

**REDISCOVERING THE JOYS OF OUR CONSECRATIONS:
*Look to the Past with Gratitude, Present with Passion and Future with Hope***

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All Superiors of different Religious Congregations
My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord's vineyard,
I say a very good morning to you all.

INTRODUCTION

Our Holy father Pope Francis in declaring this year of grace a year for consecrated life wrote to us Consecrated persons a thought provoking apostolic letter in which he called on each one of us to live up to our identity; by living a joyful life for that is the shape of our calling. He also highlighted three aims of the year consecrated life which we are to focus in order to rediscover our essence in the church. These are: "Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope". These three captions hold the key to our rediscovering the joy of our vocation as consecrated persons.

A BRIEF PANORAMIC EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF JOY

Joy can be defined as a pleasant feeling and satisfaction that normally manifest itself in our external activities, a feeling of great happiness, or deep contentment. Is the emotion evoked by well being, success or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires. As such one can boldly say that joy is the emotion of great delight or happiness as a result of achieving something great. Seeing yourself doing what you greatly valued can also be a source of joy.

Joy is a concept with diverse meanings because the act of expressing joy is not only an act for the human person but also for animals. Generally speaking joy could be seen as a gift (call it spiritual or natural), is also a state of mind depending on one's point of view. Succinctly, joy is a state of pleasure, and satisfaction that is manifested externally. It may take the form of a reaction, that is to say as a result of a passing event such as a good news, great time spent with members of our family or friends, or winning an award or celebrating the victory of favourite team. In this sense the joy express here is momentary.

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From a philosophical point of view, joy is a state of the soul in which the human person feels satisfied. Is the feeling of the soul that completely transforms its contents. In most cases philosophers have juxtaposed joy along side with happiness. And so from Aristotelian view point, happiness is a fundamental and lasting sense of joy and serenity that results from achieving personally meaningful and rational values.

For the progressive psychologist, like María Prieto Ursúa, a Spanish psychologist joy is defined as a positive emotion. These emotions are from daily habits and virtues and personal efforts. From this point of view therefore we can deduce that joy is part of our daily activities that manifests itself when we are happy with what we have done. This is in line with the thought of St. Augustine that affirms the mind experiences joy when all difficulties are surpassed.

From this brief panoramic exploration of joy, it can easily be postulated that the qualities of joy are: joy is expressive meaning when one feels it, it cannot be hidden. It is easily noticed. Another quality of joy is that is contagious, the joy of someone leads to the joy of another person.

Also joy is transparent, meaning it can be communicated. Finally, joy is therapeutic, this indicates that joy renews our confidence, gives us sense of belonging. As such is not only a property that is internal but also external. May we now focus our attention on the joy of being a consecrated person.

THE JOY OF BEING A CONSECRATED PERSON

The holy Papa recalled the old saying that; “where there are religious there is joy”. (cf. Apostolic letter of His Holiness to all consecrated people on the occasion of the year of consecrated life). In a more Christian sense joy is more than feeling good at all time. By so doing, Rick Warren defined joy as “the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation”. (*Daily Hope* with Rick Warren, rickwarren.org).

First and fore most consecrated persons are Christians and so Pope Francis affirms that a Christian is never bored or sad. Rather, the one who loves Christ is full of joy and radiates joy. By our dedication as Consecrated person, we are epitome of JOY. The joy that speaks for itself, of the goodness of God that we serve, the joy that exude from our life style, and that fulfil the words of the psalmist “*Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum* (Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity) Ps 133:1.

We are called to radicalize and transform the world with our joyful state of life. The church we belong is the church that seeks for the joy of all, and so in the words of Pope Francis we cannot think of a church without joy, and our joy is rooted in announcing to all and sundry the name of Jesus.

HOW CAN WE AS CONSECRATED PERSONS REDISCOVER OUR JOY

The triple exultation of the pope clearly lead the way on our each and every one of us can rediscover our joy. By saying rediscover it means we have let go the joy of being a consecrated person.

