

Day of consecrated life

February 2, 2022

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
the Lord give you peace!

All over the world today we celebrate the day for religious life.

I would like to let the Word of God we have heard to help us to re-read the sense, the profound meaning of what we religious live, which is precious, not only for the life of each of us and our respective communities, but also for the whole Church.

Our lifestyle has something provocative, or at least it should put a question that disturbs, because it is absolutely against the stream of our mentality, and it comes out of what are the common and ordinary values and patterns not only of our society, but also of a certain way of being Christian and of thinking of the life of faith.

Somehow our religious choice should be a prophecy of what we all are, and are called to become, of what we all will be one day.

The Word gives us today two icons, which speak to us precisely of all this.

Who are Simeone and Anna?

I like to think that Simeone and Anna are two people whom the Lord has **consoled**.

Verse 25 tells us precisely that in Jerusalem there was a just and pious man, who was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

The whole announcement of the prophets could be summed up in this word: "consolation".

The second part of the book of Isaiah, for instance, which begins with the famous announcement of liberation ("Console, console my people - says your God - ..." Is 40,1), is called the "Book of the consolation of Israel". The prophets remind the people that God wishes to console, make himself present, be close to us, that God does not abandon.

And Simeon is waiting for this, he is waiting for the consolation of Israel. He is a just and pious person, but he is a person who knows that being just and pious is not all, that the truth of life is not within our justice, that is, within an exclusively human logic of living, but it goes and takes us beyond, and needs to be **waited**. And Simeon waits, all his life, with the only certainty that comes to him from the Spirit. He waits all his life, and on a day like all other days, at the temple as always, Simeon is consoled.

What consolation is?

Simeon tells us this, in verse 30, when, re-reading what happened to him today, welcoming this child in his arms, he discovers that he is amazed to have "**seen your salvation**", to have seen it with his own eyes.

Therefore, the consolation is to see salvation, and to see it with one's own eyes, that is, to experience it. It is the ability to discover that God makes himself present and visits our life, and he does so in a new, unpredictable way. That the Lord visits precisely where we would not expect him or we would no longer expect him.

Consolation is the experience of what man desires more than anything else, but which it is impossible for him to obtain with his own strength. This is precisely what becomes - by grace

- reality. It is the experience of heaven that is torn apart, so that what you hope against all hope is given to you. And so we experience a healing that has taken place in us. Only God can truly console.

We alone we cannot console because we do not have words of eternal life. We have human words, poor, limited, incapable of giving life, of healing.

But when we have experienced God's consolation, then it happens that we too can be a sign of consolation for one another.

This is what Saint Paul says in 2 Corinthians:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2 Cor. 1,3–4)

Simeone and Anna are two consoled people because they are two consecrated persons, in the deepest sense of the term, that is, a man and a woman who have linked the meaning of their life to an expectation, people who have given meaning to their desire, and they lived with it, without giving in to fatigue, fear, pessimism.

Consecrated are those who know that only God can console, only He can give them life, and they choose to remain with that attitude of expectation, waiting, in a poverty that awaits the fulfillment of their existence from Him.

And this expectation, this living in reference to something beyond, is the profound truth of their life.

It seems to me that this is one of the great challenges of today: that is, the ability to find one's own deep desire, and to unify life around this desire, also accepting to be in a void, to live in a desert where there is none or nothing else, where life is filled with nothing other than a fixed gaze on the consolation that comes from God.

The Eucharistic adoration that we all do at least once a week possesses these traits, this ability to make emptiness in the heart, to live only from a glance, from a “beyond” that becomes present in everyday life.

Precisely because Simeone and Anna can wait, then they know how to **recognize**. But they are also capable of being surprised. (Cf. John the Baptist, at the Jordan, when he recognizes him precisely because he lets himself be surprised by this Messiah who lines up like everyone else ...)

God surprises because he is little, a child, because he has nothing different from any other child, because his coming has nothing extraordinary.

We religious also have this mission, to persevere in recognizing God and in some way "train ourselves" to recognize him within every poor person and within every poverty, starting from one's own, from the poverty of one's life. In recognizing him within everything that has nothing extraordinary.

The extraordinary happens within us, when we recognize him, because then it changes our life, because this recognizing God in one's life brings peace: *“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...”* (Luke 2,29).

The fruit of all this can only be a profound peace, which has the face of these two meek elders, who no longer need anything else, because they have seen salvation.

We are here, therefore, to acknowledge all this, and to ask the Lord that this profound attitude of expectation, consolation, recognition, meekness and peace today could mark forever our life, that of your communities, and - consequently - also of each of us.