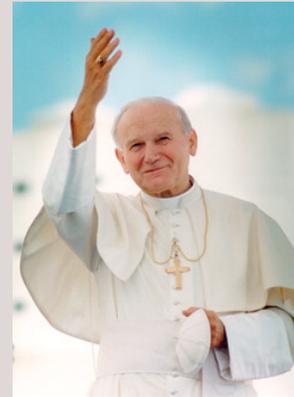


THE FECUNDITY OF VIRGINAL LOVE IN SERVANT OF GOD JOHN PAUL II

Sr. Karen Muñiz, SCTJM

Introduction

"For me, then-who had special grace of participating in it and actively collaborating in its development- Vatican II has always been, and especially during these years of my Pontificate, the constant reference point of my every pastoral action, in the conscious commitment to implement its directives concretely and faithfully at the level of each Church and the whole Church."¹ Servant of God John Paul II made it his underlying mission to continue the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in his Pontificate and reinforce its richness in elevating the dignity of the human person to the heights of God's plan for His beloved people. In addition, our Blessed Mother's faithful Pope consecrated his heart and Pontificate to be formed in Her school of love, making it his mission to take his sheep to our Lord through Her womb. His Holiness continues this line of thought throughout his writings on the fecundity of virginal love, in particular, to make God's people aware of the supreme calling of those consecrated persons who joyfully receive the gift of God's initiative of love and freely respond to the invitation to espouse Jesus and live this communion of love as a religious vow, the evangelical counsel "based on the teaching and example of Christ"² in which they freely choose Christ as their spouse and His love above any other love. Since love of God has the characteristic of being a cycle that goes back and forth between the one giving the love and the one receiving it, then the following presentation focuses on one aspect of the expression of the love of God- the spousal, eschatological, and apostolic dimensions of the fecundity of virginal love and the perfect model for consecrated persons, that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the "Queen of Love,"³ the "highest expression of the feminine genius."⁴



Marriage in Old Testament/New Testament

To first understand the spousal dimension of the virginal love professed by a consecrated person it is important to begin by describing God's relationship with humanity in His desire to marry His people. First, in the Old Testament the use of marriage indicates the close relationship of God and Israel and was used to reconcile the people back to God if they had broken their fidelity. Like Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezequiel, for example, the prophet Jeremiah narrates God's devotion to his people, "Go, cry out this message for Jerusalem to hear! I remember the devotion of your youth, how you loved me as a bride, following me in the desert, in a land unsown....For the Lord is creating something new on earth: the Woman sets out to find her Husband again."⁵ Throughout the Old Testament we also see that whenever God establishes a new covenant with His people there is always a call to be fruitful, a revelation of the Father's love for His people.

In the New Testament, marriage takes on a fuller meaning as Jesus calls himself the long awaited messianic Bridegroom who comes to bring His Kingdom, "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son."⁶ Jesus our King makes His Kingdom present on earth and fulfills God the Father's desire to marry humanity following what the prophets foretold so as to establish a New Covenant with His people. In his second letter to the Corinthians, we also see that Saint Paul understood Old Testament heritage and Jesus as our Bridegroom and so exhorts the first community of Christians to live their lives in a spousal union with Christ, "I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."⁷ This is the universal call for all Christians to experience spousal union with Jesus Christ, but to some he asks for a more intense and radical response which is answered by virginal love for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, and which elevates this union to a greater understanding.

Spousal Dimension of Virginal Love

To further understand why God would want to marry humanity lies in visualizing God's desire to expand His family, the Trinity, out of the unfathomable love that overflows from Him. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that "God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange."⁸ In God's plan of creation, man is destined in Christ to share in Trinitarian Communion. Because of His unfathomable love He created man to extend the Trinity, to love in the image and likeness of God so as to have man participate in Trinitarian life and love. Because God first gave man the gift of His love, giving Himself to us and creating us as a unique and unrepeatable gift in His image and likeness, he gives man the power to express love and fills man with the need to give himself to another in a total surrendering of self, a deep rooted desire which is connected to the spiritual nature of the human person. Servant of God John Paul II further explains how a consecrated person can give him or herself to God: "God gives Himself to man, in a divine and supernatural fashion (a mystery of faith revealed to mankind by Christ). The human soul, which is betrothed to God, gives itself to Him alone. This total and exclusive gift of self to God is the result of a spiritual process which occurs

