



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Feast of the Visitation

Mass for the Archdiocesan Council of Consecrated Women

*Homily*

[*Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12; Luke 1:39-56*]

We are celebrating this mass at that time of year when the Council of Consecrated Women would normally come together for their annual assembly. For reasons known to all of us, we cannot hold the meeting, yet again. In this context, it is striking that the Gospel passage for this mass of the Visitation concerns an in-person meeting of two consecrated women. What transpired in that encounter underscores dramatically the beauty and power of communal testimony, and inspires us to look forward to that day when we are able to meet and give such witness ourselves.

Mary has been consecrated – chosen and set apart – to bear within her humanity’s reason for hope. Elizabeth has been elected by God to carry in her womb humanity’s first recognition of that hope as well as its initial proclamation. What was born of that meeting was a profound joy as Mary’s soul exulted in praise and Elizabeth’s child leapt in the womb.

The consecrated women of today each carry individually what Mary and Elizabeth bore separately. In virtue of the indwelling Spirit by which they and Christ mutually abide, consecrated women carry to the world Jesus Christ as the reason for hope. By their response to God’s call and the consecration of their lives, they also make manifest their own recognition of the hope given in Jesus and proclaim it by personal witness. When women so consecrated meet and recognize in one another the movement of divine grace, joy issues naturally and plentifully from the encounter.

Here we are given the answer to a question that Sr. Hazel and I recently pondered. In preparation for today, we met over Zoom. Foremost on our minds was not so much what to do in the absence of an assembly but more the ongoing role of the CCW in the Archdiocese. Some ideas were floated, and I’ll meet again with the Executive to discuss it further. But it seems to me that the unique and irreplaceable role of all consecrated women is given in the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth: to give communal witness to joy.

As we ponder this, we can see that the timing of this mass with its Gospel text is providential. There is a joy that is starting to bubble up in the hearts of the people as they see light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. Yet this is a joy arising from our own undertakings. We will move through the stages of the re-opening on the basis of our own efforts to keep vaccination rates up and hospitalizations down. Reliance upon human capacity makes this particular joy fragile at best. The joy to which consecrated women give witness is of another order, and is both solid and unquenchable.

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Mary and Elizabeth rejoice not because of what they are able to do. Their joy arises solely from the divine initiative and the recognition of what God is doing for the world in and through their consecration. This is the witness of joy that we are all called to give, born of the certainty that God is with us and at work to accomplish His saving purpose. Neither Mary nor Elizabeth knew at the time all that God was doing. That didn't matter. Sufficient for their exuberant joy was the knowledge that God was acting in fidelity to the divine promises. Neither do we know how God is shaping the events of history in accord with His purpose. We don't need to know. What suffices is the awareness that God is with us, knows what He is doing, and is turning all things to the good for the people He loves. That is more than enough to fill us with a joy that we want to share.

Moreover, it is a joy that needs to be shared. The consecrated women of this Archdiocese are very well aware of the suffering of many people. You are aware because you are close to them. You always have been. Where there is hardship, despair will always lurk in the shadows as a very powerful temptation. The only effective vaccine against it is the witness of Christian joy, because in announcing God's presence it relieves people of the illusory and unbearable burden of thinking that we have to figure everything out on our own and solve all our problems by ourselves. Christian joy proclaims that God, who once did great things for Mary, and even greater things through her Son, remains always with His people in the power of the Holy Spirit. God is faithful; God is with us. This is what is announced to the suffering and despairing people of our day by the communal witness to joy offered by consecrated women. There can be no more important role than that in the life of this local Church.

The strength for that witness comes not from ourselves but from the Lord, so let us turn now to the Eucharist. Here, the very same Jesus, born of Mary, the same One to whom John, born of Elizabeth, gave witness, comes to visit with us, reaches us in an in-person encounter. May our communion with the Lord in this sacrament awaken us anew to his abiding presence and deepen within our hearts the joy by which we announce to others the faithful love of God.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith  
Mass Livestreamed from St. Frances de Sales Chapel  
May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021