

Consecrated Life



Thirteenth Festival Letter of
✠ Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Consecrated Life

My 13th Festival Letter – AD 2015

At the heart of our Catholic Faith is the experience of God's great love. Our religion simply makes no sense without meeting the Lord, knowing the Lord, feeling His love, and loving Him in return. Christianity is essentially grounded in God's relational love, that love which is eternally shared by the Persons of the Trinity. All the doctrines of our theology and all the structures of our Church ultimately find their inner coherence through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, grounded in our knowledge of the Father's love in Jesus Christ. God is the event of love. Love is God's substance. Love is God's essence. It was God's outpoured love that created and redeemed us, not out of any necessity but only out of God's own boundless goodness. There is even the promise of what could almost be described as a kind of romance between God and man, a deep attraction constituted in grace between Divinity and humanity. *God is love, and whoever abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him,* (1st John 4:16) or as the Beloved Disciple goes on to explain: *We love God, because He loved us first.* (1st John 4:19)

Saint Augustine once famously observed that "Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you, O Lord." To find our wholeness and completion in God is the inspiration for all subsequent Christian vocations. Marriage and parenthood, the widowed life, the single life, the life of consecrated virginity, the life of ordained ministry, and the

vowed religious life are all basically responses to God's invitation to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and God specifically calls each one of us to live in a particular vocation, according to His loving providence. To place divine expectations on any other relationship or public role fashioned in isolation from God is a recipe for sadness and dissatisfaction. If in our lives, however, we *let God be God*, we can then let parents, spouses, children, and friends *be people*, and our work, play, service, and communities be rich but temporal blessings. *Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (Matthew 6:33) For it is always the deepest wisdom of faith to finally realize that humanity's endless desire can only be fully satisfied in God's endless love.

This year, our Holy Father Pope Francis is inviting all of us to reflect upon the particular vocation in the Church of consecrated religious life. From the earliest days of Christianity, some men and women among the disciples were called by Christ to leave all things for the sake of the Kingdom and to embody in their manner of living the absolute priority of God's astonishing love. As when the Lord met the rich young man: *Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing. Go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me."* (Mark 10:21) Or as Jesus said to Martha about her sister Mary who simply sat at his feet and listened to his words: *You are worried about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.* (Luke 10:41)

Religious are called to be living signs of that *better part*. They are given to the entire Church as witnesses to a radical way of hearing and then living the Gospel. Religious embrace what our Catholic tradition calls the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity,

and obedience which embody a communal form of utter dependence upon God and total commitment to neighbor. Religious hold all things in common, individually owning nothing, so that they can be more fully enriched by the things of God. Religious *for the sake of the Kingdom* (Matthew 19:12), have no exclusive human love so that unencumbered they can generously love everyone. Religious freely obey so as to be set free for service.

When religious give up possessions, marriage and parenthood, and a measure of autonomy, it is absolutely essential that they constantly welcome God into those empty personal spaces. Otherwise, what is emptied could easily become filled with self-absorption and frustration. Devils even worse than the old ones are always ready and willing to occupy the bare interiors of souls. It is therefore vital for religious to always be centered in a loving relationship with God, even living in a form of spousal love with their Lord. Persistent prayer and even moments of union with God constitute the foundation for all religious witness. In its own unique way, consecrated life is profoundly generative. The experience of religious life should always overflow into creativity and service. The evangelical counsels are intentionally based on the example of the Lord and represent the form of life he himself embraced, when he came into the world to do the Father's will and to save us from the sadness of sin.

There is, of course, enormous diversity in the charisms, customs, and traditions of the various orders and congregations, but common life, common prayer, common table, and common work have long been characteristic of religious life in the Catholic Church. Some communities are fundamentally contemplative in nature and exist primarily for the worship and praise of God and to intercede for the Church and the whole world. Some communities are essentially

apostolic, and their shared life is designed to support apostolates such as evangelization, parish ministry, teaching, nursing, or direct service to the poor. Other communities have sometimes been described as “mixed” because of their specific synthesis of both the contemplative and apostolic traditions. The consecrated life must in every case offer a radical alternative to the dominant culture of the world. The ideal would be to embody a form of spiritual freedom in Christ, which instills courage, detachment, friendship, patience, generosity, and most especially love.

