

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITAS LATERANENSIS  
PONTIFICIUM INSTITUTUM  
THEOLOGIAE VITAE CONSECRATAE  
CLARETIANUM

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**THE EUCHARIST AS A SYMPHONY OF  
COMMUNION IN CONSECRATED LIFE  
ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING OF  
JOHN PAUL II**

*Excerptum Thesis ad Doctoratum in Theologia Vitae  
Consecratae adsequendum*

Romae 2024

Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis  
Pontificium Institutum Theologiae Vitae Consacratae  
*CLARETIANUM*  
Romae

**Tesi a stampa:** Simi Thomas

**Titolo:** *The Eucharist as a symphony of communion in consecrated life according to the teaching of John Paul II*

**Vidimus et approbamus ad normas Statutorum Instituti Theologiae Vitae Consacratae**

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Romae, die il 14.05.2024

## ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CD	Christus Dominus
CL	Christifideles Laici
CS	Caritatis Studium
DAS	Divini Amoris Scientia
DC	Dominicae Cenae
DCE	Deus Caritas Est
DD	Dies Domini
DM	Dives in Misericordia
DV	Dominum et Vivificantem,
EAF	Ecclesia in Africa
EAM	Ecclesia in America
EAS	Ecclesia in Asia
EE	Ecclesia de Eucharisita
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
ET	Evangelica Testificatio
FC	Familiaris Consortio
FR	Fides et Ratio
GS	Gaudium et Spes
HV	Humanae Vitae
LG	Lumen Gentium
MD	Mulieris Dignitatum
MDT	Mediator Dei
MF	Mysterium Fidei

MND	Mane Nobiscum Domine
NMI	Novo Millennio Ineunt
OL	Orientale Lumen
ORE	Osservatore Romano (English Edition)
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
PDV	Pastores Dabo Vobis
PG	Pastores Gregis
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
RD	Redemptionis Donum
RH	Redemptor Hominis
RM	Redemptoris Missio
RP	Reconciliatio et Paenitentia
RVM	Rosarium Virginis Mariae
SaC	Sacramentum Caritatis
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
SD	Salvifici Doloris
SRS	Sollicitudo Rei Socialis
TMA	Tertio Millennio Adveniente
UR	Unitatis Redintegratio
US	Ut Unum Sint
VC	Vita Consecrata
VS	Veritatis Splendor

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

For those following the mountain path of Catholic theology and spirituality, the Holy Eucharist constitutes the summit. The gravitas and majesty of the Holy Eucharist is beyond human telling since it contains the sum total of Christ's presence and sufferings. This thesis will seek to examine the profound mystery of how the Eucharist operates to create a symphony of communion in the consecrated life and it will take the pedagogy of the Pope Saint John Paul II as the lens for its observation. Indeed, often referring to the Holy Eucharist as "the source and summit of the Christian life"<sup>1</sup>, the teachings of John Paul II offer a comprehensive understanding of its theological significance.

Since the sacrament of the Eucharist is the remembrance of Christ's Sufferings, Death and Resurrection, Saint Pope John Paul II sees it as the most profound manifestation of Christ's relationship with God and man<sup>2</sup>. It is a manifestation resonating with a transformative and unifying power that draws believers closer to Christ and to each other: "Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it, Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body"<sup>3</sup>. John Paul II considers that consecrated persons have - in a special way embraced "the rhythm of the Eucharist [...which] is the rhythm of the love with which Christ having loved His own [...] loved them to the end"<sup>4</sup>. The Eucharist therefore plays a pivotal role in bringing consecrated persons to "the union and unity that [they] must establish with [Christ]"<sup>5</sup>, thereby uniting and harmonizing them with Christ, who creates a beautiful and spiritually resonant harmony among the members of a community. As a consequence of this Eucharistic

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<sup>1</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (hereinafter referred to as *LG*), (21 November 1964), no. 11; John Paul II, *Ecclesia da Eucharisita*, (hereinafter referred to as "*EE*"), Encyclical Letter, (April 17 2003), no.1: AAS 95 (2003), 432.

<sup>2</sup> *EE*, no.1.

<sup>3</sup> CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, (hereinafter referred to as "*CCC*"), (New York: Doubleday, 1995), no. 1396.

<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Your whole life proclaims the Eucharist the sacrament of Christ's love 'to the end'", *To Cloistered Nuns*, L'Osservatore Romano, (hereinafter referred to as "*ORE*"), (6 July 1987), 4.

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Living Examples of Holiness", *To clergy, men and women religious of the Diocese of Siena and all of Tuscany*, *ORE* (September 29 1980), 8.

influence, they are enabled to share the spirit of communion and love with those with whom they come into contact.

The pontificate of John Paul II expresses his profound love for the Holy Eucharist and a steadfast commitment to the consecrated community, which he sees as offering the opportunity to form a spiritual symphony that helps to unite the faithful in their journey. His teachings delve deep into the profundity of the consecrated life's corner-stone: vows, community life and Eucharistic life. These all entail sacrifice, self-emptying, self-giving love and mission. The vows of obedience, chastity and poverty are not only an outward sign of male and female religious' consecrated life, but also confirm consecrated persons' intense interior communion with God. They also reveal themselves to be the means for serving humanity. This study will, therefore, likewise seek to reflect on the significance of consecrated life in the Holy Catholic Church, since John Paul II discloses how this vocation stands out as the perennial and living witness to Gospel values.

Whoever receives the Body and Blood of Jesus through the Holy Eucharist is sealed as a carrier of God's love and is called to testify to Christ's body, the Church, through deeds of compassion and love. Becoming a disciple of Christ, Who gave Himself as food and drink, means to become a self-giving witness to this love. Like Christ, Who gave Himself for us, we give our time, health and abilities, and forgive unconditionally, so as to love as Christ loved us and become a witness to His love. Thus, the Eucharist "becomes contagious and, in a manner of speaking, it warms our hearts [...] we come to know the transforming power present in the Eucharist"<sup>6</sup>.

## 1. The Concept of Symphony

The etymology of 'symphony' lies in the Greek word *συμφωνία* ('symphonia'). According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word signifies, *inter alia*, a "musical union" or "instrumental concert"<sup>7</sup>. As John Burrows and Charles Wiffen describes us, "The symphony is like a castle (with its own grand structure or form), whereas a short song will have a different and complex form (more like a modest cottage). The color or texture of a piece of music depends on how the voices or instruments are used, and

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<sup>6</sup> *EE*, no. 62: AAS 95 (2003), 474.

<sup>7</sup> JOURNAL ARTICLE, *Symphony: What Does It Mean?* A. C. Keys, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Apr., 1972), pp. 235-241, Published By: Oxford University Press, p. 235

how they are combined or orchestrated”<sup>8</sup>. A symphony orchestra comprises a combination of various families of instruments generally classified as string, woodwind, brass and percussion. It produces its own musical sound which contains a “richness of harmony and orchestration and a strong sense of form”<sup>9</sup>. When all these come together, the result is beautiful music.

“Music is made up of three basic elements: melody, harmony and rhythm”<sup>10</sup>. If one instrument fails to produce its actual sound, the music loses its melody and harmony and becomes distorted. “Harmony occurs when two or more notes are sounded together. Notes combined vertically provide harmony as opposed to horizontally or serially in the case of melody”<sup>11</sup>. Another specialty of a symphony orchestra is that all the instruments are in close proximity of one another without considering the difference in their size and power. Each needs the others. That means, each one is closely connected with the others. Above all, “The conductor is responsible for overall interpretation and encourages the orchestra to perform as a unit”<sup>12</sup>.

Pope Francis considers that “it does us good to reflect upon ourselves as the image of the orchestra, in order to learn to be an ever more symphonic”<sup>13</sup>. He states that “the Holy Spirit [...] manifests itself through a symphony of sounds that harmoniously unites and composes diversity [...] He builds up the community of believers by harmonizing the unity of the body and the multiplicity of its members”<sup>14</sup>. Fulton J. Sheen points out also that “each member of the orchestra is free to follow the conductor and

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<sup>8</sup> JOHN BURROWS AND CHARLES WIFFEN, eds., *The Complete Classical Music Guide* (London: DK Publishing, 2019), 11.

<sup>9</sup> ALISON LATHAM, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1239.

<sup>10</sup> STEPHEN COLLINS, *Get Started in Classical Music*, Revised edition, Teach Yourself (London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 2014), 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> JOHN BURROWS AND CHARLES WIFFEN, eds., *The Complete Classical Music Guide*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Work for an ever more symphonic and synodal Church”, *Homily during Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals*, (30 September 2023), Accessed January 6, 2024.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20230930-omelia-concistoro.html>.

<sup>14</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Everyone Understands the Language of Truth and Love”, General Audience, (19 June 2019), ORE (21 June 2019), 3.

thus to produce harmony. But each member is also free to disobey the conductor” and thus produce disharmony<sup>15</sup>. He describes God’s creation of a symphony with man as follows:

God wrote a beautiful symphony of creation: chemicals, flowers and animals were subject to man, man’s passions were under the guidance of reason, and *man’s personality was in love with Love, which is God*. God gave that symphony to man and woman to play, with a complete set of directions, down to the last detail of what to avoid. Man and woman, being free, could obey the Divine Director and produce harmony, or they could disobey Him. The Devil suggested that, because the Divine Director had marked the script and told them what to play and what not to play, He was destroying their freedom. The woman first succumbed to the idea that freedom is license, or absence of law [...]. She then induced man to do the same [...]. On and on through the whole human race this original discord swept [...]. That original discord could not be stopped by man himself. Instead of conscripting man, God willed to consult humanity again as to whether or not it wanted to be made a member of the Divine orchestra once more<sup>16</sup>.

By giving us His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Divine Conductor began a new symphony through “all who freely will to produce harmonies in the new harmony”<sup>17</sup>. In other words, Jesus Christ is the only mediator through Whom the new symphony can emerge, enabling us to enter into a harmonious unity with God. As John Paul II states, “No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ”<sup>18</sup>. By giving us His Body and Blood, the incarnate Son of God serves as the channel for a new symphony that unites us with God through the Eucharist. We are the instruments that reverberate this symphony resound in the universe. In this symphony, God the Conductor takes the responsibility of bringing about unity through the Eucharistic Jesus and each instrument plays its own unique part, thereby contributing to a magnificent harmonious melody.

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<sup>15</sup> FULTON J. SHEEN, *Peace of Soul* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan Ltd, 1950), 39.

<sup>16</sup> FULTON J. SHEEN, *Peace of Soul*, 40.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, (hereinafter referred to as “*RM*”), (December 7, 1990), no. 5: AAS 83 (1991), 254.



In this study, the word ‘symphony’ is used as a metaphor. That is, this word is used metaphorically to highlight the importance of fostering unity when seeking to build a harmonious and integrated life for the consecrated members in a religious community. Pope John Paul II frequently teaches, “the Eucharist is the sacrament and source of the Church’s unity”<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, it is the Holy Eucharist that brings together the members of a consecrated community who originally come from different backgrounds. It unites them in devotion, in service and a common spiritual path. This is because John Paul II emphasized to consecrated persons, “the centrality of the Eucharist means to place at the center of our thoughts and our prospects not ourselves, our human programs, but Him, the life of our lives”<sup>20</sup>. By embracing a Eucharistic spirituality, consecrated communities create a symphony of self-giving love and unity that inspires consecrated individuals to sacrificially serve others and strengthen harmony in their consecrated lives.

Just as the various instruments of an orchestra play together, so consecrated members who are called to follow Jesus wholeheartedly work together in unity to fulfill their own physical and spiritual needs first of all. In other words, through mutually supportive activities within the community, providing spiritual comfort and solace to their community members, promoting loyalty and fostering fraternity, consecrated persons play a crucial role in nurturing the spiritual growth and well-being of their members in the community. This enables them to fulfil their call to live a life entirely devoted to the service of God and others. According to John Paul II, “[the consecrated person] has the duty to maintain fidelity to community life and contribute to making it a place of fraternal encounter, an environment of reciprocal help and spiritual comfort, an environment that each one desires and seeks, in order to make [...] a ‘pilgrimage’ to his [/her] own heart and to temper himself [/herself] in God”<sup>21</sup>. In this thesis, therefore, the word “symphony” will be used to emphasize the profound communion, love and unity in diversity that harmonizes the cooperation between the members of a consecrated community. Each one contributes

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<sup>19</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Eucharist is Sacrament of the Church's Unity”, *General Audience*, ORE (15 November 2000), 11.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Nourish your spirituality and catechesis with dogmatic truths”, *To women religious gathered in the Sport Palace of Milan*, ORE (6 June 1983), 2.

<sup>21</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Visible witnesses of the Church in a More and More Desecrated World”, *On the Occasion of the Meeting with women religious in São Paulo*, (21 July 1980), 3.

their unique talents and time for the benefit of others in the community thereby rendering it a symphonic one. The term “communion”, on the other hand, will be used to emphasize their spiritual relationship and the life of sharing.

In other words, a “symphony of communion” means that a communion of people from different backgrounds unite their various gifts, talents and experiences in a chorus of devotion and creates a magnificent and harmonious spiritual symphony. John Paul II affirms that “where communion and participation in material and spiritual goods are created, where efforts are made to establish the civilization of love”, there, in the end, “God’s salvation will arrive, with the good news of the Gospel”<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the symphony metaphor emphasizes the beauty of consecrated life when orchestrated by the spirituality of the Holy Eucharist in its relations, values and duties. This is through the latter’s harmonious integration rooted in the self-giving love of Christ in the Eucharist into the daily rhythm of prayer, communal living and service. Thus, the symphony metaphor is meant to convey the full power and beauty of the spiritual force emanating from members of consecrated communities living in communal unity.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this research is to give a comprehensive descriptive account of how the Holy Eucharist resonates as a symphony of communion in the spiritual journey of consecrated people. The study will seek to cast light upon the fact that the Holy Eucharist is not merely a ritual observation but, rather, a reality to be lived; one that establishes and organizes a harmonic relationship between God and the whole of humanity through its symphony of communion. This research aims to provide a definite, authentic interpretation to all those who are longing to emulate Christ through a Eucharist-centered life.

In the context of consecrated life, the image of a symphony of communion originating in the Holy Eucharist acts as a profound spiritual metaphor to exhibit the latter’s binding force in the sphere of faith and love in a community, just as the assortment of musical instruments in a symphony orchestra creates an exquisite musical melody. As a symphony

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<sup>22</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Visible witnesses of the Church in a More and More Desecrated World”, *On the Occasion of the Meeting with women religious in São Paulo*, (21 July 1980), 3.

creates appealing, harmonious music by uniting diverse musical instruments, so this metaphor accentuates the splendor of that deep-rooted unity, love and mutual trust in religious life that is the rich gift of the Eucharist.

Another objective of this research is to contribute insights and convictions that can reinforce consecrated persons' potential in the area of helping and serving humankind. This by amalgamating the practical spheres of consecrated life with the theological realities of the Holy Eucharist. Such an undertaking makes their daily mission in the Catholic Church and society more fruitful, and they become a sign of God's kingdom in this world. Thus, this research offers an inspiration to go back to a Eucharist-centered life.

### **3. Scope**

My investigation of John Paul II's Eucharistic theology and his teaching on the consecrated life led to a deep conviction that the Eucharistic mystery is a symphony of communion. This research therefore aims to help consecrated persons rediscover the richness of the Eucharistic mystery and prepare themselves for a worthy reception of this sacrament. It also seeks to lead them to deepen their consecration to God by experiencing Christ's self-giving love in its fullness in the Eucharist. John Paul II emphasizes the importance of the role that consecrated persons play in the Catholic Church.

The scope of this study reaches to how the grace of God coming through the Holy Eucharist strengthens those who receive the unparalleled call to consecrated life. Through consecrated life, the Kingdom of God becomes visible to the world and makes Christ known to others through their witness. Because the Eucharist is the principles source to nourish ourselves to receive in the grace and love of Christ, to get the strength to follow Jesus. thereby, they recognize the fact that only when we surrender to God's will in all situations of life, God's Kingdom lives and strives for the expansion of this kingdom. Thus, every consecrated person becomes a sacrifice of Christ's love. Without the unity of love in Christ- without the real love- humanity's unity is impossible. Therefore, the study presents the role of the Holy Eucharist in consecrated life as a source of love and unity and examines how it thus builds up a symphony of unity and sharing among the consecrated persons in a community. Moreover, it considers how consecrated persons thus leading a life of symphony deepen their communion with God and, as a result, equip themselves to lead a

Eucharist-centered life that is a giving of oneself to others in selfless service.

#### **4. Originality and Relevance**

The highlight of this research is that it collages the different teachings and exhortations of John Paul II concerning the Holy Eucharist and consecrated life and performs a profound and systematic analysis. It covers his Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations, Apostolic Letters, Homilies, Messages and Speeches from the twenty-seven years of his pontificate (1978-2005). The major source for these works is the *Osservatore Romano* but I have also consulted *Insegnamenti di San Giovanni Paolo II*. His Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* are the main texts analyzed as they particularly highlight the importance of the Holy Eucharist in creating a symphony of unity in consecrated life.

This study tries to provide a deeper understanding of how the Holy Eucharist, in fact, creates a symphony of communion in the consecrated life. In addition, the research offers a new perspective by providing directions as to how to put the Eucharist-centered life into practice in a consecrated person's life. It clarifies both that the Holy Eucharist nurtures love for and relationships with God and one's fellow beings and that it creates a symphony of unity and love in the consecrated life. This research thus contributes towards a clearer comprehension of how the Holy Eucharist constitutes an unparalleled means of honoring the commitment that consecrated persons make in their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

#### **5. Methodology**

The methodology adopted in this study is that of a systematic theological analysis applied to the symphonic realm of the Eucharist in consecrated life. It encompasses a structured examination of the relevant theological teachings, insights, advice, homilies and speeches of John Paul II concerning the Eucharist and consecrated life. This study seeks to serve as a practical guide by illustrating how communion with God is established through Christ in the Eucharist, Whose divinity has a transformative effect on us and our relationships with our brothers and sisters. The arguments in the study are substantiated through analysis of biblical passages, official Church documents and the teaching and insights of other Popes. This so that they can then be applied in the lived experiences of believers,

especially in the context of consecrated life. The analysis demonstrates transformational and outward expressions of the Eucharist as a guide to successfully navigating the horizontal dimension of community life and mission. It is hoped that this will provide a solid foundation for being a living witness to the Kingdom of God in the world through love-based missions.

## **6. Structure and Arguments**

We can appreciate from John Paul II's words how consecrated persons assimilate Christ's all-inclusive love, compassion and selflessness and can thereby become witnesses to a vigorous and revolutionary presence in a world that is living in spiritual hunger. This study is organized into five chapters. Each one reflects on a particular aspect of the incomparable relationship between Holy Communion and the consecrated life.

