

CHOICES

FROM THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS OFFICE OF VOCATIONS

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Why Consecrated Life?



The Vocations Team: (left) Fr. Jim Gallagher, C.S.C., and Fr. Jarrod Waugh, C.S.C.

Consecration and Commitment

Pope Francis called the Church into a Year of Consecrated Life beginning with the start of this past Advent. It is a year meant to bring attention to the great gift of consecrated men and women in the Church as well as to inspire a new generation of men and women to enter into the consecrated life.

One of the defining moments in the life of a Holy Cross priest or brother is when he takes his Final Vows. That is the moment of his complete consecration to God in Christ Jesus through the profession of the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience.

We are drawn to this consecration because we have come to know of God's great love for us. To know and experience the truth of this love has inspired us to strive to make of our lives living images of Christ for the good of the Church and the world. We desire to make the good news known and offer our lives to the effort of making it so.

These vows also unite us together in community. Holy Cross brothers and priests make the very same vows. Our consecration is the same at the level of our religious profession. Priests later receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders in their ordination. Yet, there remains a bond that comes through in our religious profession. Our vows bind us together as religious priests and religious brothers united in our community and in our consecration – united in our commitment to Christ.

In this issue of CHOICES, we offer several reflections on our consecration and commitment. Each reflection takes a look at our life through a different lens, yet each seeks to provide insight into the joy we have found in our consecration and the ways in which this commitment serves the needs of our world.

If you would like to learn more about our life in Holy Cross or if you think that Christ may be inviting you to join us, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

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Poverty: Go to the Flesh of Christ

A reflection by Fr. Kevin Grove, C.S.C.



Most often in the world, we hear inspiring conversations about those who are trying to eliminate poverty. So what good does it do to vow one's life to poverty? To get at that, we need to consider

poverty in two ways, and be very clear what we are talking about.

There is a kind of poverty that is both real and sinful; it diminishes human flourishing. We see it on the streets, in the news, and study it in sociology, culture and government. Taking a vow of poverty does not mean embracing a life that is abject or inhuman, as if a tacit endorsement of something we could all agree is not good in our world.

But what if there were another definition of poverty? This is a theological one, that is, a definition of poverty that has to do with God and our relationship to Him. Poverty is theological "because God, the Son of God, abased Himself, made Himself poor to walk with us on the road. And this is our poverty: the poverty of the flesh of Christ, the poverty that the Son of God brought us with His Incarnation ... If we go to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty is, the poverty of the Lord." That definition is from Pope Francis. The only way that poverty can have meaning is in Christ. Once one practices it in Him, it is transformative for the world.

When we go to the flesh of Christ, we go to someone human like ourselves. He did, after all, come eating and drinking into our world. Christ's poverty did two things. First, Christ put into right relation our desire for the goods of the world - anything we might wish to own and control - and God. He did this in His temptation in the desert by not accepting the tempter's offer to own the kingdoms

of the world at the expense of His relation to God. But Christ's poverty has a second dimension when He explains to those around Him that when they care for the least and the lowly they care for Him. He puts all of us "in Christ," or in His flesh, which means caring for every other part of Him with all that we have and are because we are part of the same. So poverty in Christ shapes us in two ways: It redirects our desire to own and control the world around us; and it also links us in the most demanding and profound way - through Christ - to every person around us.

So, when we commit ourselves - in Christ - to poverty, we are committing ourselves to see every person we meet as part of our own body - caring for, loving, praying for, teaching and blessing them in the way that is worthy of our Head. That's right, our vow of poverty commits us to others at the very root of our being and theirs. It witnesses a whole way of relating to the world.

Our vow of poverty is not for the purpose of living life on the absolute minimum of dollars and cents (misers do that without a vow). There is a deeper part. For instance, when I put on the same color of shirt every day of the week (though my priest shirts are simple, they are not the cheapest shirts I could buy), I am reminding myself and others of a commitment to a life in Christ - one that they have a claim on as other members of His body. Others can approach me and expect my kindness. The homeless can ask for help and expect generosity. Those who have been hurt



"Look into the depths of your heart, look into your own inner depths and ask yourself: do you have a heart that desires something great, or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things?"

