

900 YEARS ORDER OF PRÉMONTRÉ
TOGETHER – WITH GOD – AMONG THE PEOPLE
DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE 2021

The celebration of our Order's jubilee invites us to give special attention to the Solemnity of the Presentation of the Lord in the temple, a day which since 1997 has been marked as the day of consecrated life. Saint John Paul II instituted this yearly celebration in order to help the entire Church to appreciate the testimony of those who have chosen to follow Christ more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels. At the same time the day of consecrated life seeks to offer to those who lead a consecrated life a favorable opportunity to renew their proposals and to rekindle the sentiments that should inspire their dedication the Lord.

Saint Norbert would have endorsed wholeheartedly the description of consecrated life as flowing from the desire to follow Christ more closely. On many occasions the authors of his *vitae* underscore how his way of life was rooted in the Gospel. In the description of his way of life as an itinerant preacher we read: "According to the gospel mandate Norbert carried with him neither purse nor sandals nor two tunics..." When explaining his purpose to the canons in Laon he says: "To sum up briefly, I have chosen to live simply the evangelic and apostolic life rightly understood." The radical and literal observance of the Gospel as a rule permeates the whole biography of our holy father Norbert. At the same time, however, we can see how he intelligently responded to the needs and the circumstances of his time.

The presentation of the Lord in the temple certainly is an apt image to evoke a life that is totally given up to God. It is therefore an image of the quintessence of religious life. But in order to live a life following Christ more closely we need to translate the Gospel into our own inner life and in our day to day behavior. We cannot simply copy. We are to listen attentively to the Spirit of Christ in the signs of our times, in the needs of people and at the center of our very being. Listening, indeed "together, to God, among the people", we will have to search ways to act according to this ongoing inspiration. Every aspect of religious life has to be rooted in a contemplative attitude of listening. It is not a coincidence that the Gospel of this solemnity in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke in three verses (25-27) mentions as many times the Holy Spirit when speaking about Simeon: "This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the spirit into the temple..."

The presence of the Holy Spirit in Simeon's life is decisive in his meeting with Christ. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon is transformed by this meeting and becomes a prophet, singing the praise of the light of salvation for all. Likewise we need to be open to the Spirit to find our way to live the evangelical counsels, inspired by the true Spirit of the Gospel. The Spirit, who is the giver of life is the one who also gives life and full meaning to our Premonstratensian Charism in each and every community of our Order, indeed, in the life of every sister or brother who makes profession in our Order.

Although the juridical obligations flowing from the profession of the evangelical counsels are the same for all consecrated, their practice is colored by the proper Charism of each Order or Congregation. In our constitutions the life according to our profession is treated in the numbers 11-25. Rereading these numbers, it struck me how expressions describing profession of the evangelical counsels as "offer to God" are often associated with "and to the brethren" or "and to the community". Our profession is indeed meant to be an expression of ecclesiastical *communio* and, therefore, of the *vita apostolica* in its fullness. The apostolic life as Saint Augustine and Saint Norbert present it to us is proposed in our constitutions in such a way that it embraces a fraternal way of life in which brothers and sisters feel at home, are loved, appreciated and cared for. This way of life is a prophetic sign in the Church and the world of our times where polarization and division are magnified by modern means of

communication. According to our constitutions, our way of life is explicitly rooted in the Gospel and in the Apostolic Church, so that it expresses an aspect of what the Church has to be: “Our canopies are especially ordered so that through the practice of common life and the apostolic mission they may manifest the communio of the Church of Christ among themselves and also beyond in the people of God and in the whole world.” (Const. n. 12)

Apostolic, as appears from our constitutions, also means to be sent. We do have a mission. It struck me how much this aspect is integrated into our very profession, which is a giving up oneself to God, to the sisters and brothers with whom we form our canonry and with God’s people: “Our profession expresses the surrender of ourselves. By one and the same impulse we offer ourselves to God and to the community, which is at the service of the people of God.” (Const. n.14) It is as if we pledge ourselves to continue the mission of Jesus Christ himself, who was sent to the world, and so to humankind, since his Father “so much loved the world”. “When we bind ourselves to the three evangelical counsels by vows, our vocation and obligation is to give ourselves with undivided heart to the service of God and of humanity.” (Const. n.16) The same thought is underscored in the context of the vow of consecrated celibacy, thus linking chastity and being really human together, rather than stressing the aspect of abstinence: “Through fraternal love and friendship in common life and through solicitude toward humankind, our celibacy should be endowed with a humanity which reveals the love of God for all and promotes human flourishing.” (Const. N .19)

Our life in common, together with God, among the people, is the expression of a wonderful vocation in which we are called to be fully human and to offer our very being to God so that He may assume it so that we may speak in word and in our way of life to the world. A vocation to follow Jesus as He is offered to his Father in the temple, brought there by Mary and Joseph and welcomed by Simeon and Hannah as representatives of God’s people.

Let us listen carefully to the Spirit to let this happen in our daily life.

Heavenly Father,
grant us the grace of the jubilee,
the grace of renewal and conversion.
Give us the fullness of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may discern the ways
in which we can live according to the Gospel,
follow the teachings of the Apostles,
and grow in the charism that you entrusted to our holy fathers Augustine and Norbert.

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