The first chapter systematizes the foundation of consecrated life through an analysis of John Paul II's teachings. This chapter focuses on the theological and spiritual dimensions of the consecrated life. With the help of the aforementioned Pope's teachings, it describes how consecrated persons are related to the mystery of God's kingdom through their unparalleled commitments and partnership. John Paul II highlights the Holy Eucharist as the most effective means of deepening their intimate relationship with Christ and thereby contributing to the accomplishment of God's kingdom here on earth.

Chapter Two examines the supreme importance of the Holy Eucharist as the heavenly food and spiritual bread that nourishes the soul and deepens the relationships between community members. This chapter elucidates how consecrated lives become the embodiment and thus concrete manifestation of the Holy Eucharist's transforming power. It analyzes how Holy Communion, in its capacity of a spiritual food, acts as a unifying force and gives its recipients the strength to fulfill their mission. Rooted in the teaching of John Paul II, this research unveils the theological richness and transformational power in this sacrament that outwardly appears in the form of bread and wine. This Chapter Two will describe how to bridge the lacuna between the material and the spiritual spheres. It invites us to reflect on how the material elements of bread and wine become the vehicles of God's presence and our spiritual nourishment.

Chapter Three, entitled ‘The Source of Love’, explores the profundity of the relationship between consecrated life and the mystery of divine Eucharistic love. This chapter elucidates on the Holy Eucharist as the interior communication of Christ’s self-sacrificing love, which becomes a means for the inner transformation of a person. This third chapter additionally plumbs our awareness of how the Holy Eucharist gives us the grace needed for fraternal love. John Paul II’s teachings emphasize that the Holy Eucharist stimulates fraternal love. The love that transcends the person creates a conviction that he/she belongs to a large divine family. This fraternal love in consecrated lives becomes the foundation of community life, mutual association and collaboration.

The Fourth Chapter probes how the Holy Eucharist, as the fountain of harmony, brings the consecrated members of a community into profound unity through its transformational grace. As the source of our unity, the Holy Eucharist ushers us towards the Holy Trinity. Here we discover how the divine energy gushes forth into us through inner silence, asceticism and Eucharistic adoration. This fourth chapter also examines how, through participation in the Holy Mass, consecrated persons comprehend the fraternal, sharing nature of divinity and realize that they are called to assimilate this fraternity in their lives. In this sense, the Holy Eucharist becomes the means enabling consecrated people to unite with each other and with the world. John Paul II’s teachings underline that inner silence and asceticism are major factors for developing a deep intimacy with the Holy Eucharist. The insights of John Paul II elucidate that Eucharistic adoration is a powerful way to nurture the interior life, strengthen the consecrated call, reinforce personal relationships and deepen communion with Christ.

The Fifth Chapter explores the effects and fruits of the Holy Eucharist in the consecrated life. This by analyzing the vertical and horizontal dimensions of its operation. This chapter first unveils the vertical dimensions. To those who have received the call to consecrated life, the Holy Eucharist pours out strength, happiness and the medicine of a transformational symphony. This chapter thus examines the profound theological significance of the Holy Eucharist that converts itself into the Body and Blood of Christ, creates strong resonances and transforms the hearts of those who have surrendered their lives through intense sacrifice and service. Analysis of the horizontal dimensions explores the resonance of the Eucharistic Symphony that accepts and loves all people. In addition, it also explores how the Eucharistic love that urges them to evangelize and

carry out charitable works among the sick, the poor and orphans, directs the latter to God's love and thus Christ's love is made manifest in this world. In this way, they are actively engaged in the Holy Eucharist and give witness to Christ in the world.

## **7. Limitations**

This thesis discusses how the grace of God conferred through the Holy Eucharist makes it possible - for those who live a Eucharist-centered life - to live a life of unity and symphony by receiving the character of Christ's love, compassion and humility. Thus, the main objective of this research is not to analyze the whole theology of the Holy Eucharist but, rather, to describe its relevance and richness for following the example of love and sharing in consecrated life. Furthermore, this research does not consider the different dimensions of consecrated life namely, contemplative, active and monastic life since it focuses solely on the life of unity in the Eucharistic symphony.





# CHAPTER ONE -THE CONSECRATED LIFE AS A LIVING WITNESS TO GOD’S KINGDOM

## Introduction

Consecrated life begins with an encounter with the Lord. This encounter sets one free. The consecrated person will feel transformed and enabled to fulfil the will of the Lord: “The call to the way of the evangelical counsel springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love [...] the encounter with this love becomes something specifically personal”<sup>23</sup>. According to Saint Pope John Paul II, the call to consecrated life leads a person “to complete self-giving for the Kingdom of God”<sup>24</sup> and enables them to bear witness to it by courageously offering their whole lives to following Christ and serving others. John Paul II affirms that consecrated persons “give[] the people of our time the beginnings of God’s Kingdom [...by] dedicat[ing themselves] to fully living the spousal mystery of exclusive union with Christ”<sup>25</sup>. The Pope emphasizes that “to follow Christ is [...] wanting imitate Him to the point of allowing oneself be configured to Him, assimilated to Him”<sup>26</sup>.

This chapter will seek to analyze John Paul II’s insights and teachings on consecrated life so as to understand how consecrated life is centered on the life of Jesus Christ<sup>27</sup> and called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God. It will also attempt to analyze the Eucharist as a

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<sup>23</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptionis Donum*, (hereinafter referred to as “RD”), (25 March 1984), no. 3: AAS 76 (1984), 516.

<sup>24</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Pray, reflect and work so that African Synod' will be fruitful”, *To priests, religious, seminarians and laity in the Cathedral of Notre Dame des Miséricordes in Cotonou Benin*, (4 February 1993), ORE (10 February 1993), 8.

<sup>25</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Only One Thing is Needful”, *Address to Women Religious of the Bologna Area*, ORE (8 October 1997), 8.

<sup>26</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitation of Christ in Chastity, Poverty, Obedience”, *To the Nuns in the Garden of Rue Du Bac* (31 May 31 1980), ORE (9 June 1980), 7.

<sup>27</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, (hereinafter referred to as “VC”) (25 March 1996). no. 1: AAS 88 (1996), 377; “consecrated life comes from baptismal consecration and expresses it with greater fullness. With a free response to the call of the Holy Spirit, you decided to follow Christ, consecrating yourselves to him completely. “The more stable and firmer this bond (the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his Church) is,”—the Council says—“the more perfect will the Christian’s religious consecration be” *LG* no. 4)”. For details JOHN PAUL II, “Consecrated Life Relevant Today”, *To Enclosed Nuns*, ORE (12 February 1979), 9.

privileged place for living a consecrated life and bearing witness to the Kingdom of God. By devoting their lives completely to establishing God's Kingdom, consecrated people allow themselves to be transformed into the face of the Kingdom of God in this world. John Paul II says to consecrated persons: "Through you Jesus wants to [...] be seen announcing God's Kingdom, healing the sick, bringing sinners to conversion, blessing children, doing good to all and always obeying the will of the Father who sent Him. In you the Church and the world must be able to see the living Lord"<sup>28</sup>.

In order to understand the role of consecrated life in the mystery of the Kingdom of God, I shall consider how male and female religious make Christ visible to the world and act as a sign of God's love in this world. John Paul II affirms that life with Christ in the Eucharist gives us the strength "to spread the leaven of God's Kingdom throughout the earth"<sup>29</sup>. The Pope considers that, "nourished by the Word and by the Eucharist"<sup>30</sup>, consecrated persons experience the spirit of communion and thus "are enabled to take up the mission of Christ, working and suffering with Him in the spreading of His Kingdom"<sup>31</sup>. John Paul II's teaching reflects the words of Edith Stein that "to live the life of the Eucharist is to exit completely from the small circle of one's own life and to grow into the infinity of the life of Christ"<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, his writings remind us that through "the Eucharist [religious] always find themselves, every day, in the very heart of their vocation"<sup>33</sup>. For this reason, John Paul II emphasizes to all consecrated people that the life of a consecrated person must be in, through, and for the Eucharist.

### **1.1 Consecrated Life in the Mystery of the Kingdom of God**

What is the Kingdom of God? In a general sense, it is God's sovereign and eternal rule over the universe, which brings "justice, peace,

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<sup>28</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "The Secular City Has Need of Your Witness", *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5; Cf. *LG*, no. 46.

<sup>29</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "We Await a New Heaven and a New Earth", *Audience*, ORE (9 Dec 1998), 19.

<sup>30</sup> *VC*, no.44: AAS 88 (1996), 417.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 36: AAS 88 (1996), 410.

<sup>32</sup> EDITH STEIN, *Autobiography*, trans. Immaculata Adamsda OCD, in: *Swiatlosc w ciemnosci*, vol. I, Krakow, 1977, p. 243, quoted by John Paul II in his address to contemplative Nuns in Poland on June 8, 1987, ORE (6 July 1987), 4.

<sup>33</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Your Whole Life Proclaims the Eucharist the Sacrament of Christ's Love to the End", *Address to contemplative Nuns in Poland*, ORE (6 July 1987), 4.

and happiness” (Rom 14:17): “A Kingdom eternal and universal, a Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower”<sup>34</sup>. When Jesus began His public life, He proclaimed: “The Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). The goal of the Kingdom of God is “transforming human relationships” bringing them in line with the commandment of love: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (Jn 13:34; cf. 15:12). Such love manifests the love which the Father has for the world (cf. Jn 3:16). His Kingdom “grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another”<sup>35</sup>.

According to John Paul II, all Christians are called to follow the life and example of Jesus and to be witnesses, thereby “build[ing] the Kingdom of God by working with the Lord, who is its first and decisive builder”<sup>36</sup>. Benedict XVI also affirms that “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”<sup>37</sup>. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II emphasizes the fact that the consecrated life follows in the ‘footsteps and life of Jesus Christ’<sup>38</sup>. According to the Pope John Paul II, to consecrate means to live for the Kingdom of God: that is to say, it involves “the total and irrevocable consecration of [a person’s] inner self and [their] feminine capacities to Christ and to His Kingdom”<sup>39</sup>. This by participating in Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection and always being with Christ. John Paul II also states that “the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of future time, is begun in the Eucharist, and it will develop from it until the end of the world”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, (hereinafter referred to as “GS”), (7 December 1965), no.39, quoted in John Paul II’s speeches to Indian community in Rome titles as “Church’s Path is Defence of Human Dignity and Humble Service of Person”, ORE (30 June 1986), 11.

<sup>35</sup> RM, no.15: AAS 83 (1991), 263.

<sup>36</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “All are Called to Build God’s Kingdom”, *Audience*, ORE (13 December 2000), 11.

<sup>37</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (hereinafter referred to as “DCE”), (25 December 2005), no. 1: AAS 88 (1996), 377.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1: AAS 88 (1996), 377.

<sup>39</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fully involved in Church’s Prophetic Mission”, *To women religious gathered in the Carmel of Kinshasa, Zair*, ORE (19 May 1980), 3.

<sup>40</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Penance and Eucharist lead to freedom in the Spirit”, *Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ*, ORE (21 June 1982), 1.

### 1.1.1 Contemplating the Splendour of Christ's Face

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (Isa 60:1). Saint Pope John Paul II tells consecrated persons: “Your life, your prayer, your services, your action have as their first end to shine the light of the Savior in the world”<sup>41</sup>. That is to say, consecrated persons offer the light of Christ to the hearts of those who are dejected, tormented, distressed, orphaned or widowed: “like a lamp shining in the dark” (2 Pet 1:19), they give their life completely to God<sup>42</sup>. John Paul II teaches that consecrated people testify through their good example to the light of Christ. Benedict XVI also states the same, quoting the words of John Paul II:

[...] the light that comes from Christ and shines on Mary and Joseph, on Simeon and Anna, and through them, on everyone. The Fathers of the Church connected this radiance with the spiritual journey. The consecrated life expresses this journey, in a special way, as “*philokalia*”, love of the divine beauty, a reflection of God’s divine goodness. On Christ’s Face the light of such beauty shines forth [...] those who are called to the consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world<sup>43</sup>.

In his Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II calls Jesus Christ “the true light that enlightens all”<sup>44</sup>. ‘God the Father is the source of heavenly light’ (cf. Jm 1:17). In the same way, ‘Christ also is light’ (cf. Jn 8:12). He is the personification of the invisible God and “the reflection of God’s glory” (Heb 1:3). In this sense, it is through the Eucharist, Christ Himself, “the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of man”<sup>45</sup>: this in order to liberate the world from the darkness of

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<sup>41</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Your Gift of Self Amazes the World”, *Meeting with men and women religious of Fourvière* (October 4, 1986), ORE (10 November 1986), 4.

<sup>42</sup> “By offering them the light of faith which opens them to trust and to the transcendent dimension of life”. For details JOHN PAUL II, *To the women religious of Basilicata*, Insegnamenti di San Giovanni Paolo II XIV, 1, (28 April 1991), 929.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. VC, no. 15, 19, quoted by BENEDICT XVI in his homily to consecrated people in ORE, “The Person for the Gospel on the Roads of Humanity”, (9 February 2011), 4.

<sup>44</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (hereinafter referred to as “VS”), (6 August 1993), no. 1: AAS 85 (1993), 1134.

<sup>45</sup> VS, n. 2: AAS 85 (1993), 1134; GS, no.22.

sin. Whoever encounter this light turns into brightness of light (Mt 5:14), “sharing in His mystery and surrounded by His light”<sup>46</sup>, and the light shining upon them is the glory of God. The person who touches the divine light shines with heavenly splendour. According to John Paul II, “religious vocation is [...] the spark which lights a ‘bright flame of love’ in the soul”<sup>47</sup>.

### **1.1.1.1 Shining With the Divine Glory of Christ**

“Christ is, in fact, first of all the man of God, who reveals and glorifies God, as the only Son totally given to the realization of His Father’s work”<sup>48</sup>. We see and know God the Father through the “heavenly light” that illuminates the face of Jesus. Thus, John Paul II states that, by contemplating the face of Christ, “we have also adored the Father and the Spirit, the one and undivided Trinity, the ineffable mystery in which everything has its origin and its fulfilment”<sup>49</sup>. Since “consecrated life in the world and in the Church is a visible sign of [the] search for the face of the Lord and of the ways that lead to the Lord (cf. Jn 14:8)”<sup>50</sup>, consecrated persons are called to reveal the love of Jesus. In other words, they are “projecting the evangelical face of the Spouse of Christ at all times”<sup>51</sup> by bearing each other’s sorrows and pains.

John Paul II reminds those consecrated: “In order to be Christ’s light and prophetic presence you must generously follow the Master. In this way, the religious becomes a person consecrated to God in the Church, through Christ, in the charity of the Spirit, for the benefit of the entire

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<sup>46</sup> VS, no. 15: AAS 85 (1993), 1145.

<sup>47</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Riches of Living Faith at the Heart of the Church”, *To Women Religious of the Diocese of Rome*, ORE (23 November 1978), 5.

<sup>48</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “To recognize Christ in the poor, we must meet him first in prayer”, *To the International Union of Superiors General*, ORE (16 June 1986), 6.

<sup>49</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunt*, (hereinafter referred to as “*MI*”), (6 January 2001) no.5: AAS 93(2001), 269.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The Service of Authority and Obedience: Faciem Tuam, Domine, Requiram : Instruction* (5 November 2008), n. 1 quoted by BENEDICT XVI in his homily on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> day of consecrated life titled as “The Person for the Gospel on the Roads Of Humanity”, ORE, (9 February 2011), 4.

<sup>51</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fidelity to your charism and to the People of God”, *To religious women in San José, Costa Rica*, ORE (28 March 1983), 4.

ecclesial community”<sup>52</sup>. That is to say, consecrated persons make their life more bright and fruitful by seeking and experiencing the same light that shines on the face of Jesus. Those searching for the light of Christ receive abundant experiences of peace, and so they are able to meet the daily demands of consecrated life that are involved in following and living the will of God. John Paul II therefore affirms that “[consecrated persons] kindle a light for the people of our time when [they] show that austere living for the sake of the kingdom of God leads to joy and fulfilment the more it is lived in freedom and devotion”<sup>53</sup>. Consequently, by being deeply rooted in the example of Christ, consecrated persons “shine forth like a burning fire of love”<sup>54</sup>, showing Christ to the world through their life.

The duty of being living examples of the Christian life belongs, too, in a specific way, to the religious of the Church. Dear religious: in you who have been consecrated to the Lord, the believers and unbelievers of this world expect to see that special love that Christ taught as His ‘new’ commandment: ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (Jn 13, 35). The charity of Christ, the pillar and support of your life in community and the power of your apostolic activities, will be the most effective proclamation of the truth of the Gospel, giving inner strength and vitality to the Church<sup>55</sup>.

The Pope therefore strongly emphasizes that every person who follows Christ must “look upon the face of Christ, [...] recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of His human life, and then [...] grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father”<sup>56</sup>. By “contemplating

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<sup>52</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Your Work for Total Liberation must be by Gospel Criteria and Methods”, *Meeting with the priests, religious and seminarians in the Cathedral of Asunción*, ORE (27 June 1988), 9

<sup>53</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Faithful to the Prophetic Mission to Deliver Christ to the World”, *To Superiors General of women religious*, ORE (8 June 1987), 11.

<sup>54</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitate St Louise's fidelity to prayer”, *Papal letter to the Superior General of Daughters of Charity*, ORE (5 August 1991), 2.

<sup>55</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Privilege of a Christian Vocation Requires a Total Response Every Day”, *Address to clergy, religious people and laity Cathedral of Bangkok*, ORE (21 May 1984), 9.

<sup>56</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, (hereinafter referred to as “RVM”), (16 October 2002), no. 9: AAS 95(2003), 11.

the face of her Bridegroom and Lord”<sup>57</sup>, the Church shines with the light of Christ and “with an extraordinary energy”<sup>58</sup> she draws people towards Christ. She has to let herself be illuminated by looking at the face of Christ. Just as Jesus Christ became the light of the world, so each consecrated person should direct the light that they obtain through prayer and good deeds out onto the world<sup>59</sup>. During his visit to the Adorer Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, John Paul II said that “one finds the spring of living water, this perpetual light, this inexhaustible force of renewal, [...] in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament”<sup>60</sup>.

