

**First Profession of Vows of Sister M. Maris Stella Larkin  
of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George**

**February 2, 2019**

**St. Francis Convent Chapel  
Alton, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here on this joyful occasion for the First Profession of Vows of Sister M. Maris Stella Larkin as a member of this community of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George.

It is fitting that we celebrate First Profession of Vows on the Feast Day of the Presentation of the Lord. This observance of this feast originated in the Fourth Century in Jerusalem and came to be celebrated in Rome by the Fifth Century. It is also known as “Candlemas Day,” in light of the fact that candles are blessed today in churches throughout the world as a reminder that Jesus, the King of Glory, is presented in the temple to be a light for all the nations. So too, those in consecrated life are called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

This day is also observed as World Day for Consecrated Life. As declared by Pope Saint John Paul the Great in 1997, its purpose is “to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels” of poverty, chastity and obedience, as well as “to be a suitable occasion for consecrated persons to renew their commitment and rekindle the fervor which should inspire their offering of themselves to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Given his episcopal and pontifical motto, *Totus Tuus*, by which he pledged himself to the Blessed Mother to be “Totally Yours,” Pope Saint John Paul the Great quite naturally entrusted to the maternal protection of Mary the institution of this World Day for Consecrated Life, praying that “the Virgin Mary, who had the sublime privilege of presenting to the Father His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a pure and holy oblation, obtain for us that we may constantly be open and welcoming in face of the great works which He does not cease to accomplish for the good of the Church and of all of humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

It is often said that Mary is the model Christian because she shows us how to respond to the gifts offered by her Son, Jesus. We should look to Mary, therefore, to imitate her example of how to be a good disciple – a true

follower of Christ. Mary is the great example of how we are to respond to God.

Mary always responded by turning to God in prayer. At the wedding feast in Cana, she prayed by asking Jesus to help the wedding party when they ran out of wine, which, of course, He did.

Mary always responded with trust and faith. As her cousin Elizabeth said of Mary, she believed that what God had spoken to her would be fulfilled!

Mary always responded by doing what she could. She went looking for Jesus when he had disappeared as a twelve-year old boy, instead of sitting helplessly and worrying, and she found Him in the Temple.

Mary responded as part of the community of the Church. She accepted an important place in the community with John at the foot of the cross. After the crucifixion, she was with the disciples in the Upper Room where they had eaten the Last Supper with Jesus.

In a sense, it may be said that every feast day of Mary is also a reminder of how God works in all of our lives.

In the Immaculate Conception, we learn, as Mary did, that God will never ask us to do anything without having prepared us to be able to say “yes.’

In the Annunciation, we learn, as Mary did, that God will also respect our free will. As St. Francis of Assisi wrote, “God begged flesh from the Blessed Mother in order to become one of us.” She could have said “no” to God, but Mary said “yes” and opened the doors of our salvation.

At the Nativity of Our Lord, we learn, as Mary did, that God will always be with us, no matter how dire the circumstances.

Finally, in her Assumption, we learn, as Mary did, that our destiny, our true home, is with God in heaven.

Ultimately, our response to the gift of God’s grace is the response of faith. It may rightfully be said that any profession of vows makes sense only insofar as the profession of vows relates to the profession of faith. So to understand more fully why anyone would profess to live in poverty, observe physical and spiritual chastity, and pledge obedience to a religious superior, it is good to review our profession of faith: as Catholics, what do we believe?

The profession of faith starts with the expression of our belief in the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is how we were baptized: one God, but three persons, united in relationship to each other in a divine community of love:

We believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in God the Son. Jesus is our Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, died, buried, rose from the dead, now seated at the right hand of the Father.

We believe in the God the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and was given to you sacramentally when you were baptized and again at your Confirmation. St. Augustine described the Holy Spirit as the “bond of love” and “communion” between Father and Son. St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that every divine action “has its origin in the Father, passes through the Son, and is brought to completion by the Holy Spirit.” God does not live or act in solitude.

We believe that the Church is holy and catholic, that is, it contains the fullness of the truth and extends to everyone throughout the world: we share in the divine community of love.

We believe in the communion of saints. We are all called to be saints in the holiness of our lives here on earth so that we can be saints for all eternity in heaven.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins, made possible by our Lord's suffering and death as a gift freely bestowed upon us. In response to this gift, we are asked to repent our sins and live as Christ taught us to live.

We believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. This refers to all of us, not just Jesus. When we die, we will not exist for all eternity simply as spirits. We believe that Christ will come again and raise up our mortal bodies to be glorified form like His for all eternity.

This creed, this statement of our beliefs as Christians, has been put into song by a Christian band called the Newsboys. The title of the song, appropriately enough, is simply, "We believe," and it goes like this:

In this time of desperation  
When all we know is doubt and fear  
There is only one foundation  
We believe, we believe

[Refrain:]

We believe in God the Father  
We believe in Jesus Christ  
We believe in the Holy Spirit  
And He's given us new life  
We believe in the crucifixion  
We believe that He conquered death  
We believe in the resurrection  
And He's comin' back again, we believe

In this broken generation  
When all is dark, You help us see  
There is only one salvation  
We believe, we believe [repeat refrain]

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the First World Day for Consecrated Life*, January 6, 1997, n. 1, accessed online at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_06011997\\_i-consecrated-life-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_06011997_i-consecrated-life-day_en.html).

<sup>2</sup> *Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the First World Day for Consecrated Life*, 1997, n. 6.