sixth Week of Easter, from the treatise on John, Tract. 124, 5, 7: CCL 36, 685-687).

The lives of the virgins in the ancient Church as well as the lives of the virgins of later centuries bear witness to Christ as we rest in His revealed words that continue to apply to all of us as we follow Him. "If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" It is our duty TO LOVE HIM with mystical eternal love.

Current Council

Members and Officers

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2016-2018;
Diocese of Lansing.

Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large, 2016-2018
(Appointed Vice-President through 2018);
Archdiocese of Miami.

Margaret Flipp, Treasurer, 2014-2016,
Diocese of Arlington

Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large, 2014-2016
(appointed Secretary through 2016)
Diocese of Steubenville.

Marie Beccaloni, Member-at-large, 2015-2017,
Archdiocese of Chicago.



Upcoming USACV- Sponsored Events

**2016 United States Convocation
of Consecrated Virgins
August 6-10, 2016,
The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center,
Chicago, Illinois**

(See article, page 13)

**2016 National Information Conference
on the Vocation of Consecrated Virgins
August 2-5, 2016
The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center
Chicago, Illinois**

(See article, page 12)

Upcoming Issues of The Lamp:

September 8, 2016 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

December 12, 2016 Our Lady of Guadalupe

February 2, 2017 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life

May 25, 2017 Ascension Thursday

Special Announcements

Consecrated virgins are invited to consider hosting the 2017 (or 2018) Convocation in your diocese. We have not received any proposals yet for the 2017 convocation. Your suggestions and offers are most welcome.

Thanks to all who have renewed membership in the USACV in 2016. If you have not yet done so, now is a good time!

Recordings are available from the 2015 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virgins, and from the 2015 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins. Order forms are available on the USACV website: www.consecratedvirgins.org.

2016 USACV Member and Friend Registration Renewal Forms are also available on the USACV website.



By Judith Stegman

Jesus asked, "Peter, do you love me?" And to Peter's response, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you," Jesus responded, "Feed my sheep." As virgin brides of Jesus Christ, we also respond to the love of the Bridegroom with the heartfelt expression of our love, and the love of His Bride the Church. Our solemn consecration is for this very purpose: that we might live "as a surpassing sign of the Church's love for Christ." How might we do this – how might we as His virgins show our love by feeding his sheep? The Church tells us: we live as "an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ." As we live in this world with its troubles, let us encourage one another in hope of the world to come, witnessing to the power of our Divine Spouse, who has overcome this world!

We anticipate with joy our August convocation with Cardinal Burke, and hope that many consecrated virgins will be able to join us for the days of prayer and encouragement in the living of our vocation. This year marks twenty years of the active work of the USACV: facilitating relationships among consecrated virgins; engaging in ongoing study about the vocation of consecrated virginity together with virgins from around the world; and helping to prepare and disseminate accurate vocational information. More and more I note that we are asked serious questions by responsible diocesan personnel about the nature and meaning of a vocation of consecrated virginity, and I think this reflects a certain maturity on the part of the vocation of consecrated virginity in the United States.

I'd like to encourage all to invite those interested in learning more about the vocation of consecrated virginity to attend the Information Conference sponsored by the USACV, which will be held August 2 to 5 in Chicago. Bishop Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing and Episcopal Moderator of the USACV, and a team of experienced virgins will give significant presentations on the meaning of the vocation. The conference is designed not only for those inquiring about the consecration for themselves, but also for those who are newly consecrated or

preparing for consecration soon, and for diocesan personnel and consecrated virgins who are interested in learning how to best assist women in the discernment and preparation process.

2016 Election Announcement

Two USACV Council positions, Treasurer and At-Large Representative, will open January 1, 2017. Details of our governing structure can be found in the organizational statutes and bylaws of the USACV, which have been mailed to all members and are available upon request. A summary of election information and position descriptions follow.

Election Process

Candidacy: Written notification of a member's desire to run for an open Council position must be received by midnight on Friday, October 28, 2016. We encourage each candidate to also submit a biographical statement of approximately 500 words, including remarks about her own life as a consecrated virgin, as well as her vision, qualifications, and motivation for serving in the position for which she desires to run.

