

*Mass of Thanksgiving for Celebration of the Consecrated Life
at Blessed John Duns Scotus on 9th February 2011*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am delighted to have the opportunity of concelebrating this Mass with you this evening here at the Church of Blessed John Duns Scotus, himself a Religious, one of the sainted members of the Franciscan family and particularly dear to us as a Scot born at Duns in the lowlands of Scotland.

As you know, he was a distinguished theologian and there is a tenderness about his theology which we could say has been a distinguishing mark of Franciscan spirituality. There are those among you who as Religious men and women seek to reflect the Franciscan spirit in your pastoral and educational service of the Archdiocese.

There are thirty-two Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life presently serving within this Archdiocese, whose historical origins range from the early mediaeval period to the period of the reform of the Church around the time of the Council of Trent, and subsequently extending through that long period between that Council of the sixteenth century and that of the First Vatican Council in the nineteenth. We have Religious Institutes represented which grew up at the time of the French Revolution, with the subsequent need for the catechising of children, for the training of teachers and for education at all levels.

We have in our midst also those Institutes of Consecrated Life whose specific charisms were in the revitalising of the spiritual lives of the faithful through devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Among us also are those Missionary Societies which in the wake of trade and conquest entered hitherto closed societies ensuring the spread of the Gospel to every part of the world. In even more recent times new Institutes, responsive to changing cultural trends and new ways of communicating the Gospel, have made the infiltration of society through engagement in the professions, and by the use of modern means of communication, their particular charism.

Here also are represented those who have been termed *The New Movements*, which are marked by the way in which Priests, Religious and lay people are engaged together in evangelising a culture from within. If their members are active within the world, as we describe it, there are those communities among us which continue to be faithful to that detachment from society which enables them to pursue the contemplative life and to be powerhouses of prayer for the support of all.

When St Therese of the Child Jesus was spiritually agitated by wanting to understand fully her vocation as a Carmelite nun, she found an answer in Saint Paul's words about the primacy of charity; and that the love of God and the love of mankind was the heart of every vocation, though it could be expressed in different ways within the Church, from communities dedicated more fully to a daily round of prayer, to those whose prayer enabled them to address in practical ways the needs of the poor - in poverty ranging from physical deprivation through cultural impoverishment to spiritual emptiness, such as we have seen addressed in those Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life which were founded in the seventeenth century and were extended by imitation of the faithful in such Societies as that of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, and many other lay groups which have justice and peace as their banner and the development of peoples as their charitable aim.

The wealth of the Religious families which serve the Church, the variety of their charisms and the effect of their activity are truly remarkable, and

on a day like this, having taken account of them even so briefly, we are inspired to thank God for His graces.

Lest any of you think that you have been missed out, let me describe your variety and service in a different way by thanking all of you who are involved in education; in pastoral work; in the care of the sick and the elderly; in the proclamation of the Gospel; the fostering of devotions and ensuring through the integrity of your professional lives the evangelisation of our culture. I thank all of you in whichever Religious family you have been formed for the prayer you raise at the heart of the Church. Age does not prevent this, but in so many instances can provide an enhanced opportunity for it, as well as the inspiration arising from a serene acceptance of the hardships and disabilities which inevitably come in the passing of the years.

In his homily for this year's Day for Consecrated Life the Holy Father remarked:

"We live today, above all in the most developed societies, within a condition often marked by a radical pluralism, by the progressive marginalisation of religion from the public sphere, and by a relativism that touches fundamental values. This calls for our Christian witness to be luminous and coherent and for our educational efforts to be better attuned and more generous. In particular your apostolic action, dear brothers and sisters, must be a commitment of a life which reaches with perseverance, to that wisdom which is truth and beauty – the 'splendour of the truth.' With the wisdom gained from your own lives and trusting in the inexhaustible riches of an authentic education, direct toward the full life of the Gospel the minds and hearts of the men and women of our own times."

The Holy Father in referring to this orientation has in mind the practice of Lectio Divina. In this connection he said:

"Dear brothers and sisters, be assiduous listeners of the Word, because all wisdom in life is born of the Word of the Lord! Be scrutinizers of the Word, through Lectio Divina, because consecrated life "is itself born from listening to

the Word of God and accepting the Gospel as its norm of life. To follow the chaste, poor and obedient Christ is to provide a living 'exegesis' of the Word of God."

I would like as your Bishop to echo those words of the Holy Father, taking my inspiration from them. Since most of you live in Community then Lectio Divina, which implies togetherness in reading, in reflection, and in prayerful contemplation of the Word of God, is most apt for holding you together as Communities, as well as well as in refreshing your commitment and illuminating your charisms.

The passage chosen from the Gospel for today's Mass provides such an opportunity. However, I will avoid the temptation to convert my homily into a period of Lectio Divina, but I do not resist the temptation to echo Saint Paul's words in our first reading: for they express mine as they express his admiration and thanksgiving for those who in his words "*...are called to take their place among all the saints everywhere who pray to Our Lord Jesus Christ*".

And the words I want to echo are these "*I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways, especially in your teachers and preachers: The witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you, so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for Our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed*".

Today's commemoration is linked to the Feast of the Presentation of our Blessed Lord in the Temple, where Simeon and Anna would seem to express for all of us that confident waiting for Our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed, and whose waiting was so marvellously rewarded with the sight of the Divine Infant carried on the breast of His mother Mary and protected by His foster father, Joseph: "*My eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared for all the nations to see*" exclaimed Simeon, "*A light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel*".

May you, at least from time to time, catch a glimpse of that beauty and have a sense, even passing, of that joy which is the fulfillment of all that you await, and for which you qualify through your generous response to Our Lord's call.