

Chapter 16

CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY

INTRODUCTION

Nature and Value of Consecration to Virginity

1. The custom of consecrating women to a life of virginity flourished even in the early Church. It led to the formation of a solemn rite constituting the candidate a sacred person, a surpassing sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ. In the rite of consecration the Church reveals its love of virginity, begs God's grace on those who are consecrated, and prays with fervor for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Main Duties of Those Consecrated

2. Those who consecrate their chastity under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit do so for the sake of more fervent love of Christ and of greater freedom in the service of their brothers and sisters.

They are to spend their time in works of penance, in apostolic activity, and in prayer, according to their state in life and spiritual gifts.

To fulfill their duty of prayer, they are strongly advised to celebrate the Liturgy of Hours each day, especially Morning and Evening Office (as well as daily participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass). In this way, by joining their voices to those of Christ the High Priest and of His Church, they will offer unending praise to the Heavenly Father and pray for the salvation of the world.

Those Who May Be Consecrated

3. This consecration may be received by nuns or by women living in the world. In the case of women living in the world it is required:

4. In the case of nuns it is required ...

5. In the case of women living in the world it is required:

a) that they have never married or lived in public or open violation of chastity;

b) that by their age, prudence, and universally approved character they give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbor.

c) that they be admitted to this consecration by the Diocesan bishop who is Ordinary of the place.

It is for the Diocesan bishop to decide on the conditions under which women living in the world are to undertake a life of perpetual virginity.

The Minister of the Rite

7. For the consecration of women living in the world the rite described in Chapter One of this Ritual is to be used.

The rite consists of these parts:

- a) the calling of the candidates;
- b) the homily or address, instructing the candidates and the people on the grace of virginity;
- c) the examination by which the bishop asks the candidates about their readiness to persevere in their intention and to receive the consecration;
- d) the litanies, in which prayer is offered to God the Father and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints is invoked;
- e) the renewal of the intention
- f) the solemn blessing or consecration by which the Church asks our heavenly Father to pour out the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the candidates;
- g) the presentation of the insignia of consecration as outward signs of a spiritual dedication.

MASS FOR THE CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY

8. It is appropriate to use the ritual Mass for the day of consecration to a life of virginity. On a solemnity or a Sunday of Advent, Lent, or the Easter season the Mass of the day is used, but the special formularies for the Eucharistic Prayer and the final blessing may be used.

9. The Liturgy of the Word for the rite of consecration to a life of virginity can be a help in understanding the importance and place of virginity in the Church. Therefore it is lawful, when the Mass for the day of consecration to a life of virginity is not permitted, to take one reading from the special list of readings from this rite. But this may not be done during the Easter Triduum, on the solemnities of Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, or Corpus Christi, or on other solemnities of obligation.

10. White vestments are worn for the ritual Mass for the day of consecration.

OUTLINE OF THE RITE

Introductory Rites

Liturgy of the Word

Consecration

Calling of the Candidates

Homily

Examination

Invitation to Prayer

Litany of the Saints

Renewal of Intention

Prayer of Consecration

Presentation of the Insignia of Consecration

[Presentation of the Liturgy of the Hours]

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Concluding Rite

Solemn Blessing

A. CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY FOR WOMEN LIVING IN THE WORLD

Introduction

- 1 It is appropriate for the rite of consecration to take place during the octave of Easter, on solemnities, especially those which celebrate the incarnation, on Sundays, or on feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of holy virgins.
- 2 On a day scheduled close to the day of the rite of consecration, or at least on the day before the consecration, the candidates are presented to the bishop, so that the father of the diocese may begin a pastoral dialogue with his spiritual daughters.
- 3 It is at the discretion of the bishop and by his authority that women living in the world are admitted to this consecration, and often they take part in the good works of the diocese. It is therefore fitting that the rite of consecration should take place in the cathedral, unless local circumstances or custom suggest otherwise.
- 4 As occasion offers, and especially to promote an esteem for chastity, to deepen understanding of the Church, and to encourage a greater attendance of the people, the faithful should be notified of the celebration in good time.
- 5 The Mass of the day or the ritual Mass for the day of consecration is celebrated, in accordance with the rubrics (see Introduction, nos. 8-10, p. 285).
- 6 The consecration ordinarily takes place at the chair. To enable the faithful to take part more easily, the bishop's chair may be placed in front of the altar. Seats for the candidates should be so arranged in the sanctuary that the faithful may have a complete view of the liturgical rites.
- 7 For the Eucharistic celebration enough bread and wine should be prepared for the ministers, the candidates, their parents, relatives, and friends. If only one chalice is used, it should be sufficiently large.
- 8 In addition to what is needed for the celebration of Mass, there should be ready: a) the Roman Pontifical; b) veils, rings, or other insignia of bridal consecration to be presented in accordance with local rules or approved customs.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

