

+ Maria

31st Anniversary Mass for Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, O.Carm.

Reverend Fathers, Mother Mark Louis Anne and members of the General Council, members of the McCrory Family, honored guests, and all my dear brothers and sisters in Carmel. On this snowless day, I greet you all once again, and thank God who has brought us together in this beautiful place to offer the Eucharist and keep the memory of the Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, Foundress of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm, on the 31st Anniversary of her entrance into eternal life. Many times before, we have gathered for this special moment of prayer and remembrance. Although the years continue to pass, for sure the spiritual and charismatic presence of Mother Angeline does not fade away. In thought, in prayer, in actions inspired by her life and legacy, what Mother stood for and how she lived continues to inspire her Sisters, their co-workers in the ministry, new vocations and those who look from the outside in. Like each of us, at her baptism, Mother Angeline received the light of Christ. Within her, and radiating from her, that light never flickered and never dimmed, but continued to shine brightly even through her days of physical and mental diminishment. Now today, we can still sense and observe that her Christian life and witness continues to be a beacon, a lamp to enlighten our way in a world filled with bogus lights and darkness. Mother Angeline's light, kindled by the fire of her deep love for and faith in God, always sheds rays of optimism, joy and hope.

The Church is now in the midst of the Year of Consecrated Life, a special period when the Holy Father invites all believers to consider the role and mission of consecrated persons within the Church, a period when he invites the consecrated to a deeper reflection and strengthening of their vocations, and a period of time for the Church in a special way to support and pray for this charismatic gift of the Consecrated Life in terms of the holiness and effectiveness of the witness of the Church in the world. All consecrated persons, all religious, have been invited by the Pope first, to look to the past with gratitude, then, to live the present with passion, and finally, to embrace the future with hope. The only way to face into the future is to remember and

build on the values of the past, the religious patrimony of the foundation of our religious families, to act and live in the present with the intentionality, determination and zeal that will help position us for the future and - the Lord alone knows what He has in store for our future. Within Carmel, we have a long past, a history of eight centuries that has seen the Order go through many trials, near extinction, and yet still remain alive today. During the last General Chapter of the Carmelite Sisters, their 13th General Chapter, I reminded them as a sign of hope, that the Carmelite Order itself had just completed its 213th General Chapter! Within Carmel, we have a deep and rich spirituality from which to draw constant inspiration and from where we can gain countless insights to apply to our present living and mission. Within Carmel, armed with our past and present, we can see many challenges but much hope for the future, and without question, we have the assurance that God is with us every step of the way.

It is no stretch, then, to honor and remember Mother Angeline Teresa McCrory this year as a Consecrated Woman of the Church. This thoroughly human woman filled with that feminine genius that St. John Paul II so recognized and extolled as vital to the life of the household of faith, a woman of love and compassion, she always self-identified as a religious, consecrated by vows, and a daughter of the Church. She loved the Church. She loved the liturgy, she loved bishops and priests, she adored seminarians and novices, and she had wonderful friends in other religious communities. Her manner of life and all of her concerns were focused on the living of her religious vocation, and she never tired of exhorting her Carmelite Sisters to be faithful to their beautiful vocation as daughters of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. The real object of her Circular Letters over the years was always to encourage her Sisters, even with corrections, to be good religious, women of faith and charity, of prayer and service, and to protect and promote community life. She was happy in her vocation, and she was faithful. All she wanted was for her Sisters to be happy as well, and to be faithful to Jesus Christ their Spouse and Lord, shining witnesses to his charity with each other, with the elderly, and with all the people that they met.

I think it's important to remember that we cannot will ourselves into a state of consecration. To be consecrated is to be made holy, set apart. Only God can make something or someone holy, He who is holiness itself. At the Mass, the priest extends his hands and says the words of consecration, but it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. In baptism, we are made God's children again by the Holy Spirit, acting through water and the words of the sacrament, baptized in the name and power of the Holy Trinity. Consecrated men and women in the Church have been consecrated by God's action. They profess their vows in response to God's call, but God gives them the charisms and holiness for their state of life, for He says, "It is I who have chosen you." This does not make monks, and nuns, Sisters and Brothers merely passive receivers of consecration, but remembering that this is God's work and God's choice, does help us to put the emphasis in the right place. The consecrated must present themselves, respond to God's invitation and call, and be active in cooperating with the vocation offered to them. Most certainly, Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa did so by responding at age 19 to the call to enter the Little Sisters of the Poor in Glasgow, Scotland and again at her profession at LaTour St. Joseph, and again in Brooklyn, and again in Pittsburg and, finally, in the Bronx. She experienced the call of God, as did Samuel in today's first reading, and answered repeatedly throughout her life, "Speak Lord. Your servant is listening." God's grace worked powerfully in the life of the Prophet Samuel, and God's grace worked powerfully, and I think we can also say prophetically, in the life of Mother Angeline, spurring her on to found a new community, a new way of caring for the elderly, and a lifelong dedication to Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles offers for us the results of total giving. Especially when lived with others, we can see one of the fruits of consecration: those who are consecrated become witnesses. They have the power to draw people to themselves, and to Christ. We read: "Awe came upon everyone" who witnessed the communal life of the apostles and disciples, and "Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." The consecrated life, lived deeply and faithfully by men and women, always affects other people. Certainly, Mother Angeline's witness inspired and continues to inspire

many. Although the youngest of the Carmelite foundresses, she was recognized as the leader, and the one who could set the tone. As we have been reminded often by Popes, our world is in need today more of witnesses, then teachers, and leadership is best shown by example.

When we say that it is God who consecrates, we can ask, how does He do this? If God is love, then His consecrating power is the power and the effect of His love. As St. John quoted Jesus at the Last Supper, "Remain in my love. Love one another, as I have loved you." He consecrated His apostles in His love, and commanded them to remain in that love. Jesus consecrates all of us in His love as well, and wants us to love one another, thus sharing in His life. In the consecrated life, and by vow, religious commit themselves to grow toward perfect love in the service of God and His Church, which, in plain English means religious commit themselves to a lifelong and public process of becoming more loving people, in imitation of Christ, and in imitation of Mary, the handmaid of that Lord. Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa most certainly, by her example of forgiveness, and forbearance, and charity and generosity, grew constantly in God's love, and deepened the witness of her consecration in the Church, even today remaining a model to contemplate.

God loves us abundantly, brothers and sisters. By His own life, death and resurrection, Jesus perfectly modeled the complete, self-emptying love of the Father for His children. God perennially calls men and women to give themselves to Him completely in the various vocations within the Church, and in an altogether special way in the consecrated life, a life which demands constant growth in love. Mother Angeline luminously lived that life to the full, and we thank God for her example, and for the inheritance she left as a Consecrated Woman of the Church. May she pray for us, and may each of us respond to the Lord, by lovingly fulfilling our own vocations in His service.

Very Reverend Mario Esposito, O.Carm.
Avila-On-Hudson
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