Eligibility to Vote: A member is eligible to vote in the 2016 election if she has a consecration certificate on file with the USACV archivist and if she has registered as a USACV member in 2016 (Article III D 2). Ballots will be mailed in early November to those listed as registered members on October 30, 2016.

Voting Process: Ballots (and candidate biographies) will be mailed to all USACV members in early November 2016. Ballots will be due back to our Election Team leader by Friday, December 1, 2016. Further details of the election process will be announced in the September issue of *The Lamp*.

Election Results: The position of Treasurer must be elected by a simple majority (over 50% of the voting members). The At-Large Representative Council member seat will be won by the candidate receiving the most votes of the voting members. (Article VI F). "Voting members" refers to the number of valid ballots that are returned, not to of the total membership (see Article XI).

Position Terms, Descriptions, and Responsibilities

Treasurer

Term: January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019.

Eligibility to run for office (Article III Section D3):

Open to any current voting member who has been a member or actively involved in the Association for the two previous years and has the necessary qualifications to carry out the responsibilities of Treasurer.

Duties (Article V Section E):

1. To serve as a member of the Council [see duties below].
2. To be responsible for the collection of dues, collection of other income, payment of bills and accounting of all receipts and disbursements.
3. To prepare and submit to the Council an annual budget and financial report.
4. To prepare and submit financial reports as needed for the meetings of the Council and membership.
5. To prepare and submit an annual financial report for all members.
6. To administer the goods of the Association in accordance with these statutes and under the overall direction of the Episcopal Moderator (cf. canon 319 par. 1), and to give a yearly accounting to him.
7. To faithfully account to the Episcopal Moderator, on behalf of the Association, for the disbursement of contributions and alms which have been collected (cf. Canon 319 par 2).

At Large Representative

Term: January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019.

Eligibility to run for office (Article III Section D3):

Open to any current voting member who has been a member or actively involved in the Association for the two previous years.

Duties (Article V Section A):

1. To collaborate with other Council members in the governance of the USACV in accord with the provisions of the organizational statutes, with

particular focus on the ecclesial objectives (Article II) of the Association.

2. To make every effort to attend the annual membership meeting and the annual Council meeting held with the Episcopal Moderator. To participate in other Council meetings or discussions as needed.

3. If serving as the Council representative on a standing committee, to facilitate ongoing communication between the Council and the committee.

4. If elected as an At-Large Representative, to make every effort to accept an appointment as Vice President (Article V Section C) or Secretary (Article V, Section D), recognizing that some responsibilities of the offices may be delegated to others (Article IV, Section A).

Other Notes – both positions

Council members rely heavily on email to facilitate communication, since we are geographically in all parts of the United States.

The Association's travel budget currently covers accommodations and meals for Council members during the annual Council meeting with our Episcopal Moderator, but not travel expenses.

Any of the current council members would be happy to discuss these positions with interested members.



From the Shrine of the Visitation in Jerusalem, contributed by Andrea Valenzuela

Letters from Cardinal Burke Continued

From the July 6, 2007 (St. Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr) issue of The Lamp:

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Happy feast day of Saint Maria Goretti. May Saint Maria Goretti's example and intercession be a source of great blessing for you in the daily living of your vocation to consecrated virginity lived in the world.

In the third part of his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, "On the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission," our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI reflects on the Holy Eucharist as a sacrament to be lived. He comments, in a special way, on the importance of the Holy Eucharist for those called to the consecrated life, "who find in the celebration of the Eucharist and in Eucharistic adoration the strength necessary for the radical following of Christ" (n. 81).

