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Holy Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 25th World Day of Consecrated Life

At 17.30 this afternoon, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and 25th World Day of Consecrated Life, the Holy Father Francis presided, at the Altar of the Cathedra in the Vatican Basilica, at the celebration of Holy Mass with the members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life.

The prefect, the secretary and the official secretaries of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life concelebrated with the Holy Father, along with the Superiors General of the Religious Orders.

During the liturgy, which began with the blessing of the candles and the procession and continued with the Eucharistic celebration, the Pope delivered a homily.

The following is the homily that Pope Francis pronounced during the Eucharistic celebration and his words at the end of the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

Simeon, so Saint Luke tells us, “looked forward to the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25). Going up to the Temple as Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus there, he took the Messiah into his arms. The one who recognized in that Child the light that came to shine on the Gentiles was an elderly man who had patiently awaited the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises.

The patience of Simeon. Let us take a closer look at that old man’s patience. For his entire life, he had been waiting, exercising the patience of the heart. In his prayer, Simeon had learned that God does not come in extraordinary events, but works amid the apparent monotony of our daily life, in the frequently dull rhythm of our activities, in the little things that, working with tenacity and humility, we achieve in our efforts to do his will. By patiently persevering, Simeon did not grow weary with the passage of time. He was now an old man, yet the

flame still burned brightly in his heart. In his long life, there had surely been times when he had been hurt, disappointed, yet he did not lose hope. He trusted in the promise, and did not let himself be consumed by regret for times past or by the sense of despondency that can come as we approach the twilight of our lives. His hope and expectation found expression in the daily patience of a man who, despite everything, remained watchful, until at last “his eyes saw the salvation” that had been promised (cf. Lk 2:30).

I ask myself: where did Simeon learn such patience? It was the born of prayer and the history of his people, which had always seen in the Lord “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and fidelity” (Ex 34:6). He recognized the Father who, even in the face of rejection and infidelity, never gives up, but remains “patient for many years” (cf. Neh 9:30), constantly holding out the possibility of conversion.

The patience of Simeon is thus a mirror of God’s own patience. From prayer and the history of his people, Simeon had learned that God is indeed patient. By that patience, Saint Paul tells us, he “leads us to repentance” (Rom 2:4). I like to think of Romano Guardini, who once observed that patience is God’s way of responding to our weakness and giving us the time we need to change (cf. *Glaubenserkenntnis*, Würzburg, 1949, 28). More than anyone else, the Messiah, Jesus, whom Simeon held in his arms, shows us the patience of God, the merciful Father who keeps calling us, even to our final hour. God, who does not demand perfection but heartfelt enthusiasm, who opens up new possibilities when all seems lost, who wants to open a breach in our hardened hearts, who lets the good seed grow without uprooting the weeds. This is the reason for our hope: that God never tires of waiting for us. When we turn away, he comes looking for us; when we fall, he lifts us to our feet; when we return to him after losing our way, he waits for us with open arms. His love is not weighed in the balance of our human calculations, but unstintingly gives us the courage to start anew. This teaches us resilience, the courage always to start again, each day. Always to start over after our falls. God is patient.

Let us look to our patience. Let us look to the patience of God and the patience of Simeon as we consider our own lives of consecration. We can ask ourselves what patience really involves. Certainly it is not simply about tolerating difficulties or showing grim determination in the face of hardship. Patience is not a sign of weakness, but the strength of spirit that enables us to “carry the burden”, to endure, to bear the weight of personal and community problems, to accept others as different from ourselves, to persevere in goodness when all seems lost, and to keep advancing even when overcome by fatigue and listlessness.

Let me point to three “settings” in which patience can become concrete.

The first is our personal life. There was a time when we responded to the Lord’s call, and with enthusiasm and generosity offered our lives to him. Along the way, together with consolations we have had our share of disappointments and frustrations. At times, our hard work fails to achieve the desired results, the seeds we sow seem not to bear sufficient fruit, the ardour of our prayer cools and we are not always immune to spiritual aridity. In our lives as consecrated men and women, it can happen that hope slowly fades as a result of unmet expectations. We have to be patient with ourselves and await in hope God’s own times and places, for he remains ever faithful to his promises. This is the foundation stone: he is true to his promises. Remembering this can help us retrace our steps and revive our dreams, rather than yielding to interior sadness and discouragement. Brothers and sisters, in us consecrated men and women, interior sadness is a worm, a worm that eats us from within. Flee from interior sadness!

