



- Bro. Jayabalan SG,

Consecrated Life – An Exclusive Faith Response to God

“Lord, give our sisters, brothers and Priests in consecrated life, whom you have chosen from our families, the light to know their vocation deeply, the strength to respond to it generously and the love to live it faithfully – Amen.”

Faith is a loving response to God’s revelation. Consecrated life in itself is a faith response to the call of God. In John Ch. 15, Jesus says, “I have chosen you; you have not chosen me.” This call of God does not demand an obligatory response from the called. It is a free choice, in which God takes the initiation to closer relationship. It is a call for dialogue with God and the first step towards the encounter with Him in a faith relationship. The call to consecrated life, as a revelation of God is two-fold, God revealing Himself and through that revelation facilitates the revelation of self. In any relationship, the knowledge of each other enhances the closeness and mutuality. The knowledge of God, the perfect one doesn’t end in gaining of the knowledge itself but further leads us to action. It engulfs and absorbs the person into the ultimate.

When the consecrated life is said to be a call of faith, it certainly obliges permanent and committed response. No wonder that the Religious congregations have perpetual vows which acts as an enduring seal of God (Not imposed but a seal marked as a sign of Love) for an exclusive relationship. The faith response of human person is concretised in the self-giving which is actualised in the religious vows with a special focus on the commitment to God, His people and service to the flock. Self-giving is not self-extinction but the Self-Denial that Jesus speaks of... an attempt, where one doesn’t stop with the self but transcends oneself to love others. Further, this love is an action-oriented Love that James speaks of in his epistle. The circle of such love must have two characteristics a) Multiplicity: Love that spreads to many irrespective of the packages that human beings carry and not limiting to one or a few and b) Dynamicity: The circle which is ever accommodative of anyone.

Often consecrated life is considered to be a life based on deontological or teleological models that fundamental theology speaks about. However, consecrated life is not a life based on duties. It is a deliberate choice and thus makes our call not one of the commitments to rules, regulations and duties. Further, it is not a call to labour or bring a change in the world. In simple terms, we are not hired workers or social reformers. Our call must be based on the relational model in which every act of ours depends on the relationship with God and His people, further reminding us of our responsibility towards the same, besides our commitment to the nature, that Pope speaks in recent encyclical, “*Laudato si.*” The commitment is never for any particular human being but for the whole humanity. In simple terms, in religious life, one doesn’t belong to any particular person and

no one in return belongs to that person. It must also be noted that in married life, commitment plays a vital role demanding the persons to belong to each other, first of all.

An undeniable truth that faith stresses out in vocation is that it is exclusively a gift of God, beyond human doubts and questions. Thus, often the question on the purpose of vocation remains unanswerable and the search for meaning in the consecrated life ends in dissatisfaction, though we often tend to attribute a number of meanings to our Vocation. We don't and can't fully know what it is. However, the consolation is that it is (true) and it's initiated by God, the will of God being fulfilled in human life.

Like faith crisis that we have heard of, another often-heard experience in the consecrated life is the vocation crisis. Sometimes, even a small problem can disturb persons and tip to question one's vocation. Questioning one's vocation and thinking about it more, is in itself a strengthening experience as it helps the person in owning the gift that God gives. If there's no problem in our vocation, it is not a vocation at all because our vocation is not a response once and for all but dynamic response that needs to be constantly renewed and refreshes. When a person undergoes faith crisis, the best response is to fall back on God in faith. Similarly, vocation crisis also asks us to fall back on God, relishing the gift He has given us.

The faith of Jesus is the beacon for living the consecrated life in joy and in its fullness. His faith is compatible with his self-awareness as being the SON OF GOD. He entrusts Himself to the Divine Father throughout his life, lives in deep communion with Him, seeks His will and goes out to fulfil it. This serves as a model for us to live a consecrated life, understanding the life we are called to, though not in its fullness. Finally, faith stands as a backing for our consecrated life knitted well into religious life. Faith is not a separate entity to be understood just in terms of Dogmas and professing it vocally. It becomes complete in its action, that is, when it transcends itself into action. Let's live our call to the consecrated life ever led by faith that will help us in knowing our vocation deeply, giving us the strength to respond to it generously and stimulating the love in, to live our response of faith joyfully.

Prayer : Our Father and Mother in Heaven, thank you for your call, we have received to be sisters and brothers in Christ. Hallowed be your name and may we not work for hallowing our own names. May the Spirit of John the Baptist be upon us saying, "Must I decrease and God increase in my life." May your kingdom come and May we be the instruments of Justice, equality and peace. Your will be done in our lives as well we help others to discern and discover your will and realise heaven concretely here and now. Give us today our daily bread, the bread of your presence that quenches our spiritual thirst and may we be rooted in our relationship with you. Forgive us our sins as we forgive each other and those who have spoken ill of us and spread rumours about us. Save us from falling into temptations and sins. Keep us aware of the vain way of living and protect us from pride. Deliver us from all the evils of groupism, mediocrity and power-mindedness. Help us to practice what we preach others. Amen.