### 1.1.1.2 The Mystery of Growing in Holiness

The words of the Psalmist “O Lord let the light of your face shine upon us” (Ps 4:6) inspired Pope John Paul II to meditate on the face of Christ which “shone like the sun” (Mt 17:2). In his Apostolic letter to Bishops, clergy and lay people, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, the Pope emphasizes the importance of contemplating the face of Christ, saying “holiness [...] is the living reflection of Christ”<sup>61</sup>. According to John Paul II, “all [...] pastoral activity [...] springs from the overflowing source of holiness that is the mystery of the Eucharist that calls everyone to aspire to holiness”<sup>62</sup>. The Pope reminds us that the consecrated life is especially a call to the great mystery of growing in holiness: “Religious vocation [is...] essentially a call to holiness in the form that arises [...] from the charism connected with the profession of the evangelical counsels”<sup>63</sup>. He states:

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<sup>57</sup> *NMI*, no. 1: AAS 93(2001), 266.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Your gift of self amazes the world”, Meeting with men and women religious of Fourvière, ORE (10 November 1986), 4. By following these examples Mother Teresa shine her light upon the poor, the needy, the tormented and orphans. She realized that the purpose of her vocation is to give life to people in darkness and they're by shine as the light of God for those who are broken and downtrodden. For details Teresa of Calcutta, THERESIA A CALCUTTA, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta,”* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 44.

<sup>60</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “You are a Shining Example of a Lay Spirituality”, *To the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament*, ORE (15 May 1989), 4.

<sup>61</sup> *NMI*, no.7: AAS 93(2001), 270.

<sup>62</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Jesus Our Hope”, Homily: *Pastoral Visit to Frosinone*, (16 Sept 2001),” accessed January 25, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20010916\\_frosinone.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010916_frosinone.html).

<sup>63</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Christ's Witness of Love and Peace Needed Today”, *To priests and religious in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires*, ORE (28 June 1982), 3.

Holiness is intimacy with God; imitation of Christ poor, chaste and humble; unreserved love for souls and dedication to their true good; love for the Church, which is holy and wants us to be holy, because such are the nature and mission that Christ entrusted to her. The sanctity of [...] a religious is nourished by prayer, a simple life, poverty, chastity preserved with all delicacy, above all praise in the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Eucharist<sup>64</sup>.

From this we can understand that consecrated persons, are obliged to contemplate the living presence of Christ in the Eucharist, “the best mystery of the Church”<sup>65</sup> and grow in holiness. John Paul II states that the Eucharist, “attests to the inexhaustible love”<sup>66</sup> of God, and is a mystery: the glory of Christ revealed in the transfiguration and resurrection is hidden in the Eucharist. The Pope has told women religious that “the readiness to give public witness to Christ Whom you love [...] becomes a constant call to inner conversion, to justice and holiness of life on the part of each religious”<sup>67</sup> and therefore, “it is in the Eucharist especially that you are united to the One Who is the object of all your love”<sup>68</sup>.

Introduced to us by John Paul II, the expression “Eucharistic face of Jesus”<sup>69</sup>, urges us, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who recognized Jesus at the breaking of the bread, to seek the face of Jesus and adore Him in the Eucharist<sup>70</sup>: “The Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery”<sup>71</sup>. According to John Paul II, in “gazing on the face of Christ” who is present in the Eucharist, “the bride contemplates her treasure and her joy”<sup>72</sup> and is transformed and enabled to surrender to God. St Thérèse of Lisieux tells us how the light of Jesus that “flowed to her

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<sup>64</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Christ's Witness of Love and Peace Needed Today”, *To priests and religious in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires*, ORE (28 June 1982), 3.

<sup>65</sup> *NMI*, no.7: AAS 93(2001), 270.

<sup>66</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia*, (hereinafter referred to as “DM”), (30 November 1980), no. 13: AAS 72 (1980), 1218.

<sup>67</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Without Love Religious Life Incomprehensible”, *Speeches: Address to women religious in Washington*, ORE (5 November 1979), 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *EE*, no.7: AAS 95 (2003), 437.

<sup>70</sup> *NMI*, no. 59: AAS 93(2001), 309.

<sup>71</sup> *EE*, no. 10: AAS 95 (2003), 439.

<sup>72</sup> *NMI*, no. 28: AAS 93(2001), 284.



from the Eucharist was so powerful”<sup>73</sup> that it gave her the strength to suffer with more zealous love towards God:

On that luminous night which sheds such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle, little Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light. On that night when He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me, He made me strong and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory<sup>74</sup>.

### 1.1.1.3 Transfiguration into Christ’s Love

John Paul II reminds consecrated persons that “in Christ encountered, loved, imitated, left to live in [them] through His Spirit, [they] will find the inexhaustible source of a spiritual dynamism which will transform [their] life and make it that handful of leaven capable of leavening the whole mass”<sup>75</sup>. The Pope portrayed the transfiguration of Jesus in Mount Tabor as the ‘Icon of the consecrated life’. The glorified and ‘transfigured face’ of Jesus on Mount Tabor, enabled Peter, James and John and enables us to understand who Jesus is. A while after this glorified vision, those same disciples would see the battered face of Jesus on Mount Calvary. The experience of the transfiguration helped them to find the strength to accept the disfigured face of Jesus. The Pope exhorts consecrated persons to “contemplate the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at His disfigured face on the Cross”<sup>76</sup>.

According to John Paul II, the time spent with Jesus on the mountain of the transfiguration, prepares us for the journey to Calvary and to climb

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<sup>73</sup> CONRAD DE MEESTER, *With Empty Hands: The Message of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, New rev. ed (London: New York: Burns & Oates, 2002), 17.

<sup>74</sup> THÉRESE, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, 3rd ed (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 97. In his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict says that the saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa of Calcutta and others are the true bearers of light within history

<sup>75</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Retain the Spirit of Your Foundress, Blessed Ursula, Giving Witness to Love and the Spirit of Sacrifice” *To the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, ORE (30 July 1984), 7.

<sup>76</sup> VC, no. 15: AAS 88 (1996), 389.

the mountain of Golgotha. The relationship between Tabor and Calvary is very significant. In both places we see the face of Jesus: glorified and illuminated in one and deformed and scorned in the other. The face of Jesus, in both its glorified and its deformed state, is hidden in the Eucharist. As St Teresa of Avila writes, the Lord, is hidden in the Eucharist. Thus, a consecrated person:

will find joy and comfort in the Most Holy Sacrament. There is no need or trial or persecution that cannot be easily borne if we begin to partake and taste of those which He Himself bore, and to make them the subject of our meditations [...] let our own task be to beg the Eternal Father that we may merit our heavenly bread, so that, although our bodily eyes cannot feast themselves on the sight of Him since He is thus hidden from us, He may reveal Himself to the eyes of the soul and may make Himself known to us as another kind of food, full of delight and joy, which sustains our life<sup>77</sup>.

John Paul II keeps reminding us that, Christ invites every consecrated person to “a transfigured existence” through “contemplating and bearing witness to the transfigured face of Christ”<sup>78</sup>. By contemplating Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, we get peace and happiness, and the sufferings and troubles of life can be accepted without distress. The Pope therefore exhorts consecrated persons: “May the Eucharist, that is Holy Mass and Holy Communion, truly be the affective and dynamic center of your consecrated life and of all your communities, so that the very virtues of Christ may always shine forth in you: fortitude, patience, kindness, generosity, total offering, supernatural joy”<sup>79</sup>.

According to John Paul II, “the Eucharist is a mystery of light”<sup>80</sup>. The Pope therefore affirms that “any attempt to live with [the Eucharist] in the spirit of faith, brings with it new light, new amazement and new joy”<sup>81</sup>. For this reason, through the Eucharist, which is ‘the image of the

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<sup>77</sup> TERESA, *The Way of Perfection*, ed. E. Allison Peers (New York.: Image Books, 2014), 133-135.

<sup>78</sup> VC, no.35: AAS 88 (1996), 409.

<sup>79</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Nourish Your Spirituality and Catechesis with Dogmatic Truths”, *To women religious gathered in the Sport Palace of Milan*, ORE (6 June 1983), 3.

<sup>80</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “To be a Pilgrim with Christ Along the Ways of the World”, *Homily at Corpus Christi Mass*, ORE (30 June 1980), 19.

<sup>81</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Sacrament of Christ’s Closeness to Man”, *General Audience*, ORE (18 June 1979), 1.

invisible God’ and ‘the reflection of His glory’, consecrated persons become “His living instruments”<sup>82</sup> and bind up the abandoned and downtrodden in the love of Christ<sup>83</sup>. Our transfiguration depends on our inner transfiguration, which is closely related to our effort to carry our own cross and purify ourselves internally. When a consecrated person strives to attain love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc., her life begins to be transfigured into the love of Christ: “It is ‘a love of choice’, which takes on ‘a nuptial character’. The love of Christ embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether male or female, in his personal and absolutely unique self”<sup>84</sup>.

### **1.1.2 A Living Witness to the Presence of God’s Kingdom in the World Today**

Several passages from Scripture teach that, all created things are subject to God’s statutes. “The Lord has established His throne in heaven and His kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103:19). As King Nebuchadnezzar says, “His kingdom is an eternal kingdom” (Dan 4:3). God sent His Son to deliver us from the slavery of sin and bring us into His Kingdom. Thus, “He awakens [in us] a longing for full and definitive life with Christ, and at the same time imbues us with the strength to spread the leaven of God’s kingdom throughout the earth”<sup>85</sup>.

Christ’s Kingdom is “not of this world” (Jn 18:36). His Kingdom is not the play of force and wealth and conquest which appears to shape our human history. It is rather the power to vanquish the Evil One, the ultimate victory over sin and death. It is the power to heal the wounds which disfigure the image of the Creator in His creatures. Christ’s is the power to transform our weak nature and make us capable, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, of peace with one another and communion with God Himself. “To all who received him,

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<sup>82</sup>JOHN PAUL II, *Meeting with the priests, religious and seminarians in the chapel of the Seminary of Cochabamba in Bolivia*, Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, XI, 2 (11 May 1988), 1311.

<sup>83</sup> Wyatt North says that in Francis, people saw the face of Christ and a disciple who was wholly devoted to living the message that Jesus proclaimed. For details NORTH W., *Saint Francis of Assisi: A life Inspired*, (Washington, D.C: LLC, 2014), 29.

<sup>84</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Vitality of Religious Institutes Implies Renewal of Community Life”, *To religious people Switzerland Friborg*, ORE (25 June 1984), 9.

<sup>85</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “We Await a New Heaven and a New Earth”, *Audience*, ORE (9 Dec 1998), 19.

who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).<sup>86</sup>

Hence, those who accept the Lordship of Christ and offer their mind and heart happily to God are members of the Kingdom of God<sup>87</sup>. Thus, the Kingdom of God is spiritual. Jesus said ‘My Kingdom is not of this world’ (cf. Jn 18:36). Repentance is needed to become a part of the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul warns that “wrong doers do not enter the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9) and Jesus compares the Kingdom of God with the realm of redemption. The consecrated life is an invitation to a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. It enables people to be conformed to Christ and “to take up the mission of Christ, working and suffering with Him in the spreading of His Kingdom”<sup>88</sup>. They “learn detachment”<sup>89</sup> from worldly things. Therefore, John Paul II reminds consecrated persons: “Your public profession of the evangelical counsels is a radical response to the Lord’s call to follow Him. As a result, your lives are meant to offer a clear witness to the reality of the Kingdom of God already present in the affairs of men and nations”<sup>90</sup>.

### **1.1.2.1 An Eloquent Sign in the World’s Midst**

Quoting Jesus’s parable of the mustard seed, John Paul II shows how Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God begins with something similar to a mustard seed (which is tiny and almost invisible) and will eventually grow into something bigger and clearly visible. “Therefore, we must entrust ourselves to His hands, to His Word, to His guidance, like inexperienced children who find security only in the Father”<sup>91</sup>. In St. Mathew’s Gospel (21:22), Jesus also tells us that faith is the thing that makes this Kingdom of God grow.

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<sup>86</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Here Every day is Christmas”, *Jubilee Pilgrimage to the Holy Land Mass in the Manger Square*, ORE (29 March 2000), 5.

<sup>87</sup> “Any other activity as a testimony, offered to the Lord, of your deep communion with him [...] will contribute to the extension of the kingdom of God, with the testimony of your life and with a "hidden apostolic fruitfulness". For details JOHN PAUL II, “Consecrated Life Relevant Today”, *To Enclosed Nuns*, ORE (12 February 1979), 9.

<sup>88</sup> VC, no. 36: AAS 88 (1996), 410.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Secular City Has Need of Your Witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>91</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “All are Called to Build God’s Kingdom”, *General Audience*, ORE (13 Dec 2000), 11.

The greater our faith becomes; the more God's love and His Kingdom grow within us. "The Kingdom is grace, God's love for the world, the source of our serenity and trust"<sup>92</sup>. For John Paul II, consecrated life is a state of life in which the Kingdom of God becomes visible to the world<sup>93</sup>. The Pope therefore affirms that the presence of consecrated persons "is an eloquent sign of the richness and variety of charisms with which the Holy Spirit enriches the Church, raising up numerous and varied religious families to respond to the multiple needs of the people of God"<sup>94</sup>. He states that:

The Consecrated Life [is] deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, [...]. By the profession of the evangelical counsels *the characteristic features of Jesus* — the chaste, poor and obedient one — *are made constantly 'visible' in the midst of the world* and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven<sup>95</sup>.

John Paul II emphasizes that "the Kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father (cf. Lk 11:2; Mt 23:9) and strives to do His will (cf. Mt 7:21)"<sup>96</sup>. The Pope highlights that consecrated persons are called to follow Jesus more closely so that they become "a particular sign of the presence of God for Whom all live, embraced by the invisible dimension of His Kingdom"<sup>97</sup>, a Kingdom that Jesus has already inaugurated in the world. Their constant conversion enables them to experience more deeply the mysteries of God's Kingdom and thus, by reflecting "the eloquent image of Christ"<sup>98</sup>, empowers them to help their brothers and sisters to follow Christ our Redeemer.

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<sup>92</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "All are Called to Build God's Kingdom", *General Audience*, ORE (13 Dec 2000), 11.

<sup>93</sup> VC, no. 7: AAS 88 (1996), 382.

<sup>94</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Faithful to the Prophetic Mission to Deliver Christ to the World", *To Superiors General of women religious* (14 May 1987), ORE (8 June 1987), 11.

<sup>95</sup> VC, no. 1: AAS 88 (1996), 377.

<sup>96</sup> RM, no. 13: AAS 83 (1991), 262.

<sup>97</sup> RD, no.8: AAS 76 (1984), 525.

<sup>98</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Be Instruments of Reconciliation in the Church and Society", *To women religious and members of Secular Institutes*, ORE (21 April 1987), 9.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II tells us that the seed of the Kingdom of God becomes a great tree through the Eucharist: “His Incarnation, culminating in the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Spirit, is the pulsating heart of time, the mysterious hour in which the Kingdom of God came to us (cf. Mk 1:15), indeed took root in our history, as the seed destined to become a great tree (cf. Mk 4:30-32)”<sup>99</sup>. In his *Encyclical Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II affirms that the “entry into the kingdom comes through faith and conversion”.<sup>100</sup> For a person to grow in faith in Jesus Christ, that person must ‘purify himself, must try to be pure as Christ’ (cf. 1 Jn 3:3) and also be transformed and renewed inwardly. That is why Jesus says that “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). Through submission to Christ, the reign of God’s Kingdom begins in that person and grows like a mustard seed within him/her until he/she becomes fully like Christ<sup>101</sup>.

What must we do in order to receive the Kingdom of God? Jesus answers this question when before returning to His Father, He says to His disciples: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Act 1:8). Witness Lee states that it is only by ‘living and walking in the Spirit’, (that is, when our words, deeds, thoughts, etc., are fully in the Spirit and not in our natural man) that, in reality, we are the Kingdom of God.

The reality of the Church is the Kingdom of God, but the reality of this Kingdom is in the Spirit; [...] when we live in the mingled Spirit and walk according to the Spirit, we are in the reality of the kingdom. If we behave according to the old man or live in the flesh or the self, we are out of God’s Kingdom in a practical way, even though we may be in the realm of the church life. Whenever we are in the flesh, we are in the old realm of the fallen human nature, which has been usurped by Satan in full to form His kingdom<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> *NMI*, no. 5; AAS 93(2001), 269.

<sup>100</sup> *RM*, no.13: AAS 83 (1991), 262.

<sup>101</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “All are called to Build God’s Kingdom”, *Audience*, ORE (13 December 2000), 11.

<sup>102</sup> W. LEE, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, vol. 15 (Anaheim, Calif.: Living Stream Ministry, 1985), 2236.

### 1.1.2.2 A Proclamation of God's Presence

Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, John Paul II assures the lay faithful that they are called by God Himself to do the will of God “according to the spirit of the Gospel and to work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven by fulfilling their own particular duties”<sup>103</sup>. If that is the case of the lay faithful, how much more is it the responsibility of the consecrated person “whom the Lord selects from the midst of this people”<sup>104</sup> to reveal Christ’s presence to the world? The consecrated person “introduces [us] into the universal mission of this people”<sup>105</sup> and makes Christ known to others through the witness of her life in the world. Hence the Pope reminds consecrated persons that “through the offering of oneself to God as His exclusive possession”<sup>106</sup> they have to be reborn in the Spirit so as to direct all temporal affairs to the praise of the Creator and Redeemer.

For Benedict XVI, the consecrated person is “an eloquent sign for today’s world of the presence of God’s Kingdom”<sup>107</sup>. Those who embrace consecrated life proclaim the presence of God in the world, through their vowed life. John Paul II gives the life of our Mother Mary as an example of consecrated life: Mary “associated with Christ on the path of obedience, proven faith and shared His suffering”<sup>108</sup>. The Pope advises consecrated persons that they are witnessing to the world as they strive to live their vocation and mission to the full, just as Mother Mary was fully consecrated to God.

John Paul II often highlights that consecrated persons helps to spread the Kingdom of God in the world by living righteously. This they do “by living out their consecration to God in the world through the profession of the evangelical counsels in the midst of temporal realities”. They become “a leaven of wisdom and a witness of grace”<sup>109</sup> in the world. In this way, by their faithful submission to God’s service, “their activity in

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<sup>103</sup> *LG*, no. 31 quoted in John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, (hereinafter referred to as “CL”) (December 30 1998), no. 15.

<sup>104</sup> *RD*, no.8: AAS 76 (1984), 525.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, no.7: AAS 76 (1984), 523.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, no.8: AAS 76 (1984), 525.

<sup>107</sup> BENEDICT XVI, “Shine with Love of Christ, Light of the World”, *Holy Mass for Religious on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*, ORE (8 February 2006), 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>109</sup> *VC*, no. 10: AAS 88 (1996), 384.

the ordinary life of the world contributes, by the power of the Spirit, to shedding the light of the Gospel on temporal realities”<sup>110</sup>.

Your way of living and working can vividly express full belonging to the one Lord; placing yourselves without reserve in the hands of Christ and of the Church is a strong and clear proclamation of God's presence in a language understandable to our contemporaries. This is the first service that the consecrated life offers to the Church and to the world. Consecrated persons are like watchmen among the People of God who perceive and proclaim the new life already present in our history<sup>111</sup>.

