

Consecrated Life... as Lived by the Famille Marie-Jeunesse

Embracing the Gospel as the ideal of holiness, young people from several countries—consecrated persons, priests and families—have come together to form the young ecclesial shoot that is the Famille Marie-Jeunesse. Depending on our states of life, we commit ourselves to following Christ through a contemplative and missionary spirituality, Marian and Eucharistic. We see ourselves primarily as children gathered together by a Mother to learn to live with Christ.

Indeed, the history of the Famille Marie-Jeunesse began with a group of young people linked by friendship and gradually discovering the joy of believing in God. The desire to share this treasure of faith, received through praying the rosary and participation in the Eucharist, led them to discover consecrated life. This seemed to them to be the preferential means of living with Jesus and offering him as a gift to the world so that young people might have Life. Réal Lavoie, who was discerning his vocation at the time, encouraged and accompanied the group on this journey.

A Gift to Celebrate!

What a joy for us to read Pope Francis proclaiming The Year of Consecrated Life in his Apostolic Letter: "Together let us thank the Father, who called us to follow Jesus by fully embracing the Gospel and serving the Church, and poured into our hearts the Holy Spirit, the source of our joy and our witness to God's love and mercy before the world." His words strengthen us in our choice of life, encouraging us to respond to the call of Jesus with love for love.

Moreover, other words provoke the same result in us: those words are the radiant lives of consecrated persons with whom we celebrate the gift of vocation in different ecclesial meetings. We marvel at the light that the Spirit spreads throughout the Church through the charism of each spirituality. It is a great encouragement for us and a source of hope to share in the vitality and wisdom of the communities that preceded us in the *sequela Christi*.

Consecrated Life: A Friendship with Christ

The heart of our consecrated life, the living relationship with the Lord, is expressed especially through friendship with him in day-to-day life. Our joy is to do everything with him—whether it be cutting carrots or washing a floor—by sharing with him, in childlike simplicity, everything that makes up our life. It also involves listening to him, as Mary did, so as to let ourselves be transformed and share what makes his life what it is - and to do that freely, in abandonment and joy.

A sister in the community recently shared her sense of belonging to Jesus: "The Lord is looking for hearts in which he can rest; hearts that don't refuse him anything; hearts where he can work and transfigure. In a way, he chose me—with and because of my weaknesses—because I choose to give him everything. Only then could I bear fruit by going out to evangelize simply because I was overflowing. Beyond my ability to accomplish many things, to go on a mission or to serve, the Lord called me freely, through love."

Consecrated Life: A Friendship Offered to All

This love freely given is expressed especially through another aspect of our consecrated life: the being together, the life of family. Our charism bespeaks unity, brotherhood and charity as a means to be there for God and to incarnate the Word with Mary: "For the Beauty and Joy of God, to live the whole of the Gospel with Mary in unity, brotherhood and joyous charity." Brother and sister become sacrament: visible sign of an invisible reality. Thus, the bonds uniting us to one another in charity open the family to the young people towards whom the Spirit and the Church send us.

Evangelizing youth is therefore based on friendship. In sharing with them the same interests and desires, the Spirit enables us to forge bonds by which we can pass on to them our greatest treasure: friendship with Christ. By doing things *with* youth rather than *for* youth, we want to offer them a presence, an ear, an encouragement. By highlighting their beauty, their dignity, their ability to love, we hope to gently awaken them to God's love and mercy.

How Young People Look at Consecrated Life

Let us listen to the testimony of a young Belgian woman who stayed with us in our hostel in Ciney. She wrote to us after coming very close to committing suicide: "I realized in tears that Marie-Jeunesse is a breath of fresh air for every young person who walks through your door! I do not think you realize the impact that your lives of devotion have on our own lives. By giving of your own life, you have received the gift of saving souls because the fruits are too abundant!"

We like to remind ourselves that our spiritual family was born out of a double cry: that of youth in search of meaning, joy and beauty, and that of a Mother seeking to give her Son and his life in abundance. Our consecrated life thus finds its roots and its meaning in the meeting of these two cries. Our hostels are primarily places to welcome youth, houses of prayer, of sharing everyday life and openness to the other. We welcome every young person as being sent by Mary, chosen by her to be led to Christ.

Rami, a young worker from Montreal, often tells us: "Since I have been coming to Marie-Jeunesse, to this family that has become my own, I cling to the yesses given daily by my consecrated sisters and brothers. I firmly believe that this vocation is a very precious gift for us young people. Only God knows how many times my heart was been enveloped and rebuilt because I attached myself to a Eucharist celebrated, to a rosary recited, to the prayers of a consecrated sister or a brother... It is a great comfort to have the certainty that, through these people fully consecrated to God, we can strengthen ourselves in Jesus and trust him again in our trials."

Even today young people believe in consecrated life; they need it and are looking for authentic witnesses, people who have risked everything for an eternal love. The joy of God attracts them, the freedom permeating a life of poverty, chastity and obedience seduces them. Consecrated people remain for them a bright beacon giving rise to Hope.

Consecrated Life Inspired by Mary

May this year of celebration help us, throughout the Church and in each one of our commitments, to hold fast to the example of Mary, "the Virgin of listening and contemplation, the first disciple of her beloved Son. It is she, the dearly beloved daughter of the Father, endowed with every gift of grace, whom we consider the

unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbour.” (Pope Francis). Like Mary and with her, we have so many words to ponder: those of Christ calling us to live with him, those of the Church and of the world calling for greater love, and those springing from our hearts in generous response...

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