

Pope Francis, Vatican City, World Day of Consecrated Life, February 02, 2015

Here is a translation of the text of the Pope’s homily given in St. Peter's Basilica at a Mass for the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, marking the World Day of Consecrated Life.

We have before our mind’s eye the icon of Mother Mary, who walks with the Child Jesus in her arms. She takes him to the Temple, introduces him to the people, carries him to encounter his people.

The Mother’s arms are as the “stairs” on which the Son of God comes down to us, *the stairs of God’s condescension*

. We heard this in the First Reading of the Letter to the Hebrews: Christ “had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17). It is the twofold way of Jesus: He
came down
, made himself like us, to
ascend
to the Father together with us, making us like Him.

We can contemplate in our heart this movement, imagining the Gospel scene of Mary who enters in the Temple with the Child in her arms. Our Lady walks, but it is the Son who *walks before her.*
She carries him, but it is He who carries her in this way of God who comes to us so that we can go to Him.

Jesus followed our same path to indicate the new way to us, namely the “new and living way” (Cf. *Hebrews* 10:20), which is He himself. And *for us, consecrated, this is the only way that, concretely and without alternative, we must follow with joy and perseverance.*

The Gospel insists a good five times on *Mary’s and Joseph’s obedience to the “Law of the Lord”:* (Cf. *Luke* 2:22.23.24.27.39). Jesus did not come to do his will, but the will of the Father; and this – he said – was his “food” (Cf.
John
4:34). Thus, one who follows Jesus puts himself in the way of obedience, imitating the “condescension” of the Lord; lowering himself and making his own the Father’s will, even to the annihilation and humiliation of himself (Cf.
Philippians
2:7-8). For a Religious, to progress means to lower himself in service, that is, to follow the same way of Jesus, “who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (
Philippians
2:6). To lower himself, making himself a servant to serve.

And this way takes *the form of the Rule,* marked by the *charism of the Founder*, without forgetting that the irreplaceable Rule for all is always the Gospel. The Holy Spirit, then, in his infinite creativity, translates it also into the different Rules of consecrated life, all of which are born from the *se*
quela Christi,
namely of this way of lowering oneself by serving.

Through this “law” the Consecrated can attain *wisdom,* which is not an abstract attitude but is the work and gift of the Holy Spirit. And an evident sign of such wisdom is joy. Yes, the evangelical happiness of the Religious is the consequence of the way of lowering himself with Jesus. And when we are sad, it will do us good to ask ourselves: How are we living this *kenotic* dimension?

In the account of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple *wisdom* is represented by *two elderly persons:* Simon and Anna: persons *docile to the Holy Spirit* (this is mentioned three times), guided by Him, animated by Him. The Lord gave them *wisdom* through a long journey in the way of obedience to his law. Obedience that, on one hand, humiliates and annihilates, but, on the other, it lights and protects hope, making them creative, because they were full of the Holy Spirit. They also celebrated a sort of liturgy around the Child that entered the Temple: Simeon praises the Lord and Anna “preaches” salvation (Cf. *Luke* 2:28-32.38). As in Mary’s case, the elderly Simeon also takes the child in his arms but, in reality, it is the child that clasps and leads him. The liturgy of the First Vespers of today’s Feast expresses it in a clear and beautiful way:
“senex puerum portabat, puer autem senem regebat.”
Both Mary, young Mother, as well as Simeon, elderly “grandfather,” carry the Child in their arms, but it is the Child himself that leads both of them.

It is curious to note that in this event the creative are not the young but the elderly. The young, as Mary and Joseph, follow the law of the Lord on the way of obedience; the elderly, as Simeon and Anna, see in the Child the fulfilment of the Law and of God’s promises. And they are capable of celebrating: they are creative in joy, in wisdom.

However, the Lord *transforms obedience into wisdom,* with the action of his Holy Spirit.

Sometimes God can also lavish the gift of *wisdom* on an inexperienced youth, suffice it that he be willing to follow the way of obedience and of docility to the Spirit. This obedience and this docility are not a theoretic fact, but are under the logic of the Incarnation of the Word: docility and obedience to a Founder, docility and obedience to a concrete Rule, docility and obedience

to a Superior, docility and obedience to the Church. It is about concrete docility and obedience.

Personal and community *wisdom* mature through the persevering way of obedience, and thus it also becomes possible to *link the rules to the times*: true "modernization" in fact is the work of *wisdom*, forged in docility and obedience.

The *reinvigoration* and *renewal* of consecrated life come about through *a great love of the Rule,* and also through the capacity to *contemplate and to listen to the elderly* of the Congregation. Thus the "deposit," the charism of every Religious Family, is *protected together with obedience and wisdom.* And, through this way, we are preserved from living our consecration in a *light* way, in a disincarnate way, as if it were a gnosis, which would reduce religious life to a "caricature," a caricature in which a following is acted without renunciation, prayer without encounter, fraternal life without communion, obedience without trust and charity without transcendence.

Like Mary and Simeon, we also want to take Jesus today in our arms so that He encounters his people, and we will certainly obtain this only if we let ourselves be gripped by the mystery of Christ. We guide the people to Jesus by letting ourselves, in turn, be guided by Him. This is what we must be: guided guides.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Mary our Mother, of Saint Joseph and of Saints Simeon and Anna, grant us all that we asked for in the Collect Prayer: to "be presented [to Him] fully renewed in the spirit." So be it.