within a person under the influence of Grace. This is the essence of mystical virginity- conjugal love pledged to God Himself."⁹ The great mystery of the marriage of Christ and the Church¹⁰ gives the marriage of man and woman¹¹ its highest meaning. It is precisely through virginal love that the mystery of the Church's spousal union with Christ is represented in every consecrated person and enables them to participate more directly in this mystery since the consecrated person gives him or herself directly to the person of Christ whereas married persons give themselves to each other in a conjugal love through human intermediaries. Consecrated persons participate in a complete spousal union with Christ since they unite to Him without any intermediaries. As a result, virginal love is at the heart of the Church because through the profession of virginal love, the Church expresses her union as Bride with Christ the Bridegroom to the greatest extent.¹² Through the virginal love of a consecrated woman, in particular, "the mystery of the Church's spousal union with Christ...is particularly realized in the consecrated woman, to whom the title "sponsa Christi" is frequently attributed. The feminine soul has a particular capacity to live in a mystical spousal relationship with Christ and thus to reproduce in herself the face and heart of his Bride, the Church."¹³

We continue to reflect on the importance of marriage when Christ spoke of the particular vocation of the call to an exclusive donation of self to God in virginity for the sake of the Kingdom as a continuation of his conversation with the Pharisees on marriage and its indissolubility, "[His] disciples said to him, "If this is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." He answered them, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom that is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."¹⁴ Matthew's narration shows that continence for the kingdom of heaven does not oppose marriage nor does it connote a negative characteristic but rather it shows that those who choose virginal love for the kingdom of heaven do so in view of the particular value of their choice and their vocation. This is why those who are able to receive it do so and not all can receive it because they do not have the inclination for it nor are given the grace for it. For those to whom it is granted involves being firm in making continence for the kingdom their fundamental state in their life on earth and places greater emphasis on the spousal character of love since it is a counsel addressed to the love of the human heart.¹⁵ Also, for those who receive the vocation had to have been given it, a dynamic which involves personal choice and the particular grace to make the choice. Furthermore, those who make themselves eunuchs comes about from a voluntary and supernatural choice because they freely and willingly choose a life of deeper union with Christ, their Spouse, that entails the supernatural grace to live it and keeping in mind its supernatural motive—to be totally dedicated to God in communion with Christ. We can summarize this with the words from the Second Vatican Council:

"The chastity 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'¹⁶ which religious profess should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion¹⁷ so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men. Thus it not only symbolizes in a singular way the heavenly goods but also the most suitable means by which religious dedicate themselves with undivided heart to the service of God and the works of the apostolate. In this way they recall to the minds of all the faithful that wondrous marriage decreed by God and which is to be fully revealed in the future age in which the Church takes Christ as its only spouse."¹⁸

The spousal dimension of virginal love leads us to meditate on the nature of the consecration to God, an act of love for God. "The purpose of religious vows is to scale the heights of love—a complete love, dedicated to Christ under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and through Christ, offered to the Father: hence the value of the oblation and consecration of religious profession."¹⁹ The value of this oblation is found in the consecration of consecrated persons who undergo a complete, interior consecration to God through the bonds of the evangelical counsels,²⁰ an "initiative [that] comes from Christ who asks for a freely accepted covenant in following him."²¹ Christ begins his sanctifying action in us by imparting his holiness in us through sanctifying grace and instilling in us the need for our response to that grace using our physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral capacities.²² The consecration of religious is "the mature choice that one makes for God himself, the spousal response to God's love."²³ By offering the Lord our virginal love and with the grace received in Baptism, we see how the Lord uses our daily dying to self to grant us new life. "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."²⁴ Dying to ourselves and remaining hid with Christ in God means that it is not by our efforts that moves us, but by the profession of our virginal love in us and through us that will bear fruit, that what is visible is our witness to Christ, to God who is Love, the gift we first received to be hid in Christ. This will ultimately lead to a more perfect and complete union with Christ our Spouse, a union that with this newness of life produces more abundant fruits. "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."²⁵ The only way that we can say that our hearts and love for Christ is hid with Christ in God is to die for the sake of the newness of life possible in a complete union with Christ through the evangelical counsel of chastity.

