

Bishop Peter J. Jugis Homily

World Day for Consecrated Life Mass

February 5, 2022

St. Patrick Cathedral

“We thank God that we are able to come together in person this year to celebrate the World Day for Consecrated Life. This year we are also celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of the Charlotte, and we praise God for blessing the diocese with many different charisms of religious life to enrich our witness to the presence of Christ’s kingdom.

From the very beginning of the diocese, in fact, and even before the diocese was formed, some of our religious communities were already here, making Christ known.

The scripture readings we have just heard, are taken from those that are suggested for the Mass for Religious. The first reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah reminds us of the beauty of the grace with which we are clothed through the new covenant with Christ.

It speaks of the beautiful adornment that a bride has on the wedding day, bedecked with jewels. It speaks of the adornment that the bridegroom has on his wedding day, adorned with a diadem. Or even to the beauty of nature, adorned with its garments.

But these material adornments cannot compare to the beauty of grace of life in Christ. In the context of this Mass, the beauty of the grace of a religious vocation with which the Lord has adorned you, a life of total dedication to God.

Your lives are a powerful witness in our local Church of the primacy of God in one’s life. You say with Isaiah, ‘My God is the joy of my soul, I rejoice heartily in the Lord.’

The Gospel reading from St. Matthew reminds us, however, that the Lord does make demands of those who do respond to the call to religious life, to leave all and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. For He says, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me, must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.’

There is the denial of self, self-denial, of giving up one good – a family, one’s home, and a career in the world – in order to choose another good, the Pearl of Great Price, that of following Jesus. Though the Lord does make great demands of those who follow Him, it is true, as we know, that His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Some years ago, someone said to me, ‘You certainly chose a hard life for yourself, becoming a priest.’ Rather than calling it hard, it actually is more accurate to say, it is a constant companionship with Christ. The vocation of following Jesus, to make Jesus one’s life, does entail taking up the cross and sacrifice and self-denial, but the grace of vocation is humbling and fulfilling and enables one to say with Isaiah, ‘My God is the joy of my soul.’

Pope Francis met with many women religious four years ago on his trip to Peru and he told them then that the most precious possession of a consecrated person is the Lord’s gaze, His look of love.

The presence of vowed religious in the diocese enriches the life of our local Church and all of its ministries. Consecrated religious can be found active in ministry to the poor, ministry to the sick and

homebound, ministry to seniors, ministry to homeless pregnant women, ministry to battered women, ministry to those suffering with AIDS, healthcare ministry, ministry to disabled children and adults, daycare ministry to little children, ministry of contemplative prayer for the Church and the world, ministry to migrant populations, ministry of catechesis and faith formation and Catholic education at all levels, parish ministry, prison ministry.

No doubt there are many more ministries that possibly I am not even aware of at the moment.

May the Lord bestow His blessing on our religious sisters, our religious brothers and religious priests, and especially those who are celebrating special anniversaries of religious profession.

Since we were not able to get together last year in person for this annual Mass, we have listed all the great numbers of consecrated religious, vowed religious in our diocese, who have been last year, and this year now, celebrating special anniversaries of religious profession.”

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