

## **“How to be Faithful Daughters in the Church in Our Present Time”**

### **Monthly Conference for the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George Alton, Illinois**

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- Thank you, Mother Mediatrix, for inviting me here for your monthly conference of Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George. Mother Mediatrix asked me specifically to talk about “How to be Faithful Daughters in the Church in Our Present Time,” and I am happy to do so.
- How many of you want to become saints? We should all want to be saints! Important to understanding how to be a faithful daughter of the Church is to root it in our divine filiation. This is something St. Josemaría spoke and wrote about constantly, and I will say more about him later. By virtue of baptism, we become sons and daughters of God. As such, we are called to live as members of God’s family. This “call” from God is known as a “vocation,” from the Latin word *vocare* = to call.

Ultimately, to be holy means to be a saint, i.e., to live forever in God's kingdom.

- In the First Letter of St. Peter, we read, "Become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you; remember, Scripture says, "Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting Leviticus 19:2).
- In the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, we are told that our holiness is the "will of God," which means that we are to love one another with mutual charity, while refraining from immorality and lustful passions (1 Thess. 4:1-12).
- My approach to talking about "How to be Faithful Daughters in the Church in Our Present Time" will be to give some personal reflections inspired by the lives of ten saints: Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Francis de Sales, St. Josemaría Escrivá, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Vincent DePaul, St. Thomas More, St. John Fisher, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

- Why saints? Saints are our heroes for holiness, and I have some personal connection with each of these ten saints in my path to holiness. I encourage each of you to make your own list and emulate them.
- In my lifetime, I have been blessed to meet two saints in person: Pope St. John Paul II and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I met Pope St. John Paul II many times while I was doing my graduate studies in canon law in Rome, and it was he who appointed me to be a bishop in 2003. At the Masses for the Installation of a New Pastor, I like to quote from our late Holy Father, the Great Pope Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "On Entering the New Millennium," which I quote as follows (nos. 30-31): "First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."
- We can find excellent direction here specifically for consecrated religious in *Vita Consecrata*, the apostolic exhortation written by Pope John Paul II, published on March 25, 1996. The exhortation is a post-synodal document. Its sub-title is "On the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world." It seems to me that Mother

Mediatrix was asking how me to explain how to be faithful in this particularly tumultuous time in the Church's life, and *Vita Consecrata* allows us to avoid being swamped by the many distractions/attacks/difficulties/questions of the present moment wherever those come from: COVID, Biden, Pope Francis, etc.) and keep ourselves founded on the principles that allow for faithfulness at all times.

- VC came as the conclusion of the “tryptic” of apostolic exhortations (after *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1992), turning to the third state of life in the Church: religious life. Within the document, we have three main parts, which I think offer a beautiful reminder of what faithful-daughter-ship looks like. Basically, it begins from the Trinity – which is a perfect communion, and an infinite love – and is an invitation into faithfulness-by-communion, and daughtership-in-love. So, religious life finds its pattern upon the trinity – perfect communion, perfect love – and to be faithful-daughters is to emulate that – faithful insofar as they live communion, daughters insofar as they receive, and give, the Father's love).

- Chapter 1 is *Confessio Trinitatis* (14-40, religious life is from the Trinity)
- JPII shows the foundation of religious life to be the Trinity, and the communion of Love that is the Trinity.
- Aquinas had explained religious life the other way around: choosing the evangelical counsels in order to seek union with God. JPII emphasizes the complementary vision of religious life as being entrusted with the evangelical counsels, which are themselves first grounded in the Trinity's Love.
- JPII begins with a reflection upon the Transfiguration and speaks to the fact that religious, though given the same baptismal grace/call as every Christian, have also taken up the special call to be in close communion with Christ
- They are called up the mountain for a close-encounter with the mystery of the Trinity, and the Incarnation.
- Main point: A living, profound, relationship with the Trinity is offered to religious. They're invited up Mount Tabor, to be particularly close to Christ, and to see in Him the Father's love manifest for them.