In the light of the Cross, every union with Christ the Bridegroom is a commitment of love to the Pierced One. Those who profess their virginal love to Christ are destined to share in Christ's sacrifice for the redemption of the world. The fundamental choice for continence wills to share in the redeeming work of Christ such that "through the gravity and depth of the decision, through the severity and the responsibility that it bears with it, love appears and shines through—love as the readiness to give the exclusive gift of oneself for the sake of the kingdom of God."²⁶ Through the offering of oneself to God in self-giving virginal love, a special covenant of spousal love is made to God which is a total consecration to God that presents the body and soul "as a

living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”²⁷ “In this way the likeness of that love which in the heart of Christ is both redemptive and spousal is imprinted on the religious profession.”²⁸ Such fecund love is what makes consecrated persons partakers in the economy of salvation and the renewal of creation since such virginal love has the power to transform the attitudes that come from the world and are not from the Father so that a perfect offering may be given to God. “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”²⁹ Furthermore, this offering is perfected in love the more consecrated persons participate in the self-emptying of Christ which renews and gives the daily opportunity to be reborn, to be a witness to the new creation so that others may have life. Lastly, it is through the profession of virginal love that “consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of married and family life; on the other hand, precisely by their “having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection and of eternal life: life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart.”³⁰

Eschatological Dimension of Virginal Love

The characteristics of the kingdom of heaven find their description in light of the eschatological dimension of virginal love. As the human person gradually prepares himself and ascends the ladder of holiness- the perfection of love-- here on earth to ultimately unite with God for all eternity, the kingdom of heaven is realized here on earth. Virginal love professed by a human person espoused to God already anticipates this eternal union with God and is an eschatological sign that points others towards it. In the kingdom of heaven people “will no longer marry”³¹ since God will be “everything to everyone.”³² So since consecrated persons have renounced earthly marriage for the sake of the kingdom and have accepted the invitation to make God their everything, to love Him above anyone or anything else, then this is why the consecrated person already experiences a foretaste of the possession of Christ as the one Bridegroom, even if it is not in its totality since only in Heaven will we fully experience perfect union with God face-to-face. Living virginal love as a consecrated person brings profound happiness in consideration of this goal of heavenly union with Christ the Bridegroom and becomes a witness among men that anticipates the future resurrection. For married people, virginity reminds them of the primacy of God, that God has made us for Himself and that our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.³³ It also reminds them that we are all called to live in an eternal relationship with God who is destined to be our “all” forever.³⁴ This witness was even modeled by Christ in the work of redemption when He himself chose continence for the kingdom of heaven when he became Man.

When Christ spoke to his disciples about those who “have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” it was difficult for them to understand given that marriage and procreative fecundity was the norm in the old covenant tradition. So if Christ was to introduce a new tradition it would have to be by giving them the model of his example. By he himself remaining celibate for the kingdom of heaven and since he is the fruit of the virginal love of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he showed his disciples that those who choose continence for the kingdom of heaven are indeed fruitful.

By being a witness to continence for the kingdom of heaven, Christ showed his disciples that it exists, it is possible, and it is efficacious for the kingdom of heaven. This last characteristic is especially important for virginal love to give life since it needs to be seen in view of man's eschatological vocation to union with God instead of a utilitarian motive that religion can fall into with their works of the apostolate.

Apostolic Dimension of Virginal Love

The source for apostolic zeal and fruitful activity of a consecrated person is contained in what Saint Paul told the Corinthians in regard to apostolic missionary activity, “An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit.”³⁵ Saint Paul uses anxiousness to indicate the primacy of seeking only the kingdom of God in an unmarried woman's endeavors. If the human person “can “be anxious” only about what is truly in his heart,”³⁶ then this indicates that what truly is in the heart of a consecrated person is those “things of the Lord,” that is, the kingdom of Christ and everything in it, his Body, the Church, and everything that will give it life. “The kingdom of heaven is certainly the definitive fulfillment of the aspirations of all men, to whom Christ addressed his message. It is the fullness of the good that the human heart desires beyond the limits of all that can be his lot in this earthly life. It is the maximum fullness of God's bounty toward man.”³⁷ Then this should be the driving force that impels consecrated persons to give fruit and in this way, the consecrated person will seek to please the Lord, following his model and striving to grow in holiness, both of which have their virginal love as their foundation. If “man always tries to please the person he loves,”³⁸ then the virginal love between God and the consecrated person is made fruitful in the expression of this love.