A second setting in which patience can become concrete is community life. We all know that human relationships are not always serene, especially when they involve sharing a project of life or apostolic activity. There are times when conflicts arise and no immediate solution can be expected, nor should hasty judgements be made. Time is required to step back, to preserve peace and to wait for a better time to resolve situations in charity and in truth. Let us not allow ourselves to be flustered by tempests. In the Breviary, for tomorrow’s Office of Readings, there is a fine passage on spiritual discernment by Diodochus of Photice. He says: “A tranquil sea allows the fisherman to gaze right to its depths. No fish can hide there and escape his sight. The stormy sea, however, becomes murky when it is agitated by the winds”. We will never be able to discern well, to see the truth, if our hearts are agitated and impatient. Never. Our communities need this kind of reciprocal patience: the ability to support, that is, to bear on our own shoulders, the life of one of our brothers or sisters, including his or

her weaknesses and failings, all of them. Let us keep in mind that the Lord does not call us to be soloists – we know there are many in the Church – no, we are not called to be soloists but to be part of a choir that can sometimes miss a note or two, but must always try to sing in unison.

Finally, a third setting is our relationship with the world. Simeon and Anna cherished the hope proclaimed by the prophets, even though it is slow to be fulfilled and grows silently amid the infidelities and ruins of our world. They did not complain about how wrong things are, but patiently looked for the light shining in the darkness of history. To look for the light shining in the darkness of history; to look for the light shining in the darkness of our own communities. We too need that kind of patience, so as not to fall into the trap of complaining. Some people are masters of complaining, doctors of complaining, they are very good at complaining! No, complaining imprisons us: “the world no longer listens to us” – how often do we hear that - or “we have no more vocations, so we have to close the house”, or “these are not easy times” – “ah, don’t tell me!...”. And so the duet of complaints begins. It can happen that even as God patiently tills the soil of history and our own hearts, we show ourselves impatient and want to judge everything immediately: now or never, now, now, now. In this way, we lose that “small” but most beautiful of virtues: hope. I have seen many consecrated men and women who lose hope, simply through impatience.

Patience helps us to be merciful in the way we view ourselves, our communities and our world. In our own lives, do we welcome the patience of the Holy Spirit? In our communities, do we bear with one another and radiate the joy of fraternal life? In the world, do we patiently offer our service, or issue harsh judgements? These are real challenges for our consecrated life: we cannot remain stuck in nostalgia for the past or simply keep repeating the same old things or everyday complaints. We need patience and courage in order to keep advancing, exploring new paths, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And to do so with humility and simplicity, without great propaganda or publicity.

Let us contemplate God’s patience and implore the trusting patience of Simeon and of Anna. In this way, may our eyes, too, see the light of salvation and bring that light to the whole world, just as these two elderly individuals did in their words of praise.

Words of the Holy Father at the end of the Holy Mass

At the end of the Holy Mass, the Holy Father Francis pronounced the following words:

Please, be seated.

I would like to thank the Cardinal for his words, which are an expression on behalf of us all, of all the concelebrants and all the assistants. There are few of us here: this Covid drives us into a corner, but let us bear this with patience. It takes patience. And we must keep on offering our life to the Lord.

That young religious sister who had just entered the novitiate was happy... She found an elderly religious sister, good, holy. “How are you?” “This is paradise, Mother!”, said the young woman. “Wait a little: there is purgatory”. Consecrated life, community life: there is purgatory, but it takes patience to keep on.

I would like to indicate two things that can help: please, flee from gossip. It is gossip that kills community life. Do not speak ill of others. “It is not easy, Father, because at times it comes from the heart!”. Yes, it comes from the heart: it comes from envy, it comes from many capital sins we have within. Turn away. “But, tell me Father, is there any medicine against this? Prayer, goodness?” “Yes, there is a medicine, a very homely one: bite your tongue. Before speaking ill of others, bite your tongue, so that your tongue swells and takes up all your mouth, and you won’t be able to speak ill. Please, flee from gossip, which destroys the community!

And then, the other thing I recommend to you in community life: there will always be many things that don’t go

well. The superior, the consultor, this or that person... We always have things we don't like, don't we? Do not lose your sense of humour, please: this will help us a lot. It is the antidote to gossip: knowing how to laugh at yourself, at situations, even others – in good faith – but don't lose your sense of humour. And turn away from gossip. What I am recommending to you is not too clerical a form of counsel, let's say, but it is human: it is human to keep going with patience. Never speak ill of others: bite your tongue. And then, do not lose your sense of humour: it will help us greatly.

Thank you for what you do, thank you for your witness. Thank you, many thanks for your difficulties, for how you bear them, and the pain you bear when vocations do not come. Keep on, take heart: the Lord is greater, the Lord loves us. Let us follow the Lord!