Pope Francis, Homily for the opening of the General Chapter of the Order of St. Augustine, Rome August 28, 2013

by the Church can be upset and expect one who will listen. And, I, myself am learning to practice each day that a life in Christ means constantly discovering how to see and love the world through His eyes, His hands, and His heart. Poverty gives that concrete link with the very flesh of Christ. It is the vow that trains us to treat and honor the other members of Christ's body with the dignity they were created to have.

Obedience: Listening for God

A reflection by Fr. Patrick Reidy, C.S.C.



Wait until later. Explore new opportunities. Keep the door open.

(Until you're incapable of deciding at all.)

There's an unspoken rule that guided my accomplishment-driven life in high school: If you work hard enough, study long enough, practice well enough, you can do anything. Of course, anyone who has seen me play basketball knows that the rule didn't hold true for everything; though when it did, it was addicting. I joined every other club and choir and team and troupe because I could. The idea of limitless opportunity fascinated me. I desired it with naïve longing.

That desire continued into my freshman year at Notre Dame. I sought the restless validation of activity, justifying my sleep-deprived pursuit with each recollection that "I only get four years here." Decisions between groups seemed anathema, though deep down, I knew that something was broken. Physical and emotional exhaustion began to accompany my extracurricular existence. I went through the motions of planning meetings and coffee dates without stopping to consider whether any two pieces of my



life fit meaningfully together. I couldn't quit - opportunity had long since paralyzed me from doing so.

That all changed with my University Seminar and the "Worst Assignment Ever Assigned." Our topic was *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky. For nearly two weeks, we savored the impossible richness of each character, weaving our hearts into the language, the setting, the story. Our professor was so inspired by the quality of our reflection that he gave our paper an open prompt: "In 8-10 pages, tell me what you think about this book."

I couldn't do it. I couldn't *begin* to do it. "Tell me what you think?" About the characters that captured my heart? About the scenes that kept me up at night? About the rhetoric that challenged my conviction? There was far too much material to engage in any meaningful way. I burned the better part of one midnight's oil pounding out enough text to cover my page limit, though to no avail. My wandering thoughts were too scattered to touch on how the story moved me. The story was too broad to hear it all well.

I needed more guidance. I needed parameters for engaging the story and the characters involved. I needed someone who had heard the story before to map out the journey of my reflection. I needed practice in the art of hearing stories *well*. And I needed to start with my own.



"Listening
This is the beauty
in being called,
found, touched,
transformed,
in the joy of the
faithful 'yes'"

*Cardinal João Braz
de Aviz, Be Glad, A
letter to consecrated
men and women in
preparation for the
year dedicated to
Consecrated Life*

Obedience found me long before I professed religious vows for the first time. Friends encouraged me to stop and enjoy the sunshine. Priests reminded me that passion matters more than ability. Professors challenged me to consider deeper questions. With each encounter, my heart was given over to listening. Listening for my life. Listening for God.

We need to learn how to hear our own story. The characters, the setting, the plot - we need to understand them as deeply meaningful and revealing of God's love. To be sure, the story of our life and of God's life within us rarely lends itself to the simplicity of "Tell me what you think" reflection. Few stories will. But, with a little guidance, a little practice and a little grace, we can discover in our story the scribbles of Providence: *Come, follow me.*

Celibacy: A Gift of Love

A reflection by Fr. Brian Ching, C.S.C.



It sounds cliché, but our world is one desperately in need of love - the right kind of love. To so many, "love" is merely a response to a perceived benefit. I distinctly remember asking one of our second graders why they were friends with someone and he very honestly replied, "Because he has a swimming pool at his house."

In a world where love is so often misunderstood, celibate chastity stands as an important witness to the love of Christ. Religious who profess the vow of chastity point to the abundance and universality of God's love - a love that finds its fullest expression in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Chastity is a sign in a world of finite love that there is a greater, infinite love in Christ that

is the true fulfillment of our longing. There are so many who seek to find fulfillment in their lives, yet struggle because they look only at the “loves” of this world and not the love of Christ. Whether someone loves a job, or a passion, or even a spouse, those loves cannot fill the deepest longings of our heart if they stand separate from Christ, if they are only focused inwardly and not toward another.

