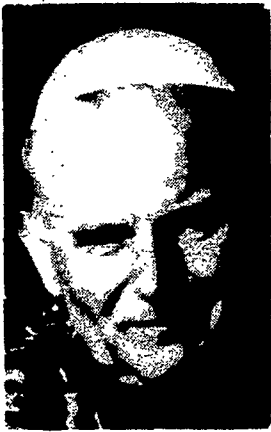


Words to Women Religious

Last month at the shrine of Jasna Gora in Poland, Pope John Paul II delivered the following address to a group of women religious.

Dear Sisters,

I rejoice with all my heart at this meeting, disposed for us by Divine Providence, today at the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Gora. You have come in such great numbers from all over Poland to participate in the pilgrimage of your fellow countryman whom Christ in



his inscrutable mercy has called, as he once called Simon of Bethsaida, and has commanded him to leave his native land to take upon himself the succession of the Bishops of Rome. Since he has now been given the grace to return again to these parts, he wishes to speak to you with the same words that he used in speaking to you more than once as successor of St. Stanislaus of Krakow. Those words now take on a different dimension, a universal dimension.

The theme of religious vocation is one of the most beautiful of which the Gospel has spoken and continues to speak to us. The theme was given a particular incarnation in Mary, who said of herself: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." I think that these words have been echoed in the depths of the religious vocation and profession of each one of you.

While this opportunity to speak to you is being presented to me today, the splendid chapters of the Church's teaching in the last council come to my mind, as do the very numerous documents of the last popes.

I would like however, on the basis of all this wealth of teaching by the Church, to refer to some modest statements made by myself. I do so because these statements were echoes of my very numerous past meetings with religious in Poland. These meetings, as a "resource" of my personal experience, went with me to Rome. It will therefore be perhaps easier for you to find yourselves in those words, for, in spite of having been addressed in other surroundings, they speak in a way of you — of the Polish Sisters and of the Polish religious families.

Soon after my new ministry began I had the good fortune to meet almost 20,000 sisters from the whole of Rome. Here is a part of the talk that I gave them on that occasion:

Your vocation is a special treasure of the Church which can never cease to pray that the Spirit of Jesus Christ will bring forth religious vocations in souls. They are, in fact, both for the community of the People of God, and for the world, a living sign of the future life: a sign which is at the same time rooted (also by means of your religious habit) in the everyday life of the Church and of society, and permeates its most delicate tissues.

Your presence must be a visible sign of the Gospel for all. It must also be the source of a particular apostolate. This apostolate is so varied and rich that it is even difficult for me to list here all its forms, its fields, its orientations. It is united with the specific charism of every Congregation, with its apostolic spirit, which the Church and the Holy See approve with joy, seeing in it the expression of the vitality of the Mystical Body of Christ! This apostolate is usually discreet, hidden, near to the human being, and so is more suited to a woman's soul, sensitive to her neighbor and hence called to the task of a sister and mother.

It is precisely this vocation which is at the very heart of your religious being. As Bishop of Rome I beg you: be spiritually mothers and sisters for all the people of this Church which Jesus, in his ineffable mercy and grace, has wished to entrust to me.

Last November I had the occasion to meet the large group of Superiors General assembled in Rome under the leadership of the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. I would like to repeat some phrases from the address I gave on that occasion.

The religious vocation belongs to that spiritual fullness which the Spirit himself, the Spirit of Christ, brings forth and molds in the People of God. Without religious orders, without consecrated life, by means of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the Church would not be fully herself. Your houses must be, above all, centers of prayer, meditation and dialogue — personal and of the whole community — with him who is and must remain the first and principal interlocutor in the industrious succession of your days.

If you are able to nourish this climate of intense and loving community with God, it will be possible for you to carry forward without traumatic tensions or dangerous confusion, that renewal of life and discipline, to which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council committed you.

Finally, Mexico. The meeting I had in that country's capital remains indelibly inscribed in my memory and my heart. It could not be otherwise, since Sisters

always create in these meetings a particularly cordial atmosphere and receive with joy the words spoken to them. Here then are some thoughts from the meeting in Mexico.

Your vocation is one that deserves the highest esteem on the part of the pope and of the Church, today, no less than yesterday. For this reason I wish to express my joyful confidence in you and to encourage you not to lose heart on the way that you have undertaken, and which is worth continuing on with fresh spirit and enthusiasm. What a lot you can do today for the Church and for humanity! They are waiting for your generous gift, the giving of your free hearts, so that your hearts may broaden their unsuspected potentialities for love in a world that is losing the capacity for altruism, for self-sacrificing and disinterested love. Remember in fact that you are mystical brides of Christ and of Christ crucified.

Now let my thoughts and yours turn once again in this place to Our Lady of Jasna Gora, who is the source of living inspiration for each one of you. Let each one of you as she hears the words spoken at Nazareth, repeat with Mary: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." These words contain in a way the prototype of every religious profession by which each one of you embraces with her whole being the mystery of the grace transmitted to her in religious vocation. Each one of you, like Mary, chooses Jesus, the Divine Spouse. By fulfilling her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, she wishes to live for him, for love of him. Through these vows each of you wishes to give witness to the eternal life that Christ has brought us in his Cross and Resurrection.

Dear Sisters, this living sign that each one of you constitutes in the midst of humanity is beyond price. Embracing with faith, hope and charity your Divine Spouse, you embrace him in the many people you serve: in the sick, the old, the crippled, the handicapped, people of whom nobody is capable of taking care, because this demands a truly heroic sacrifice. Where else do you find Christ? In the children, in young people receiving catechetical instruction, in pastoral service with the priests. You will find him in the simplest service as well as in the tasks that at times demand deep preparation and culture. You will find him everywhere, like the bride of the Song of Solomon: "I found him whom my soul loves."

