

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Mass of First Profession for Sister Angela Marie Clare Conti

Mass of First Profession

Sister Angela Marie Clare Conti

Little Sisters of the Poor

Queens, New York

July 28, 2018

Dear friends in Christ,

We have gathered in joy for the Mass of First Profession of Sister Angela Marie Clare, the daughter of Diane and Jim Conti, together with her brother, Jason, her grandparents, relatives and friends.

In these days you are experiencing the joy and hospitality of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Together with the sisters, I greet you and thank you. Each and all of you – but especially Sister Angela's parents – played a special role in helping her to discern and embrace her vocation to consecrated life.

And if Sister Angela Marie Clare is a daughter of Diane and Jim Conti, she is also a spiritual daughter of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

With you, Sister Angela, I thank the many priests, sisters, and parishioners who also played a role in your formation and who gave you good example and encouragement along the way.

Here I would mention especially the youth group at Trinity Parish in Glen Bernie led in the past by Father Michael DeAscanis, who is with us today. It has been especially fruitful for the life of the Church!

The Whispering Voice of God

Yet, for all the support you received from many quarters in the Church, there were those critically important moments of grace when, like the prophet Elijah, you had to retreat into the wilderness, “far from the madding crowd” (as Thomas Hardy would say), far from “the dictatorship of noise” (as Cardinal Sarah would say).

There, in the spiritual wilderness, you listened to the voice of the Lord and became radically available to him and to His Church.

In your solitude, the Lord sustained you, just as he did the prophet Elijah and he also spoke to you, just as he spoke to Elijah.

God’s voice was that gentle, whispering breeze that you discovered in the wonderful example of dedication and service offered on a daily basis by the Little Sisters of the Poor.

In their life of prayer, their life in common, their chastity, poverty, and obedience, and in their unique way of welcoming and caring for the elderly poor – in all of that you heard the voice of the Lord, “not shouting, not crying out, not making his voice heard in the street” (Is. 42:2).

Rather, the Lord’s heart confided in your heart and you listened, you prayed, you discerned.

How beautifully the experience of finding your vocation is reflected in today’s Psalm: “‘Come,’ says my heart, ‘seek his face’ – your face, LORD, do I seek!”

And seeking the Lord you embraced formation for consecrated life, just as the four young women who, yesterday became novices, are doing. And now, Sister Angela, on behalf of the Church, your religious superiors and the bishop of your home diocese confirm your calling

to live consecrated life as a professed Little Sister of the Poor.

What a day of joy and grace for you, your family, the Little Sisters and the Church!

Disengaging to Engage

If, however, we would understand more deeply the step Sister Angela is taking, then, let us *all* listen to the voice of the Lord in the Gospel where he engages the rich young man.

This young man was a good person who strove to lead an upright life. He was admirable in habitually keeping the commandments.

Yet, his questioning heart prompted him to ask Jesus, “What else ought I do?” Jesus’ answer disappointed him: “Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and then, come and follow me!”

As you recall, the young man went away sad, for his possessions were many.

We stand at a moment, Sister Angela, in which *you* present *yourself* to the Lord as one who has striven in God’s grace to follow him throughout your life.

You also have asked the question, “What else should I do?” and you have received an answer not unlike the Lord’s response to the rich young man.

But instead of going away sad you are running joyfully toward the Lord, leaving behind not only your possessions but also foregoing marriage and, at the same time, submitting yourself to a life of religious obedience.

To many people, what you are doing is positively, absolutely unthinkable. Yet, in the power of God’s grace, what you are really doing is freeing yourself to follow the Lord: free to embrace his own style of life; free to live a life that breathes the air of the Gospel, free to lead a life of integrity, discipleship, consecration and joyful service.

And in embracing this life, you encourage all of us, myself included, to strive in God’s grace to follow the Lord unreservedly.

In the words of your foundress, St. Jeanne Jugan, “It is so good to be poor, to have nothing, to depend on God for everything!”

The Pursuit of an Enduring Hope

Today, of course, is not an end but a beginning.

Like the Sisters who were instrumental in inspiring your vocation, you are setting out on a way of life in which Christ will continue to take ever more complete possession of your heart.

In today's reading from Philippians, St. Paul describes for us the mystery that will unfold in your life, day by day, until you are called to glory.

You will come to regard your plans, your efforts, your righteousness, anything that you attain or strive to attain as so much dross in light of the supreme good of knowing and loving and serving Christ Jesus.

It was St. Jeanne Jugan who said, "My Jesus, I have only you," and again, "We were grafted on the Cross!"

Knowing, loving, and serving Christ Jesus is not merely a pious thought. Rather, it means embracing the Cross of Christ in its varied forms, forgetting about yourself and straining forward to what lies ahead.

For the way of life upon which you have embarked looks, not to the past, but rather to the future, indeed, to the absolute future.

It looks to that day when, as St. Paul says, *all of us*, God willing, will somehow have attained the resurrection from the dead.

Then we will stand before the Lord as utterly single-hearted in our love, having no other possessions at hand but love itself, with our wills utterly conformed, like Christ's, to the will of the Father.

None of us is there yet but all of us count on those in consecrated life to lead the way, to unveil for us now what we shall later become, if only we cling to the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

In this way, by a life centered on Christ, rooted in the Gospel, and looking ahead in hope to the goal, "the prize of God's upward calling," you contribute mightily to the Church's mission of evangelization, even in times as challenging as these.

You also foster vocations to consecrated life, bearing witness even now to the

discerners who are with us this morning in such good numbers.

Finally, lest I overly idealize your way of life, let me invite all here present to pray for you, Sister Angela and for our novices, knowing from my own experience that the ongoing process of purification, consecration and service is not easy.

There will be days in which your vocation will be tested. Your fellow sisters have surely told you of this and along the way you have seen it for yourself.

So let me leave you with this – the wise and loving advice of St. Jeanne Jugan to her sisters: “Jesus is waiting for you in the chapel.

Go and find him when your strength and patience are giving out, when you feel lonely and helpless. Say to him: ‘You know well what is happening, my dear Jesus. I have only you. Come to my aid’

And then . . . go your own way.

And don’t worry how you are going to manage.

It is enough to have told our good Lord. He has an excellent memory!”

St. Jeanne Jugan, pray for us!

St. Joseph, pray for us!

Holy Mary, model of consecration, pray for us!