Pope Benedict XVI notes, in particular, the intrinsic relationship between the Holy Eucharist and consecrated virginity, "inasmuch as the latter is an expression of the Church's exclusive devotion to Christ, Whom she accepts as her Bridegroom with a radical and fruitful fidelity" (n. 81). His words remind us of the powerful sign of your vocation for all who are baptized in Christ and, thereby, are called to live for Christ alone in pure and selfless love. Your consecration leads all disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ to the fountain of their life and mission in the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, in the Body and Blood of Christ offered up for them in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Our Holy Father lists three ways in which consecrated virginity relates essentially to the Holy Eucharist. First of all, the consecrated virgin finds in the Holy Eucharist "inspiration and nourishment for [her] complete dedication to Christ." Second, the consecrated virgin "draws" from the Holy Eucharist "encouragement and strength to be a sign, in our own times too, of God's gracious and fruitful love for humanity." Third, the consecrated virgin, by the witness of her consecrated life, becomes "an objective sign and foreshadowing of the 'wedding-feast of the Lamb' (Rev 19:7-9) which is the goal of all salvation history" and which is anticipated in every celebration of the Holy Eucharist (n. 81). In the life of the consecrated virgin, every Christian views the ultimate context and meaning of his or her daily living.

May the reflection of Pope Benedict XVI on the relationship of your vocation to the Holy Eucharist inspire in you a new knowledge and love of our Eucharistic Lord, your Bridegroom. Let us all pray that the daily living of your vocation will draw many to our Eucharistic Lord, so that they may live for Him alone and, one day, enjoy with Him the eternal joy and peace of Heaven.

Be assured of my sentiments of profound esteem and of my prayers for God's blessing upon you and your consecration.

Asking a continued remembrance in your prayers, I am

Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Yours devotedly in Christ,



(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Archbishop of Saint Louis

From a homily given January 29, 2016, by His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke during Holy Mass at the tomb of St. Peter the Apostle

It is a great joy for me to be able to be here to celebrate the Holy Mass with you during your pilgrimage to Rome with consecrated virgins living in the world. We are at the very tomb of Saint Peter the Apostle, whose confession of faith we make also with him today: faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son Incarnate, who suffered and died for us, rose from the dead and ascended, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and remains alive for us in His Holy Church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From the earliest days of the Church, we recognize in your vocation, that is, in the consecration you received through your Bishop, a very particular outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is for a life of consecrated virginity lived in the world, which is a vocation of consecration closely connected to the office of the Prince of the Apostles, the Shepherd of the Universal Church, Saint Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiff.

In an unbroken line from the time of Saint Peter, consecrated virgins have been bound by a special bond of love to the Roman Pontiff. In a very particular and luminous way, the life of the consecrated virgin is devoted to manifesting the spousal love of the Church, the Bride and Mystical Body of Christ, for her Bridegroom. I think, for instance, of the passion and death of Saint Agatha, whose feast we will celebrate in exactly one week, who underwent a cruel torture and the attempted amputation of her breast to try to force her to abandon both her faith in Christ and her consecration as a virgin. We pray through the intercession of Saint Peter, who came to Saint Agatha and worked a miracle on her behalf after that cruel suffering. The miraculous healing of Saint Agatha is an expressive and moving witness of the bond of the consecrated virgins with Saint Peter and his successors, even to our own day with Pope Francis.

Let us pray today with the same faith that Saint Peter professed at Caesarea Philippi. Let us be one with the Roman Pontiff in confessing our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone is the salvation of the world. In a particular way I pray for you. Let us pray for all consecrated virgins that they may be faithful through their witness in the world to the spousal love of God the Son for His Mystical Body, the Church, in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation. Let us pray in a special way too, for our Holy Father Pope Francis, that the Lord may grant him ever new wisdom and strength in order to carry out his mission on behalf of the universal Church.



Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke saying Mass at the tomb of St. Peter

The Consecrated Virgin Living in the Divine Will

By Diane Christine Farr

We learn from the writings of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, that God wishes to draw us into a deeper union with Himself by giving us the gift of living in the Divine Will. We are called not only to be resigned to doing God's Will but to possess it as our very life. We should have the intention of fusing ourselves with the Divine Will as we pray, and as we work, enclosing all of our acts in the Divine Will which imparts to them an infinite value. Fusing ourselves with the Divine Will in prayer, we offer God love, adoration and thanksgiving for all of the *Fiats* of creation, all the works of redemption, and the works of sanctification on behalf of everyone, especially those who have not cooperated with God's grace.