May Poland ever rejoice in your evangelical witness. Let there be no want of warm hearts that bring evangelical love to their neighbor. As for you, rejoice always with the joy of your vocation, even when you will have to endure inward or outward suffering or darkness.

Religious Leaders: Turn Sacrifice To Moral Benefit

New York (RNS) — An ad hoc coalition of religious leaders has urged Americans to "turn the necessity for sacrifice to our own moral benefit and the attainment of justice throughout the world."

In a joint statement issued the morning after President Carter's televised address on the energy crisis and the crisis of confidence in the nation, they declared that "inevitably, there will be public debate on the specific proposals which the President has set forth. But all Americans, as a part of God's human family, have a duty in charity and in justice to join hands in meeting this crisis squarely."

"Despite stern features," the statement said, "there is nothing tragic about the changes which the crisis presents. On the contrary, it poses a challenge that could have a profoundly bracing effect on the national character."

Stressing that the burden must be borne fairly by all, the religious leaders commented that "given the structure of our society, there is always the danger that the rich and

comfortable will go on their way undisturbed, while the poor, the disadvantaged, the politically weak will suffer cutbacks in the very necessities of life.

"In responding to the present crisis, it is imperative that we ensure that our national programs and policies and the sacrifices which they will entail will be just. We must never lose sight of the needs of the poor, the jobless and the more vulnerable members of our society."

The religious leaders pledged to take steps to reduce energy consumption in their institutions, set a good example by adopting simpler means of living, seek to formulate programs of energy assistance for the poor, elderly and disabled, and work to develop programs of education and spiritual formation to focus on "the moral issues underlying the present crisis."

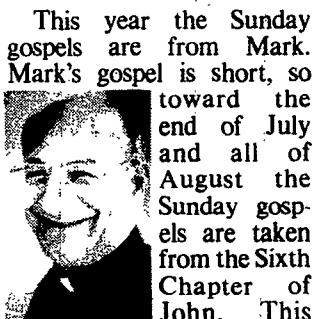
The joint statement was endorsed by some 35 religious leaders, including Cardinal Terence Cooke, as a representative of the U.S. bishops.

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

The Faith Is Our Greatest Inheritance

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 6:24-35. (R1) Ex. 16:2-4, 12, 15. (R2) Eph. 4:17, 20-24.



This year the Sunday gospels are from Mark. Mark's gospel is short, so toward the end of July and all of August the Sunday gospels are taken from the Sixth Chapter of John. This Fr. Shamon chapter is eucharistic. Last Sunday (July 29) the readings spoke of miracle stories about bread; this Sunday they treat of the manna miracle.

The Eucharist is the mystery of faith. The first reading sets forth the great faith of Moses. Did you ever stop to think what wonderful faith he must have had to lead an army of people into a desert? He knew firsthand, from 40

years of experience, that nothing short of a miracle — in fact, a series of daily miracles — could meet the needs of so vast a throng in a desert. Yet so great was Moses' faith in God that he did just this (as God had commanded).

In shocking contrast to this great faith, we see the pitiable faithlessness of God's people. They had been the recipients of God's miracles in Egypt, had witnessed the incredible crossing of the Red Sea, the daily Pillar of Cloud and Fire — yet the shadow of a problem caused them to grumble, complain, rebel. Not just a few, but the entire Israelite community. Grumbling, not just to themselves but against their divinely appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron. Devoid of faith, they became victims of imagination, daydreamers. They talked of pots full of meat and stomachs full of bread. When did merciless Egypt ever permit her slaves to sit by fleshpots and eat their fill of bread? Cowards — craving the security of slavery to the responsibility of freedom.

And what was God's response to these faithless liars? "I will rain down bread from heaven for you," so that they might have what they never had had in Egypt — their fill of bread; and "I will send you meat," so that they could actually sit by fleshpots.

From this response of God, we ought to learn that God's gifts are undeserved, are freely given; and that his gifts superabound, are plentifully given — "I will rain..."

The manna is a beautiful type of the nourishment God has provided for us: of the food for our minds, the bread of His inspired word (the Scriptures); and of food for our hearts, the bread of life (His incarnate Word).

The word of God, like the manna, is not the product of man's mind or his genius; it comes down from heaven, the inspiration of God Himself. Thus Scripture is called "sacred," and the Bible "holy." As manna sustained the bodily life of Israel in the desert, so God's word nourishes the spiritual life of him who ponders it with faith and shields him as it did Christ when tempted in the desert!

The manna is also a type

of Jesus Christ. But it typified Him as He gave Himself to us — as our food. Those who ate the manna died; those who eat the bread of life will live forever. The manna was given only to God's people, not to the Egyptians, nor to the Canaanites. Holy Communion is offered only to those baptized into God's people, His Church. The manna was given to a grumbling people, unworthy of it; we cry, "O Lord, I am not worthy to receive you!" The manna was given at night; the Eucharist was instituted when it was dark. The manna was gathered daily, each morning; why not daily communion? The manna was preserved in the Ark; the Eucharist, in the tabernacle. The manna lasted 'til Canaan was reached. Holy Communion is our Viaticum; the food with (cum) you (ti) on the road (via) to the Promised Land.

At each Mass, the Church gives us the hinges on which can swing a healthy and vigorous spiritual life: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. By drinking the milk of God's word daily in faith and by devoutly eating the bread of life daily, we shall infallibly obtain the life and love we need to reach our Promised Land, heaven.

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