Introductory Rites

- 9 When the people are assembled and everything is ready, the procession moves through the church to the altar in the usual way, while the choir and people sing the entrance song of the Mass. The candidates may join in the procession.
- 10 It is appropriate for two women -- either consecrated themselves or chosen from the laity -- to accompany the candidates to the altar.
- 11 When they come to the sanctuary, all make the customary reverence to the altar. The candidates go to their places in the body of the church and Mass continues.

Liturgy of the Word

- 12 The liturgy of the word takes place as usual, except for the following:
 - a) the readings may be taken from the Mass of the day or from the texts listed in the appendix, p. 344 (see Introduction, nos. 8-9, p. 285);
 - b) the profession of faith is not said, even if prescribed by the rubrics of the day;
 - c) the general intercessions are omitted, since they are included in the litany.

Consecration

CALLING OF THE CANDIDATES

- 13 After the gospel, if the consecration takes place in front of the altar, the bishop goes to the chair prepared for him and sits.

1

If candles are used, the choir sings the following antiphon:

**Be wise: make ready your lamps.
Behold, the Bridegroom comes;
go out to meet him.**

Any other appropriate song may be sung.

The candidates then light their lamps or candles and, accompanied by the two women

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

mentioned above (see no. 10, p. 290), approach the sanctuary and stand outside it.

■ Then the bishop calls the candidates; he sings or says aloud:

14

**Come, listen to me, my children;
I will teach you reverence for the Lord.**

The candidates reply by singing this antiphon or some other appropriate song:

**Now with all our hearts we follow you,
we reverence you and seek your presence.
Lord, fulfill our hope:
show us your loving kindness,
the greatness of your mercy.**

As they sing the antiphon, the candidates enter the sanctuary and take up their positions so that everyone may have a complete view of the liturgical rites. They place their candles in a candelabrum, or give them to the ministers until they are returned at the end of Mass. They then sit in the places prepared for them.

Or:

2

15 When candles are not used.

[138] The deacon calls each of the candidates by name. Each candidate, on hearing her name, rises and replies: **Lord, you have called me.** The candidate may make some other suitable reply. Then she goes to the sanctuary and stands outside it.

■ After the calling of the candidates, the bishop invites them in these or similar words:

[139]

**Come, daughters,
that through me, his servant,
the Lord may consecrate
the resolution you have formed in your hearts.**

The candidates reply by singing this antiphon or some other appropriate song:

**Now with all our hearts we follow you,
we reverence you and seek your presence.
Lord, fulfill our hope:**

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

**show us your loving kindness,
the greatness of your mercy.**

As they sing the antiphon, the candidates enter the sanctuary, accompanied by the two women mentioned above (see no. 10, p. 290), and take up their positions so that everyone may have a complete view of the liturgical rites. They then sit in the places prepared for them.

HOMILY

- The bishop then gives a short homily to the candidates and the people on the gift of virginity and its role in the sanctification of those called to virginity and the welfare of the whole Church. He does so in these or similar words:

16

Dear brothers and sisters, today the Church consecrates these candidates to a life of virginity. They come from God's holy people, from your own families. They are your daughters, your sisters, your relatives, joined by the ties of family or friendship.

God has called them to be more closely united to himself and to be dedicated to the service of the Church and of mankind. Their consecration is a call to greater fervor in spreading the kingdom of God and in giving to the world the spirit of Christ. Think of the good they will accomplish by their prayers and good works, and the abundant blessings they will obtain from God for holy Church, for human society, and for your families.

He then addresses the candidates:

And now we speak to you, dear daughters. Our words are not words of command but encouragement from the heart. The life you seek to follow has its home in heaven. God himself is its source. It is he, infinitely pure and holy, who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom he gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all-holy God.