We take everything into our heart that God has manifested through His one eternal act, making it our own. We see the love God has placed in the beauty and harmony of creation. Pondering the Incarnation, we enter into everything Jesus has done for us in His sacred humanity, and treasure it in our heart. We appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, especially through the sacraments and the hidden workings of the sanctification of souls. The only way we can enter into God's Will is by uniting ourselves with Jesus in His humanity as He carried out in perfect obedience the Will of His Father.

The Catechism states, "Christ enables us *to live in him* all that he himself lived, and *he lives it in us*. By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each [person]. We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model." (CCC 521).

This reminds us of Jesus' invitation, "Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me." (*John 15:4*)

We pray in the Our Father, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." This is what the Catechism tells us about how we can fulfill God's Will more perfectly while living on earth:

"We ask our Father to unite our will to His Son's, in order to fulfill his will, his plan of salvation for the life of the world. We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father. (CCC 2825)

How can the consecrated virgin view her vocation as she seeks to make the Divine Will of the most Holy Trinity the foundation of her life?

God has willed that virginity play a special role in our sanctification, adopting an attitude that affects our whole being. It is a divine adornment, a unique expression of love between the bride and Jesus, her heavenly Bridegroom. It is an unmediated union of singular beauty. This beauty that adorns soul and body has its origin in the Heart of the Holy Trinity. As with all authentic forms of holiness, consecrated virginity has its source in God, not in us.

The holiness of living in God's will helps us to enter more deeply into the meaning of our particular vocation. God wishes to clothe all of us with His Divine Will as with a garment of light. The consecrated virgin is also adorned with the bridal dress of holy virginity. It is our holy Mother Mary who prepares her and presents her to her divine Spouse.

We may say that perpetual virginity is a sacred sign revealing Our Lady as the Ark of the new covenant. So also does it signify the profound nature of the union of the consecrated virgin with her Lord. Finding Jesus lovingly present in her virginity, she truly understands and appreciates these words from Isaiah: "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you." (*Isaiah 62:5*) Likewise, as the rite of consecration states, Jesus becomes her joy and her crown.

Living in the Divine Will means that the consecrated virgin is totally immersed in Jesus. He is perfectly at rest in her soul, since He finds all that pertains to Him present there. The consecrated virgin should never be preoccupied with

herself, but always be attentive to pleasing her divine Spouse and accomplishing her acts in union with Him in the Divine Will.

As brides of Christ, we contemplate the interior life of our holy mother Mary whose entire existence was in perfect harmony with the Divine Will. Mary's soul is a paradise of radiant purity, illumined by the sun of God's Will. Through the grace of our consecration, we are blessed to share in the splendid beauty of Mary's virginal life. We also make present in this world, through our mystical espousal to Christ, the virginal life of heaven and a foreshadowing of the eternal wedding feast. Living in God's Will we see the value of everything from the vantage point of eternity, and our prayer is all-inclusive. It is with God's own love that we love and embrace Him and reach out to others in perfect charity. We strive to never let our own will interfere with what God wills for us. In receiving the grace to know and love Jesus as our beloved Spouse, we grow in an ever deepening intimacy with His most gentle Heart.

This Heart is our dearest possession and we draw everything we need from it. We share in its joys and sorrows as well as its zeal for the salvation and sanctification of souls. Identifying with the mission of Christ, we may often feel keenly in our own hearts His interior pain. Indeed, our communion with Him increases our knowledge of all that He suffered for our sake.

We can see from the following quote, taken from the homily for the rite of consecration, how the gift of virginity flows from the Divine Will and how the virgin herself anticipates the life of heaven:

“The life you seek to follow has its home in heaven. God Himself is its source. It is he, infinitely pure and holy who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom he gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all holy God.”

Again we read in the liturgy of the hours for All Saints Day: “You gave holy virgins the gift of imitating the virginity of Christ. May those consecrated to virginity be steadfast witnesses to the coming of your Kingdom.”