This witness of virginal love that consecrated persons offer the Church is a fundamental aspect of revealing the fecundity of virginal love. A witness sees, lives, and then transmits what he has seen be it through his actions or simply by being. First, the witness of consecrated persons sees God through eyes of faith and with their whole mind and heart in prayer. Prayer is the main form of achieving and expressing intimacy with the divine Bridegroom. Contemplating the Bridegroom before the Blessed Sacrament is quality time dedicated to listening to Christ, to assimilating the Incarnate Word in one's soul for nourishment and in one's mind to fully

comprehend it. Through contemplation, consecrated persons remain close to Him and adhere to Him in spirit and spirit and heart. The Evangelist Luke shows us in the example of a woman of prayer, Mary of Betany,³⁹ how she understood contemplation "as if to say that God—and also the Son made Man—desires the homage of the heart before that of activity."⁴⁰ This homage is the proper response to the love of God who has first loved us.⁴¹ Since religious were called by God in a unique and personal way, they are "to seek God, to direct their desires to the Father, to maintain contact with him through prayer and to give him their hearts with ardent love. They realize this intimacy with God in a life with Christ and in Christ."⁴² Furthermore, the souls of consecrated persons should thirst for divine intimacy with total self-dedication, seeking ways for cultivating a spirit of prayer in all their actions and motives. Through prayer their hearts will beat in the same beat as their Bridegroom. "Prayer yields abundant fruits of holiness and obtains for the People of God a hidden apostolic fruitfulness,"⁴³ which comes from an interior prayer life rich in faith, hope, and love.

Consecrated persons live their witness of virginal love first and foremost in their communities, their religious families which contribute to the life and holiness of the Church.⁴⁴ We are one body in Christ. How important it is to be of one mind, heart, and soul so that as a religious family within the Body of Christ we can bring the love of God to His People. The virginal love of consecrated persons "constitutes a special possession of the whole People of God. The Church is aware that in the love that Christ receives from consecrated persons, the love of the entire Body is directed in a special and exceptional way towards the Spouse, who at the same time is the Head of this Body."⁴⁵ Our virginal love for Christ is reflected first within our communities with the other spouses of Christ He handpicked to live fraternally. Religious life according to the evangelical counsel of chastity can manifest to our brothers and sisters in community the eternal plan of God the Father who desires the complete gift of the human person as a filial response to his infinite love, the attractive power of God the Son who ennoble life by the highest participation in the mystery of Trinitarian life, and the transforming power of God the Holy Spirit who infuses in all souls the gifts of eternal Love.⁴⁶ A consecrated person's virginal love, then, is a special witness of love, a witness of a total dedication to God with an undivided heart. This witness of virginal love of which the world is in so much need "leads the world and humanity in the Holy Spirit towards that definitive fulfillment which man and-through man-the whole creation find in God, and only in God."⁴⁷ The more consecrated persons make this present today, the more we can testify that "God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."⁴⁸

The third aspect of the witness of consecrated persons' virginal love is found in their apostolate, the fruit of what they see and live. First, consecrated persons transmit their virginal love in their apostolate by following Christ's way of life and in that way they bring the good news of the Gospel to His people. The fundamental work of the apostolate is not a function of what a consecrated person does but what he or she is, and this is what will give fruit. By living a life of virginal love, consecrated persons make others aware of their own Christian calling to accept with joy the duties of their vocation. By seeing the joy of virginal love expressed with a sole desire to have Christ abide in one's heart, the people of our times can see the effectiveness of a way of life filled with happiness attained through renouncement and sacrifice. Virginal love gives "the testimony of a love for Christ which is greater than any other love, of a grace that overcomes the forces of human nature, of a lofty spirit which is unflinching when confronted with the illusions and ambiguities caused by the demands of sensuality."⁴⁹ This will consequently help promote the sanctification of God's people because it increases their love of God and neighbor. Finally, virginal love reminds humanity of the value of the life to come in perfect union with Christ the Bridegroom, the motive for all apostolic activity.