Addressing consecrated persons, John Paul II tells them: “I have come to encourage you in the great mission you have to help build a better world, to advancing Christ’s Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace”.<sup>112</sup> Hence the Pope exhorts the consecrated person “to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession”<sup>113</sup>. Jesus “Himself took our weakness and carried our diseases” (Mt 8:17), He had compassion for the poor (Lk 7: 13), sat down to eat with sinners and tax collectors (Mt 9:10) and He obeyed the will of the Father unto death (Phil 2:8). He unconditionally forgave those who crucified Him and put Him to death (Lk 23:34).

John Paul II emphasizes in his homily that the Eucharist is the principles source for nourishing ourselves on the grace and love of Christ and receiving the strength to “follow in His footsteps” (cf. 1 Pet 2:21)<sup>114</sup>. Consecrated persons “who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ”<sup>115</sup> bear witness to His Kingdom through active participation in the Eucharist. In his address to priests, women and religious, the Pope emphasized that “the Eucharist is the vital center, it is the heart of the Church, which ceaselessly receives from it the faith, grace

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<sup>110</sup> VC, no. 10: AAS 88 (1996), 384.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., no. 10: AAS 88(1996), 384.

<sup>112</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Generous Disposition to Build a New Society”, *Apostolic Pilgrimage to Nigeria*, ORE (22 February 1982), 1.

<sup>113</sup> RD, no.7: AAS 76 (1984), 524.

<sup>114</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Eucharist is the Source of the Church’s Life”, *Audience*, (15 April 1992), 11.

<sup>115</sup> VC, no. 15: AAS 88 (1996), 389.



and energy which it needs on its journey through history”<sup>116</sup>. Since grace is essential to living a consecrated life, the Pope advises: “The consecrated person must find time to be alone with God, listening to what He has to say to him in silence. They must therefore be souls of prayer, souls of the Eucharist”<sup>117</sup>. In his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Pope explains how the Lord unites a person to Himself:

The Lord unites us with Himself through the Eucharist - Sacrament and Sacrifice-and He unites us with Himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union; and thus united, he sends us into the whole world to bear witness, through faith and works, to God’s love, preparing the coming of His Kingdom and anticipating it, though in the obscurity of the present time [...] Our personal commitment, like Christ’s and in union with His, will-not be in vain but certainly fruitful<sup>118</sup>.

In order to establish “the Kingdom of God within us”, Jesus, “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16), descended from heaven and became man, whereupon “He endured the Cross, scorning its shame” (Heb 12:2) and even death “on the Cross opened the gates of the Kingdom of God”<sup>119</sup>. John Paul II considers that “a consecrated person is a person who, renouncing himself and the world, has given himself completely to God and, filled with God, returns to the world to work for the Kingdom of God and for the Church”<sup>120</sup>. This leads a person to reflect, once he/she begins considering the call to a consecrated life. One question that will arise is, should the person ever have to experience the pains that Calvary represents, would he/she be able to accept it, as Jesus did? It is only when we surrender to the will of God in every circumstance of life that we will be living the Kingdom of God and striving to the spread this Kingdom.

In *Vita Consecrata* and other addresses, John Paul II tells consecrated persons that Jesus called them “not only to welcome the

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<sup>116</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Living Examples of Holiness”, *To clergy, men and women religious of the Diocese of Siena and all of Tuscany*, ORE (29 September 1980), 8.

<sup>117</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Christ’s Witness of Love and Peace Needed Today”, *To priests and religious in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires*, ORE (28 June 1982), 3.

<sup>118</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, (hereinafter referred to as “SRS”), (30 December 1987), no. 48: AAS 80 (1988), 583.

<sup>119</sup> *NMI*, no. 4: AAS 93(2001), 268.

<sup>120</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Church Needs Your Witness and Apostolic Initiatives”, *To religious and members of the secular institutes in Madrid*, ORE (7 March 1983), 10.

Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating His own way of life”<sup>121</sup>. *Jesus says the way of the Kingdom is not by ‘exalting oneself but by being humble’ (Mt 23 12): That is to say, by choosing “the way of the Gospel Beatitudes and live as ‘the poor in spirit’, detached from material goods, in order to raise up the lowly of the earth from the dust of their humiliation, [...] by lovingly bearing the sufferings of life”,*<sup>122</sup> we become witnesses to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, he comments that “through their own specific blending of presence in the world and consecration, they seek to make present in society the newness and power of Christ’s Kingdom, striving to transfigure the world from within by the power of the Beatitudes”<sup>123</sup>.

By willingly serving in the Kingdom of God wherever he/she may be, the consecrated person makes the Gospel and the Kingdom present and active in their daily life. The Pope thus reminds consecrated persons: “[Y]our vocation leads you to total self-giving for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and makes you witnesses, for your brothers and sisters, of the courageous commitment of a whole life to following Christ”<sup>124</sup>. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters [...] It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:23-24). Consecrated persons are sent forth to proclaim the Kingdom of God by bearing this prophetic witness of their lives: they show the transforming power of the Good News and attract all people to God’s Kingdom, already “present and active”<sup>125</sup>. In this way the consecrated person allows Christ to be “made present and active in the world for the salvation”<sup>126</sup>.

## 1.2 Imitating His Example and Continuing His Mission

John Paul II invites all consecrated persons to follow Christ ‘without any hesitation’: He is the model “which we must contemplate and imitate, the program which we must carry out”<sup>127</sup>. According to the Pope, this

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<sup>121</sup> VC, no. 14 AAS 88 (1996), 388.

<sup>122</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “All are called to Build God’s Kingdom”, *Audience*, ORE (13 December 2000), 11.

<sup>123</sup> VC, no. 1: AAS 88 (1996), 384.

<sup>124</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Pray, Reflect and Work so that African Synod' will be Fruitful”, *To priests, religious, seminarians and laity in the Cathedral of Notre Dame des Miséricordes in Cotonou Benin*, ORE (10 February 1993), 8.

<sup>125</sup> VC, no. 72: AAS 88 (1996), 448.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> VC, no. 72: AAS 88 (1996), 448.

imitation means “wanting to imitate Him to the point of allowing oneself to be configured to Him, to assimilate to Him, to the point of being [...] in His mystery of chastity, poverty and obedience”<sup>128</sup>. To be more precise, it means to emulate Christ and to make Christ the center of one’s life. By “shar[ing] in His Passion, Death and Resurrection in a special way”<sup>129</sup>, and above all “sharing in His free and loving obedience to the will of the Father”<sup>130</sup>, we would allow the Lord to take control of our life. Jesus was obedient unto death and surrendered Himself to the will of the Father. Quoting from the First Letter of St. Peter, John Paul II states that the consecrated person is called to imitate Christ “because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps” (2:21).

There is therefore a need to reflect and to ask ourselves the following questions: How do we imitate Christ? For what purpose do we imitate Him? According to Pope Francis, “to follow Him means ‘carrying one’s cross’ (Lk 14:27): shouldering, like Him, one’s own burdens and those of others, making one’s life a gift”<sup>131</sup>. John Paul II also points out that “following Jesus, you have to change and improve the taste of human history. With your faith, hope and love, with your intelligence, courage and perseverance, you have to humanize the world we live in, in the way that [...] Isaiah indicates: ‘loose the bonds of injustice [...] share your bread with the hungry [...] remove the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil [...] Then your light shall rise in the darkness’ (Is 58,6-10)”<sup>132</sup>. In his Encyclical *Veritatis Splendour*, the Pope states that “Jesus asks us to follow Him and to imitate Him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God: ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you’ (Jn 15:12)”<sup>133</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitation of Christ in chastity, poverty, obedience”, *To women religious gathered in Rue du Bac Park in Paris*, ORE (9 June 1980), 7.

<sup>129</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Priesthood and the religious life the incarnation of the Beatitudes”, *To clergy and religious people of Korea*, ORE (14 May 1984), 2.

<sup>130</sup> VS, no. 19: AAS 85 (1993), 1149.

<sup>131</sup> “Papal Chapel for the Beatification of the Servant of God John Paul I,” accessed January 25, 2023, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/09/04/220904a.html>.

<sup>132</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “You are the Salt of the Earth, You are the Light of the World”, *17th World Youth Day*, ORE (8 August 2001), 3.

<sup>133</sup> VS, no. 20: AAS 85 (1993), 1150.

*Following Christ* is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of His being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to Him* who became a servant even to giving Himself on the Cross (cf. *Phil* 2:5-8). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. *Eph* 3:17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord. This is the *effect of grace*, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us<sup>134</sup>.

Since we “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23), we can’t enter heaven without ‘purifying us by the Blood of Jesus Christ’ (1 Jn 1:7). Therefore, John Paul II says that we are cleansed and purified by the Eucharist, His living body which “is the sacred banquet of communion with the body and Blood of Christ”<sup>135</sup>.

### 1.2.1 Conforming Ourselves to His Will

John Paul II asks consecrated persons whether “it is possible to look at the Cross of the Lord Jesus, without conforming to His mystery of obedience to the Father?”<sup>136</sup>. The Pope depicts Jesus as the chosen Son of God in whom God the Father declares that He is well pleased. He also portrays Jesus as the Servant of God Who redeemed the world from the clutches of sin, through His sufferings and death on the Cross. The Pope exhorts consecrated persons as those chosen and set apart specifically to follow Jesus - to imitate Jesus and always unite themselves with Him, “living and expressing this by conforming one’s whole existence to Christ”<sup>137</sup>.

Since “the Eucharist is called ‘*koinonia* in the Body’ and ‘*koinonia* in the Blood’ of Christ’ (1 Cor. 10:16)”<sup>138</sup>, Jesus Christ renews human beings through His love in the Eucharist. Indeed, in the Eucharist, not only does Christ “feed us His Body and His Blood, but we are also provided

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<sup>134</sup> VS, no. 20: AAS 85 (1993), 1150.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., no. 12,16,19: AAS 85 (1993), 1142, 1146 1149.

<sup>136</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Poor are Always with US”, *To the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul*, ORE (4 February 1980), 7.

<sup>137</sup> VC, no.16: AAS 88 (1996), 390. Jesus’ life was to fulfil Father’s will. In Isaiah chapter 53, the words, sketches, temperance and silence of the anguished servant was not only his deeds of boldness and benevolence but also, the victory over the evil and death by surrounding himself completely to the divine justice by the Son’s deep faith and hope.

<sup>138</sup> J. ZIZIOULAS, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 20.

with spiritual food and spiritual drink (1 Cor. 10:3-4)”<sup>139</sup>. We can therefore say that, in the Eucharist, we participate not only in the paschal mystery, but also in Christ Who rose from the dead, offering Himself to the will of the Father. That is to say, “[we] have the effect of deliverance from sins, which are ‘forgiven’ thanks to this sacrifice and the communion of the many in it, which is the fount of eternal life”<sup>140</sup>. Benedict XVI highlights that the Eucharist conforms a person to the will of Christ. He states:

The risen Lord enters into our midst. Then my intellect and will and heart open up towards Him and from Him. In the risen Christ, the incarnate God is present, who suffered for us because He loves us. We enter this certainty of God’s tangible love for us with love in our own hearts. This is adoration, and this then determines my life. Only thus can I celebrate the Eucharist correctly and receive the Body of the Lord rightly.<sup>141</sup>

In the perspective of Thomas Adams, we sinners must reflect on the merits of Christ who became incarnate, died and was resurrected from the dead in the Eucharist. Adams states that lives lived in Christ and through Christ are the corner stone of Christian life<sup>142</sup>. However, if we are to live such a life, we have to take leave of our sin: only then will we be able to follow Christ. “This life consists in the practice of the Christian virtues; the practice of the Christian virtues leads up to union with Christ; and union with Christ is consummated in the Eucharist”<sup>143</sup>.

### **1.2.2 Following the Way of the Cross**

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, the Pope clarifies that consecrated persons will get the grace to imitate and follow Jesus more closely if they contemplate the glorified as well as the crucified Jesus hidden in the Eucharist<sup>144</sup>. Pointing to the example of St. John, standing at the foot of the cross with Our Mother, Mary, the Pope shows how to

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<sup>139</sup> J. ZIZIOULAS, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 20.

<sup>140</sup> J. ZIZIOULAS, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 20.

<sup>141</sup> BENEDICT XVI, “A New Way of being Christmas”, *On the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, ORE (28 December 2011), 6.

<sup>142</sup> T. ADAMS and J. SHERMAN, *An Exposition upon the Second Epistle General of St. Peter* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 14.

<sup>143</sup> AZARIAS, *The Culture of the Spiritual Sense* (New York: Steigel & Co., 1884). Cited in Sherley-Price, “Introduction,” 13.

<sup>144</sup> John Paul II, *VC*, no. 23: AAS 88 (1996), 396.

surrender oneself totally to Jesus. John could only withstand witnessing the pain Jesus suffered during His Passion and death when his own heart had been filled with God's love. Therefore, "consecrated persons discover that, the more they stand at the feet of the Cross of Christ, the more intimately and profoundly, they experience the truth of God which is love"<sup>145</sup>.

Imitating Christ is associated with following the way of the Cross. It is by sharing this way of the Cross that we testify to our faith in God's love made manifest there and find meaning in even the slightest of life's trials. This also contributes to making us able to forgive more profoundly. The Pope affirms that there is a strong bond between the suffering and death of Christ and the ways of consecrated life. "The consecrated life reflects the splendour of this love [through] its fidelity to the mystery of the Cross"<sup>146</sup>.

Quoting St Paul, John Paul II reflects that following Christ is not a matter of external imitation, since it reaches deep to the innermost core of man (2 Cor 4:16). Following Christ means being one with Him, the servant of God, who was so obedient that He surrendered Himself on the Cross. Likewise, every moment when we surrender ourselves to Christ, we "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body" (Col 1:24) and, by faith, Christ is living in us (Cf. Epf 3:17). Thus we "[become] a sharer in Christ's sufferings"<sup>147</sup>. This is the realm of faith. It is made possible by the vibrant presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Its source and stronghold are the Eucharist.

Our union with Christ in the Eucharist must be expressed in the truth of our lives today--in our actions, in our behaviour, in our lifestyle, and in our relationships with others. For each one of us, the Eucharist is a call to ever greater effort so that we may live as true followers of Jesus: truthful in our speech, generous in our deeds, concerned, respectful of the dignity and rights of all persons, whatever their rank or income, self-sacrificing, fair and just, kind, considerate, compassionate and self-controlled-looking to the well-being of our families, our young people, our country, and

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<sup>145</sup> VC., no. 24: AAS 88 (1996), 397.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., no. 24: AAS 88 (1996), 397.

<sup>147</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, (herein after referred to as "SD"), (11 February 1984), no. 24: AAS 76 (1984), 233.

the world [...]The Eucharist helps love to triumph in us--love over hatred, zeal over indifference<sup>148</sup>.

### 1.2.3 Carrying Out the Mission

Pope John Paul II affirms that Jesus Himself is the one who calls each person to follow Him and then gives each one of them a special mission. Every member of the faithful is called to follow Christ and this is especially so for consecrated persons. It is therefore the obligation of each and every one of them to imitate Christ. John Paul II highlights that the “Gospel of suffering [...] contains in itself a special call to courage and fortitude”<sup>149</sup>: qualities needed to win over the world. Thus, consecrated persons who are called to follow Jesus must also walk along the same path as Jesus if they are to carry out their mission. In imitating Jesus, they are called to abandon the ways of the world, hardheartedness, overindulgence and revenge, and to choose the path of forgiveness by turning away from sin and death<sup>150</sup>. They bear witness to Christ in this world and partake in His “redemptive suffering”<sup>151</sup> and are thereby transformed to reflect the love of God in this world. Therefore, the Pope reminds consecrated persons: “Your personal life is centred on your spousal love for Christ. For this reason, modelled by His Spirit, you must give Him your whole being, making His own sentiments, His projects and His mission of charity and salvation your own”<sup>152</sup>.

The most challenging part of discipleship is to imitate the crucified Jesus present in the Eucharist because it invites us to practise sacrificial love, which demands humility, selflessness, and a readiness to put the needs and interests of others ahead of our own. It also extends an invitation for us to participate in God’s transformative work in the world, to accept suffering, and to remain steadfast in the face of adversity. As emphasized

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<sup>148</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Only in Christ will You Discover the True Greatness of Your Lives”, *Homily on the Apostolic Journey to Ireland*, ORE (8 October 1979), 9.

<sup>149</sup> *SD*, no. 25: AAS 76 (1984), 235.

<sup>150</sup> “The truth of our union with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is tested by whether or not we really love our fellow men and women; it is tested by whether we practice in life what our faith teaches us [...] We must always remember what Jesus said. “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn. 15:14)”. For details see homily of John Paul II on 30 Sept 1979.

<sup>151</sup> *SD*, no. 17: AAS 76 (1984), 220.

<sup>152</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Visible Witnesses of the Church in a More and More Desecrated World”, *On the Occasion of the Meeting with Women Religious in São Paulo Brazil*, ORE (21 July 1980), 3.

by John Paul II, the Eucharist is “the Church's entire spiritual wealth”<sup>153</sup> and “it is from the Eucharist that all of us receive the grace and strength for daily living to live real Christian lives”<sup>154</sup>. Along the way of the Cross, Christ was isolated from everyone. Similarly, when those who are consecrated encounter painfully isolating experiences in life, they are testifying to the truth of Christ and this is especially so when they undergo trials. John Paul II sees that by imitating Christ in the Eucharist in this way, consecrated persons fulfil their mission of spreading Christ’s Gospel all over the world. Quoting *Perfectae Caritatis*, John Paul II points out:

You yourselves can testify how much strength and joy true dedication produces. When one tries to uproot the cross and the sacrifice of the consecrated life, it becomes sterile. Instead of the serene and contagious joy, typical of the experience of intimacy with the Lord and of life in the Spirit, bitterness and a sense of frustration grow. Suffering is overcome by loving and finding in it a new way of serving the brothers. The joy of spiritual motherhood, which is the joy of the Holy Spirit, sprouts in the heart only when it has known how to transform suffering into donation and service (cf Jn 16, 21-22). ‘The more fervently they are united with Christ by this gift of themselves, the more fruitful becomes the life of the Church and the more vigorously the apostolate is fertilized’<sup>155</sup>.

It is not possible to imitate and live the love of Christ solely through one’s own efforts. Christ urges those close to Him, “[I]f you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10). The Eucharist strengthens us to live in the love of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, who is the promise of Christ, “the love of God [is] poured into our

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<sup>153</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *PO*, (21 November 1964), no.5; Also quoted in *EE* no.1 and *VC*, no.95.

<sup>154</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Only in Christ will you discover the true greatness of your lives”, *Homily on apostolic journey to Ireland*, ORE (8 October 1979), 9.