The virgin has an attentive and listening heart. Virginity has been called a fullness in Christ. This is because the consecrated virgin experiences the joy and freedom of loving Jesus with her whole being. Her one aim is to render perfect praise and honor to her beloved Spouse with this virginal love, a love that she has first drawn from His own Heart. With an undivided heart, she has preserved the veil of virginity in body and soul for the glory of her heavenly Bridegroom.

Virginity is a choice and noble flower planted in the garden of the Church by God for the good of all souls. It is a sweet flowering of the mystical life, foreshadowing the eternal wedding banquet. Speaking of virginity and referring to Jesus, Luisa Piccarreta states in Volume 3 of her writings: “He, being the first noble lily and the model, is the exemplar of all the others.” She continues:

“Oh, how beautiful it is to see a virgin soul. Her heart gives off no other breath but that of purity and that of candor; it is not even shaded by a love which is not God, and even her body gives off fragrance of purity. Everything is pure in her, pure in her steps, pure in operating, in speaking, in looking and also in moving. So at the mere sight of her, one feels the fragrance and recognizes a soul who is truly pure. What charism, what graces, what mutual love and loving stratagems between the soul and her Spouse, Jesus.”



Life Corner

by Florence Sundberg

We are living in challenging times where it seems we have lost not only the sense of the sacredness of each and every human life but we seem to have lost the sense of the sacred entirely. How do we, as followers of Christ and His Church, stand strong against such powerful opposition to goodness and truth – against opposition to life? I recall the words of Blaise Pascal who said that the serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence on the world, next to the might and power of God. And Mother Teresa tells us that in order to defend and protect life, all life, beginning with the baby in the womb, we must become burning lights of justice and peace and love in the world, in the dark places, at the peripheries where so many wait in darkness and despair for the shining light of Christ, the Son of God. He is our Spouse, our Beloved, so let us follow Him and respond to those raging, discordant voices we hear around us with the tenderness of His love and the power of His Word.

Consecration Announcements

Upcoming Consecrations:

June 4, 2016, 1:00 pm, Valerie Wilson, St. Martin of Tours Church, Archdiocese of Louisville. All are warmly invited. You may contact Valerie at valerielynnwilson@yahoo.com.

June 29, 2016, 5:15 pm, Shannon Ryan, Aquinas Newman Center on the campus of the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, at the hands of the Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe.

Recent Consecrations:

Costa Rica:

May 14, 2016, Lilliana Quesada Solano and María Teresa Araujo Cruz, Diocese of Cartago, at the hands of the Most Reverend José Francisco Ulloa Rojas, Bishop of Cartago.

India:

April 4, 2016, Lynn Pereira, Archdiocese of Bombay, at the hands of the Most Reverend Agnelo Rufino Gracias, in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Malad, Mumbai.

2016 Information Conference

Announcement

The 2016 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginité Lived in the World, sponsored by the USACV, will be held at The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center in downtown Chicago, Illinois, from August 2 to August 5. The Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing and Episcopal Moderator of the USACV, will once again be present to give key presentations along with experienced virgins of the Association.

The deadline for registration is July 5, 2016. Please encourage attendance by anyone you think would benefit from the Conference, including those discerning the vocation, those preparing for consecration, or those in dioceses who assist in the discernment and formation process for the vocation of consecrated virginité. Registration forms and additional information is available on the USACV website: www.consecratedvirgins.org.

Please contact the conference coordinator, Theresa Marshall, with any questions: tel. 734-332-4648 or marshallcv@gmail.com.

2016 Convocation of Consecrated Virgins

Announcement

Please join the United States consecrated virgins for our annual convocation to be held August 6 to 10, 2016 at The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center in downtown Chicago, Illinois. We are pleased that we will welcome His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke to offer key addresses, as we explore the theme, ***Consecrated Virginity as a Reality in Today's Church.***

All consecrated virgins, including those from other countries, are warmly invited to attend. Virgins who have been accepted by their Bishops as candidates for the consecration are also invited to come if they have attended a previous Information Conference.