The Virgin Mary: perfect model for Consecrated Virgins

After reflecting on the spousal, eschatological, and apostolic dimensions of virginal love, we find that the Blessed Virgin Mary, both a virgin and a mother, is the perfect model for all consecrated persons. In order to understand the spousal love characteristic in the femininity of the Virgin Mary and all women, it is important to first meditate on the truth of the female person. A woman, by the very nature of her physical constitution, is already predisposed to a special gift of self in her openness to the new person nurtured in her womb and to whom she gives birth. The Second Vatican Council describes that "the human being is a person, a subject who decides for himself. At the same time, man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self."⁵⁰ In the case of consecrated women who renounce their physical motherhood, they nonetheless participate in the sincere gift of self to another by freely choosing virginity and giving their self to Christ in spousal, virginal love so as to empty herself of any self-centeredness and make room for the gift of God to dwell. It is thus in this way that the femininity of consecrated women expresses a constant thanksgiving, a constant receptivity of the gift of God, His love, the vocation he entrusts to them, and, at the same time, it expresses a constant giving back of the gift received. Sharing in the self-emptying of Christ is what fuels this cycle of giving, being emptied, and receiving again. Through Christ's total gift of self, the choice for virginity on the part of consecrated virgins becomes a response to His gift and, as a result, a woman becomes one spirit with Christ her Spouse in a spousal union. This is most perfectly evident in the Virgin of Nazareth, "the one most fully and perfectly consecrated to God. Her spousal love reached its height in the divine Motherhood through the power of the Holy Spirit....How dedicated she was in all her earthly life to the cause of the kingdom of heaven through her most chaste love."⁵¹

The fruit of this spousal union between a consecrated woman and Christ is evident in her spiritual motherhood which is manifested in various forms, especially since virginity does not exclude a woman from being a mother. For consecrated women who live the charism and way of life of their apostolic Institutes they

find opportunities to pour out their virginal love for Jesus their Spouse in each and every one of the people they encounter.

"For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfill their deepest vocation...women acknowledge the person, because they see persons with their hearts... They see others in their greatness and limitations; they try to go out to them and help them. In this way the basic plan of the Creator takes flesh in the history of humanity and there is constantly revealed, in the variety of vocations, that beauty-not merely physical, but above all spiritual-which God bestowed from the very beginning on all, and in a particular way on women."⁵²

For this reason, there is no limit to the amount of children that consecrated women may have since every person with whom they come into contact is an opportunity to give their virginal love from their spousal union with Christ, they can give them the love of Christ. More so such that if every person is loved by God in Christ, then His spouse is to also love every one of His creatures, thus showing coherency with their choice of a Spouse and way of manifesting that love for Him. In addition, just as a pregnant mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb, a consecrated virgin also accepts and loves all of God's children in a spiritual sense and she is open to expand her heart to manifest her virginal love for them. This is the fecundity of her limitless spiritual motherhood and the life that she gives birth to points her children to the ultimate goal of eternal union with God.

A look at the Annunciation takes us deeper into this mystery of spousal love and virginal maternity evident in the Virgin Mary. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."⁵³ This is an expression of faith and love, which is made concrete in obedience to the divine call, at the service of God and of our brothers and sisters. It also manifests the value of participating in the condition of the Servant of the Lord who "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁵⁴ "By Jesus giving his life for many, it shows the special fulfillment of the Church's spousal dimension in union with Christ and in the constant application to the world of the fruits of the Redemption wrought by the priesthood of the Cross."⁵⁵ The service that the Apostle Mark points out is one of reigning, because "to serve...means to reign,"⁵⁶ it means to have a share and serve in the Kingdom of Heaven that Christ came to establish here on earth as his true disciple, it is to put oneself at the service of love. The Blessed Virgin Mary was that true disciple who was always at the disposition to serve and fulfill God's desires and, in the process, she lead and continues to lead others to become Christ's disciples. Also, "the maternal 'reign' of Mary consists in [that] she who was, in all her being, a gift of her Son, has also become a gift for the sons and daughters of the whole human race."⁵⁷

