

*The following reflection was prepared by Sr. Margaret McPeak, D.W. on the occasion of her 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Celebration, in a mass celebrated at St. James Church in Setauket, NY.*

Early in the year 2014 Pope Francis sent an Apostolic Letter (!) to all the consecrated women and men throughout the world - on every continent - announcing that there was to be a year dedicated to Consecrated life. The year began on the first Sunday of Advent 2014 and is to end on Feb. 2nd 2016, the feast of the Presentation of Jesus. The choice of dates was made deliberately to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which has a section on religious life and also the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life.

I found it interesting that this call for the renewal of religious comes on the heels of the apostolic visitation - read investigation - of religious women in the U.S., the results of which have recently been released to our favor. One headline I saw read "Vatican ends visitation with praise for the Sisters." Was it this investigation that prompted Pope Francis to call women and men religious into a kind of self-evaluation? But there is continuing suspicion of the faith integrity of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious which represents the vast number of religious women in the U.S. Or in the larger scheme of things is it that now is the time? And then I must remember that this letter was sent to all consecrated women and men across the globe, religious "called to follow Jesus." He uses the words of St. John Paul II "you have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even better things." to strengthen his proposal of a good idea.

How to describe this year! I think the best way is to liken it to a refresher course. It's not a sabbatical. Pope Francis doesn't want all of us to take a leave of absence. Rather he wants each consecrated woman and man to make time in what for most is a very busy schedule, take time to reflect on who they are and what moves them to do what they are doing.

In this letter, Pope Francis set forth definite aims to accomplish this. The first that he proposes is that we look at the past with gratitude/ On whose shoulders are we walking today? What is our history that makes us want to bring vigorous and joyful witness before the world to the holiness and vitality of consecrated life?

He goes on to express his desire that religious women and men wake up the world, continue, really, to wake up the world by living, the prophetic life to which we are called which is our ability to scrutinize the times in which we live so to create the atmosphere of the Gospel, that of endless compassion and self-giving.

Pope Francis is also encouraging us to dig deeper into the Gospels, to fully embrace them; what do they tell us about Jesus what were his priorities, how did he treat people, what did he teach, how did he train his disciples to carry on after his death, after he left them to return to his Father. Of course the Holy Spirit was there then as that same Spirit is with us now, to be rediscovered during this year of reflection.

He asks so much from the consecrated men and women who are involved in ministering in so many different parts of our world, with so many different needs, with so many different possibilities or lack of possibilities. It doesn't seem as if one year would cut it. But it's this year's work. Translate that into it's really our life's work, but this year is to be lived with greater intensity and awareness. And because it's important I ask that you pray for us that we enter the work it involves with joyful hearts and determined stamina that the year will be a bonus not only for those of us directly involved but also for you, for the Church who you are. In today's bulletin there is a copy of a prayer for those living a Consecrated life, a prayer you might want to use.

In my lifetime as a religious there have been many changes in your lifetime in life itself which never seems to stand still, -there have been many changes In our convent life, in the forms our ministries had taken it's all different. Many of us left the schools, the hospitals. We wanted to be where the people were as if we weren't already where the people were. But we wanted away from institutions; wanted to be out with the poor, the disenfranchised, the outcasts, those who didn't fit in. And that's where we went. But, so many of us are aging, retiring. And this is where you come in. There is another decree from Vatican II, the decree on the laity. For me the two decrees can't be separated. Our call to service, to holiness is rooted in our baptism. That decree doesn't mention that we religious will be getting old, but it definitely calls on you lay women and men to take your places, with our priests, in building and nourishing the Church, the people of God. Take a look at what goes on here in our parish, the work that is being done. Fathers Bob and Daniel are good. They sure couldn't do it alone. They know what's needed, what's going on but they depend on you to help carry it out. When I finally retire, after two previous retirements all here, there may be no religious women or men present in this parish. But that's aside from the consecrated women and men - DW and Montfort Fathers and Brothers buried here in our cemetery- living here - definitely in a different form but none the less here to continue to listen to us and intercede for us. And you, lay men and women, must continue find your place in serving and nourishing the People of God.

Today in this year of spiritual renewal Sr. Marie Immaculata and I are renewing our commitment as DWs. I renew my commitment with the promise to you, my faith community, that with this renewal, in this year of study and reflection I will deepen my understanding of and dedication to the charism embraced by the founders of our religious family, St. Louis Marie

de Montfort and Bl. Marie Louise Trichet, as will Sister Marie Immaculata who is here with me. Sr. is new to our parish. She comes to us from Riverhead where she lived and for 21 years taught at Mercy High School. Sister and I with Daughters of Wisdom throughout the world, in Europe, Africa and Asia; in South America, Haiti, and Canada will embrace the renewal outlined by Pope Francis We make this commitment so that we will be reinforced, to do what the Church is looking for: our going out into our world to serve those experiencing the loss of hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, the sick, those on the fringe financially, to the men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine. Of course I'm using poetic license here. Sr. Marie and I aren't going out anywhere. But we read the papers, periodicals, we listen to the radio, we watch TV -CNN and BBC; we talk to those who are involved in social justice issues. We pray.

As our Provincial Leader, Sr. Cathy Sheehan, receives this renewal of our religious commitment, in the name of our community, the Daughters of Wisdom and of our Church don't ever think that this witness to God's consistent and loving Presence in our world is ours alone, consecrated women and men. Today, in these times, we are all called to "hear the cries for justice that are looking for attention in all parts of our world."

***Margaret Mc Peak, D.W. 2015***