<sup>155</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness”, *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia* (5 July 1986), ORE (25 August 1986), 10; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Perfectae Caritatis*, (hereinafter referred to as “*PC*”), the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, no.1.



hearts” (Rom 5:5) when we live in Christ. By the power<sup>156</sup> of Jesus, Who is present in the Eucharist, we become capable of following and imitating Christ and fulfilling our mission<sup>157</sup>.

### 1.3 The Call to Follow Christ and Make Disciples of All Nations

During the last days of Jesus’s life on earth and at the Last Supper with His disciples, in particular, the Master indicates their mission to go and spread the good news (or gospel) of salvation. The disciples, on receiving the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, were enlightened and strengthened by that Spirit and gave birth to Christ’s Church. As directed, they commenced their mission by spreading Jesus’s teaching and message of salvation to all: those who believe in Jesus would be saved. Through the Spirit of Christ, they proclaimed the good news of salvation, announcing that good news all over the world, healing the sick, casting out evil and unclean spirits from those possessed and finding the courage and strength to withstand persecutions and martyrdom.

John Paul II states that “the mission of the Church is primarily prophetic. She announces Christ to all nations and transmits her message of salvation to them. [Therefore, the Pope asks the consecrated persons that] this is what primarily involves your personal and community lifestyle. Is it truly luminous, prophetic?”<sup>158</sup>. Living as a disciple of Christ means to live as He lived<sup>159</sup>: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up His cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). In other words,

Discipleship means a willingness to love others with a sacrificial love. The disciples are to share whatever they have with others (Lk 6:30). They are to take the last place and serve others (Mk 9:35). Their love of others is to be all-inclusive, placing others first, yielding to them, and being willing to bear

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<sup>156</sup> According to John Paul II Holy Spirit “is the *gracious power of God who brings forth life*.” For details see JOHN PAUL II, “The Church Wishes to Spread Christ’s Fire in Human Hearts”, *Homily*, ORE (3 June 1998), 2.

<sup>157</sup> VS, no. 22: AAS 85 (1993), 1151.

<sup>158</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fully involved in Church’s prophetic mission”, *To women religious gathered in the Carmel of Kinshasa, Zair*, ORE (19 May 1980), 3.

<sup>159</sup> “Consecrated life is born from an expression of love, manifested in the ‘follow me’ every day. The evangelical knowledge of Christ and the living force of the personal and communal encounter with Him will model your obedient, poor and chaste life. For details JOHN PAUL II, “Follow Christ unconditionally to serve him in the poor”, *To women religious of Ecuador in the Basilica of the National Vow*, ORE (25 February 1985), 7.

insult and injury (Mt 5:38- 42). Nowhere is the ideal of sacrificial love more clearly expressed than in John's Gospel, where Jesus says: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 12-13)<sup>160</sup>.

According to John Paul II, "the religious vocation lies in the acceptance of a severe discipline, which does not come from an order, but from an evangelical counsel: the counsel of chastity, the counsel of poverty, the counsel of obedience. And all that, embraced consciously and rooted in love for the Divine Bridegroom, is, in fact, the particular revelation of the depth of the freedom of the human spirit"<sup>161</sup>. Therefore, the Pope considers that consecrated persons must "be vigilant in practising this virtue in order to live"<sup>162</sup> the discipleship of Christ. Therefore, John Paul states:

The profound nature of your consecrated life consists, as you well know, in a permanent gift from God that translates into spousal and total dedication to the Lord. Your donation is an unconditional response to a declaration of love, which is nourished by faith and prayer, following the example of the Virgin Mary, the perfect model of union with Christ the Redeemer. The direct reference point of such a vocation is the living person of Jesus Christ. Before the angelic announcement, intuiting the sublime mission to which she was called, Our Lady offered herself as the slave of the Lord. The word 'slave' is a term that indicates unlimited generosity, an expression of love on fire for the will of God, a responsible attitude of a mature personality. It is the projection of the fecundity of faith<sup>163</sup>.

Christ shows Himself in other people who need our help and asks us to love them like He did, He who gave Himself for us through the Holy Eucharist to go to those who are oppressed, poor, sick, frail and orphans.

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<sup>160</sup> M. DOWNEY, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1993), 282.

<sup>161</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Riches of Living Faith at the Heart of the Church", *To Women Religious of the Diocese of Rome*, ORE (23 November 1978), 5.

<sup>162</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "The Church and the world need the witness of your poverty and charity", *Meeting with women religious in the Abbey of Madonna del Monte in Cesena*, (May 9, 1986), ORE (2 June 1986), 12.

<sup>163</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness", *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

John Paul II reflects that “religious who, seeing the image of Christ in their needy brother, bend over, with touching motherly dedication, over all the bleeding wounds of the suffering, the sick and the poor, to give them help, serenity and comfort, in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes”<sup>164</sup> thus becomes the disciples of Christ. *Lumen Gentium* teaches us that we, who receive Christ in the Eucharist, will grow in our love for others, like organs in the body of Christ, and thus become His disciples.

John Paul II affirms that the source of our strength to become a disciple of Christ is the Holy Eucharist. It is the Holy Eucharist that enables us to live a holy life<sup>165</sup>. In other words, Christ not only gives Himself as a gift for us, in the Holy Eucharist, but “renew[s] and strengthen[s] it each day more in the love of Christ”<sup>166</sup>. Therefore, the discipleship of the Eucharist insists us to give ourselves as a gift for others. For this reason, it helps us to live as a more faithful disciple of Christ. Therefore, John Paul II affirms that “[consecrated persons] are disciples because [they] followed Him through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience”<sup>167</sup>.

### **1.3.1 The Eucharist Manifests the Inner Nature of the Christian Calling**

In the history of the people of Israel the encounter between God and man led to a covenant that reflects a total consecration to God: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength” (Dt 6:4-5). Jesus reaffirms this covenant by establishing a new covenant, the Eucharist, “the fulfilment of that ‘new covenant’ which Jeremiah had foretold (cf. 31: 31-34)”<sup>168</sup>. The “intimate communion that is created between God and man [...] finds its supreme sign in the Eucharist”<sup>169</sup>. Jesus assures us of this intimate communion in the Eucharist

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<sup>164</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Be a Sign of Complete Joy”, *Meeting with women religious in the Basilica of St Maria Ausiliatrice*, ORE (28 April 1980), 7.

<sup>165</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Vitality of religious institutes implies renewal of community life”, *To religious people Switzerland Friborg*, ORE (25 June 1984), 9.

<sup>166</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Christ's witness of love and peace needed today”, *To priests and religious in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires*, ORE (28 June 1982), 3.

<sup>167</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fidelity to your charism and to the People of God”, *To religious women in San José, Costa Rica*, ORE (28 March 1983), 4.

<sup>168</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Eucharist is Perfect Sacrifice of Praise”, *Audience*, ORE (18 October 2000), 11.

<sup>169</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Eucharist, Banquet of Communion with God”, *Audience*, ORE (25 October 2000), 11.

through His words: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in Him!” (Jn 6:56).

Consecrated Vocation is a call within a Christian call<sup>170</sup>. John Paul II considers that “[the vocation] is the relationship that God has with every human being in the freedom of love, because “every life is a vocation”<sup>171</sup>. Therefore, the Pope states that “the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse”<sup>172</sup>. Jesus is the centre of a consecrated person<sup>173</sup>. Union with Jesus is the heart of the consecrated vocation and “the source of her fruitfulness in the Church and in the world”<sup>174</sup>.

### 1.3.1.1 Commitment to Continual Conversion

“To live the life of the Eucharist is to exit completely from the small circle of one’s own life and to grow into the infinity of the life of Christ”<sup>175</sup>. For this reason, John Paul II emphasizes to all consecrated people that the life of a consecrated person must be in, through and for the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a great sign of God’s mercy. This is the life of the Trinity through which God the Father’s merciful love is infused in to the body of

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<sup>170</sup> “This vocation is derived from a living faith, consistent to the ultimate consequences, which opens up to man the final perspective, that is, the perspective of the meeting with God himself, who alone is worthy of a love “above everything”, an exclusive and nuptial love. This love, consists in the giving of our whole human being, body and soul, to him who gave himself completely to us men by means of the Incarnation, the Cross and abasement, by means of poverty, chastity, obedience”. For details JOHN PAUL II, “Riches of Living Faith at the Heart of the Church”, *To Women Religious of the Diocese of Rome*, ORE (23 November 1978), 5.

<sup>171</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Every Human Life is a Vocation”, *Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, ORE (6 December 2000), 3.

<sup>172</sup> VC, no. 3: AAS 88 (1996), 379.

<sup>173</sup> For consecrated persons Mother Mary is “the perfect model of woman, the best example of a life dedicated entirely to her Son the Savior, in a constant inner attitude of faith, hope, and loving dedication to a supernatural mission”. For details JOHN PAUL II, “Need of Deep Vision of Faith”, *To religious women of Mexico at Miguel Ange College, Republic of Mexico*, ORE (12 February 1979), 4.

<sup>174</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Be instruments of reconciliation in the Church and society”, *To women religious and members of Secular Institutes* (3 April 1987), ORE (21 April 1987), 10.

<sup>175</sup> EDITH STEIN, *Autobiography*, p. 243, quoted by JOHN PAUL II in his address to contemplative Nuns in Poland, ORE (6 July 1987), p. 4.

the Son through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Eucharist is the glorious celebration of God's unlimited love and self-outpouring.<sup>176</sup> By eating the life-giving body and drinking the Blood of Jesus, we get live through the Eucharist.

Your [consecrated] life - contemplative, spousal, sacrificial - is born in a particular measure from the Eucharist. And it also, in a special way, leads to the Eucharist, announces it - even if you live in hiding. Your entire life announces the Eucharist: the sacrament of Christ's love "to the end" [...] Through the Eucharist you always find yourselves, every day, in the very 'heart' of your vocation. And you find yourselves in the 'heart' of the Church [...] The heart of the Church in fact beats with the Eucharistic rhythm. This is the rhythm of love with which Christ 'after having loved Him. [...] He loved them to the end'<sup>177</sup>.

Quoting *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, John Paul II teaches us that, as the Holy Eucharist contains Christ who is the spiritual richness of the whole Church<sup>178</sup>, it is a life-giving bread for us. He emphasizes that consecrated persons should be self-disciplined and lead a life of repentance; this by partaking in the Eucharist daily so as to imitate the life of Jesus more closely and become a light to the whole world. The Pope confirms that there is no other medicine like the Holy Eucharist for helping us not to accept the deeds of this world, since it transforms us by renewing our mind. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, the Pope refers to the inner transformation that the Holy Eucharist brings to our life:

By means of the Eucharist all consecrated persons are called to live Christ's Paschal Mystery, uniting themselves to him by offering their own lives to the Father through the Holy Spirit. [...] In the celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood, the unity and charity of those who have consecrated their lives to God are strengthened and increased. [...] The Eucharist is also closely connected with the

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<sup>176</sup>VC, no. 95: AAS 88 (1996), 471.

<sup>177</sup>JOHN PAUL II, "Your whole life proclaims the Eucharist the sacrament of Christ's love 'to the end'", *To Cloistered Nuns*, ORE (6 July 1987), 4.

<sup>178</sup>EE, no. 1: AAS 95 (2003), 433; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, (Hereinafter referred to as "PO"), (7 December 1965), no. 5.

commitment to continual conversion and necessary purification which consecrated persons bring to maturity<sup>179</sup>.

### 1.3.1.2 Disseminating God's Mercy and Love

The Holy Eucharist is “an inexhaustible source”<sup>180</sup> of our life and it is the fullness of the “mystery of mercy”<sup>181</sup>. When we eat and drink from this source, we receive a special gift that brings eternal life (Jn 6:54)<sup>182</sup> and, transformed by that, we become capable of disseminating mercy, tenderness and life. Pope reminds us that we should allow the divine mercy that we experience through the Eucharist to work within us and through us. He further reiterates that it is through God's mercy that we are enlightened by the Eucharist and that we should receive it in our life as the principal means of our sanctification, enlightenment and complete transformation. Only then will the consecrated life acquire its full value and be able to testify to the gospel values.

These Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with Him, ‘the firstborn among many brothers’ (Rom. 8:29); brothers to one another in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church<sup>183</sup>.

As our Mother Mary, standing at the foot of the Cross, was strengthened by her beloved Son and enabled to say ‘Amen’ to the will of God, so Christ in the Holy Eucharist strengthens and sanctifies every consecrated person, helping them to repeat the same ‘Amen’ at every moment of their life. John Paul II says to consecrated persons: “It is necessary to make your lives a Magnificat, that is, a joyful “yes”, a hymn to divine mercy [...] this Magnificat is only possible when one offers one's life in the attitude of ‘standing’ like Mary, next to the Cross of Christ”<sup>184</sup>.

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<sup>179</sup> VC, no. 95: AAS 88 (1996), 389.

<sup>180</sup> EE, no. 10.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., no. 11.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., no.18.

<sup>183</sup> VC, no. 60, quoted in “Role of Lay Religious in the Church” in ORE (1 March 1995), 11.

<sup>184</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness”, *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia* (July 5, 1986), ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

Christ offered Himself to the Father: through the Holy Eucharist we should annihilate our selfishness and offer our life as a sacrifice and unite more closely with the Paschal mysteries like the merciful Jesus. It is then that our life becomes a celebration of resurrection. Likewise, when we experience God's merciful love in the Eucharist, our life, choices, values, dreams and actions can all be lived in a spirit of self-effacement and self-denial. It makes us understand the need to serve others by losing ourselves. The Holy Eucharist teaches us the truth that God is calling us to live for poor and deprived people through our total self-effacement. We, too, become bread broken and blood shed for them and thus become another instance of divine mercy.

[O]ne other point [...] it significantly affects the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist. It is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society [...] It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the "washing of feet" (cf. Jn 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of His disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally<sup>185</sup>.

"This loving knowledge of Christ is realized and deepened every day through [the] liturgical, personal and community prayer"<sup>186</sup> of consecrated persons. This leads them to recognize and manifest their vocation. Since "the Lord wished to remain with us in the Eucharist, making His presence in meal"<sup>187</sup> and sacrifice the promise of a humanity renewed by His love. John Paul II says to consecrated persons, "Your impulse to follow the way of the evangelical counsels was born of an interior encounter with the redemptive love of Christ"<sup>188</sup>. For a consecrated person, the offering of each Eucharist is a prophetic call to live life through the Passover of Christ's Paschal mysteries, His Death and Resurrection.

In short, living their vocation profoundly, consecrated persons grow in their personal relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist. Thus, they

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<sup>185</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, (hereinafter referred to as "MND"), (7 October 2004), no. 28: AAS 97 (2005), 350.

<sup>186</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Your Vocation is Born of the Light which is Christ", *On the Feast of presentation of Jesus*, ORE (16 February 1987), 4.

<sup>187</sup> *EE*, no.20: AAS 95 (2003), 446.

<sup>188</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Your Vocation is Born of the Light which is Christ", *On the Feast of presentation of Jesus*, ORE (16 February 1987), 4.

become the Body of Christ. Moreover, they manifest Christ in order “to illuminate the world and temporal reality [...] and bear true witness to the future light, to eternal life, in the everlasting light.”<sup>189</sup>. This is because Christ’s mighty power passes to the person who receives the Holy Eucharist and transforms that person, inviting them deeper into the vocation of consecrated life. This gift is the fruit of Christ’s self-sacrifice. It invites us to focus our attention on the crucified and resurrected Lord’s wounds and His transfiguration. This is a call to live for others, suffer and die for others and it is a challenge. A call to be humbled, to give oneself and to become a ransom for others. Through this, the Lord calls consecrated persons to share divine life with others, just as Christ gave His life as a ransom: He calls them to give life to others, which is “a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in Him, of every member of the human family”<sup>190</sup>.

### 1.3.2 The Eucharist and Evangelical Identification

Through evangelical identification, consecrated persons “follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way”<sup>191</sup>. The constitution adopted by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) teaches that evangelical identification “for carrying out a specific mission is a free gift that God alone can give. To those whom He chooses, He gives sufficient grace for surrendering themselves through the observance of the public vows of obedience, chastity and poverty”<sup>192</sup>. Moreover, John Paul II assures consecrated persons that, by properly pursuing the vows “with the eyes of faith in a world which ignores [God’s] presence”<sup>193</sup>, they can become capable of offering themselves for the service of the world and thus become “the living person of Jesus Christ”<sup>194</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Lighted Candles Represent the Mystery of the Liturgy and Your Consecrated Lives”, *Holy Mass of the Presentation of the Lord*, ORE (18 February 1980), 3.

<sup>190</sup> VC, no. 3: AAS 88 (1996), 379.

<sup>191</sup> POPE FRANCIS, “Witness of Joy”, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated Persons for the Year of Consecrated Life*, ORE (5 December 2014), 19; Cf. JOHN PAUL II, “The secular city has need of your witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>192</sup> ADORATION GENERALATE, *SABS Constitution* (Sanjo press, Kothamangalam: Superior General, 2011). no.18.

<sup>193</sup> VC, no. 68: AAS 88 (1996), 443.

<sup>194</sup> RD, no. 6: AAS 76 (1984), 521.



According to the SABS Constitution,

The consecrated person is called to configure herself with Jesus in the Eucharist, assimilating His personal qualities through a life centered on the Eucharist. Co-operating with the grace of God at every moment, we allow the ‘fire of the body’ and our Lord Jesus Christ to burn and glow in us. Thus, our thoughts, words, values and priorities may make our life itself become a manifestation of the Eucharistic spirituality<sup>195</sup>.

John Paul II makes the same point when on the World Day for Consecrated Life he told consecrated persons, “The Eucharist is the inexhaustible source of fidelity to the Gospel, for in this sacrament, the heart of ecclesial life, the deep identification and total conformation with Christ to which consecrated persons are called, is completely fulfilled”<sup>196</sup>. Therefore, John Paul II reflects that the consecrated life is for letting the light of Christ’s love in the world:

You are in the world without being of the world; and it is precisely your consecration that, far from impoverishing, characterizes your Christian witness. Your commitment to living the evangelical counsels makes you more available for this witness. Indeed, you are no less free for obeying and no less capable of loving for having chosen consecrated virginity, on the contrary; and through the vow of poverty, which commits you to following the poor Christ, you can better understand and share the harrowing dramas of those who find themselves deprived of everything<sup>197</sup>.

Through the Evangelical Counsel consecrated person enters into an intimate relationship with God. As St. Paul, consecrated persons must also give up themselves in order to gain Christ: “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8-9). “There can be no evangelically fruitful activity without the continuous and intimate relationship with the one who is love

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<sup>195</sup> SABS CONSTITUTION, no.19

<sup>196</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Secret to Spiritual Ardour: The Eucharist”, *Homily: World Consecrated Day*, ORE (9 February 2005), 7.