From the earliest days of our local Church in Central Illinois, male and female religious have played an irreplaceable role in founding and strengthening of the Catholic Faith. Missionaries and martyrs, preachers and pastors, teachers and nurses, monks and nuns, brothers and sisters, working in close collaboration with the bishops and diocesan clergy helped establish what is today the rich reality of the Catholic Diocese of Peoria. It is something of a phenomenon and a certainly a manifest grace that even today so many young people from our parishes, schools, and Newman Centers continue to enter the religious life, both in active and contemplative communities. Our diocesan priests enthusiastically encourage young people to test their vocations as religious, just as our religious energetically promote vocations to the diocesan priesthood. The growing number of young religious serving in the Diocese of Peoria is an extraordinary gift, for which we should all give special thanks to God.

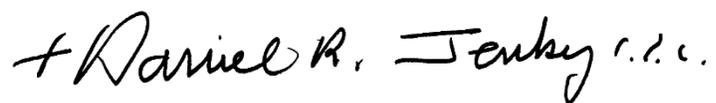
Regarding the universal Christian vocation, Saint Irenaeus observed: “In proportion to God’s need for nothing is man’s need for everything in God.” It is essentially the experience of God, God’s great goodness, God’s great mercy, God’s great love that draws believers to find their heart’s desire in God’s insistent call. Love always asks for love in return. And God is lovable for God’s own

sake. God is mysterious. God is tremendous. God is wondrous. God is glorious. As the Old Testament teacher of wisdom, Jesus ben Sirach exclaimed: *Who could ever be sated gazing at his glory.* (Sirach 42:26) A vocation to the consecrated religious life dramatically offers meaning and encouragement to other believers called to other ways of life, because by their manner of life religious remind those who are married, those who are widowed, those who are single that God is such good company and gives meaning to all human existence. As Saint Augustine once rhapsodized: “Do I love a kind of light, a kind of fragrance, a kind of food, a kind of embrace in loving you, who are my light, my fragrance, my food, my embrace, all of them deep within me, where my soul’s light never fades, its song never ends, its fragrance is never dispersed in the air, its taste never blunted in satiety, its embrace never ended in completion. This is what I love in loving you my God.” Or as Saint Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth: *These are the things that last, faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.* (1st Corinthians 13:13)

May we all first seek the will of God in all our individual choices. May we always affirm the faith and celebrate the generosity of all our fellow Christians as they serve God each in their own particular vocations. May we continue to especially honor the consecrated men and women who so selflessly minister in our midst and build up the entire Body of Christ by their public witness. They are radical signs of the resurrection which is to come, where *men and women do not marry.* (Matthew 22:30) *This world and its desires are passing away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.* (1st John 2:17). May all of us who are disciples of Christ, whatever our state of life, always love God with our whole heart, mind, strength, and soul, and love our neighbor as ourself.

On this great Solemnity of the Epiphany, we remember with special thanks the witness of Mary, the first and greatest of all the Lord's disciples, who faithfully revealed to the Magi and to the whole world that timeless light shown in time, manifest in the flesh, hidden by nature, yet coeternal and consubstantial with the Father. May that same most blessed and glorious, ever virgin Mary, who had no portion in this world except her Lord, continue to pray with the Church for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life.

Epiphany Sunday

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky C.S.C." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Festival Letter 2015 – Calendar

In the early centuries of Catholic Christianity, when calendars were uncommon and often imprecise, a bishop would send out an annual “Festival Letter” to announce the proper dates for observing the fasts and feasts of the Liturgical Year. It was not uncommon to also use such a letter as a means of instruction for the faithful. I have established this custom in our Diocese both to foster a greater love for the liturgy and to afford myself an additional opportunity for teaching.

Dear brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has shone upon us and shall ever be manifest among us, until the day of His return. Through the rhythms of times and seasons, let us celebrate the mysteries of our salvation.

