

*Diocesan Bishop  
and  
the Consecrated Virgin:*

*Spiritual Bond*

## THE DIOCESAN BISHOP AND THE CONSECRATED VIRGIN: SPIRITUAL BOND

*Jesus Christ wants to build His Church. He is depending on your hearts and hands to do it.*

The vocation of the consecrated virgin is intimately tied to the building up of the Church--that is, the *spiritual* flourishing of the Church. "To have a consecrated virgin in a diocese is a blessing," Archbishop Francis George, OMI, stated recently in a private conversation. Why is this vocation to be considered a blessing, a gift, to any given diocese? She is not commissioned to any particular work in the diocese or parish, so why is her vocation a blessing to a diocese?

Let us look back to history for an insight into this answer and then to theology.

Consecrated virginity flourished in the early centuries of the Church. It is obvious that these virgins were women living in the world, since as yet monastic life as we know it in later centuries had not yet come into being. The names we have of virgins from those early centuries are familiar to us from the Roman Canon of the Mass--Agnes, Cecilia, Agatha, Lucy.

The faith during those early centuries was spreading over the whole Mediterranean area and moving beyond, as into northern Europe itself. Christians were on fire with the faith, the Apostles and later their successors were preaching the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit was being poured out to bring men into the obedience of the faith. At the same time, consecrated virginity was taking hold; women were hearing the call of the Lord to give their entire selves in love to Him forever in perpetual virginity. The Church recognized this vocation; and through the power given to her, she instituted the sacramental of the Consecration of Virgins. Conferred by the bishop himself, this sacramental is a means to bring great spiritual fruitfulness to the life of perpetual virginity for the love of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the Bride of Christ, recognized in a consecrated virgin an icon of herself; the consecrated virgin is espoused to Christ forever in a sacred bond of mystical love that no power can dispense.

In addition to the fervent missionary activity of the Apostles and their successors of those early centuries and the institution of the sacramental of the Consecration of Virgins, we see yet another phenomenon during these same centuries. These were centuries of martyrs, these were centuries of persecution within pagan cultures.

Do we have any parallels today in our century? Yes, the Consecration of Virgins for women living in the world has been restored near the end of a century that has been a century of martyrs. Consecrated virgins today are living in environments that could be termed "neo-pagan." Not one country in the world can be called today a bastion of Christendom. If consecrated virgins today do not undergo a rapid martyrdom of blood, they are surely called to a slow martyrdom by the witness of their life in the world. Where they may not have to endure physical death or hateful epithets thrown at them, they must face the sneer.

So, what is their value anyway in a diocese? How do they build up the Church?

We must remember that the Church was born on Calvary. With the blood and water from the open side of Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out. The most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Martyrs, Queen of Virgins, and the Sorrowful Mother stood under that Cross and received the first inundation of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. She was then the New Eve, as Jesus Christ was the New Adam. At the foot of the Cross, the new spiritual family, the Mystical Body of Christ, was born. Mary then became the Mother of the Church, as her Son then commissioned her.

Mary is the model of all virgins, their prototype, their Queen. Consecrated virgins today, with the grace of the Holy Spirit conferred on them through their reception of the Consecration, unite their prayer, sufferings, sacrifices, penances with Christ on the Cross so that the Church may be built up, especially in their dioceses. Their bond with their bishop, and with his co-workers the priests, is spiritual. Like Mary, they offer their lives to the Father through Jesus on the Cross so that the preaching, teaching, governing, reconciling, and consoling of the faithful and those yet outside of the fold may bear fruit. The more fervent and faithful they are in their lives, the more fruitful the fulness of the priesthood will be in their bishop, who represents Christ Himself in their diocese, and in the pastoral work of the diocesan priests.