When the fullness of time had come, the almighty Father showed, in the mystery of the incarnation, his love for this great virtue. In the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word was made flesh, in a marriage covenant uniting two natures, human and divine.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

Our Lord himself taught us the high calling of such a life, consecrated to God and chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. By his whole life, and especially by his labors, his preaching, and, above all, by his paschal mystery, he brought his Church into being. He desired it to be a virgin, a bride, and a mother: a virgin, to keep the faith whole and entire; a bride, to be one with him for ever; and a mother, to raise up the family of the Church.

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, through baptism has already made you temples of God's glory and children of the Father. Today through our ministry he anoints you with a new grace and consecrates you to God by a new title. He gives each one of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ and binds you to the Son of God in a covenant to last for ever.

The Church is the bride of Christ. This title of the Church was given by the fathers and doctors of the Church to those like you who speak to us of the world to come, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage. You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church.

Make your whole life reflect your vocation and your dignity. Our holy mother the Church sees in you a chosen company within the flock of Christ. Through you the Church's motherhood of grace bears its abundant fruit. Imitate the mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord. Preserve the fullness of your faith, the steadfastness of your hope, the single-heartedness of your love. Be prudent and watch: keep the glory of your virginity uncorrupted by pride. Nourish your love of God by feeding on the body of Christ; strengthen it by self-denial; build it up by study of the Scriptures, by untiring prayer, by works of mercy. Let your thoughts be on the things of God. Let your life be hidden with Christ in God. Make it your concern to pray fervently for the spread of the Christian faith and for the unity of all Christians. Pray earnestly to God for the welfare of the married. Remember also those who have forgotten their Father's goodness and have abandoned his love, so that God's mercy may forgive where his justice must condemn.

Never forget that you are given over entirely to the service of the Church and of all your brothers and sisters. You are apostles in the Church and in the world, in the things of the Spirit and in the things of the world. Let your light then shine before men and women, that your Father in heaven may be glorified, and

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

his plan of making all things one in Christ come to perfection. Love everyone, especially those in need. Help the poor, care for the weak, teach the ignorant, protect the young, minister to the old, bring strength and comfort to widows and all in adversity.

You have renounced marriage for the sake of Christ. Your motherhood will be a motherhood of the spirit, as you do the will of your Father and work with others in a spirit of charity, so that a great family of children may be born, or reborn, to the life of grace.

Your joy and your crown, even here on earth, will be Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will call you to his presence and into his kingdom, where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever he leads you.

EXAMINATION

- **After the homily the candidates stand and the bishop questions them in these or similar words:**

17

Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of virginity and in the service of God and his Church?

Together, all the candidates answer:

I am.

- **Bishop:**

Are you so resolved to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel that your whole life may be a faithful witness to God's love and a convincing sign of the kingdom of heaven?

Candidates:

I am.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

■ **Bishop:**

Are you resolved to accept solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Candidates:

I am.

■ **Bishop and all present:**

Thanks be to God.

INVITATION TO PRAYER

■ Then all stand, and the bishop, without his miter, invites the people to pray:

18

Dearly beloved, let us pray to God the almighty Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that, by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, he will pour out the Holy Spirit of his love on these servants of his whom he has chosen to be consecrated to his service.

19 **Deacon (except during the Easter season):**

Let us kneel.

LITANY OF THE SAINTS

Then the bishop, the ministers, the candidates, and the people kneel (except during the Easter season, when all stand). Where it is customary for the candidates to prostrate themselves, this may be done.

20 The cantors then sing the litany (appendix, p. 358). At the proper place they may add the names of other saints who are specially venerated by the people, or petitions suitable to the occasion.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

- Then the bishop alone rises and, with hands joined, sings or says:
21

**Lord,
hear the prayers of your Church.
Look with favor on your handmaids
whom you have called in your love.
Set them on the way of eternal salvation;
may they seek only what is pleasing to you,
and fulfill it with watchful care.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.**

All:

Amen.

Deacon:

Let us stand.

All stand.

RENEWAL OF INTENTION

1

- 22 Then, if it seems suitable, the candidates offer themselves to God at the hands of the bishop. This may be done, for example, in the following way: the candidates come one by one before the bishop. Each one kneels, places her joined hands between his hands and says:

Father, receive my resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, I here profess before you and God's holy people.