Consecrated virginity is among the most excellent gifts bequeathed by Our Lord to his Bride, the church. From apostolic times women have dedicated their virginity to God, so adding to the beauty of the mystical body of Christ and making it fruitful in grace.

-from the 1970 Decree promulgating the revised rite for the consecration of virgins

Our 2016 Convocation, with its broad ecclesial emphasis, will focus on the presence of the *Ordo Virginum* in countries throughout the world and in dioceses throughout the United States. We desire to encourage one another in the dedication of our virginity, so that the mystical body of Christ might be ever more fruitful in grace, and its beauty enhanced. Our gathering will include a look back over the twenty-year history of the USACV, not in complacency, but with an eye to considering where it is that the Lamb has led us, as a group and as individual virgins faithfully living this vocation of love. We will consider our story in light of the witness of virgins living the vocation throughout the world.

Our days together will be centered upon prayer, including Lauds, Holy Mass, Vespers, and Compline. In addition, the schedule will include time for Eucharistic Adoration and Confession. To round out the day, our evenings will serve as a time of fellowship as we engage in enjoyable recreational activities. Cardinal Burke and various consecrated virgins will offer presentations relevant to our theme. A detailed program and registration material are available on the USACV website. For additional information, please contact Kathy Reda at kathyreda@aol.com.

Once again, we encourage all consecrated virgins and candidates who have attended an Information Conference to join us for this wonderful time of study, prayer, and fellowship at the 2016 Convocation. We hope to see you all in August!

Anniversary Reflections: 5 Years

*Joyce Stolberg, Diocese of Colorado Springs,
consecrated October 30, 2011.*

The Only Path that I Could Follow

In order to truly comprehend the conundrum that dimmed the bright path of religious life during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, one had to have been there. For me it was a time of severe trial. I had equated my membership in a small contemplative religious community with God's choice of me as his beloved spouse. I had relied on the grace of God, done my best and had given it my whole heart. When that community fell apart I wondered if God had tossed me aside and rejected me as he rejected Saul from being King of Israel. Alone, in dire poverty after 11 years of service, still loving a Church that had no heart for its former nuns, I needed to establish myself, find work, learn to drive, and acquire marketable job skills and education beyond high school level — all at once.

I achieved all that — not at once, but gradually — acquiring a bachelor degree, a professional laboratory certification, a master degree, and an advanced theological education, together with volunteering as a catechist and sponsor within the RCIA process, all while working full time building a career in hospital laboratory service.

My prayer life perdured, sometimes thriving, at other times, dry, and I discerned no desire to embrace the married state. Decades later, I had to give up my laboratory work because multiple cumulative trauma injuries generated chronic pain and disability. I continued to volunteer with the RCIA process and published my own course of instruction, which earned a place on the USCCB Conformity List of Catechetical Materials. Yet for almost a literal 40 apparently pathless desert years, one major lingering doubt haunted my psyche and recurring nightmares alerted me that my life was somehow incomplete: Were the gift and the call of God irrevocable? *"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not!"* (Rom. 11:1) Or had God rejected me as he rejected Saul from the throne of Israel? *"Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord in turn has rejected you as king."* (1 Sam. 15:23) If the gift of God's election as his bride

was irrevocable, how could I ever get back onto the only path that I ever knew — the only path that I could follow?

Several articles in our diocesan Catholic newspaper, a recommendation by a pastor who had known me for over 15 years, and a bishop who is open to the vocation of Consecrated Virginity lived in the world combined to open the door of Consecration for me. The bishop's canon lawyer told me that the consecrated life requires basically fulfilling all the duties proper to a religious, but in one's own environment and on one's own initiative. I had already been doing these things and living this lifestyle, being essentially a contemplative on my own rhythm. Suddenly the bright path reappeared before me! Suddenly my dilemma was resolved! I was consecrated on October 30, 2011 in Colorado Springs, Colorado by Bishop Michael Sheridan.

