

World Day for Consecrated Life

I welcome this opportunity to join with the religious of the Archdiocese of Baltimore in celebrating the World Day for Consecrated Life. I might even suggest that there is no Church in the United States more appropriate in celebrating the gifts of consecrated women and men than this Church of Baltimore.

To gather as we do in this home of the Oblate Sisters of Providence reminds us of Mother Mary Lange, our sisters' foundress and so representative of the many other indomitable religious communities who acknowledge this Archdiocese as their home or even their birthplace in America.

"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" of our Lord Jesus Christ, the missionary claim of St. Paul and the watchword of every community of consecrated life, whatever your special charism. Like Paul you are consecrated to preach the Gospel, personal convenience, taste and inclinations, irrelevant.

In work and word you give yourself free of charge to that preaching, like Paul a slave to all, becoming weak to the weak, all things to all, to win over as many as possible to Christ.

You are the heart of the evangelizing Church of Baltimore, the missionary Church of Baltimore. In one way or the other you live out the charism of our Oblate Sisters: "with total trust in God's Providence, to bring joy, healing and the liberating, redemptive love of the suffering Jesus to the victims of poverty, racism and injustice despite contradictions, prejudice and pain."

In referring to your vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Pope Benedict while in the United States last year praised your special way of life: "In places where there are so many hollow promises which lure (young) people away from the path of faith and genuine freedom, the consecrated persons witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift."

As I thank you for the irreplaceable gift that you are to this Premier Church,

may I point to the example which Jesus gives us in the very opening of today's Gospel. From synagogue worship, to the demanding and even exhausting ministry of healing bodies and souls, then off to a deserted place for prayer. Liturgy, to ministry, to private time with the Lord – the secret at the success of your foundress, the daily challenge lived out so beautifully in your lives of consecration.

Then, with the whole town at his doorstep, push on further, to other towns “that I may preach there too. For this purpose I have come.”

Jesus seeks to form a missionary heart in each of his followers. In the words of the late, great biblical scholar, Fr. Raymond Brown, I might suggest that yours must be a monomaniacally consuming vocation to know, love, serve and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Another Sulpician Father, William Du Bourry, founder of St. Mary's Seminary here, was named in 1812 apostolic administrator of the vast lands of the Louisiana Purchase, much of it French speaking. Desperately short of priests, he wrote to the dioceses of France in search of missionaries. His message was simple, if startling, calling for missionary hearts monomaniacally consumed with Christ. The message?

We offer you no salary, no recompense, no holidays, no pension. But much hard work, a poor dwelling, few consolations, many disappointments, frequent sickness, a violent or lonely death, an unknown grave.

And they came!! As so many others, your forebears, to lay the foundations of the Church in America.

It is that missionary spirit which the Lord would renew in this local Church. It is that missionary spirit, that Holy Spirit, that he would stir into flame as each of you will soon renew your baptismal promises and your holy vows.

So may you continue to be whatever your mission within this Church, signs of the radical following of Christ, living witnesses of the Gospel, proclaimers of the Kingdom and prophets of the ultimate and new City of God.