

Homily for the Feast of the Presentation

February 3rd 2019.

23 years ago, on February 2nd 1996, Pope St. John Paul II established the Feast of the Presentation as the *World Day for Consecrated Life*. This day was chosen because in the Gospel we read of two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, who consecrated their lives to God. Of Simeon we are told:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.¹

In these words we learn something about Simeon's character, he lived a life responsive to the word and will of God. This is, in part what it means to be righteous. His was also a life devoted to prayer. His consecration inspired him to be a person of hope – for he looked forward to the consolation of Israel. I love this phrase, ‘the consolation of Israel’. Simeon understood that when the Messiah came, the Anointed One would comfort the sorrowful. At the same time Simeon prophesies that Jesus, as the consoler, work of comfort would find its fullest expression on the Cross, at which time His Blessed Mother's pierced heart – filled with such sorrow would be comforted when Jesus would say:

Woman behold your son, son behold your mother.

Simeon was a hopeful and holy man because the Holy Spirit was upon him. When he takes the Child in his arms, he learns, not through any reasoning process but through a special grace from God, that this Child is the promised Messiah, the Consolation of Israel, the Light of the nations, indicative of the prophetic voice of the Holy Spirit.²

Of Anna we read:

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.³

Anna is a contemplative Consecrated, spending her whole life in prayer. We are told she never left the Temple, giving herself entirely to a life of prayer. She was looking forward to the redemption of Israel. This is another dimension of the Saviour's work which of course points to the Cross – where St. Luke tells us that Jesus redeemed the penitent thief Dismas, by promising

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 2:25). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*Saint Luke's Gospel*](#). (2005). (p. 48). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 2:36–38). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

him: “Today you will be with me in paradise”. We see in this man, dying next to Jesus, the one who is truly consoled because Jesus redeems him, saving him from hell and promising him heaven.

The Church has always called men and women to follow in the example of Simeon and Anna, in lives dedicated and consecrated to the Lord. The Church in our day invites young people to consider giving themselves to the consecrated life. Perhaps some of you here today, or others watching this homily on line have sensed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to consider the Consecrated life. I would encourage you to pursue discerning this calling.

For you see the Consecrated Life is the heart of the Body of Christ, the Church. Without a healthy heart, those committed to a life of sanctity and prayer like Anna and Simeon, the Church is lethargic and listless. But when there is an increase in those who consecrate themselves totally to Jesus in this way, the body will be increasingly vibrant and alive able to more fully extend Jesus redemptive consolation to a sorrowful and lost world.

We thank Jesus this day for our Consecrated brothers and sisters because like Simeon they take Jesus in their arms holding him close to their hearts so they can be the heart of the Church. We also pray for an increase in Vocations to the Consecrated Life.