

Catholic Review Column: Praying and Giving Thanks for Consecrated Life

This weekend, our church celebrates World Day for Consecrated Life. As the name suggests, it is a time to highlight those who have consecrated themselves to God and to their countless good works “by the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.”

Though I am not a member of a religious institute, nor a member of an apostolic society or secular institute, I approach this column as one whose ministry includes the fostering of consecrated life and whose spiritual life and ministry are greatly enriched by the witness and work of the many women and men in consecrated life in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Blessed John Paul II created World Day for Consecrated Life in 1997, choosing the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Feb. 2, also known as Candlemas Day, the day on which candles are blessed symbolizing Christ who is the light of the world. Those who have consecrated their lives to Christ are called to reflect his light to the world. Their way of life is a living portrait of Christ, a way of revealing and making present the Lord’s love in a love-starved world.

We need not look beyond the boundaries of our own archdiocese to see the impact made by those in consecrated life serving in fields such as health care, education at all levels, parish life, social justice and spiritual direction – ministries which greatly enrich the church. Through these varied forms of service, women and men in consecrated life are woven into the fabric of this local church and into the fabric of the church universal.

They do this by opening minds and hearts to the truth and beauty of the Gospel ... in the classroom and through formation programs and various forms of spiritual direction. They do this by being present for people of all ages who face sickness and death or try to cope with the many wounds of human existence. Their ministries take on many forms but all of them have this goal: to invite all those they serve to become

living members of the church, the Body of Christ and the People of God.

Yet, it's not enough simply to view consecrated life through the prism of service. It is the love behind the service, that indefinable something that consecrated men and women bring to their works. That indefinable something is consecration – the call received and answered to dedicate their lives to Christ in a very special way. Somewhere, somehow in their life's journey they sensed how deeply Christ loves them and in the power of the Spirit, they answered his call by embracing consecrated life. At the heart of this way of life are the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. To many these seem like the recipe for an unhappy, hemmed-in life. But through the eyes of love, these vows are truly at the heart of the Gospel.

Some years ago, Pope Benedict XVI said, "Consecrated men and women are granted (the grace) to show the primacy of God, passion for the Gospel as a form of life and proclaimed to the poor and lowliest of the earth." With lives patterned on Christ's own style of life and shaped by the deepest truths of the Gospel, consecrated religious bear witness to Christ in an amazing variety of ministries here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and beyond.

Our church is so blessed by those in consecrated life who have profoundly influenced our archdiocese, from its beginnings until the present day. Their lived and corporate witness to the Gospel and their generous ministries are part and parcel of the work of evangelization, that proclamation of the Person of Christ and the truths of the faith which is not only the church's mission but her deepest identity. May ever more women and men answer the call to consecrate their lives to God in service to the church and to others.