<sup>197</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Visible Witnesses of the Church in a More and More Desecrated World”, *On the Occasion of the Meeting with Women Religious in São Paulo Brazil*, ORE (21 July 1980), 3.

and life”<sup>198</sup>. According to John Paul II, when offered for God and God’s people, consecrated life becomes the life of real ‘covenantal relationship’. In his own words:

In your consecration to God through the vows of the evangelical counsels, strive towards a particular fullness of Christian life. Your special vocation and the whole of your life in the Church and the world take their character and their spiritual power from the same depth of the mystery of the Redemption. By following Christ along the ‘narrow and [...] hard’ (Mt 7:14) way, you experience in an extraordinary manner how true it is that ‘with him is plenteous redemption’ (Ps 130: 7)<sup>199</sup>.

The Pope adds, “Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ”<sup>200</sup>. Addressing Italian military representatives, John Paul II affirms that union with God gives a person true happiness and meaning in his/her life. He said: “The most beautiful and stirring adventure that can happen to you is the personal meeting with Jesus, who is the only one who gives real meaning to our lives”<sup>201</sup>. As we know, military are those who dedicate their lives for the country for a certain period of time for the security of the country. on the contrary, consecrated persons dedicating their entire lives to God’s will, revealing God’s Kingdom. Therefore, the Pope exhorts those consecrated to follow Christ wholeheartedly: Christ, the most holy, poor and obedient to the Father, is the real happiness of our soul and “one finds the joy of praising God, of living in Him, of Him and for Him”<sup>202</sup>. In the Pope’s own words:

Poverty, chastity and obedience are distinctive features of the redeemed person, inwardly set free from the slavery of egotism. Free to love, free to serve: this is the way the men and women are who renounce themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven. Following in the footsteps of the crucified and risen

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<sup>198</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Retain the spirit of your Foundress, Blessed Ursula, giving witness to love and the spirit of sacrifice”, *To the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, ORE (30 July 1984), 7.

<sup>199</sup> *RD*, no. 1: AAS 76 (1984), 514.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, no.7: AAS 76 (1984), 522.

<sup>201</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Jesus Christ is Adequate Answer to Questions of Life and History”, *To the Representative of the Italian Military*, ORE (12 March 1979), 4.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ, they live this freedom as solidarity, taking on the spiritual and material burdens of their brothers and sisters<sup>203</sup>.

Quoting *Starting Afresh from Christ*, John Paul II says that the Eucharist unites the consecrated in Christ<sup>204</sup>. He therefore exhorts all those consecrated to enter into the mystery of the Eucharist by following the example of Mary, ‘Woman of the Eucharist’. They should ask her help “to participate diligently in Holy Mass and obtain [...] the gift of prompt obedience, faithful poverty and fruitful virginity; may she make them holy disciples of Christ in the Eucharist”<sup>205</sup>.

### 1.3.2.1 Obedience

Through “the permanent practice of evangelical counsels”, the consecrated person manifests “a living expression of the life of the poverty of Christ, who detached Himself from everything and became ‘obedient to death and death on the Cross’ (Phil 2, 8). Through this consecration to the Lord, the immolation of Christ for the sake of the salvific will of the Father clearly appears”<sup>206</sup>. John Paul II considers that “religious obedience [...] is undoubtedly the sharpest of the three golden nails which attach to the will of Jesus Christ His imitators”<sup>207</sup>. Because it is “a sacrifice of the will out of love”<sup>208</sup>. For this very reason, it “bears abundant fruits of salvation for the whole world”<sup>209</sup>. Hence, John Paul II reminds the consecrated persons: “Through your obedience, which is a complete dedication of yourselves to the will of God, you seek to achieve the ‘mature measure of

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<sup>203</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Free to Love, Free to Serve, Free from Solidarity”, *Message: Vigil to the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, ORE (5 February 2003), 2.

<sup>204</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Secret to Spiritual Ardour: The Eucharist”, *Homily: World Consecrated Day*, ORE (9 February 2005), 7; CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Instruction Starting afresh from Christ. A renewed commitment to consecrated life in the third millennium*, (19 May 2002), no. 26.

<sup>205</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily: World Consecrated Day*, ORE (9 February 2005), 7; *Starting Afresh from Christ* no. 26.

<sup>206</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Be Instrument of Unity for the Work of Evangelization”, *Homily: Apostolic Journey to Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, Mass for the Consecrated and Pastoral Workers in Buenos Aires*, ORE (18 May 1987), 7.

<sup>207</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Poor are Always with US”, *To the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul*, ORE (4 February 1980), 7.

<sup>208</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitation of Christ in chastity, poverty, obedience”, *To women religious gathered in Rue du Bac Park in Paris*, ORE (9 June 1980), 7.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4, 13)"<sup>210</sup>. According to John Paul II:

Obedience can only be understood and lived as an espoused participation in the immolation of Christ, who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil 2:8). In the midst of the ecclesial community, you are a particular sign of Christ crucified for love; this is your theology of the cross. All the brothers, but especially the poor and those who suffer, need to see in you the way to look, love, listen, live and serve Christ, the Good Shepherd, who lived and died loving and forgiving"<sup>211</sup>.

According to the SABS constitution, consecrated sisters "surrender their personal inclinations and interests with full freedom and perfect love"<sup>212</sup> through "the divine gift"<sup>213</sup> of evangelical obedience. The Pope advises consecrated persons that "you follow Christ who redeemed and sanctified men with His obedience brought to death on the Cross"<sup>214</sup>. Therefore, quoting *Perfectae Caritatis*, John Paul II states that the more fervently those consecrated "are joined to Christ by this total life-long gift of themselves, the richer the life of the Church becomes and the livelier and more successful its apostolate"<sup>215</sup>.

Just as Jesus walked the path of obedience all the way to His death on the Cross (Phil 2:5-8), so, through the loving vow of obedience, consecrated persons "testify to what is imperishable (Cf. 1 Cor. 15, 50. 53)"<sup>216</sup> by surrendering their likings and desires to Jesus in a loving sacrifice: "This emptying of self, this *kenosis* necessary for exaltation,

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<sup>210</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "The secular city has need of your witness", *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>211</sup>JOHN PAUL II, "United to Christ, You are a Liberating sign of Holiness", *Homily: The Religious and Members of Female Secular Institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 Aug 1986), 10.

<sup>212</sup>SABS CONSTITUTION, no.23.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Dedicate your religious vocation to the real advancement of mankind", *To participants in the Assembly of Major Superiors in Italy*, ORE (26 October 1981), 10.

<sup>215</sup>JOHN PAUL II, "United to Christ, You Are a Liberating Sign of Holiness", *Homily: The Religious and Members of Female Secular Institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

<sup>216</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Preserve 'Church's autonomy of action", *To priests and religious at Saint John's Co-Cathedral in La Valletta*, ORE (28 May 1990), 7.

which is the way of Christ and of each of His disciples (cf. Phil 2:6-9), sheds light on the encounter of cultures with Christ and His *Gospel*. Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery”<sup>217</sup>.

Jesus showed us the dignity of obedience: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Mt 26:39), “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Therefore, “in the vow of obedience, we promise to follow God’s call and Will as it is discerned by us and by the community”<sup>218</sup>. Moreover, by living life always fulfilling His will, consecrated persons “give expression to humanity’s transcendent vocation which can only be achieved by walking the road of the Cross in company with Christ”<sup>219</sup>. Through obedience, those consecrated conform themselves to the divine will and “become instruments in His hands for the fulfilment of the twofold design - His glory and our own happiness”<sup>220</sup>.

According to the Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, obedience is a ‘spiritual cement’ that unites the group and saves it from divisions:

Obedience to the action of the Spirit unifies the community in its witness to His presence, makes the steps of all joyful (cf. Ps 37:23), and becomes the basis of community life in which all obey, each with various tasks. The search for the will of God and the willingness to carry it out is the spiritual cement that saves the group from the fragmentation that can arise from the great variety of persons in all their diversity when they are lacking a unifying principle<sup>221</sup>.

“Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, *He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him*” (Heb 5:8). “As for the obedience of Jesus, it occupies a

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<sup>217</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, (hereinafter referred to as “EAF”), (14 Sept 1995), no. 61: AAS 88 (1996), 38.

<sup>218</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Preserve Church's autonomy of action”, *To priests and religious at Saint John's Co-Cathedral in La Valletta*, ORE (28 May 1990), 7.

<sup>219</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Preserve Church's autonomy of action”, *To priests and religious at Saint John's Co-Cathedral in La Valletta*, ORE (28 May 1990), 7.

<sup>220</sup> B. FEUNELLY, *Follow Me: The Three Vows of Religious Ascetically and Canonically Considered*, (London: Burns and Oates, Washburne Ltd, 1943), 192.

<sup>221</sup> CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, no.18

central place in His redemptive work [...] which initiates the ascent of the humanity to God”<sup>222</sup>. From this we can understand that, through the pinnacle of extreme sacrifice for love, Christ fulfils God’s will that the world be redeemed through His filial obedience. John Paul II points out that consecrated persons experience the truth that “the joy of spiritual motherhood, which is the joy of the Holy Spirit, is born in the heart only when one has learned to transform suffering into gift and service” (cf. Jn 16, 21-22)”<sup>223</sup>. He also reveals, “The secret of this spiritual ardor is the Eucharist”<sup>224</sup>. Therefore, the Pope urges the consecrated persons

[...] to establish an ever more profound communion with Christ by sharing daily in the sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of His love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God’s pilgrim people [...] Jesus gives Himself as Bread ‘broken’ and Blood ‘poured out’ so that all may ‘*have life, and have it abundantly*’ (cf. Jn 10: 10). He offers Himself for the salvation of all humanity. Taking part in His sacrificial banquet does not only entail repeating His gestures but also means drinking the same cup and taking part in the same immolation. Just as Christ makes Himself ‘bread broken’ and ‘blood poured out’, so each Christian, and especially every consecrated man and every consecrated woman, is called to give his or her life for the brethren, in union with the life of the Redeemer<sup>225</sup>.

According to the SABS constitution, “obedience becomes a sacrifice and adoration through the unconditional surrender of our self”<sup>226</sup>. Since it is centered on the eternal sacrifice of Christ, “the Eucharist is sacrificial food”<sup>227</sup>. Furthermore, the Eucharist unites this self-offering with “the offering of Christ, which includes like sentiments of love and obedience

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<sup>222</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitation of Christ in chastity, poverty, obedience”, *To women religious gathered in Rue du Bac Park in Paris*, ORE (9 June 1980), 7.

<sup>223</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “United to Christ, You Are a Liberating sign of Holiness”, *Homily: The Religious and Members of Female Secular Institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

<sup>224</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Secret to Spiritual Ardour: The Eucharist”, *Homily: World Consecrated Day*, ORE (9 February 2005), 7; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, no. 26.

<sup>225</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Secret to Spiritual Ardour: The Eucharist”, *Homily: World Consecrated Day*, ORE (9 February 2005), 7; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, no. 26.

<sup>226</sup> SABS CONSTITUTION, no. 24.

<sup>227</sup> D. O’CONNOR, “the Eucharist: our sacrificial food”, in studies in pastoral liturgy, (Ed.), Murray Placid Dom, Maynooth: *The Furrow Trust*, 1961, 92.

toward the Father also on behalf of mankind”<sup>228</sup>. According to John Paul II the Eucharist gives us “the true, real and substantial presence of Christ who offers Himself to the Father as a sacrifice in our name and is intimately united with us in Communion”<sup>229</sup>. For this reason, the Eucharist is the source both of this obedience and of the strength required to exercise it<sup>230</sup>. Thus, “by living out the evangelical counsel of obedience, [consecrated persons] reach the deep essence of the entire economy of the Redemption...and all will be made righteous”<sup>231</sup>. Moreover, Mary, “the woman of the Eucharist”, is our model because “through the faith and obedience of Mary all of the families of the earth are blessed.”<sup>232</sup>.

In short, the will plays a valuable role in human life. “In that act [of obedience], the intellect and will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full”<sup>233</sup>. We are ready to give anything, but to surrender our will demands sacrifice. The result of this sacrifice will be “victories during [the person’s] life and at his[/her] death he[/she] will receive a crown of glory”<sup>234</sup>. Consequently, John Paul II considers that “the evangelical counsel of obedience is the call which derives from this obedience of Christ unto death”<sup>235</sup>. Those who accept this call, in real obedience and love, should always strive to strengthen the inner person<sup>236</sup>. Therefore, the Pope affirms that “the profound essence of religious consecration is an act of love for Christ. Religious [...] are called to reproduce more closely to Christ his same love.

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<sup>228</sup> E. J. KILMARTIN, *Church, Eucharist, and Priesthood: A Theological Commentary on “The Mystery and Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist”* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>229</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Nourish your spirituality and catechesis with dogmatic truths”, *To women religious gathered in the Sport Palace of Milan*, ORE (6 June 1983), 2.

<sup>230</sup> Hence through the surrendering of our will through the vow of obedience, we reciprocate the surrender of Jesus and share the mysteries of the Holy Eucharist with others.

<sup>231</sup> *RD*, no. 13: AAS 76 (1984), 536.

<sup>232</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Accept the Whole Messianic Programme of the Gospel”, *Homily at St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Parish*, ORE (12 December 1983), 3.

<sup>233</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Fides et Ratio*, (hereinafter referred to as “*FR*”), (14 September 1998), no. 13: AAS 91 (1999), 15.

<sup>234</sup> O. DOLPHIN, *The Secret of Religious Life*, (trans.), (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1923), 38.

<sup>235</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *RD*, no. 13: AAS 76 (1984), 535.

<sup>236</sup> The inspiration for this obedience is love. Therefore, as we are the brides of Christ, we should receive his character and mind and follow his examples and commandments. Then we also become partakes of God’s redemptive work in this world.

They are a sign of resurrection. But they can be this only in so far as their love shines through their oblation and their spirit of sacrifice, like Christ”<sup>237</sup>.

### 1.3.2.2 Chastity

In the Christian view, chastity by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality or lack of esteem for it: rather it signifies spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it towards its full realization [...] consecrated persons [...] through chastity embraced for the Kingdom of heaven, makes them ever more available to dedicate themselves generously to the service of God and to the works of the apostolate<sup>238</sup>.

According to John Paul II “chastity at the service of [the] Church [...] reflects the purity of Christ. In the reality of the Church and the world today, the witness of chaste love is [...] a form of spiritual therapy for humanity”<sup>239</sup>. “Having loved His own who were in the world” (Jn 13:1), Christ gave Himself completely for us and lives amongst us through the Holy Eucharist: “[a] the gift par excellence, for it is the gift of Himself, of His person in His sacred humanity, as well as the gift of His saving work”<sup>240</sup>. For John Paul II, chastity “places greater emphasis on the spousal character of this love”<sup>241</sup>.

The chastity of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-

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<sup>237</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Let Your Works attest to the eminence of Religious Life”, *To the Sisters in Palermo Cathedral* ORE (13 December 1982), 3.

<sup>238</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, (hereinafter referred to as ‘FC’), (22 November 1981) no. 33, 74: AAS 74(1982), 121, 172.

<sup>239</sup> *PG*, no.21; “By the vow of chastity [they] have become special heralds of the Resurrection of Christ and of the promise of eternal life. [They] lift people’s eyes beyond the demands of worldly affairs and the press of daily tasks, reminding them of the things that truly last. And yet, for the vow of chastity to be a compelling sign of the Kingdom to come, it must be inspired by a concrete love for every one of God’s children. [They] are to follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God. By doing so [they] proclaim to the world that “God is love” (1Jn. 4, 16), for his glory and for the salvation of all”. For details JOHN PAUL II, “May you always experience the joy of bringing your people to know and embrace the fullness of truth in Christ”, *Meeting with the priests, religious and laity in the Cathedral of Gaborone*, ORE (19 September 1988), 13.

<sup>240</sup> *EE*, no.11: AAS 95 (2003), 440.

<sup>241</sup> *RD*, no.11: AAS 76 (1984), 532.



34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving His life, the love ‘poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren<sup>242</sup>.

John Paul II states that “religious chastity, [...] is truly wanting to be like Christ; all the reasons that can be advanced elsewhere vanish before this essential reason: Jesus was chaste”<sup>243</sup>. His redemptive sacrifice manifests God’s love for us who became the Eucharist to dwell with us. Edward J. Kilmartin also reflects that in doing so, “the Eucharistic Christ is personally present to change mankind into the true Body of Christ and so to enable it to become an acceptable offering”<sup>244</sup>. John Paul II considers that because of their love for Christ, consecrated persons choose chastity throughout their life, “return Christ’s infinite love with [their] own total and exclusive love”<sup>245</sup> and become His disciple. The Pope reflects that “by embracing chastity, [consecrated persons] make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that He is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11)”<sup>246</sup>. Through the observance of chastity, out of a love of God, when consecrated persons surrender their likings and desires to God and ‘[become] one spirit with Christ’ (1 Cor 6:17),

women, called from the very ‘beginning’ to be loved and to love, in a vocation to virginity find Christ first of all as the Redeemer who ‘loved until the end’ through His total gift of self; and they respond to this gift with a ‘sincere gift’ of their whole lives. They thus give themselves to the divine Spouse, and this personal gift tends to union, which is properly spiritual in character. Through the Holy Spirit’s

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<sup>242</sup> VC, no. 21: AAS 88 (1996), 394.

<sup>243</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Imitation of Christ in Chastity, Poverty, Obedience”, *To women religious gathered in Rue du Bac Park in Paris*, ORE (9 June 1980), 7.

<sup>244</sup> E. J. KILMARTIN, *Church, Eucharist, and Priesthood: A Theological Commentary on “The Mystery and Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist”*, 10. Also cf. V. RAFFA, *Liturgia Eucaristica: Mistagogia Della Messa: Dalla Storia e Dalla Teologia Alla Pastorale Pratica*, Bibliotheca, (Roma: C.L.V.-Edizioni liturgiche, 1998), 986.

<sup>245</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “You are Sign of Church’s Virginity”, *25th Anniversary of Promulgation of Rite of Consecration International Conference of Consecrated Virgins*, ORE (14 June 1995), 3.

<sup>246</sup> VC, no. 16: AAS 88 (1996), 390.

action, a woman becomes ‘one spirit’ with Christ the Spouse (cf. 1 Cor 6:17)<sup>247</sup>.