Another treasure of the feminine heart is her receptivity which is evident in the complementarities of the two vocations of motherhood and virginity in the Virgin Mary. "How can this be, since I have no husband?"⁵⁸ Mary's question is not one of avoiding from doing God's will, but one of how she can be of service to fulfill His will while remaining a virgin. Since her motherhood was a consequence of the work of the Holy Spirit, "virginity and motherhood co-exist in her: they do not mutually exclude each other or place limits on each other. Indeed, the person of the Mother of God helps everyone - especially women - to see how these two dimensions, these two paths in the vocation of women as persons, explain and complete each other."⁵⁹ The Virgin Mary's spiritual fruitfulness was so intense that in this definitive moment in salvation history it made her the Mother of the Church and of the human race. Through her maternal fiat and receptivity to the gift, God begins a new covenant with humanity. The fruitful reality of this is found in Christ, whose flesh and blood are significant of its beginnings in the Mother. "Thanks solely to her and to her virginal and maternal 'fiat', the 'Son of the Most High' can say to the Father: 'A body you have prepared for me. Lo, I have come to do your will, O God.'⁶⁰ Each and every time that motherhood is repeated in human history, it is always related to the Covenant which God established with the human race through the motherhood of the Mother of God."⁶¹ "Every consecrated virgin is destined to receive from the Lord a gift which in a certain way reproduces the features of universality and spiritual fruitfulness of Mary's motherhood."⁶²

Furthermore, the Angel greeted the Blessed Mother as full of grace, which "signifies the fullness of the perfection of 'what is characteristic of woman', of 'what is feminine.' Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women...When Mary responds to the words of the heavenly messenger with her "fiat," she who is "full of grace" feels the need to express her personal relationship to the gift that has been revealed to her, saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."^{63,64} The Angel greeted the Virgin Mary as "full of grace" instead of her calling her by her proper earthly name. God who is Love⁶⁵ wants the salvation of His people. So, He gives us the gift of His grace so that man can share in the life of God in Christ and become holy. In this way we become recipients of his blessing. The Angel's greeting to Mary, the "full of grace", denotes a special blessing she received in that even before the creation of the world, she is present in the mystery of Christ as the one chosen by the Father as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation.⁶⁶ So not only does the Angel's greeting refer to the election of the Virgin Mary as Mother of the Son of God, pointing out to us her divine Motherhood, but it also refers to all the supernatural generosity from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. In this way Mary shares in the life of God in a unique and exceptional way and manifests the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being.⁶⁷ By striving to imitate the Virgin Mary's receptivity to God's grace, consecrated women expand their feminine hearts further to embrace their own personal annunciations, to become, like the Virgin Mary, the first tabernacles to Christ and thus to give new life. Additionally, it can be noted that

the Virgin Mary's consent to divine motherhood "is a result of her total self-giving to God in virginity. Mary accepted her election as the Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the love which totally 'consecrates' a human being to God. By virtue of this love, Mary wished to be always an in all things 'given to God,' living in virginity."⁶⁸ The Virgin Mary's fiat shows her complete openness and total abandonment to God and perfectly unites her maternal and virginal love. The fruit of the fusion of these two loves can be shown by the mystery of virginal love of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph:

"Only Mary and Joseph, who had lived the mystery of his conception and birth, became the first witnesses of a fruitfulness different from that of the flesh, that is, of a fruitfulness of the Spirit: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁹ This was the most perfect fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in a certain sense it was the absolute fullness of that spiritual fruitfulness, since precisely in the Nazareth conditions of the pact of Mary and Joseph in marriage and in continence, the gift of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word was realized....Mary's divine maternity is also a superabundant revelation of that fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit to which man submits his spirit, when he freely chooses continence in the body, namely, continence for the kingdom of heaven."⁷⁰

A look at the role of Saint Joseph is also a model for consecrated persons in that "he was the man chosen by God to be the perfect partner for Mary, the man with complete respect for the ways of God and the mind and heart of his spouse... God gave Saint Joseph to the Virgin Mary so that he might share, through the marriage pact, in her own sublime greatness."⁷¹ In his spousal relationship with the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph was also called to a life of consecrated virginity for the sake of the kingdom and his fecundity is manifested in his virginal love for the Virgin Mary. By looking to the Mother of God and Saint Joseph consecrated persons can see the value of their virginal love in their fecundity.

