

*Colloquium on Consecrated Life*  
*Laval University*  
*October 26, 2015*

It is a distinct honour for me to address this impressive gathering at this remarkable university on the occasion of the opening of this unique and significant colloquium. It is not often that we discuss Consecrated Life any more – but it is entirely appropriate to do so here, at this Catholic University – the oldest in North America – especially during this special Year for Consecrated Life, called by Pope Francis – who, on the same occasion announced that Consecrated men and women in the Church have the duty to **Wake up the World!**

The perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, a true commitment to be counter-cultural by giving up wealth, sexual expression and power, makes an important if often misunderstood statement in today's world. It says NO DISTRACTIONS in the commitment to love Jesus Christ, and to follow him closely for a lifetime. Nothing will interfere with my love for him and my commitment to him – nothing: not money, not sex, not power – the three major temptations. I am His and He is all I desire, all I need.

Two disciplines sustain such a commitment. The first is regular prayer. Consecrated women and men are taught to pray daily and many times during the day. They pray the Prayer of the Church, in community and privately, and significant amounts of time are spent in quiet prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. This always nurtures the fundamental commitment to love the Lord.

The second discipline, and it IS a discipline, is life lived in community – with others who have made a similar commitment and who nurture and encourage that commitment by a rhythm of life which helps them remain faithful. The community calls the individual member to prayer, they serve side by side, they provide the human contact that helps them remain balanced and consoled, and they spur on the other when “the going gets tough”! The community is a reminder that it is not ever “all about me” – rather that it is all about Him!

I call community life a discipline, because, unlike marriage, it is not based on a relationship of love between those who live together, rather it is based on a mutual love for the same One who means everything and calls us all to fullness of life and love.

When I was a young Oblate scholastic and knew only a little less than I know now, I used to get all worked up about which was more important in Religious life: ministry or community – what we did or the fact that we did it together?

To be sure, ministry is important – that we serve the Lord faithfully, contributing to the building up of God's kingdom, creating a world of justice, love and peace, one day at a time, one act of kindness at a time, one caring word at a time. To be sure, working together in community is important – sustained by the support of one another, assured

that I am following God's will and not my own, assured that the project is truly focused on the good of others and not my own.

But the older I get, the more I realize that those are the discussions and reflections of the young. What is truly important is the fundamental relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. What I do and how I do it is secondary – it helps me maintain the focus on the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life – or we might say, the true way to life – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each Consecrated person is consecrated to do precisely that in their own personal way – and as a member of a specific Religious Order or Congregation which has a specific charism and rhythm or rule of life. Each is richer because he or she is part of the community, and the community is richer because of their commitment.

AND the local church – and the entire Church – is richer because of the fidelity of the Consecrated men and women to that commitment.

Kathleen Norris, in her spiritual biography ***Acedia and Me***, writes about her marriage. Knowing little at all about marriage, I found one of her insights quite compelling, and even though it is about marriage, a lengthy vowed commitment of life and love with the Lord is not dissimilar. She writes: *“For any of us, affluent or not, it is by means of repeating ordinary rituals and routines that we enhance the relationships that nourish and sustain us. A recent study that monitored the daily habits of couples in order to determine what produced good and stable marriages revealed that **only one** activity made a consistent difference, and that was the embracing of one’s spouse at the beginning and end of each day! Most surprising to Paul Bosch, who wrote an article about the study, was that ‘it didn’t seem to matter whether or not in that moment the partners were fully engaged or even sincere! Just a perfunctory peck on the cheek was enough to make a difference in the quality of the relationship’. Bosch comments wisely, that this ‘should not surprise churchgoers. Whatever you do repeatedly has the power to shape you over into a different person – even if you’re not totally engaged in every minute’. ... Every day and every night, whether I ‘get it’ or not, these ‘meaningless’ words and actions signify more than I know.”*

Every time a Consecrated person makes their way to the Chapel for prayer, every time they whisper a word of thanksgiving, every time they receive His Body and Blood, whether done with intention, in full consciousness, or simply done out of the habit developed over a lifetime of discipline, we believe that it is an expression of their love for Him AND His for them. Much as a peck on the cheek, or a squeeze of the hand nurtures the relationship of love of married couple, so a time of prayer, long or short, refreshes and deepens the relationship with the Lord. Prayer is fundamental in the commitment of Religious life. And for us it is a priceless witness of inestimable love and service!

***Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum, habitare fratres in unum!*** How good it is and how pleasant, when brothers and sisters live in unity! That is the title of my **Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Hamilton** on the occasion of this Year honouring Consecrated persons. And the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Religious

Conference co-authored a second letter on the same occasion. I offer both resources to you for your reflection during these days.

Congratulations and thank you for such a wonderful initiative. I am convinced that your reflections during this colloquium will ***“Wake Up the World!”***

**(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton  
President of the Canadian Conference of  
Catholic Bishops**

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