The first step is when we reflect of our past as religious men and women we should not do that like the hypocrites who Pope Francis said they do not believe in the forgiveness of Jesus and the Joy of being a Christian. Rather our past should be embraced with a heart fill with gratitude to God for all the great achievements of our founders and founderesses. The Pope remarked that “all our institutes are heir to a history rich in charismas. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the church”.

Without any iota of doubt, nothing builds our joy as consecrated person like celebrating with great gratitude the heroic act of our founders and foundresses. “Telling our story, recounting our history, gives us the platform to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts”.

In the light of celebrating our past with immensurable joy, we are at the same time invited to have recourse to God’s mercy by confessing our own weakness in order to experience the joy of bearing witness to the word of God.

It naturally follows that commemorating our past and celebrating it enables us to be reinvigorated to live the present with passion. This lies on our apostolate and the ability to be opened to the challenges of the gospel. The pope challenges us to reflect “whether the Gospel is truly the manual for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make. The Gospel is demanding, it demands to be lived radically and sincerely, it is not enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential), nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives”.

Living the present with passion also challenges our fidelity with Jesus. As we still in love with Him as we were on the first day of our profession, can we still boldly proclaim “Lord you have seduced me and I allowed myself to be seduced” (cf Jer20:7). Living the present with passion also called for great introspection along the line of our mission if it is still in the spirit of our founders and foundresses. Are we close and in touch with the people we minister to identifying ourselves with their joys and sorrows?

Living the present with passion cannot be meaningful if we do not bring to life, the vision of our founders and founderesses who longed to build a community that replicate the first community of Christ disciples in Jerusalem that was characterized by their style of evangelical living to be of one heart and one soul and to rejoice in the Lord’s presence”.

Living the present with passion, underline the fact that our radical witness to the Gospel in this present time must present us as people in the world but not of the world. In his Apostolic Exaltation; *Evangelii Gaudium* the pope note that, “an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral let

us recover and deepen our enthusiasm that delightful and comforting joy of evangelising even when it is in tears that we must sow (cf. P.10).

Therefore our communion must be visibly noticed, and commitment demonstrated. To sum it up, living the present with passion automatically makes us herald of the good news this is joy in its holistic nature.

EMBRACE THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

A hopeless consecrated person is faithless religious. The fear of the future is accepting defect and not realizing the fullness of our potentialities. Our hope must be in Lord for he is the one who knows our futures and he made heaven and earth. The future of consecrated life in our nation is the one full of hope and prosperity. Is a promising one that should however be handle with utmost care. The future will not be the good things we hope for if we neglect and trash the experiences of the aged and ignore the vigour of the youth.

CONCLUSION

Rediscovery our Joy, as consecrated person gives us the opportunity to inflect the whole world with the joy of Christ. It gives us the privilege to bring Easter in the lives of those that seem to know only lent. In other word rediscovery the joy of being a consecrated person is not only for our salvation but also for the salvation of all.

As consecrated people we can discover our joy thus; By being a communality oriented person. (Pope Frances address to married couples caught my attention and can be applicable to our community living, that living together is an art, a patient and beautiful art). Our institutes or congregation lay great emphases on the value of living together. The joy that living together underlines our commitment to our calling, this does not come easy but it is not impossible.

We can also rediscover our joy as consecrated persons by celebrating ourselves and our fellow religious. Each and every one of us must learn how to appreciate the members of our community. We should note that each person deserve to be celebrated and prized.

Rediscovering our joy as consecrated persons also consists in accepting the limitations the strength of those we share the same vows. By so doing we are adhering to the exaltation of St Paul that "those who are strong ought to bear with the qualms of the weak" (cf. Rom. 15:1).

Consecrated persons are not only custodian of joy but also heralds of joy. As joyful people we should use this gift for the service of all and embrace the fact that we called to serve. By joyfully serving others we spread the joy of serving the Lord and one another. With this attitude our past will not hurt us, the present will be lived with passion and the future will not be scaring.

Is a known fact that joy shared is joy multiply. And so living a joyful life is *conditio sine qua non* for the growth of vocation in our different congregations. A joyful consecrated person is a happy person and he or she is one on fire with God's love and wish to spread it where ever he or she goes.

May the Lord make us partakers of the real joy of Christ Amen.

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Thanks for listening.