

World Day for Consecrated Life
February 4, 2007



Homily Notes

Fifth Sunday of the Year
Cycle C

In his book, The Wounded Healer, Henri Nouwen wrote that in order for the Church to flourish and grow there are three roles that ministers of the Church must be attentive to – be they lay, religious, or priests. First, the minister must be an articulator of the human experience when it encounters God. Second, the minister must be a person of compassion. And third, the minister must be a person of prayer, namely a contemplative.

By articulating the spiritual journey with others, ministers can help people to name their own religious experiences; such articulation also helps to break open the Word of God and enables others to assimilate the Word into their lives. Compassion, insisted Nouwen, must become the core and even the nature of ministry. Compassion is born when ministers begin to love, serve, forgive others and be forgiven, just as Jesus loved, served and forgave. Through contemplation, the ministers discover within themselves the voice of the Spirit and a sense of hope, which they can share with others. Ministers also become able to recognize the face of Jesus in others, to make visible what was hidden and to make tangible that which seemed unattainable.

When Jesus called Simon Peter, James, and John to become fishers of men (people) he was, in a very real way calling them to be compassionate contemplatives who could draw others toward God and salvation, by articulating their deepest needs and longings. Just as Jesus serves as a compassionate contemplative, notice how God's saving word becomes central and effective in the gospel. In verse one, we hear "The people pressed on Jesus to hear the word of God..." And

in verse five, Simon Peter says “if you say so” and “at your word I will lower the nets...” And finally in verse ten, Jesus’ call to follow “from now on you will be fishers of men” (people) was addressed to Simon Peter but his partners also heard the word as a call to them and they too left everything and followed.

Today, we celebrate throughout the Church, World Day for Consecrated Life. Hopefully we can each think of at least one religious woman or man sent to us by Jesus to be a compassionate contemplative, to touch our lives in such a way that she or he drew us toward God and salvation. Have you known a religious who helps you to articulate your deepest spiritual needs and longings, someone that caught you up into the net and showed you the face of Jesus, and knowing Jesus has filled your life with meaning and purpose?

(Here the preacher may insert a personal story of someone in consecrated life that touched him or her on a personal level and revealed God’s presence.)

There are countless experiences like this one throughout our Church community. Today is a wonderful opportunity for the Church to reflect and pray in thanksgiving for the gift that consecrated life has been, and continues to be, for the Church. Yet while we stop and reflect on this beautiful gift of the vocation of consecrated life, we must also stop and reflect on the need for more women and men to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The apostles heard Jesus and felt compelled to heed his call to become compassionate contemplatives. Certainly, we must pray for vocations to the consecrated life, and we must also encourage young people to hear the call and to follow Jesus.

Our young people need to know how we value those called by Jesus to become fishers of men (people), and how we yearn for others to be the compassionate contemplatives among us to reveal God’s presence to us. Our homes and faith community must be places where we encourage our people to hear the voice and words of Jesus as did Simon Peter, James, John, and countless others. Hopefully, when the Lord calls and asks whom shall I send, there will be those who respond as eagerly as the prophet Isaiah, “Here I am, send me!”