Another way of describing the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary is through the heart of our Mother Foundress as she reflects on the maternal soil of the Virgin Mary's womb. Upon receiving the greeting of the Angel during the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary heard the Word and meditated it carefully in her Heart, not allowing any graces to be wasted away. The Virgin Mary was a faithful, prayerful woman who knew to await the coming of the Messiah, so she already started to prepare her Heart to make a solid foundation in faith and that way make her womb soft and fertile. Her complete abandonment to the Lord's will allowed her to make her Womb more fertile and pure to receive the Word. Her pure and immaculate love from her human Heart was the perfect soil to bear the Child. In order to prepare her womb she first prepared her Heart which was contemplative, mature, totally available and receptive to the designs of God. For something to become flesh requires disposition, availability, generosity, and understanding, all of which are characteristics exuding from the Heart of the Virgin Mary to allow the Word to become Flesh. She understood the importance of prayer as a means of being in total communion with God. That way she was able to live nourished by the love and mentality of God and thus offers God what she could not comprehend with reason alone and what was beyond her human capacities.

Virginal Love in our Charism

Continuing in the line of thought of our Mother Foundress, each one of the sisters of our religious Institute, in particular, witnesses the dimensions of virginal love of our Marian charism in ways that are parallel to those described by Servant of God John Paul II. Like the Blessed Mother who showed total dedication to the cause of the kingdom of heaven, our spousal love is to have total availability and dedication towards the Spouse. This is an interior task which makes the primacy of our hearts be Jesus. From the words of our Mother Foundress "love is a human reality and God created man and woman to love mutually, to have mutual dedication." We are called to live our love for our Spouse as our fundamental option where all of our choices are spousal, where everything we are may be offered to my Spouse. This is a fundamental option one makes every day from an interior dedication rooted in love for the Spouse. This fundamental option does not reserve anything nor does it set any conditions, it is an unconditional option from our spousal love. By having Christ our Spouse as our fundamental option we place His love at the center and love everything else as a fruit of that central love.

Another characteristic of our spousal love is fidelity towards our Spouse which is tied to the fundamental option we make in choosing virginal love for our Spouse. Every day we are to ask ourselves why we are spouses of Christ. Fidelity means choosing to persevere and be constant while at the same time always bringing our original fiat to each present moment. Fidelity is the mature response to the fiat given and it is the only thing that will mature the fundamental option. It is a guarantee of the response to the love that has been given. Since all fundamental option comes from the totality of the heart, fidelity guarantees that one will attain that totality. Fidelity is proved with time, so we can fulfill the fullness of our spousal love in the perseverance of fidelity. Giving time to God is what will allow a total development of our spousal relationship and maturity needed to develop it. Fidelity gives our Spouse time to make us his masterpieces. We grow in holiness with time and so by remaining faithful to the Lord and responding to his graces we allow him to form us. Fidelity shows God that he can count on us forever, that we are His faithful disciples that will help spread His kingdom and be a witness to his love to all His children. Fidelity is the maturity of spousal love and a resting place for the Congregation because we show them that they can count on our fiat which is fed by our growth in spousal love. In the end, "being faithful to Christ is loving him with all one's soul and all of one's heart in such a way that this love becomes the standard and motive of all our actions."⁷²

Our apostolate is the gaze of the infant born from our spousal love and the more spousal our love is the more life it gives. We show our undivided heart by putting everything we are at the service of our Spouse out of love for Him. Our undivided heart manifests to the world that our entire heart is dedicated to God and for that reason we can dedicate ourselves to His affairs, we can love with his Heart, and in that way, we can lead others to His love. An undivided heart means that the Lord is our first and exclusive love and from the center of this love which is totally and exclusively occupied by Him is the source to love everything else. If everything we are is done in communion with our Spouse, then we are giving life even though it is not visible. This is parallel to what occurred in the House of Nazareth where from the outside it seemed like an ordinary looking house, but from within the Redemption of the world was already taking place here on earth. Furthermore, we cannot give life without communion, and our fecundity is always tied to our spousal love. It is our spousal communion with Christ that makes our fecundity effective.

