

Talk on the Consecrated Life- St. Boniface Cathedral

Thank you for this opportunity to speak at this gathering in honour of those living the Consecrated Life within our three archdioceses based here in Winnipeg. I was given 5 minutes, so I will be faithful in following orders –this should not be too difficult, following orders that is, since my episcopal motto is: “To Obey is to Serve in Love”! And it is precisely this factor of Serving in love that I wish to direct a word or two during this Year of the Consecrated Life.

When I preached the homily at the Catholic Schools Day Mass at St. Mary’s Academy recently, I chose the theme of the Consecrated Life. This may at first seem a little different for a gathering of teachers and principals, but I chose this theme simply because our teachers today need to understand more deeply that our Catholic Schools in all of our provinces and territories, were founded and nurtured by the women and men living the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Consecrated Life. It is important for them to understand, not so much the idea of a legacy of good memories, because that may end up being simply a quaint idea, but rather that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at the very heart and essence of Catholic Education. And unless we keep this inheritance alive and central, we will eventually lose our schools!

What holds for our Catholic Schools, holds of course for Catholic Health Care, and this conversation is a constant topic around the country, on boards and Catholic health care corporations. Many bishops in Canada were participants in the recent Toronto conference which was focused on the Catholicity of our institutions.

So much of our country and heritage was shaped by those living the consecrated life -our first teachers, health care givers and social workers for decades were women and men who dedicated their lives in order to serve the community of faith and the wider community- to engage people in a dialogue about the Good/about the source of this Good which is God –to bring healing, learning and new life –to awaken people.

Pope Francis reminds us in his Apostolic Letter on the Consecrated Life that such lives and service were shaped and purified by the particular charisms of these communities and that we need to look with gratitude at this heritage which has touched us in so many ways –a heritage which springs not from secular thinking but from a spiritual culture of engagement with people.

I also know through my travels, how the same religious , with many of the members now aging with fewer and fewer vocations, continue to live out their consecrated life in so many ways of service in this city of Winnipeg and in this province of Manitoba.

We have all been touched by the gift of Consecrated Life in many varied ways- I know that I have since my elementary schooling in Vancouver. In some ways, it would be a good spiritual exercise to write down and reflect upon how we have been touched by and influenced by these men and women in Consecrated Life. It is a certain poverty today that our young people often have no direct experience of the beauty of this form of Christian Life.

In a very real sense, all those who have the privilege of working in institutions and facilities founded by religious, whatever Apostolic work is being done, must come to see themselves as living a vocation of a special sort as it carries within it this heritage of the consecrated life and to share the joy of the Gospel with others in their charge. And for all of us who are Baptized, Pope Francis points out 5 challenges for each of us –challenges characteristic of the Consecrated Life:

1. To be living witnesses to the joy of the Gospel.
2. To be prophetic in pointing to the truth
3. To create communion- a culture of engagement
4. To go to the peripheries where those most in need are
5. To seek God's Will not our own

May God be with you,

+Richard Gagnon