If there are many candidates, the bishop may allow all to remain kneeling in their places and to say together:

Father, receive our resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, we here profess before you and God's holy people.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

Or:

2

23 Another suitable rite, in accordance with local custom, may be substituted.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

- After the renewal of intention, the candidates return to their places in the sanctuary and kneel. The bishop extends his hands over them, and sings or says the prayer of consecration. The words in brackets may be omitted.

24

**Loving Father,
chaste bodies are your temple;
you delight in sinless hearts.
Our nature was corrupted
when the devil deceived our first parents,
but you have restored it in Christ.
He is your Word, through whom all things were made.
He has made our nature whole again,
and made it possible for mortal people to reflect the life of angels.**

**Lord,
look with favor on your handmaids.
They place in your hands their resolve to live in chastity.
You inspire them to take this vow;
now they give you their hearts.
[Only you can kindle this flame of love, and feed its brightness,
giving strength and perseverance to our will.
Without you our flesh is weak,
bound by the law of nature,
free with false freedom,
imprisoned by habit,
softened by the spirit of the age.]**

**You have poured out your grace upon all peoples.
You have adopted as heirs of the new covenant
sons and daughters from every nation under heaven,**

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

countless as the stars.
Your children are born, not of human birth,
nor of man's desire,
but of your Spirit.
Among your many gifts
you give to some the grace of virginity.
Yet the honor of marriage is in no way lessened.
As it was in the beginning,
your first blessing still remains upon this holy union.
Yet your loving wisdom chooses those
who make sacrifice of marriage
for the sake of the love of which it is the sign.
They renounce the joys of human marriage,
but cherish all that it foreshadows.

[Those who choose chastity have looked upon the face of Christ,
its origin and inspiration.
They give themselves wholly to Christ,
the Son of the ever-virgin Mary,
and the heavenly Bridegroom of those
who in his honor dedicate themselves to lasting virginity.]

Lord,
protect those who seek your help.
They desire to be strengthened by your blessing and consecration.
Defend them from the cunning and deceit of the enemy.
Keep them vigilant and on their guard;
may nothing tarnish the glory of perfect virginity,
or the vocation of purity which is shared by those who are married.

Through the gift of your Spirit, Lord,
give them modesty with right judgment,
kindness with true wisdom,
gentleness with strength of character,
freedom with the grace of chastity.
Give them the warmth of love,
to love you above all others.
Make their lives deserve our praise,

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

**without seeking to be praised.
May they give you glory
by holiness of action and purity of heart.
May they love you and fear you;
may they love you and serve you.**

**Be yourself their glory, their joy, their whole desire.
Be their comfort in sorrow,
their wisdom in perplexity,
their protection in the midst of injustice,
their patience in adversity,
their riches in poverty,
their food in fasting,
their remedy in time of sickness.**

**They have chosen you above all things;
may they find all things in possessing you.**

**We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

All:

Amen.

PRESENTATION OF THE INSIGNIA OF CONSECRATION

One of the following forms is used.

1

- After the prayer of consecration, the bishop and the people sit. The newly consecrated stand and, accompanied by the two consecrated or lay women mentioned above, come before the bishop. He says once for all of them:

25

If the veil is given:

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

**Dearest daughters,
receive the veil and the ring
that are the insignia of your consecration.
Keep unstained your fidelity to your Bridegroom,
and never forget that you are bound
to the service of Christ and of his body, the Church.**

They all reply together:

Amen.

26 Or, if the veil is not given:

**Receive the ring
that marks you as a bride of Christ.
Keep unstained your fidelity to your Bridegroom,
that you may one day be admitted to the wedding feast of everlasting joy.**

They all reply together:

Amen.

27 While the newly consecrated kneel, the bishop gives the ring to each one and, if customary, the veil and other insignia of consecration. Meanwhile, the choir and the people may sing the following antiphon with Psalm 45.

**To you, O Lord, I lift my soul;
come and rescue me, for you are my refuge and my strength.**

The antiphon is repeated after every two verses. **Glory to the Father** is not said. The psalm is interrupted and the antiphon repeated when the presentation of the insignia is completed.

Any other appropriate song may be sung.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

PRESENTATION OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

- Then, if it seems appropriate, the bishop gives the newly consecrated the book containing the prayer of the Church, saying these or similar words:

28

**Receive the book of the liturgy of the hours,
the prayer of the Church;
may the praise of our heavenly Father
be always on your lips;
pray without ceasing
for the salvation of the whole world.**

All reply together:

Amen.