- From that encounter with Divine Love flows their vocation/state-of-life, and *Vita Consecrata* situates that call amazingly close to those two words – faithful and daughter – that I am speaking about.
- First, Chapter 2 is *Signum Fraternitatis* (41-71, religious life is for communion) and seems to speak directly to the concept of faithful.
- In their communal life together, they learn faithfulness to each other, to their charism/order, and to the Church at large. The difficulties, trials, distractions, and annoyances of communal life are a microcosm of the larger community that is the Church. Just as we see, sadly, factions and difficulties and infidelities in the Church, so we find them in our own hearts and the hearts of those closest to us first. And by learning to be faithful and communal with their sisters, they learn the same virtues and wisdom and charity that will allow them to be faithful to their “sister” the Church. In this regard, it important to see yourselves as spouses of Christ, and thus models of the spouse of Christ that is the Church. You endure in yourselves the same crosses and struggles that the Church does, but by being faithful to your spouse, Christ, you not

only elevate and sanctify the Church, but you learn fidelity all the more, and are witnesses of fidelity to the larger body of Christ as well).

- Second, Chapter 3 is *Servitium Caritatis* (72-103, religious life is for charity) and this one seems to me to engage the concept of daughter.

From this identity of divine filiation springs charity, which must be the foundation for living the life of a religious, so as a beloved daughter, we recognize our relationships with other members of the Body of Christ, relationships that must be rooted in charity.

- To be a daughter of God is to be drawn close to His embrace, to rest in His love, to remain in Him. Only from that foundation, that relationship that is the foundation for your identity, can we then turn towards your mission, which is to make the merciful love of Christ visible (something that this entire chapter of VC unfolds). All religious are called to incarnate the Father's love, and that stems from their first receiving it, and then both mirroring it, and passing it on. That comes out in joy, in peace, in hope, and perseverance.

- Along this line, we must be mindful of love for the Church. The following section from Pope St. John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata* is helpful:

Against this background of love towards Holy Church, “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), we readily understand the devotion of Saint Francis of Assisi for “the Lord Pope,” the daughterly outspokenness of Saint Catherine of Siena towards the one whom she called “sweet Christ on earth,” the apostolic obedience and the *sentire cum Ecclesia* of Saint Ignatius Loyola, and the joyful profession of faith made by Saint Teresa of Avila: “I am a daughter of the Church.” We can also understand the deep desire of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love” ...Because consecrated persons have a special place in the Church, their attitude in this regard is of immense importance for the whole People of God. Their witness of filial love will give power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity which, in the context of the prophetic mission of all the baptized, is generally distinguished by special forms of cooperation with the Hierarchy. (VC 46)

- In this regard, it is also important to speak about what it means to be faithful. Fidelity in religious life is exercised on various levels:
  - First to the Lord in their relationships with Him (see previous comments on divine filiation)
  - To the legitimate authority of the Church
  - Holy Father and Magisterium
  - Bishop
  - To their legitimate superiors in religious life
  - To the demands of the people whom they serve - an obedience that can sometimes be overlooked
- Fidelity begins with listening.
- After listening, the topic of speaking can be considered, and how one speaks can be a fruit of this fidelity, particularly with regard to those whose authority they are under. Are the words which we speak befitting of a daughter of the Church, recognizing the greater impact their witness is by virtue of their vocation?

- Finally, there is the charism of your own the community and remaining faithful to that charism: “making the merciful love of Christ visible.”
- Daughters, out of love for their parents, want to make their parents proud, so that they carry themselves in a way that will bring honor to their parents, never desiring to do anything that will bring dishonor to the family.
- Similarly, making Christ’s merciful love visible is demonstrated in the charity with which the religious fulfill their apostolate, doing so with joy. Doing so brings delight to our Heavenly Father and Holy Mother Church.
- One final note here on *Vita Consecrata*, the goal of your consecrated life is not just joy and peace and hope. So many people are edified by the joy exemplified by faithful religious. That is such a gift you give the world! BUT, your first priority, and the call of the Lord, is not directed towards joy itself, but that relationship with God from which joy is born. I am sure that it is a burden at times to keep smiling, and it may seem hypocritical to act joyful when we do not feel that way, but rather than

to seek joy for its own sake, we seek the Giver of joy, and that is where we find true joy.

