



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Homily: World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life

Bishop Patrick Lynch, Southwark

HOMILY, SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL, 2 FEBRUARY 2015

In his letter to all consecrated people to mark the occasion of the year for consecrated life Pope Francis mentions that he sees the year as an opportunity to do three things;

- To remember the past with gratitude,
- To live the present with passion,
- And to embrace the future with hope.

Here in the Archdiocese of Southwark we are truly grateful for the presence, the charisms and the ministry of so many religious and consecrated persons over many years. Religious congregations of men and especially women have been at the heart of the Diocese since its foundation in 1850. In the 19th century Southwark was the point of arrival for many religious from France, Belgium and then in the years after the famine from Ireland. Communities were established and schools were opened often before the local parish was fully established. In the years between and after World War I and World War II many other congregations especially of sisters established communities and schools in the rapidly expanding Boroughs of South London and Kent. Finally, in more recent years we have been blessed by the arrival of religious from further afield – especially from Asia and Africa. Your presence and ministry has greatly enriched the Archdiocese and you have led the way in educating our young people, caring for our elderly and the sick and serving the poor. Your witness to community life and prayer has been truly outstanding. My first prayer is, therefore, one of deep gratitude for all that you are and all that you have done over many years. You have been a light of hope to many people.

My second prayer is that the Holy Spirit will inspire and sustain you as you continue live your charism today. Your founders and foundresses were prophetic people. They were able to read the signs of the times with great wisdom and able to respond with great courage, compassion and creativity putting service of the poor and the Church at the forefront of all they did. They were – to use a phrase of Pope Francis 'experts in communion and models of contemplation'. My second prayer would be that the Holy Spirit will give you the enthusiasm to continue to prophetically live your charism and 'wake up the world' to God's love and God's presence through the witness of your prayer, through the witness of your community life and through the witness of your love and service to those in need especially the poor.

My third prayer, which coincides with the third aim for the year of consecrated life is that at a time when many congregations are facing the challenge of decreasing numbers you will look to the future with hope. Many of you may not be able to physically carry out the same service you gave when you were younger. Nevertheless, your presence and your prayer will be a source of great support and hope to the local Church here in Southwark. Like Pope Francis, I too encourage young people and young religious to lead the way with their energy and enthusiasm as they seek to faithfully live their charism and seek to be the hope of Christ to those who need it most.

Finally, with Pope Francis, I entrust the year of consecrated life to Mary our model of contemplation, compassion and communion. Her prayer – the Magnificat – sums up how her faith and trust in God shaped everything she did in life. Her faith and trust in God helped her see the hand of God in all that happened. Her faith and trust in God inspired her to make the long journey to visit and reassure her cousin Elisabeth and proclaim God's love for the poor. Finally, her faith and trust in God enabled her to face the future confident that God will always be with her and will always be faithful to His promises.