Let us recall the year’s culmination, the Sacred Easter Triduum of the Lord: His Last Supper, His Crucifixion, His Burial, and His Rising, celebrated between the evening of Thursday, the 2nd of April, and the evening of Sunday, the 5th of April.

Each Easter, as on each Sunday, Holy Mother Church makes present the great and saving deed by which Christ has conquered sin and death.

From Easter are reckoned all the days we keep holy:

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, in the Year of Our Lord 2015, will occur on the 18th day of February .

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. In commemoration of the Lord’s death on the cross, all Fridays of Lent are days of obligatory abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also recommended on all the Fridays of the year.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, the 31st of March.

No other activities or pastoral responsibilities, except the need to tend to the dying, should keep a priest from attending the Chrism Mass. I also

invite the faithful of our diocese to join us for this celebration as they keep their priests in prayer.

The Church will keep her most solemn night of vigil and prayer to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Saturday, the 4th of April. According to the ancient and universal practice of the Church, the Easter Vigil may not begin until after nightfall. In Central Illinois, sunset is estimated to begin at 7:54 P.M. CDT in Peoria (7:45 P.M. CDT in Danville and 8:11 P.M. CDT in Moline). The Easter Vigil at the Cathedral will be celebrated at 8:15 P.M.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the 17th of May, according to the decision of the bishops of the Illinois Province.

Pentecost, the joyful conclusion of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 24th of May.

Any Catholic in a state of serious sin is obligated to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday. All Catholics are especially urged to confess their sins during the penitential season of Lent, during Advent, before the great festivals, and regularly throughout the year.

In a special way our Divine Savior gave the Church the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to make present the Paschal Mystery for all people of every time and place. This year, the Diocese of Peoria will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders in several ways.

On Saturday, the 16th of May at 4:00 in the afternoon in the Cathedral, I will ordain two men to the transitional diaconate. On Saturday, the 23rd of May at 10:30 in the morning, I rejoice to ordain six men to the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

I invite and encourage the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay-faithful to join with me at these great celebrations. All priests serving in the Diocese of Peoria are expected to participate in the Ordination of Priests. Except the need to tend to the dying, no other pastoral duty or personal obligation is of greater importance than welcoming our new brothers to our presbyterate.

Likewise, the Pilgrim Church proclaims the Passover of the Lord in the feasts of the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Saints, and in the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed.

In the Year of Our Lord 2015, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be celebrated on Thursday, the 19th of March.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord will be celebrated on Wednesday, the 25th of March.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on Saturday, the 15th of August, and is not a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church and Patroness of our diocesan vocations program, is celebrated on Thursday, the 1st of October, and has been raised to the rank of a liturgical feast in our Local Church.

The Solemnity of All Saints is celebrated on Sunday, the 1st of November.

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is observed on Monday, the 2nd of November.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 29th of November, in the Year of Our Lord 2015.

In the Year of Our Lord 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated on Tuesday, the 8th of December, and is a holy day of obligation as well as the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on Saturday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Friday, the 25th of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Friday, the 1st of January in the Year of Our Lord 2016, and is a Holy Day of Obligation.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Saviour, in accord with the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* and the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, “the diocesan bishop in his own diocese may bestow the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence, using the proper formulary, three times a year on solemn feasts, which he will designate....”

As Bishop of Peoria, I am happy to bestow such blessing with the plenary indulgence during the Year of Our Lord 2015 at the end of Holy Mass for the great Solemnities of Easter Vigil, Pentecost Day, and Christmas Eve.

Further, to enhance the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical life of our parishes, I have encouraged a return to the practice of Rogation Days to mark the change of seasons. I have requested the Holy See to confirm these days as part of the official calendar of our local Church. Pending their confirmation, I encourage pastors to observe these Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

January 22nd to coincide with the national day of prayer and fasting for the dignity of human life.

March 24th to highlight the beginning of the growing season, associated with the Solemnity of the Annunciation

June 23rd to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist

September 13th to highlight the fruits of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross

December 7th to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

To Jesus Christ, who is, was, and who is to come, the Lord of all time and history, be endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.