- #109 of *Vita Consecrata* provides a good summary:

An impassioned love of Jesus Christ is a powerful attraction for those other young people whom Christ in his goodness is calling to follow him closely and forever. Our contemporaries want to see in consecrated persons the joy which comes from being with the Lord. Consecrated women and men, old and young alike, live faithfully your commitment to God, in mutual edification and mutual support! Despite the difficulties you may occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, you have the task of once more inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and of his Son's Gospel. Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that "you have become Christ!"

- I met St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta also when I was doing my doctoral studies in Rome, and I used to celebrate Mass for the Missionaries of Charity at their convent of San Gregorio located near the Colosseum. Mother Teresa came into the sacristy after Mass to thank me for celebrating the Mass. This was in the late 1980s or early 1990s and I didn't have a cell phone, so I don't have a selfie with Mother Teresa!
- Both Pope St. John Paul II and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta exuded a sense of holiness even while they were alive. It is hard to describe, but there was a palpable sense around them that you were in the presence of a saintly person!
- St. Francis de Sales is significant for me not only because I was appointed a bishop on his feast day, January 24, 2003, but also because he was speaking about the universal call to holiness centuries before the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Appointed Bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1602, Saint Francis de Sales wrote his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in which he said that "devotion must be practiced in different ways by the nobleman and by the working man, by the servant

and by the prince, by the widow, by the unmarried girl and by the married woman. But even this distinction is not sufficient; for the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation and to the duties of each one in particular. . . . It is therefore an error and even a heresy to wish to exclude the exercise of devotion from military divisions, from the artisans' shops, from the courts of princes, from family households. . . . Therefore, in whatever situations we happen to be, we can and we must aspire to the life of perfection." Also, you may have noticed that I usually end my homilies with the line, "May God give us this grace." I did not invent this, but picked it up from St. Frances de Sales, who often ended his sermons with this line.

- St. Josemaría Escrivá echoed these themes in the Twentieth Century and inspired the articulation of the universal call to holiness of the Second Vatican Council as expressed in chapter 5 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In 1928, St. Josemaría Escrivá founded *Opus Dei*, Latin for "the Work of God," specifically to assist people as they seek to grow closer to God and serve

their brothers and sisters in whatever state of life they happen to be. He taught that all the baptized are called to seek sanctity and spread the Gospel through faithful witness in the ordinary words and actions of their daily lives. He wrote, "Our professional vocation is an essential and inseparable part of our condition as Christians. Our Lord wants you to be holy in the place where you are, in the job you have chosen for whatever reason. To me, every job that is not opposed to the divine law is good and noble, and capable of being raised to the supernatural plane, that is inserted into the constant flow of Love which defines the life of a child of God" (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, p. 60).

- I became a cooperator of *Opus Dei* in the 1990s and more recently joined the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross as a way to foster and deepen my own spirituality as a secular priest and a diocesan bishop. Personally, I have found the "plan of life" established by St. Josemaría to be very helpful in my spiritual life, and I highly recommend it for you as well. The specific practices in the "plan of life" are referred to as "norms" and consist of the following:

- Morning Offering
  - Mental prayer, also known as meditation
  - Daily Mass, Communion, and Thanksgiving after Communion
  - Rosary
  - Spiritual reading
  - Small acts of penance or mortification
  - A short visit to the tabernacle
  - *The Preces*, a prayer which is specific to Opus Dei
  - Praying the *Angelus* each day at noon
  - Examination of Conscience at the end of the day
  - Three Hail Marys at bedtime
  - The Sign of the Cross with holy water
- St. Ignatius of Loyola is important to me because I was taught by Jesuit priests in my undergraduate studies at Loyola University in Chicago and at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. The Society of Jesus has a reputation for academic excellence, and so we should strive to keep up with our continuing theological education and

scholarship for our own personal betterment. As I learned in my first-year Latin class in high school, *non pro schola, sed pro vita* (not for school, but for life). And as the Jesuits have for their motto, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (for the greater glory of God).

