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Holy Mass on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the 22nd World Day of Consecrated Life

At 17.30 today, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and 22nd World Day of Consecrated Life, the Holy Father Francis presided in the Vatican Basilica at the celebration of Holy Mass with the members of the Institutes of consecrated life and the Societies of apostolic life.

The Cardinals, bishops and priests belonging to Orders, Congregations and religious Institutes concelebrated with the Holy Father.

During the rite, which opened with the blessing of the candles and the procession, and continued with the Eucharistic celebration, the Pope pronounced the following homily:

Homily of the Holy Father

Forty days after Christmas, we celebrate the Lord Who enters the Temple and comes to encounter His people. In the Christian East, this feast is called the “Feast of Encounter”: it is the encounter between God, Who became a child to bring newness to our world, and an expectant humanity, represented by the elderly man and woman in the Temple.

In the Temple, there is also an encounter between two couples: the young Mary and Joseph, and the elderly Simeon and Anna. The old receive from the young, while the young draw upon the old. In the Temple, Mary and Joseph find the *roots of their people*. This is important, because God’s promise does not come to fulfilment merely in individuals, once for all, but within a community and throughout history. There too, Mary and Joseph find the *roots of their faith*, for faith is not something learned from a book, but the art of living with God, learned from the experience of those who have gone before us. The two young people, in meeting the two older people, thus find themselves. And the two older people, nearing the end of their days, receive Jesus, the meaning of their lives. This event fulfils the prophecy of Joel: “Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (2:28). In this encounter, the young see their mission and the elderly realize their dreams. All

because, at the centre of the encounter, is Jesus.

Let us look to our own lives, dear consecrated brothers and sisters. Everything started in an encounter with the Lord. Our journey of consecration was born of an encounter and a call. We need to keep this in mind. And if we remember aright, we will realize that in that encounter we were not alone with Jesus; there was also the people of God, the Church, young and old, just as in today's Gospel. It is striking too, that while the young Mary and Joseph faithfully observe the Law – the Gospel tells us this four times – and never speak, the elderly Simeon and Anna come running up and prophesy. It seems it should be the other way around. Generally, it is the young who speak enthusiastically about the future, while the elderly protect the past. In the Gospel, the very opposite occurs, because when we meet one another in the Lord, God's surprises immediately follow.

For this to occur in the consecrated life, we have to remember that we can never renew our encounter with the Lord without others; we can never leave others behind, never pass over generations, but must accompany one another daily, keeping the Lord always at the centre. For if the young are called to open new doors, the elderly hold the keys. An institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And constant encounter.

Today's frantic pace leads us to close many doors to encounter, often for fear of others. Only shopping malls and internet connections are always open. Yet that is not how it should be with consecrated life: the brother and the sister given to me by God are a part of my history, gifts to be cherished. May we never look at the screen of our cellphone more than the eyes of our brothers or sisters, or focus more on our software than on the Lord. For whenever we put our own projects, methods and organization at the centre, consecrated life stops being attractive; it no longer speaks to others; it no longer flourishes because it forgets its very foundations, its very roots.

Consecrated life is born and reborn of an encounter with Jesus as He is: poor, chaste and obedient. We journey along a double track: on the one hand, God's loving initiative, from which everything starts and to which we must always return; on the other, our own response, which is truly loving when it has no "ifs" or "buts", when it imitates Jesus in His poverty, chastity and obedience. Whereas the life of this world attempts to take hold of us, the consecrated life turns from fleeting riches to embrace the One who endures forever. The life of this world pursues selfish pleasures and desires; the consecrated life frees our affections of every possession in order fully to love God and other people. Worldly life aims to do whatever we want; consecrated life chooses humble obedience as the greater freedom. And while worldly life soon leaves our hands and hearts empty, life in Jesus fills us with peace to the very end, as in the Gospel, where Simeon and Anna come happily to the sunset of their lives with the Lord in their arms and joy in their hearts.

How good it is for us to hold the Lord "in our arms" (*Lk 2:28*), like Simeon. Not only in our heads and in our hearts, but also "in our hands", in all that we do: in prayer, at work, at the table, on the telephone, at school, with the poor, everywhere. Having the Lord "in our hands" is an antidote to insular mysticism and frenetic activism, since a genuine encounter with Jesus corrects both saccharine piety and frazzled hyperactivity. Savouring the encounter with Jesus is also the remedy for the *paralysis of routine*, for it opens us up to the daily "havoc" of grace. The secret to fanning the flame of our spiritual life is a willingness to allow ourselves to encounter Jesus and to be encountered by Him; otherwise we fall into a stifling life, where disgruntlement, bitterness and inevitable disappointments get the better of us. To encounter one another in Jesus as brothers and sisters, young and old, and thus to abandon the barren rhetoric of "the good old days" – a nostalgia that kills the soul – and to silence those who think that "everything is falling apart". If we encounter Jesus and our brothers and sisters in the everyday events of our life, our hearts will no longer be set on the past or the future, but will experience the "today of God" in peace with everyone.

At the end of the Gospels, there is another encounter with Jesus that can inspire the consecrated life. It is that of the women before the tomb. They had gone to encounter the dead; their journey seemed pointless. You too are journeying against the current: the life of the world easily rejects poverty, chastity and obedience. But like those

women, keep moving forward, without worrying about whatever heavy stones need to be removed (cf. *Mk* 16:3). And like those women, be the first to meet the Lord, risen and alive. Cling to Him (cf. *Mt* 28:9) and go off immediately to tell your brothers and sisters, your eyes brimming with joy (cf. v. 8). In this way, you are the Church's perennial dawn. You, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, are the Church's perennial dawn! I ask you to renew this very day your encounter with Jesus, to walk together towards Him. And this will give light to your eyes and strength to your steps.
