

Consecrated lay people, at the centre of the modern soul tension

(FIRST PART)

I have recently read some contributions from the Magisterium of the Church on the website of the World Conference of Secular Institutes, <https://www.cmis-int.org/it/>, therefore I wish to offer some hints for reflection on secular consecration.

In particular, I focused on some documents produced on the occasion of the Latin American Congress "Evangelization and Secular Institutes in the light of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*". They are not recent texts, but they contain a great wealth of wisdom, so as, the whole Magisterium of the church does. I was struck by the singular position attributed to this vocation: at the center of the modern soul tension, that is, in balance between the values of the world and the profound donation of the heart to God. In fact, it is here, in the intimacy of the heart that the world - renewed by the leaven of the Gospel - is consecrated, offered to God in a work of evangelical transformation. Thus is Christian secularity found on a weighing plate, different than secularism, that is, the world life; on the other stands the spirit of consecration, an attitude which, through the evangelical counsels - poverty, chastity, obedience - allows to direct each reality to the Lord (Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, Puebla, 1979, n.775).

Cardinal Pironio used a touching expression to indicate the strength of the testimony connected to secular institutes: in fact, he invoked, the "living God of hope" (Card. Ed-

uardo Pironio, Message at the 2nd Latin American Congress of Secular Institutes, 12 July 1979). It is of him that we are witnesses, not a distant God, but a risen God who lives and runs through the path of men. However, the consecrated lay people are not disembodied witnesses, people who show the saving path to others from the 'shore'. No. They are immersed, together with the others, in the stormy sea of history with all its risks and difficulties. As Paul VI already pointed out, secularity and consecration are co-essential aspects. It is as if the consecrated lay person had constantly to mend a relationship, making sure that the worldly horizon does not stain the richness of the consecration, nor that the consecration takes him away from daily duties. However, the latter will be carried out, in the world and for the world, with the science that comes from the anointing received, from the total bond with Christ.

Consecration is a celestial imprint that permeates all the nuances of existence and daily occupations; it vivifies them, makes them dynamic, freeing them from selfish interests. However, it is only through grace, that it is possible to resolve the permanent and radical conflict between earthly horizon and belonging to the Lord and to climb this mountain as "mountaineers of the spirit" (Paul VI, 1st International Conference of Secular Institutes, September 26, 1970, n. 12). A task that requires generous courage, discernment in the awareness that secular institutes are a comforting gift for the church, because they realize her presence in the various human and social realities in an original way: rather, they are an experimental laboratory that allows to verify in the church/world relationship in a concrete way. In fact, they put into motion the Christian potential, which is hidden but present in the most varied dimensions (economic, cultural, etc.). For this reason, it is important to be prepared with competence and openness to the chosen profession. (It continues)

Anna Guzzi



"Whoever eats this bread will live forever"

We are faced with one of the greatest mysteries, the one of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Entire pages and treaties have been written on the Eucharist. Instead, I wish to start from a personal memory that also is meant to be a testimony for the reader. Many years ago, I was fourteen years old, I listened to some words of exhortation from the Inspirer and Founder of the Apostolic Movement, Mrs. Maria Marino, which from then on were sculpted in my heart and I still keep in my mind today. She reminded that just as the body needs to be nourished in order to live, so must the soul feed on the Body and Blood of Christ; just as the patient goes to the doctor to be treated so must each of us have a holy priest as a spiritual father to be guided on the journey of faith».

These simple words on the Eucharist have always made me have feelings of gratitude towards Jesus but also of attention and responsibility, then as a journeying young man and much more today as a priest. Gratitude because he, the Lord, descends onto the altar in the hands of the priest, to give himself as nourishment, support, strength, spiritual food and immortality medicine. Human forces alone are always insufficient to face the way. "Get up and eat: the journey is too long for you" (cf. 1Kt 19: 1-18).

The love that the Lord has had for each of us must be an always vivid and grateful remembrance. He saw us lost and welcomed us; hungry and satiated us; naked and covered us with glory; sinners and gave us back the dignity of children. "Remember all the way that the Lord, your God, has made you go [...]. Do not forget the Lord, [...] who nourished you with manna in the desert " (cf. Dt 8,2.14.16) - Moses said to

the people. "Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:24) - Jesus will say to us. "Remember Jesus Christ" (2 Tm 2,8), Paul will say to his disciple. The "living bread, come down from heaven" (Jn 6:51) is the sacrament of memory which reminds us, in a real and tangible way, of God's love history for us. Gratitude is accompanied by attention and responsibility so that such a great gift is not wasted or worse, trampled on and received badly, with sin in the heart. The Saint cannot be received and hosted in a dirty heart. The Sacrament of Confession comes to our aid to forgive sins.

«Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day. Because my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (cf. Jn 6: 51-58). To the Jews, the words of Jesus are those of a madman. They are words of a person that does not know what he says. They do not know the modalities of the gift of Jesus. They take his words literally. Taken literally, without the light of the Holy Spirit, they are really absurd words. This is the reason for Jesus' insistence on faith in his Person. Whoever believes in the Person - and Jesus has said several times that He descends from Heaven - knows that resources are infinite in Heaven, knows that he is always faced with a history that reveals the impossibility of his salvation, always speaking in terms of history; but he also knows that history is saved not by the modalities that history offers, but by the omnipotence of God who intervenes in history.

Virgin Mary Mother of the Redemption, pray for us so that our hearts are always worthy of receiving such a great gift.