- St. Vincent DePaul has a special place in my heart not only because I graduated from DePaul University College of Law in Chicago, but also because of his selfless example of serving the poor. I went to law school after I was ordained a priest. I describe my law degree as a tool for ministry. I wanted to help the poor, but I didn't want just to talk about it. I wanted to put my faith into action, so I co-founded the Chicago Legal Clinic to help provide legal services for the poor. Heroes for holiness like St. Vincent DePaul and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta show us how to put our concern for the poor into concrete deeds and actions, not mere words and platitudes. I hope they inspire you, as well, to give generously and cheerfully of your time *pro bono publico*.
- St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher are significant as my personal patron saints because I was baptized Thomas John. My parents did not

have these saints in mind at my christening, but I gravitated to St. Thomas More when I was admitted to the bar in 1981 and was appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1992. Also, my favorite movie of all time is the 1966 film, *A Man for All Seasons*, for which Paul Scofield won the Oscar Award as Best Actor for his depiction of St. Thomas More. Remarkably, as seen from our 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, the film also won Academy Awards for screenplay, cinematography, costume design, Best Director, and Best Picture.

- Very relevant for our time is Sir Thomas More's description of the inviolability of one's personal conscience, as he tells the Duke of Norfolk, "What matters is not that it's true, but that I believe it; or no, not that I **believe** it, but that *I* believe it."
- Particularly compelling is this dialogue from Robert Bolt's screenplay of the Duke of Norfolk's efforts to persuade Sir Thomas More to sign the Succession to the Crown Act of 1534:
  - Norfolk says, "Oh, confound all this. ... I'm not a scholar, as Master Cromwell never tires of pointing out, and frankly, I don't

know whether the [King's] marriage was lawful or not. But damn it, Thomas, look at those names. ... You know those men! Can't you do what I did, and come with us, for fellowship?

- More responds pointedly: “And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience, and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me – for ‘fellowship’?”
- These insights about conscience are very pertinent as conscience protections in our civil laws are increasingly being threatened.
- St. John Fisher, who served as Bishop of Rochester, became more important to me when I became a bishop, and especially so when I was installed as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois on June 22, 2010, the feast day of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More. St. John Fisher stands out as the only Catholic bishop in England who remained faithful to the Catholic Church with the Pope as her head, rather than give in to the demands of King Henry VIII that he be recognized as the Head of the

Church of England, to which the other bishops in England acquiesced in cowardly fashion.

- My Confirmation name is Joseph, which I chose in honor of my Uncle Joe, my Dad's brother. St. Joseph is another special saint for me in the example he gives us foster father of the Holy Family and guardian of Jesus. We honor him in a special way in this Year of St. Joseph.
- Finally, we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the model Christian who surpasses all the other saints. Indeed, the Archangel Gabriel proclaimed that Mary was "full of grace" (Luke 1:28). We do well to follow the instruction about her Son that Mary gave to the servers at the wedding in Cana, "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5).
- You carry a burden on your shoulders, but you do not carry it alone. Your burden is the cross, and you share it with the Lord. God and the Saints are there to guide you, and help you become the faithful leader you were born to be.
- The Sacraments help you practice and perfect the spiritual qualities of leadership. Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St.

Francis de Sales, St. Josemaría Escrivá, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Vincent DePaul, St. Thomas More, St. John Fisher, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin Mary show the way.

- God's grace will give you the strength to chart a faithful course in your daily life, just as it did with the saints, our heroes of holiness. They led well because they loved God well. The same can be true of all of you.
- The task we face is not easy. The challenges in today's world are growing, not shrinking. The culture is urging us to abandon what we believe. Heroic courage is the antidote. It springs from our trust in God, and it is strengthened when we turn to God's grace.
- May God give us this grace. Amen.