In the foregoing of spousal intimacy, the vow of chastity allows religious to stand as prophetic witnesses of the great love that lies ahead in the world to come and the vow frees us to foreshadow that life by offering our lives in service to the Body of Christ. It is easy to think of the vow of chastity only in terms of what it prohibits us from doing, but when we think of it on those terms alone, we miss the great beauty of the vow. It is not about what the vow prohibits us from doing, it is about what the vow enables us to do - to stand as a sign of Christ's infinite love through our service to the Church.

For me, the vow of chastity helps me keep a proper perspective on our life in ministry. It is a constant reminder for me that the love we are called to offer the world is the love that Christ offers to us, a love that expects nothing in return. There are certainly moments when ministry is taxing and exhausting, and it can be tempting to skip that hospital visit or birthday party. And while it is tempting to focus on the negative aspects of a particular event or encounter, it is precisely at those moments when it is



“I want to say one word to you and this word is joy. Wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy!”

Pope Francis, Be Glad, A letter to consecrated men and women in preparation for the year dedicated to Consecrated Life

helpful for me to remember that the love that we desire to offer is the love of Christ, a love that does not seek return, but is simply offered for the sake of another. This requires sacrifice, and these sacrifices bring us in closer union with the God who loved us first and helps us be His witnesses to the infinite love that is to come in the heavenly kingdom.

To profess the vow of chastity is not to reject love or to reject intimacy, but to recognize that God calls some to use the gifts of love and intimacy in service to the entire Church. It frees us to offer our lives in service in a radical way, and serves as a reminder to the whole world that it is only in Christ and through Christ that true and genuine love, that self-sacrificial love, is found. As the fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote: “chastity ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ ... should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all.” To forego marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven does not require one to stop loving, but to forego loving a singular person in the fullness of human love, so that they might be able to share Christ's love with the whole world. It is in being able to share God's love in such a special way that the vow's true beauty is found.

Community: Serving Together

*A reflection by Fr. Luke Muhindo, C.S.C.,
District of East Africa*



There's an African proverb from Western Uganda that goes something like, “One finger cannot be able to lift high a load.” The same could be said of the work of the Holy Cross Community in

East Africa - where the needs are often great and many. It is through combined efforts from the Holy Cross Community in East Africa that we have reached out even beyond education and parish ministries to serve the most vulnerable persons in unique ways.

In the parish in East Africa, where I did pastoral experience, it is common for the neighboring people without means to pay for transport - both Catholics, as well as those from other faiths - to ask our Holy Cross men for assistance with community vehicles. This is a particular challenge in many places, like Holy Cross Parish Kyarusenzi, in Western Uganda, a remote part of the district. The hospital nearest Kyarusenzi is about 40 miles away. On one occasion, a group of Christians arrived in haste, waking me for help transporting a woman in labor to a hospital 45 miles away. I woke, rushed the woman in the middle of the night to the hospital, and returned to the community at dawn - fortunate not to have delivered the baby myself! This scenario becomes familiar, and transport sometimes extends beyond those who are ill to those awaiting burial.

As a community of nine novices at the Holy Cross Novitiate near Lake Saaka, Uganda, we also saw strength in numbers building houses for elderly people in the village around the Novitiate. Through our Novice Master, Fr. Francis Murphy, C.S.C., we met an elderly man whose small grass thatched hut had fallen. The man was literally sleeping alone outside his homestead. Together, we erected a new home for the man within just two weeks. Because of our community, we were able to divide among ourselves the different roles we each served



"The restlessness of love is always an incentive to go towards the other, without waiting for the other to manifest his need."

Pope Francis, Homily for the opening of the General Chapter of the Order of St. Augustine, Rome August 28, 2013

best. Some of us were competent as carpenters or roofers, while some of us found ourselves more suited to the heavy lifting necessary; yet all of us, together, were able to serve the society and become a community relevant to them.

