



The Holy See

MASS FOR RELIGIOUS MEN AND WOMEN
ON THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

EIGHTH WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Monday, 2 February 2004

1. *"He had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest"* (Heb 2: 17). These words from the Letter to the Hebrews express well the message of today's Feast of the *Presentation of the Lord in the Temple*. They offer us *the key to its interpretation*, so to speak, putting it in the perspective of the Paschal Mystery. The event we are celebrating today takes us back to what Mary and Joseph did when, 40 days after his birth, they presented Jesus to God as their firstborn son, complying with the law of Moses. Their offering was later to find complete and perfect fulfilment in the mystery of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord. Only then would he fulfil his mission as the *"merciful and faithful High Priest"*, sharing in our human destiny to the very end. At the presentation in the Temple, *Mary*, the faithful Virgin who takes part with him in the eternal plan of salvation, *was with him* as she was on Calvary. 2. Today's liturgy opens with the *blessing of the candles* and the procession to the altar to meet Christ and to recognize him "in the breaking of the bread" until he comes again in glory. The Church celebrates the *Day of Consecrated Life* in this setting of light, faith and hope. All those who have offered their life to Christ for ever for the coming of the Kingdom of God are invited to renew their "yes" to the special vocation they have received. The entire Ecclesial Community, however, also rediscovers the riches of the *prophetic witness of consecrated life* in the variety of its charisms and apostolic commitments. 3. With sentiments of praise and gratitude to the Lord for this great gift, I would like first of all to greet Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, who is presiding at today's Celebration. With him, I extend my cordial good wishes to all who are participating in this evocative liturgical assembly. My affectionate greeting goes especially to you, dear Men and Women Religious and Members of Secular Institutes, as well as to all the witnesses faithful to the values of consecrated life in every region of the world. Christ is calling you *to conform ever more closely to him*, who out of love made himself obedient, poor and chaste. Continue to dedicate yourselves passionately to proclaiming and promoting his Kingdom. This is your mission, as necessary today as it was in the past! 4. Dear Men and Women Religious, what a favourable opportunity you are afforded on this day dedicated to you, to reaffirm your fidelity to God with the enthusiasm and generosity of the moment when you first pronounced your vows! Repeat your "yes" to the God of Love every day with joy

and conviction. In the recollection of the cloistered monastery or beside the poor and marginalized, among young people or within the structures of the Church, in the various apostolic activities or in mission lands, God wants you to be faithful to his love and dedicated without reserve to the good of your brothers and sisters. This is the precious contribution which you can make to the Church, so that the Gospel of hope may reach the men and women of our time.⁵ Let us contemplate the Virgin while she offers her Son in the Temple of Jerusalem. She who unconditionally accepted God's will at the moment of the Annunciation in a certain way is repeating her words: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word*" (Lk 1: 38). This attitude of docile adherence to the divine designs was to mark her entire existence. Thus, Our Lady is the first and most exalted model for every consecrated person. Dear brothers and sisters, let yourselves be guided by her. Turn to her for help with humble trust, especially in moments of trial. And you, Mary, watch over these children of yours, lead them to Christ, "the Glory of Israel, the Light of the peoples". *Virgo Virginum, Mater Salvatoris, ora pro nobis!*