

Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George
***Veni si Amas* Retreat Mass**
St. Francis Convent - Alton, IL
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My dear sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this Mass during the *Veni si Amas* Vocation Discernment Retreat here in Alton with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George. As Jesus once again reveals His love for us in the gift of the Eucharist, we pray that this gift will assist you in seeing more clearly the beautiful plan that He has for each of you in your lives.

The process of discerning a vocation is a very intimate experience in which you strive to listen attentively to the voice of the Lord as He invites you to come closer to Him. It can be a time of great joy, but it can also be a time of great anxiety. In the end, however, it is always a worthwhile journey to undertake, because we know in faith that it is one that leads us to the unique path that He has prepared for us, a path that will bring us to experience the fulfillment of our deepest longings, both in this life and in eternity.

As personal and intimate as this process of discernment is, it is much broader than we might initially realize. Every single vocation is situated

within the much larger context of God's plan for His Church. A vocation, while being a call from Christ, is a call that comes through the Church and one that is for the benefit of the Church, not just the individual.

We see this very clearly in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-7). The Church, confronted with the need to serve at table, discerned that it would be beneficial to prayerfully select seven reputable men to fulfill this task so that the apostles could devote themselves to those aspects of the ministry that they alone could fulfill. The result was the birth of the vocation of the diaconate.

When considering the vocation to religious life and its relationship to the life of the Church, we have to avoid the temptation to look at it solely from the perspective of function. In other words, it can be easy to put the primary focus on what one can *do* in consecrated religious life. While discerning the possibility of consecrated religious life, it is important to be attentive to those activities that are a part of the charism for a community. But the discernment of a vocation must go much deeper than what you might *do*. The chances are pretty good that you can *do* most, if not all of the activities that are a part of the charism of a community without becoming a consecrated religious sister. True discernment of a religious vocation,

therefore, is not first and foremost about what you will *do*, but about who you will *become*.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World, Pope St. John Paul II writes that the consecrated life is a “particularly profound expression of the Church as the Bride who, prompted by the Spirit to imitate her Spouse, stands before him ‘in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish’ (Ephesians 5:27).”¹ He further writes that “[t]his spousal dimension, which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.”²

It is this identity as a Bride of Christ that you are being invited to consider in your discernment. Anything that you might *do*, then, as a religious sister, will be rooted in that identity, so that every action will be a response of love to your Spouse, offering yourself to Him and the needs of His Church.

When seen from this perspective, the discernment of a vocation to religious life has many similarities to the discernment of the vocation to

marriage and family life. Both are ways of expressing the common call for you as a woman to give yourself to another totally in love. If the Lord is indeed calling you to religious life, you can rest assured that the need that you have for intimacy and union will be fulfilled in a unique and beautiful way through your profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

For some, the thought of a vocation to religious life may be frightening, or at least cause for anxiety, not knowing for sure all that God's call will encompass and demand in response. As we heard in today's Gospel, we see this kind of fear in the disciples as Jesus approached them walking on the water, but the Lord calmed them with His reassuring voice saying simply, "It is I. Do not be afraid" (John 6:20). We need never to be afraid when it is the Lord who approaches us and asks us to follow Him.

As you continue the discernment of your vocation, never forget that whatever path the Lord has chosen for you, it is rooted in the vocation that you received on the day of your Baptism, that of being a beloved daughter of God. Every woman has a longing to be protected and loved by a father, and our Heavenly Father is the best of fathers, standing next to you, inviting you to a deeper trust in His love for you. It is His desire for you to

know the joy and peace that comes from abandoning yourself into His loving plan for your life, letting Him carry you through the joys and struggles of life on your way to the final destination of all vocations, eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §19.

² Pope St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §19.