Everyone is called to a spousal life, but not always in the physical sense: “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given” (Mt 19:11). As far as consecrated persons are concerned, they live their “virginity or celibacy as an expression of spousal love for the Redeemer Himself”<sup>248</sup>. They are called to live a chaste life “for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 1:12)<sup>249</sup>. According to John Paul II “Chastity means to live in the order of the heart. This order permits the development of the manifestations of affection in their proper proportion and meaning”<sup>250</sup>. Therefore, the Pope says to the consecrated persons:

The opportunity you have recognized and have come to love is a life in intimate union with Jesus Christ, in which you want to live as he lived Himself. His life is your example. His actions are your standards. His spirit is your strength. Through your fellowship with him you share in His mission in the world and preach the Gospel of God’s works of salvation. In a life of unmarried chastity, you gain strength and freedom for this high mission, to be carried out for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, in poverty before God and man, and in obedience to God within a specific community<sup>251</sup>.

John Paul II points out that the chastity is “a gift of grace which liberates your heart in a special manner so that it may burn with love for God and neighbour and become a source of spiritual fruitfulness”<sup>252</sup>. Christ who became the Eucharist is a sign of God’s infinite love for us. “Celibacy

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<sup>247</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (hereinafter referred to as “MD”), Apostolic letter (15 August 1988), no. 20.

<sup>248</sup> RD, no.11: AAS 76 (1984), 532: Also quoted in JOHN PAUL II, “United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness”, *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

<sup>249</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The secular city has need of your witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>250</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Christian Spirituality of Marriage Possible Only by Living According to the Spirit”, *General Audience*, ORE (9 February 1984), 1.

<sup>251</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “By your life of dedication to Christ you give light to the people of our time”, *Address to Women Religious*, ORE (1 June 1987), 5.

<sup>252</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Religious life as a “sign of God’s presence”, *Morning Prayer with Dutch Religious*, ORE (27 May 1985), 3

is a response of love”<sup>253</sup>. Our final goal is to be united in love with God. Chastity is a sign that we have become partakers of this unity of Heaven on earth in love. Moreover, “consecrated celibacy or chastity, for the Lord and for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:12), enables [them] for a more generous and absolute spousal dedication to Christ who sends [them] and awaits [them] in service to [their] brothers, particularly the poorest and most abandoned”<sup>254</sup>. John Paul II considers that “virgins receive from the Lord the ‘consecration of virginity’ and become a visible sign of the Church’s virginity, a means of her fruitfulness, a witness of her fidelity to Christ”<sup>255</sup>. The Pope noted that it is “the Eucharist with which Christ in His spousal love nourishes”<sup>256</sup> His spouse. In other words, through the Holy Eucharist, Christ nurtures consecrated persons and unites them with Himself. The Pope states:

By immersing yourselves in the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer through the consecration of the religious vows, you desire, through the love of total giving, to fill your souls and your bodies with the spirit of sacrifice, even as St. Paul invites you to do in the words of the letter to the Romans, just quoted: ‘to offer your bodies as a sacrifice’ (Rm 12:1). In this way the likeness of that love which in the heart of Christ is both redemptive and spousal is imprinted on the religious profession.<sup>257</sup>

The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is commemorated in the Holy Eucharist. In the Holy Eucharist, John Paul II declares that “by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all His thoughts and deeds”<sup>258</sup>. He/she is nourished by the Eucharist, “that inexhaustible

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<sup>253</sup> J. RAYES, *Living Religious Vows: A Personal Pilgrimage* (Cincinnati, USA: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1987), 17.

<sup>254</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Meeting with the priests, religious and seminarians in the chapel of the Seminary of Cochabamba in Bolivia*, Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, XI, 2 (11 May 1988), 1311.

<sup>255</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “You are Sign of Church’s Virginity”, *25th Anniversary of Promulgation of Rite of Consecration International Conference of Consecrated Virgins*, ORE (14 June 1995), 3.

<sup>256</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “scaredness of human body and married life”, *General Audience*, ORE (6 September 1982), 3.

<sup>257</sup> *RD*, no.8: AAS 76 (1984), 526.

<sup>258</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Eucharist, Banquet of Communion with God”, *Audience*, ORE (25 October 2000), 11.

source of holiness and glorification of God”<sup>259</sup>. In this way, by being obedient to Jesus’s commandments, one gets enough grace to live a chaste life with ‘an undivided heart’ throughout life: “When the love of Christ is embraced with an ‘undivided heart’, in its fullness [...] chastity reveals itself as a joyful affirmation of love”<sup>260</sup>. In other words, “as a result of this mystery [i.e., the Eucharist] of grace and divine love, we are in a mysterious way one with Jesus: you are the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12: 27)”<sup>261</sup>.

Chastity practised ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 19, 12) is a special gift to you from Christ, and from you to the whole Church. Virginity or celibacy is not only a preferential love of the Lord, but also a freedom for a total self-giving in universal service, without conditions and without discrimination. Your chastity, when it is marked by genuine generosity and joy, teaches others to distinguish between true love and its many counterfeits<sup>262</sup>.

John Paul II states that “receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. ‘Abide in me as I abide in you’ (Jn 15:4). This relationship of profound and mutual ‘abiding’ enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth”<sup>263</sup>. The Holy Eucharist is the “sacrament of love”<sup>264</sup>. Thus, it deepens our relationship with Christ and allows us to love and accept others just as we love ourselves. “In the vow of chastity, we promise ourselves completely to God”<sup>265</sup>. Therefore, John

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<sup>259</sup> VS, no. 107: AAS 85 (1993), 1217.

<sup>260</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Be faithful to your vocation”, *To the women religious in Florianópolis*, ORE (28 October 1991), 14.

<sup>261</sup> B. FEUNELLY, *Follow Me: The Three Vows of Religious Ascetically and Canonically Considered*, 78.

<sup>262</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Secular City Has Need of Your Witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>263</sup> MND, no. 19: AAS 97 (2005), 346.

<sup>264</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereinafter referred to as “SC”), (4 December 1963), no. 47 quoted in JOHN PAUL II, “Vitality of religious institutes implies renewal of community life”, *To religious people Switzerland Friborg*, ORE (25 June 1984), 9.

<sup>265</sup> J. RAYES, *Living Religious Vows: A Personal Pilgrimage*, 52.

Paul II exhorts those who want to lead a holy life with God to “draw grace and love from the ever-living fountain of the Eucharist”<sup>266</sup>.

“Whoever eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57), Jesus, who spoke these words, ‘pours out the richness of divine love into our heart’ (cf. Rm 5:5) through this sacrament. The Holy Eucharist was divinely instituted by Jesus to help us to grow in union with Him. “Chastity is single heartedness in making God primary in our lives”<sup>267</sup>. His love will overflow in to our soul and we will receive the special grace of not wishing anything which is against His will. John Paul II also makes it clear that the Eucharist<sup>268</sup> is fundamental for “the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God's love manifested in the weakness of the human condition”<sup>269</sup>.

Consecrated persons attest that “in Christ it is possible to love God with all one’s heart, putting Him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God”<sup>270</sup>. They find joy in offering themselves as an incessant sacrifice to God and man. This is the life of the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, chastity leads them into a deeper relationship with God and others. This enables them to give and receive love. Just as from the Eucharist “springs up within us a lively response of love”<sup>271</sup>, so do they become the carriers of love. By taking up and following the vows of chastity, a consecrated person becomes a witness to the tenderness and holiness promised by God.

### 1.3.2.3 Poverty

According to John Paul II “evangelical poverty is detachment from all things in order to give oneself for love of the Lord; By this poverty you make yourselves a gift of yourselves for all the brothers, in imitation of

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<sup>266</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Indult for Use of Roman Missal of 1962 according to Judgement of Dioecian Priest”, ORE (22 October 1984), 9; PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae*, (hereinafter referred to as “HV”), (25 July 1968), no. 25.

<sup>267</sup> J. RAYES, *Living Religious Vows: A Personal Pilgrimage*, 20.

<sup>268</sup> JOHN PAUL II emphasizes that the “whole life [of the consecrated persons] proclaims the Eucharist -the Sacrament of Christ's love "to the end"-through the walls of your convents”. For details John Paul II to Cloistered Nuns (8 June 1987), ORE (6 July 1987), 4.

<sup>269</sup> VC, no.88: AAS 88 (1996), 464.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Dominicae Cenae*, (hereinafter referred to as “DC”), (24 February 1980) no. 5: AAS 72 (1980), 122.

‘Jesus Christ who, being rich, became poor for us’ (2Cor 8, 9)”<sup>272</sup>. Quoting 2 Cor 8:9 the Pope tells us that Jesus accepted God’s plan completely and renounced material possessions and that “the religious vocation takes life from these riches of living faith”<sup>273</sup>. Jesus completely surrendered all that He had to the Father; He showed us the depth of His poverty. John Paul II explains this as follows:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). According to these words, poverty actually enters into the interior structure of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. Without poverty, it is not possible to understand the mystery of the gift of divinity to man, a gift which is accomplished precisely in Jesus Christ<sup>274</sup>.

According to John Paul II, the consecrated person “is also a living expression of the poverty of Christ, who detached Himself from everything”<sup>275</sup>. As a mark of gratitude to God who is the source of all gifts, consecrated souls show their willingness to share everything that God has given them with others and this is a sign of poverty of the soul<sup>276</sup>. Christ, ‘the Word become flesh’, showed us the real meaning of poverty: “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7). The Pope reminds the consecrated persons:

You are called to represent Christ in His poverty. You have chosen a life of frugality, indeed of poverty. Every day

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<sup>272</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness”, *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia*, ORE (25 August 1986), 10.

<sup>273</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Riches of Living Faith at the Heart of the Church”, *To Women Religious of the Diocese of Rome*, ORE (23 November 1978), 5.

<sup>274</sup> *RD*, no. 12: AAS 76 (1984), 533.

<sup>275</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Be Instrument of Unity for the Work of Evangelization”, *Apostolic Journey to Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, Mass for the Consecrated and Pastoral Workers in Buenos Aires*, ORE (18 May 1987), 7.

<sup>276</sup> “Through [their] path of poverty, the path of a simple life, you are more than what you achieve... Jesus Christ is [their] riches. Possession, power and reputation can become secondary to [them]. That sets you free. You can let go, be available and show solidarity with the “poor” of our day. Because of [their] poverty [they] are particularly connected to the weak and disenfranchised, the exploited and helpless. Stand on their side and stand up for them, bravely and honestly. Then the same applies to [the consecrated person]: “You are poor and yet make many rich; you have nothing and yet you have everything” (2 Cor 6:10)”. For details JOHN PAUL II, *To Religious Sisters and Novices of the diocese of Augsburg*, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 2 (4 May 1987), 1577.

you pray, "give us this day our daily bread". The essence of this prayer is confidence in God. He keeps watch so that there may be enough for all in the world, provided people resist the 1 temptation to accumulate consumer goods [...] Love for the poor-the spiritually poor and the materially poor- is for the Church an integral part of following the poor Christ. Your life of material poverty will bring you to fulfil the prayer, "give us, all of us. today, our daily bread"<sup>277</sup>.

Jesus Christ is the visible sign of God's love towards us. By serving others, without keeping anything back for Himself, and even giving His own life for others, He showed us the way we should follow in our own lives. In the same way, those consecrated "must be a transparent sign and bearer of the offering of the world to God"<sup>278</sup>, becoming another Eucharist like Christ. The Eucharist "was a meal where all hungers were fed by bread that was life and wine that was peace"<sup>279</sup>. The Second Vatican Council teaches about this truth as follows:

Voluntary poverty, in the footsteps of Christ, is a symbol of Christ, which is much esteemed, especially nowadays. Religious should cultivate it diligently and, if need be, express it in new forms. It enables them to share in the poverty of Christ who for our sake became poor, though He was rich, so that we might become rich through His poverty. With regard to religious poverty [...] members must be poor both in fact and in spirit, their treasures being in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:20)<sup>280</sup>.

The evangelical vow of poverty makes it possible to draw happiness and satisfaction from the awareness that all that we have stems from the benevolence of God<sup>281</sup>. Mother Teresa points out that if a person seeks

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<sup>277</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Religious life as a 'Sign of God's Presence'", Morning Prayer with Dutch Religious, ORE (27 May 1985), 3

<sup>278</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Be Instrument of Unity for the Work of Evangelization", *Homily: Apostolic Journey to Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, Mass for the Consecrated and Pastoral Workers in Buenos Aires*, ORE (18 May 1987), 7; RD, no.8: AAS 76 (1984), 526.

<sup>279</sup> A. E. ALONSO, *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2021), 50.

<sup>280</sup> PC, no. 13.

<sup>281</sup> "Together with the deepening of the spiritual life and the practice of true poverty, community life is a very important part of the religious vocation". For details JOHN PAUL II, "The Church and the world need the witness of your poverty and charity",

money or any other worldly pleasure, that will cause them to lose touch with God. As a result, “our needs will increase, for one thing leads to another, and the result will be endless dissatisfaction”<sup>282</sup>. Poverty reminds us that our treasure is not on earth but in heaven. The vow of poverty serves the “detachment and purification [which] are the price of divine union”<sup>283</sup>. Paul VI shed profound light upon this reality when he urged, “experience [the world] in heart-to-heart union with Christ, make your poverty more urgent and deeper”<sup>284</sup>. Therefore, John Paul II states:

In living poverty individually and as a community, you will become free from the tyranny of the consumer society; this poverty will open your hearts ever more to a love of God and neighbor like that of Jesus; it will enable your communities to radiate the warmth of this love beyond the confines of the communities themselves. Your detachment from the goods of this world will act as a challenge to your contemporaries, manifesting to them both the greatness of God that inspires you and the faith that animates you<sup>285</sup>.

Jesus said to the rich man: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). As far as Jesus is concerned, poverty is not just the forgoing of necessary items: on the contrary, He took on poverty in order to make us understand that the most important things in life are not the material things of this world. Perfection means complete surrender: by selling all we have and giving everything to the poor, we offer our life for God and for the well-being of our fellow brethren.

To give life to others, Jesus gave His Body and Blood: “Take and eat; This is My Body” (Mt 26:26). John Paul II therefore states that “by imitating Christ’s poverty, [consecrated persons] profess that He is the Son

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Meeting with women religious in the Abbey of Madonna del Monte in Cesena (May 9, 1986), ORE (2 June 1986), 12.

<sup>282</sup> MOTHER TERESA, *The Love of Christ: Spiritual Counsels*, ed. George Gorrée and Jean Barbier, Fount Paperbacks (London: Collins, 1982), 106-107.

<sup>283</sup> B. FEUNELLY, *Follow Me: The Three Vows of Religious Ascetically and Canonically Considered*, 59.

<sup>284</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (hereinafter referred to as “ET”), (29 June 1971), no.22.

<sup>285</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Church and the World Need the Witness of Your Poverty and Charity”, *Meeting with women religious in the Abbey of Madonna del Monte in Cesena*, ORE (2 June 1986), 12.



who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10)”<sup>286</sup>. This is possible by following the life style of Christ’s tenderness: He did not consider ‘His oneness with God’, but ‘emptied Himself’ (Cf. Phil 2:7). Thus, John Paul II reminds those consecrated that “*evangelical poverty is a value in itself*, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the Poor Christ”<sup>287</sup>.

Mother Teresa highlights this truth in her book *The Love of Christ* and explains the richness of poverty.

Our Lord on the Cross possessed nothing. He was on the Cross that was given by Pilate. The nails and the crown were taken away from Him. He was wrapped in a shroud given by a kind heart, and buried in a tomb that was not His. Yet Jesus could have died as a king and He could have risen from the dead a king. He chose poverty because He knew in His infinite knowledge and wisdom that it is the real means of possessing God, of conquering His heart, of bringing His love down to this earth<sup>288</sup>.

We know that the Eucharist recalls the entire life of Christ. It is the Jesus who was born in poverty in a manger, the one who was shattered and shed blood on the Cross for us who is remembered in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus emptied Himself so as to give Himself as a food for the world and thus give life to the world. Broken and given to others by ‘emptying Himself’. “By practising evangelical discipleship”<sup>289</sup> consecrated persons give themselves for God and for others. This is the life of Eucharistic poverty. In other words, those who wish to give life to others, must follow the way of poverty and understand that “the Eucharist is the centre of the life of Christ’s disciples”<sup>290</sup>.

John Paul II considers that “poverty voluntarily embraced in imitation of Christ - being poor in spirit and in fact, singly and corporately – [consecrated persons] seek freedom from the tyranny of the consumer society”<sup>291</sup>. Christ taught us “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have

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<sup>286</sup> VC, no. 16: AAS 88 (1996), 390.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., no.90: AAS 88 (1996), 465.

<sup>288</sup> MOTHER TERESA, *The Love of Christ: Spiritual Counsels*, 108.

<sup>289</sup> VC, no.42: AAS 88 (1996), 416.

<sup>290</sup> DC, no. 7: AAS 72 (1980), 124.

<sup>291</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Secular City Has Need of Your Witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5; Cf. PC, no. 13.

necks; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58). This shows us the redemptive poverty and humility of the Holy Eucharist. “It is therefore necessary to ensure that the Eucharistic mystery, the perennial memorial of Easter and the Redemption, always has in each of our communities [...] that central position that it deserves by full right”<sup>292</sup>. Remembering the real communion with Jesus in the Eucharist, John Paul II affirms that the Eucharist “is also the merciful and redeeming transformation of the world in the human heart”<sup>293</sup>. Therefore, by receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, we become partakers in Christ’s love and are transformed into that love of His that made Him become poor for us<sup>294</sup>.

Leading a life based on the Eucharist means “to desire God to act in [oneself] in order to enable [one] to attain, in the Spirit, the fullness of Christ Himself”<sup>295</sup>. The consecrated women who become brides of Christ in this way, “voluntarily embraced in imitation of Christ, [...] sharing in the poverty of Christ, who placed himself in the Father’s hands and who made himself accessible to all without discrimination.” and express the presence of God’s Kingdom on earth; they bring the redemptive power of the Gospel to the world. As Jesus just surrendered His own will to the Father, so we sacrifice all our legitimate rights and desires because of our love of Christ. By deepening the sacrificial offering of our life, we also deepen our relationship of Eucharist life<sup>296</sup>. Therefore, the Pope exhorts the consecrated persons that they must have a profound “Eucharistic spirituality”<sup>297</sup>.

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<sup>292</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Living Examples of Holiness”, *To clergy, men and women religious of the Diocese of Siena and all of Tuscany*, ORE (29 September 1980), 8.

<sup>293</sup> DC, no. 7: AAS 72 (1980), 126.

<sup>294</sup> The vows in the consecrated life demands continuous surrender. Through the vow of poverty, when I abandon for the sake of God, all what I have and my possessions; I become one with the lord who prayed in agony “Father let Thy will be done”. This is what Holy Eucharist urges us to do.

<sup>295</sup> DC, no. 7: AAS 72 (1980), 124.

<sup>296</sup> Just as Christ become the Eucharist to give life to us, the vow of poverty helps us to give what we have to needy ones. Jesus who becomes the Holy Eucharist by giving himself completely, urges us to share our possessions such as our talents, education, security, time and money with others.