Father Francesco Cristofaro

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"YOU SAW THE WOLF COMING AND YOU DIDN'T RUN AWAY ..."

Reflections from the Letter of H.H. Francis to the priests of the Diocese of Rome (31.5.2020)

The Church never abandons her faithful and she made her closeness be felt even more in recent months due to the pandemic. Many faithful were able to see, touch and hear and also declare how their priests were close to the people. Many priests have not left their faithful, but have been close with prayer and testimony, putting themselves personally to help and some of them have even lost their lives. About this, the Pope recalls the words of the Gospel: "You have seen the wolf coming and you have not fled or abandoned the flock (cf. Jn 10: 12-13)".

In this regard, the Holy Father wanted to write a beautiful letter to the priests of the Roman diocese to thank them for all they have done, reminding that we need wisdom, foresight and common commitment, so that our sacrifices are not in vain in the phase we are presently experiencing. He takes cue from the messages the many priests have sent him, in which they describe the various situations they lived and how they individually "experienced" the suffering and pain of many souls. Persons with a face, name and history.

The pope uses two very strong verbs in this regard: "we have seen" and "we have cried". We have seen how these souls were not able to greet their loved ones, or be with them in their last moments; we lost families, neighbours, friends, parishioners, confessors and points of reference; we saw the helplessness of health workers, many of whom worked hand to hand with danger, isolation and loneliness, while the fear of contagion was increasing. We saw families worried about what to bring to their

dears' table the subsequent week. We have seen our vulnerability and impotence, we have been put to a hard test (Sir 27.5). We suddenly found ourselves facing a difficulty greater than us having no readymade answers.

We cried - the holy father continues - like Jesus in front of the tomb of his friend Lazarus (Jn 11:35), before the closure of the people (Lk 13:14; 19:41), or in the dark night of Gethsemane (Mk 14, 32-42; Lc 22,44) and also as the disciple before the mystery of the cross that affects many innocent people or as the bitter cry of Peter after his denial (Lk 22,62) and that of Mary Magdalene before the sepulcher (Jn 20, 11).

In these difficult moments it is not easy to find the way through and we are all affected and involved. We know we do not come out of this tribulation and pain as we were before, we must be vigilant and cautious, for we cannot be removed from the world but must be guarded from the evil one (Jn 17,15). And every moment is useful to talk about peace because man needs peace. We have been shut like the disciples behind closed doors and Jesus gives peace, for where sin abounded grace abounded (Rom 5:20).

Let us put our frailty into the hands of the Lord and He will transform it into strength with his blessing. Let us always announce the good news, to share it with the poor and live our dignity as children of God (Lk 4,18,19).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Redemption always bless and protect the Church, priests and all her children.

Father Nicola Coppoletta

**The
Lord's Day
ROMAN RITE**

**WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER
(Blessed Body and Blood of Christ Year A)**

NOT BY BREAD ALONE DOES MAN LIVE (Dt 8,2-3,14b-16a)

The Lord educates his people, making him dwell in the wilderness for forty years. In this lifeless place, he manifests him with all the evidence that life is only from Him. If man lives of bread alone he dies. But if he listens to the Word and observes it, he is filled with all life. If man is in death he might only produce death and never life. Progress does not give life and not even discoveries. These things move it from one sepulchre to another, from a less rich to a richer tomb, but it is always death. Life is only in the Word, from the heard and lived Word. Is not today the man who is without the Word, a creator of death and its lover? Does not our society love death and consumes itself for it? Is not a society that is capable of a billion abortions in about twenty-five years perhaps a worshipper of death? But it will always be a worshipper of death if it does not enter the Word of his Creator, Lord and God.

WE, THOUGH MANY, ARE ONE BODY (1Cor 10: 16-17)

By eating the Eucharist we who are many, we become one thing, one body. Having become one body, the other is not a stranger, but he is our body. We are not two, but one body. If we are one body in the sacrament, in Christ we must also be one body in everyday life. Having assumed human nature, Jesus became the brother of every man. For every man he died on the cross and he has risen for every man. Now the mission of the body of Christ is the mission of all his body. Whoever receives the Eucharist must live and die for the

world. He dies without knowing evil, but only good. Love begins with the release of our body from all sin to live all the potentialities of good that come from the body of Christ. Whoever does evil, who lives in vices, who transgresses the commandments sins against the sacrament of the Eucharist. He takes away his life to the highest good for every man.

MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD (Jn 6: 51-58)

The reality of the Lord's body is the essence of the Eucharist. Jesus Christ is really, truly and substantially present. Who eats his body really, truly and substantially eats his flesh and drinks his blood. Who eats the body of Christ and drinks his blood, feeds on all of Christ, the whole Father, the whole Holy Spirit, feeds on the Virgin Mary, the whole Church and of all humanity. His life must be offered in the nourishment of all humanity and the whole Church. He has to offer it really, truly and substantially for an obligation of essence and not just of will. This is the mystery of the Eucharist: Christ gives himself to us, to make us able to give all ourselves to Him, but giving ourselves all to Him we gives us all to humanity and to the Church for the salvation of humanity and the sanctification of the Church. When we receive the Eucharist we go to the altar to make Christ Jesus the offer of all our life. He takes it, immerses it in his life and gives it back to us so that we make of it a real, truly and substantial gift to the Church and to the world.

*by the theologian,
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