In the Holy Cross Community in Nairobi, Kenya, which is located in an area where crime, poverty and unemployment run rampant, we were able to intervene on behalf of a drunken man, mistaken as a thief, who was nearly stoned to death and tortured right in the street, just outside the rectory compound. As we diverted the attention of the crowd, all fell quiet, and we successfully convinced the accusers to drop their stones and sticks, so the man - already bloody from the beatings - could be taken into custody.

Yet, amid moments of distress, sadness or fear we witness and work to resolve, there are many more beautiful moments which arise from community life. Community living entails praying together, sharing responsibilities, sharing joys and sad moments; even in moments of despair, we receive strength and encouragement from each other. In living up to our charism as Holy Cross, the community sends us to extend this very way of living to other societies who can benefit from it. Community, personally, has made me reach out to many, especially the young adults in the four Holy Cross parishes in East Africa, where education still appears to be a new phenomenon. We are able to become signs of hope to these people. We are sent as educators in the faith to various institutions and communities to teach the mind and heart as we give hope to those who have lost it because of the challenges of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, sickness and old age, as well as family challenges.

We are privileged to help families uphold and revisit family values; and, through our combined efforts with community members in East Africa, there are also signs of hope that education culture is becoming welcome. In doing all these things, as a community, we make God known to many and also loved, and thereby living up to the Holy Cross charism.



Br. Flavian Laplante, C.S.C.: A True Servant of God

As with many call stories, it wasn't so much something he heard, but something he saw that spoke to Doria Laplante. The seventh of Honoré Laplante and Louise Théroux's nine children, he attended a school run by the Holy Cross brothers in Quebec, Canada, where the selfless work and faithful witness of the brothers caught young Doria's eye.

Inspired by the brothers' example of lives consecrated to God in service to His people, Doria entered the Congregation of Holy Cross. On August 15, 1923, at the age of 16, he received the religious habit and took "Flavian" as his religious name. On August 16, 1928, Br. Flavian professed forever the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Now united with the heroes of his youth in consecration, community, and mission, Br. Flavian was ready to spend his life working for and witnessing to the coming of God's kingdom.

After working several years in Notre Dame College in Quebec as a teacher and dorm supervisor, the Congregation sent Br. Flavian to its mission in East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh and India). St. André Bessette, then 87 years old, was present at Br. Flavian's departure, and remarked to him: "How fortunate you are in becoming a missionary. I envy you."



Servant of God Flavian Laplante

Although the people, language, culture, place and needs were all unfamiliar to Br. Flavian when he arrived to East Bengal on December 1, 1932, one thing was familiar to him and anchored him: his vocation as a religious brother. Like the brothers in his childhood school half a world away in Quebec, Br. Flavian was to use the consecration of his life to God to become a true brother to those he served.

And serve, Br. Flavian did. He spent his first decade in East Bengal teaching and working in administration in the Congregation's schools. Then, during World War II, Br. Flavian went to Chittagong, despite the obvious dangers, to tend to those afflicted by the violence. When the war ended, he built an orphanage at Diang to care for the orphans from the Chakati Refugee Camp.

It is during this time that Br. Flavian also met the fishermen and their families to whom he eventually devoted most of his life and ministry. He organized them into cooperatives in which they could support each other; and was so effective in working among the fishermen and their families because he cast his lot among them. He was known to go out to sea with the fishermen for days, and he participated in rescue missions to save those in distress in rough waters. Br. Flavian allowed his closeness to God to draw him close to the people.

Br. Flavian understood himself to be more than simply a social worker; he was a disciple, a missionary. His life as a religious brother was to be for the people a prophetic sign of the God who was with them. His solidarity and work among them was to reveal God's solidarity and work among them.

Br. Flavian's life clearly caught the eye of the people long before his death on June 19, 1981. He was widely recognized, even by those neither Catholic nor Christian, as a holy man, and people came to visit him at the Marian Hermitage, where he eventually took up residence in a personal hermitage in the last years of his life. They had all seen something. They had seen, as the Church would declare officially on February 13, 2009, a true Servant of God, and his life had spoken to them an education in the faith.

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