<sup>297</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Nourish Your Spirituality and Catechesis with Dogmatic Truths”, *To women religious gathered in the Sport Palace of Milan*, ORE (6 June 1983), 2.

## Conclusion

John Paul II states that “the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of future time, is begun in the Eucharist, and it will develop from It until the end of the world”<sup>298</sup>. According to John Paul II, to consecrate means, to live for the Kingdom of God, that is, “the total and irrevocable consecration of [their] inner self and [their] feminine capacities to Christ and to His Kingdom”<sup>299</sup> by participating in Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection and always being with Christ. It is from the Eucharist that all of us receive the grace, courage and “strength to live, even though the times of greatest hardship and poverty, through days of persecution and vexations for daily living--to live real Christian lives”<sup>300</sup>. Consequently, consecrated persons can continue to be nourished with love and to encounter the greatness of this gift received in the Eucharist. Moreover, John Paul II assures consecrated persons that by properly pursuing the vows “with the eyes of faith in a world which ignores [God’s] presence”<sup>301</sup>, they can become capable of offering themselves for the service of the world and thus become “the living person of Jesus Christ”<sup>302</sup>.

John Paul II emphasizes that through their “public profession of the evangelical counsels, religious lives are meant to offer a clear witness to the reality of the Kingdom of God already present in the affairs of men and nations”<sup>303</sup>. The consecrated person is nourished by love through the Eucharist and is empowered to bear witness to the Kingdom of God. As a result, consecrated persons are becoming the face of God’s kingdom in this world by giving their entire life to the advancement of God’s kingdom. In other words, through their life, services, and activities they “shine the light of the Savior in the world”<sup>304</sup>. In his teachings, John Paul II insists that, by following this light, consecrated persons can encounter Christ in their

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<sup>298</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Penance and Eucharist Lead to Freedom in the Spirit”, *Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ*, ORE (21 June 1982), 1.

<sup>299</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fully Involved in Church’s Prophetic Mission”, *To women religious gathered in the Carmel of Kinshasa, Zair*, ORE (19 May 1980), 3.

<sup>300</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Fully Involved in Church’s Prophetic Mission”, *To women religious gathered in the Carmel of Kinshasa, Zair*, ORE (19 May 1980), 3.

<sup>301</sup> VC, no. 68: AAS 88 (1996), 443.

<sup>302</sup> RD, no. 6: AAS 76 (1984), 521.

<sup>303</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “The Secular City Has Need of Your Witness”, *Meeting with religious people of England and Wales*, ORE (31 May 1982), 5.

<sup>304</sup> JOHN PAUL II, “Your Gift of Self Amazes the World”, *Meeting with men and women religious of Fourvière*, ORE (10 November 1986), 4.

daily life and “renew themselves constantly in the light”: hence, they should shine as the light of the world. Thus, they should be able to understand the meaning and challenges of human life. In addition, through their consecrated life, they can restore the image of God in the hearts of those people who are living in desperation, guilt and sinfulness.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Holy Eucharist is an important pivotal point on the path of Catholic theology and spirituality. It is the glorious gift given by Christ to us through His incarnation, Death and Resurrection. The Blood of Jesus that is shed for us remains in the Holy Eucharist as a perpetual sign of God's love because the Holy Eucharist is the demonstration of Christ's love and sacrifice. Hence, the God who reveals Himself in the Holy Eucharist by giving Himself for us, to make us partake in divine life, binds us with God. It is the Holy Eucharist that nourishes our soul and is the source of our strength. It constitutes the center of the Church. We receive the Holy Eucharist, not only to achieve unity with each other, but also to achieve unity with Jesus.

The more we are united with God, the more we are united with our brethren. That is to say, the measure in which we adhere to the grace that flows from the Source, Jesus, is the measure of our growth in unity. Thus, by a life transformed internally, we become an instrument of His grace and witness Him. The teaching of St. Pope John Paul II leads us to a profound insight into the Holy Eucharist that is relevant and timeless. He affirms that in this time of changing values and increasing secularism, the Holy Eucharist is an everlasting source of grace to solve problems such as emptiness, muteness, lack of faith and devotion that affect our society.

The words of Pope John Paul II, a profound theologian and spiritual guide, offer a powerful and enduring insight into the significance of the Holy Eucharist in consecrated life, serving as a guiding light for those on their spiritual journey. His teachings remind us that the Holy Eucharist is not just a ritual ceremony, but the dynamic communion with God that strengthens transformative communion and resonates in every area of life. The Pope's words inspire us to journey through the heart of the Holy Eucharist, which is the source of spiritual nourishment and unity. This journey elevates us into the communion of God and creates a symphony of hearts that transcends all boundaries.

This study, guided by the profound teachings of John Paul II on the relationship between the Holy Eucharist and consecrated life, recognizes that the Eucharist is a source of love and therefore invites consecrated persons into the depths of consecrated life, where love acts as a persuasive force that mediates the grace of fraternity among members, guided by Holy

Communion. Consequently, the teaching of John Paul II magnificently demonstrates that by weaving a cord of harmony of unity in consecrated life through the transforming effects of the Holy Eucharist, which enriches love, solidarity and mutual sharing, a marvelous musical symphony resounds in consecrated life.

The Holy Eucharist provides the symphony of communion that resonates in the unique vocation of the life of consecrated persons. Since the mystery of Christ is re-enacted in the Holy Mass, John Paul II affirms that consecrated persons are lifted up into a spiritual relationship with Christ by recognizing His dignity and thus enter into the union of the Holy Trinity. In other words, Christ unites consecrated life with the union of the Holy Trinity and thus helps it to reflect the depth of the Trinity's harmony and richness. In consecrated life, the symphony of communion created by the Holy Eucharist does not end with a purely theoretical exploration, but rather is an invitation to embrace the dynamic spirituality that strengthens the transformative power of communion, love, sharing, dedication and service.

The core of this research is based on the proposal 'The Symphony of Communion'. Since the Eucharist is a source of self-giving love and communion, the transforming power of the Eucharist affects the personal and communal life of a consecrated person. This creates a symphony in community life. In other words, a consecrated person's life centered on the Eucharist deepens their prayer life, their inner silence, their growth in faith and holiness, which leads them to union with God. The self-emptying and self-giving love of Christ nourishes and promotes their inner life, which finds joy in the common life and mutual support of the community. The result is a harmonious symphony of people dedicated to a common purpose and service. This symphony of fraternal love and communion reflects the beauty of consecrated life. The result is that the fruits of the Holy Spirit flourish and intensify and the symphony of spiritual growth increases in its vertical and horizontal dimensions. The spirit of Eucharistic love fills them with a zeal for God that gives them the courage to spread the fragrance of Christ's love through evangelization and service to others, so that they become living witnesses in the world.

To explain the Eucharist as a symphony of communion in consecrated life, John Paul II emphasizes that consecrated persons who live a life centered on the Eucharist imitate the self-giving love, obedience and poverty of Christ. In this way, they make the mystery of His Kingdom

visible in the world. Consecrated persons who dedicate their lives entirely to the growth of the Kingdom of God transform themselves into the face of the Kingdom of God in this world and show the living Lord to the world. John Paul II affirms that living with Christ in the Eucharist nourishes them and gives them the strength to spread His Kingdom and enables them to take on the mission of Christ. It makes their lives brighter and more fruitful when they seek, find and experience the same light that shines on the face of Jesus.

In his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II proclaims that consecrated persons find a mysterious bond that profoundly unites Christ, the Church and humanity<sup>305</sup>. This relationship culminates in the Holy Eucharist, in which Christ's self-giving love is expressed. By contemplating this relationship, the consecrated understand their role in the history of redemption and are led to a profound realization of their personality and vocation. John Paul II's words on the importance of the Eucharistic celebration and also of Eucharistic adoration shed light on our life. He says that the reception of Holy Communion and daily adoration make us grow in holiness because the Holy Eucharist is an 'inexhaustible source of holiness'<sup>306</sup>. Therefore, the Eucharist plays an important role in intensifying the symphony of Communion.

Furthermore, John Paul II assures consecrated persons that through the proper observance of vows they will be enabled to be conformed to Christ and thereby transformed to reflect the love of God in this world. In other words, participation in the Holy Mass and the encounter with Christ deepen the relationships of love and unity. This makes their devotion to life in self-giving even more intense. The Pope emphasizes the mysterious presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, who emptied himself and became the poorest of the poor. To underline this realization, the Holy Eucharist not only nourishes the consecrated, but also compels them to accept the spiritual gravity that characterizes Christ's self-emptying on the cross.

The Eucharist is a reminder that Jesus was obedient to the will of God until His death on the Cross, and thus bread and wine were transformed into His Body and Blood. John Paul II points out that obedience in the consecrated life is linked to the invitation of the Holy Eucharist to surrender to the will of God. Since bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, every action of consecrated

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<sup>305</sup> *VC*, no.21: AAS 88 (1996), 395.

<sup>306</sup> *EE*, no. 10: AAS 95 (2003), 439.

persons who respond obediently to the call of Christ becomes the unity of God's plan. Through the vow of obedience, consecrated persons allow themselves to be guided by the sacrificial character of the Eucharist and place their own preferences, desires and will at the service of a higher calling. This obedience, shared in the form of Christ's obedience to the Father, enriches the community life of consecrated persons and is transformed into a harmonious offering that reflects the self-sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist. In this way, they reflect the life of the Eucharist through their spiritual harmony of sacrifice, love and devotion that resounds the beautiful symphony within the religious community.

Since Christ, who became the Eucharist, reveals God's love for us, consecrated persons enter into a profound union with Christ through the Eucharist, deepening their relationship with Christ and nourishing themselves with His spousal love. Therefore, the reverberation of chastity through Holy Communion is mentioned as another important good quality of the consecrated life. In the teachings of John Paul II, the spousal sphere of consecrated persons with Christ is emphasized<sup>307</sup>. The Pope therefore affirms that chastity is a special gift that represents a freedom for total self-giving to God and for others, a total self-giving in universal service with true generosity and joy. So that they may find joy in offering themselves as an unceasing sacrifice for God and humanity.

Since the Holy Eucharist is an all-encompassing and undivided gift of Christ, chastity proves to be a harmonious response to the call to love Christ with all one's heart. When consecrated persons offer a harmonious gift of self to Christ and for others in their chaste commitments, they reflect the communion of Christ's self-giving love. John Paul II emphasizes that the life of consecrated persons is called to bear witness to the love of the Bridegroom<sup>308</sup>. The embodiment of this love is to be found in the Holy Eucharist. There the total self-giving of Christ becomes a source of inspiration and imitation for consecrated persons. This strengthens their self-giving and their zeal. This is the life of the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, chastity leads them into a deeper relationship with God and others.

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<sup>307</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "Only One Thing is Needful", *Address to Women Religious of the Bologna Area*, ORE (8 October 1997), 8.

<sup>308</sup> JOHN PAUL II, "United to Christ, you are a liberating sign of holiness", *To women religious and members of secular institutes of Colombia* (July 5, 1986), ORE (25 August 1986), 10: RD, no. 15; Ad Gentes, no. 1.



Poverty is not only abstinence from material possessions, but a harmonious embrace to count on God's providence. The Holy Eucharist invites us to share in Christ's self-sacrifice and His full dependence on the Father. By receiving this poverty of Christ, a harmonious bond of solidarity is created among the consecrated and they realize that Eucharistic communion with Christ is their true wealth. Those who practice a Eucharistic spirituality find inspiration in prioritizing simplicity and self-denial in order to cultivate a life that places spiritual values above material attainments. This enables them to give and receive love. Just as the Eucharist satisfies all who are hungry, the consecrated person, according to John Paul II, becomes a transparent sign of the Kingdom of God by offering to God all that he or she has and can receive.

Therefore, the Holy Eucharist, which is the ultimate source of unity, draws consecrated persons into a deep intimacy with God. This strengthens their committed life and makes their daily life more alive. The effect of the Holy Eucharist as a source of love runs like a red thread through this work. Just as Christ's sacrifice on the cross embodies the epitome of love, the Holy Eucharist embodies this sacrificial love in its most impeccable form. The Holy Eucharist acts as a sparking stone of love that leads consecrated persons, in the context of a consecrated life, to serve God and man and to offer themselves wholeheartedly.

The unity emphasized by John Paul II is not only a physical phenomenon, but a profound spiritual reality that reflects the unity with the Trinity and the growth of the relationships of consecrated persons with one another, with God and with the world. At the end of this exploration, we find ourselves in the richness of a profound illumination of how Holy Communion orchestrates a symphony of communion in the incomparable vocation of consecrated life, as the Eucharist reflects the unity within the Trinity and thereby expands its relationship with others through its services and care. As a source of unity, Holy Eucharist serves as a guide for vertical and horizontal relationships.

The Holy Eucharist as the source of love becomes the hallmark of her/his vocation, motivates her/his selfless love in the depths of her/his heart and proves to be a dynamic power of persuasion. Moreover, the transforming power of the Holy Eucharist is manifested in the promotion of solidarity in consecrated life. Through the spiritual reception of the Trinitarian union, consecrated persons discover a design that goes beyond the self and paves the way to solidarity and cooperation. Through

Eucharistic adoration, interior silence and asceticism, which help consecrated persons to live a life rooted in contemplation and prayer, this potential for transformation can be fostered and the intensity of union with Christ further strengthened.

In the Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenaе*, John Paul II emphasizes the importance of the Holy Eucharist: Eucharistic adoration increases the commitment to charity<sup>309</sup>. This statement illustrates the harmonious resonance between Holy Communion and the self-gift of a person. In other words, Eucharistic adoration proves to be fertile ground that enables consecrated persons to merge their lives with the selfless, exemplary life of Christ and to deepen their selfless service of charity. Although the Apostolic Exhortation *Dominicae Cenaе*, which sheds light on the mystery and depth of the Holy Eucharist, is not addressed to consecrated life, the teaching on the importance of the Holy Eucharist in the life of the Church and of adoration influences the life of the consecrated person.

In his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, John Paul II reflects on the theological and spiritual characteristics of the Holy Eucharist. He explains that the Holy Eucharist is the mystery of God's presence and the fulfillment of Christ's promise that He will be with us until the end of the world<sup>310</sup>. This confidence in the eternal presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist extends the symphony of unity in the lives of the consecrated beyond the boundaries of time and space. By instilling love, devotion and an awareness of eternal life in the consecrated, their hearts are transformed into a journey of spiritual relationship with the eternal presence of Christ.

John Paul II affirms that the Church draws all her invincible energy and strength for her existence from the Holy Eucharist. This truth not only expresses our faith, but also reveals the mystery of the Church's heart. In this context, the consecrated life proves to be an unmistakable expression of this Eucharistic truthfulness. Just as the Church draws her spirit from the Holy Eucharist, so consecrated persons draw their energy, zeal and dedication as well as their love, solidarity and cohesion for their self-giving from the Holy Eucharist. Similarly, John Paul II declares that the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of all evangelization.

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<sup>309</sup> *DC*, no. 7: AAS 72 (1980), 124.

<sup>310</sup> *EE*, no.15: AAS 95 (2003), 443.

John Paul II also declares, repeating the statement of Henri de Lubac: “The Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist”<sup>311</sup>. The reciprocal relationship between the Holy Eucharist and the Church mirrors the relationship between the Holy Eucharist and the consecrated life. The Holy Eucharist becomes a breeding ground that enables the consecrated to contribute to the growth of the Church, to cultivate solidarity and to pass on the love of Christ to others. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of love. It refers to love. John Paul II says that it generates love. These words of John Paul II illustrate the fact that the Holy Eucharist acts like a symphony of communion in the life of consecrated persons. Through love, consecrated persons respond with their selfless offering to the self-giving love of Christ. By remaining faithful to their vocation, they live in the grace of the Holy Eucharist.

For their goal is communion with Christ and through Him communion with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. This profound insight underlines the harmonious essence of the symphony of communion in consecrated life. Thus, the Holy Eucharist proves to be the symphony of communion that brings consecrated persons closer to a profound communion with the Triune God. This communion unites the consecrated in love, which strengthens their solidarity and thus forms a harmonious melody that impels them to selfless service.

The Holy Eucharist is presented as an encounter with Christ, as a mystery of faith and as a source of unity. Consecrated persons contribute to the symphony of faith and unity in the Church through their dedication and commitment to living life with the elegance of the Holy Eucharist. John Paul II emphatically declares to the consecrated that they are called to be a sign and witness of unity in the Church. This vocation reflects the sign of communion that is the essence of the Holy Eucharist. That is, the consecrated reflect the unity and self-giving that the Holy Eucharist represents. They thus contain the essence of the Holy Eucharist through their commitment to Christ and their confreres.

Mother Mary is described by the Pope as the “*Woman of the Holy Eucharist*”. The Pope points out that she is the most fruitful means of attaining communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit through the Holy Eucharist. This proclamation emphasizes the profound harmonious communion between the Holy Eucharist and Mother Mary. Just as the ‘yes’

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<sup>311</sup> H. D. LUBAC, *The Splendour of the Church* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 1999), 133.

of Mother Mary brought the Eucharistic Christ, so the harmonious collaboration between the Holy Eucharist and consecrated persons, enriched by the intercession of Mother Mary, leads to a profound intimacy with Christ. John Paul II reminds consecrated persons that they are the sign of the Church's love for the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ. The sign of this love is united to the Holy Eucharist, which is the sign of the nature of Christ's self-giving love. Deepening their lives in the Holy Eucharist helps them to reflect Eucharistic love in their dealings with the world and enhances their ability to internalize the love of Christ.

As the sacrificial love of Jesus in the Eucharist becomes a touchstone and fosters an intimacy between members, the Eucharist strengthens their commitment and enlivens their daily lives. Furthermore, the results of this comprehensive study shed light on spirituality, not only in consecrated life, but also in every person who wishes to penetrate the depths of spirituality. At the Last Supper, Christ gave himself for us in the form of bread and wine, showing us the greatest expression of His love and expressing his desire to be in communion with us. Christ, who gave his body and blood in the form of bread and wine, demonstrated His unconditional love by offering Himself on the Cross as a sacrifice to the Father. The bread and wine, which are necessary for bodily life, become one with the body in order to nourish bodily life. To make a person's soul participate in divine life and nourish spiritual life, you become one with Christ through the Holy Eucharist. This means that by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we become united with His love and become beneficiaries of the mystery of redemption at Calvary.

To summarize, in these descriptions of the consecrated life based on the teaching of John Paul II, the Holy Eucharist resounds as a symphony of communion. This symphony resounds in the melody of love, unity and self-giving with the realization that the consecrated life is not only a vocation within the Church, but also a gift to the Church. The Holy Eucharist empowers and enriches them to become a living witness of self-giving and love. By receiving this symphony, they participate in the transforming power of the Eucharistic mystery in their lives and services and make available their incomparable solidarity in the Church.

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