The past five years have been a time of deep spiritual peace for me. My life feels integrated, knowing that God has brought me back into a formal state of espousal to his Son Jesus Christ. Nightmares have ceased. I have been gifted with a confidence in God's call that spills over into my daily activities. I have an understanding that physical handicap and suffering draw me closer into the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. I offer that suffering to God in intercession to obtain mercy for sinners, knowing that God wants to extend that mercy. I have received a gift that will last forever, and which I will carry with me to the throne of God in heaven.



Bishop Michael Sheridan consecrates Joyce Stolberg, October 30, 2011.

*Paula Willenbrink, Archdiocese of Saint Louis,
consecrated June 2, 2011*

Mercy

Mercy - This is the word I use to describe my life as a consecrated virgin. God is rich in mercy and since this is the year of mercy, I feel it fitting that I approach my fifth anniversary from that perspective. I am awestruck at the thought that our omnipotent and all holy God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity - Jesus, called me, a finite creature to be wedded to Him. He is all faithful and in His mercy He has allowed me to remain faithful to Him. I have had challenges to deal with in my personal life regarding being a consecrated virgin but God's grace is ever present day in and day out.

In our American culture a consecrated virgin is counter cultural and truly an eschatological witness to the world.

I have a friend who is still a virgin at 68 and wears a Christian ring on her left hand. She claims Jesus as her husband but has no desire to be a consecrated virgin. It truly is a call, a vocation, for which I am grateful to God that He chose me. As St. Teresa of Jesus said "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever."

*Andrea Valenzuela, consecrated
May 31, 2011*

Shalom from Jerusalem!

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Alleluia! Dear sisters in Christ, dear virgins, Shalom from Jerusalem! May the peace of our beloved Jesus remain in our hearts. I am happy to share with you on the occasion of my 5th anniversary as a consecrated virgin. I share with you the blessing I have received from God in these last three months --- to contemplate the mysteries of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary and the Visitation of Mary full

of the Holy Spirit accompanying her cousin Elizabeth. I thank God who allows me this gift of being present in the Holy Land to revive the sacred history and to write the fifth gospel: "Jesus - I".

Before knowing the Ordo Virginum I was consecrated with private vows renewed each year over 8 years. When I learned about the Ordo Virginum, I felt in my heart that this was the way that God was calling me to go and the mission he entrusted to me. I met the Order of Virgins and I could really identify with this lifestyle. With the help of my spiritual director, I chose the date of my consecration; I wanted it to be a special occasion. Remembering the mission that God has entrusted to me, I chose May 31 when the Church remembers the Visitation of Mary. I never thought that God would bring me to the same village in which this event happened --- one of the gifts of God that helps me keep alive the flame of first love of Jesus in my life.

Several weeks ago I recalled the preparation for my ceremony of consecration. I meditated deeply on that beautiful experience of being the Bride of Christ and I keep alive that first love. One of the details that I have in mind is the choice of the date of my ceremony, May 31st the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin. At that time I did not clearly know where God would lead me; to my surprise I can now say "that the Almighty is still doing great things for me." I think I heard the Lord's voice that now allows me to live and serve in Ein Karem-Jerusalem where I can contemplate this mystery of the Visitation and serve in a smaller home of Children with special needs.



**Andrea Valenzuela in front of the
Shrine of the Visitation in Jerusalem**

The Bible teaches us that Mary, filled with the Holy Spirit, came to this town to serve her cousin Elizabeth. I urge you to renewal every day; we fill our lives by the grace of God and the example of Mary our mother. We are ready to announce to others what God

does in our lives, we can announce it with words, actions and with our prayer and finally we always remember that Jesus has called us to be the bride of Christ.

The peace of our beloved Jesus remain in our hearts every day. Praised be Jesus Christ!



Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.

Luke 22: 19, 20

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

USACV
www.consecratedvirgins.org

**United States Association
of Consecrated Virgins**
300 West Ottawa Street
Lansing, MI 48933-1577
USA

Email:
info@consecratedvirgins.org
President@consecratedvirgins.org

Fax: 253-270-5507

www.consecratedvirgins.org