The newly consecrated come before the bishop, who gives each a copy of the liturgy of the hours. After receiving it, they return to their places and remain standing.

- 29 Then, if appropriate, this or some other suitable antiphon is sung.

**I am espoused to him whom the angels serve;
sun and moon stand in wonder at his glory.**

If possible, all those newly consecrated sing the antiphon together; otherwise the choir sings it.

Or:

2

- (For the giving of the veil. The rite is omitted if those consecrated have already received the veil canonically.) After the prayer of consecration the bishop and the people sit. The newly consecrated stand and, accompanied by the consecrated or lay women mentioned above, come before the bishop. He gives the veil to each one, saying:

[151]

**Receive this veil,
by which you are to show
that you have been chosen from other women
to be dedicated to the service of Christ**

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

and of his body, which is the Church.

Each one replies:

Amen.

After receiving the veil each one returns to her place and remains standing. When all have received their veils, they sing the antiphon:

**I will raise my mind and heart to you, O Lord,
that I may be holy in body and in spirit.**

The choir may begin the antiphon after the veil has been given to the first or second one. It may be repeated after one or more verses of a suitable psalm or canticle.

- (For the giving of the ring.) When all have received the veil, the rings are given in the following way: those consecrated come before the bishop in the same order as before. Then he gives each one her ring, saying:

[152]

**Receive the ring
that marks you as a bride of Christ.
Keep unstained your fidelity to your Bridegroom,
that you may one day be admitted to the wedding feast of everlasting joy.**

Each one replies:

Amen.

PRESENTATION OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

- Then, if it seems appropriate, the bishop gives the newly consecrated the book containing the prayer of the Church, saying these or similar words:

[153]

**Receive the book of the liturgy of the hours,
the prayer of the Church;
may the praise of our heavenly Father
be always on your lips;
pray without ceasing**

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

for the salvation of the world.

Each replies:

Amen.

Each returns to her place.

After all have received the insignia of profession, those consecrated sing the antiphon:

[154]

**I am espoused to him whom the angels serve;
sun and moon stand in wonder at his glory.**

If appropriate the choir may sing the antiphon after the ring has been given to the first or second person. It may be repeated after one or more verses of a suitable psalm or canticle.

31 After this the newly consecrated return to their places in the sanctuary and the Mass continues.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

32 During the preparation of the gifts, some of the newly consecrated may bring to the altar the bread, wine, and water for the eucharistic sacrifice.

33 In the eucharistic prayer the offering of those newly consecrated may be mentioned (see Ritual Masses, Consecration to a Life of Virginity).

34 After **The peace of the Lord be always with you**, the bishop gives an appropriate sign of peace to those newly consecrated.

35 After the bishop has received the body and blood of Christ, the newly consecrated come to the altar to receive communion under both kinds.

Their parents, relatives, and friends may also receive communion under both kinds.

Concluding Rite

SOLEMN BLESSING

- When the prayer after communion has been said, those newly consecrated stand before the altar. The bishop faces them and sings or says one of the following:

36

1

**The almighty Father
has poured into your hearts
the desire to live a life of holy virginity.
May he keep you safe under his protection.**

R. Amen.

**May the Lord Jesus Christ,
with whose sacred heart
the hearts of virgins are united,
fill you with his divine love.**

R. Amen.

**May the Holy Spirit,
by whom the Virgin Mary conceived her Son,
today consecrate your hearts
and fill you with a burning desire
to serve God and his Church.**

R. Amen.

Finally he blesses the whole congregation:

**May almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit,
bless all of you who have taken part in this celebration.**

R. Amen.

A. CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD

Or:

2

[155,156]

**God inspires all holy desires and brings them to fulfillment.
May he protect you always by his grace
so that you may fulfill the duties of your vocation
with a faithful heart.**

R. Amen.

**May he make each of you a witness
and sign of his love for all people.**

R. Amen.

**May he make those bonds
with which he has bound you to Christ on earth
endure for ever in heavenly love.**

R. Amen.

Finally he blesses the whole congregation:

**May almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit,
bless all of you who have taken part in this celebration.**

R. Amen.

38 *After the blessing by the bishop, the newly consecrated may take their candles. The choir and the people sing an appropriate song or a canticle of praise, and the procession is formed as at the beginning.*