Concluding Remarks

The fecundity of virginal love is one of the mysteries of the love of God for His beloved people revealed in the special union of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church and His Bride, the Church. As mentioned before, Christ the Bridegroom has entered into history to give himself for many. Since "to give means to become a sincere gift in the most complete and radical way"⁷³ it is the greatest love man can give. (cf Jn 15:13) Thus, by giving his self for the salvation of the world, Christ the Bridegroom gives us the greatest love and shows us the perfect way of giving it to us. The Church is Bride in that she, in turn, receives the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of her own person. The Bride is united to her Bridegroom in that she lives his life, shares in His threefold mission as prophet, priest, and king, and responds with a sincere gift of self to the gift of the love of the Bridegroom. The Bride accomplishes this by the love of the Holy Spirit who himself is the unity between God the Father, the giver of the gift and receiver of our gift, and God the Son, the receiver of the gift who also gives the gift of his self. Virginal love for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven is an expression of a sincere gift of self for Christ and also a receiver of the gift of the love of God in Christ. "Through a total and unconditional gift of their heart and soul, religious reveal that Christ, whom they love above all else, is the eternal Bridegroom of the Church, the only one who can give an absolute meaning to love and affection."⁷⁴ A consecrated woman's response to the love of God is her witness to her virginal love evident in her limitless fecundity which is manifested in the different ways of expressing her spiritual motherhood through her charism and way of life characteristic to the Institutes.

It is my hope that this presentation takes you back to that initial moment of clarity when you were captured by the love of Jesus your Spouse, when you were extended the personal invitation to experience love by way of the consecrated life, that moment when you were convinced of God's personal love for you, when you realized that it was that moment God chose for you from all eternity to set His loving gaze upon you to extend to you the gift of His love and enter you into the beautiful mystery of your religious vocation. May our hearts be before others an "interior shrine" of the Virgin Mary where they can look at us and see her loving presence.

The following reading from Scripture brings a conclusion to this presentation: "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. ... For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."⁷⁵

¹ Fidei Depositum, introduction

² Second Vatican Council, Lumen gentium, no.43

³ "Letter to Women", no.12

⁴ Ibid, no.10

⁵ Jer 2:2, 31:22

⁶ Mt 22:2

⁷ 2Cor 11:2

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 221

⁹ Love and Responsibility ch.4

¹⁰ cf. Eph 5:32

¹¹ Gn 2:24

¹² cf General audience, November 30, 1994

¹³ General audience, March 22, 1995

¹⁴ Mt 19:10-12
¹⁵ cf Redemptionis Donum, no.11
¹⁶ Mt 19:12
¹⁷ cf. 1 Cor 7:32-35
¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, Perfectae caritatis, no.12
¹⁹ General audience, November 2, 1994
²⁰ cf. Second Vatican Council, Lumen gentium, no.44
²¹ General audience, November 2, 1994
²² cf General audience, November 2, 1994
²³ Marian Year Letter to Consecrated Persons, part III
²⁴ Col 3:3
²⁵ Jn 12:24
²⁶ General audience, April 21, 1982
²⁷ Rom 12:1
²⁸ Redemptionis Donum, no.8
²⁹ Rom 12:2
³⁰ Redemptionis Donum, no.11
³¹ Mt 22:30
³² 1 Cor 15:28
³³ Saint Augustine
³⁴ cf. 1Cor 15:28
³⁵ 1 Cor 7:34
³⁶ General audience, June 30, 1982
³⁷ General Audience, April 21, 1982
³⁸ General audience, July 7, 1982
³⁹ Lk 10:42
⁴⁰ General audience, January 11, 1995
⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, cf. Perfectae caritatis, no.6
⁴² General audience, January 11, 1995
⁴³ Second Vatican Council, Perfectae caritatis, no.7
⁴⁴ Second Vatican Council, cf Lumen gentium, no. 44
⁴⁵ Redemptionis Donum, no.14
⁴⁶ cf. General audience, February 15, 1995
⁴⁷ Redemptionis Donum, no.14
⁴⁸ 1 Jn 4:12
⁴⁹ General audience, February 15, 1995
⁵⁰ cf. Mulieris dignitatem, no.18
⁵¹ Redemptionis donum, no.17
⁵² Letter to Women, no.12
⁵³ Lk 1:38
⁵⁴ Mk 10:45
⁵⁵ Gen audience, Mar 22, 1995
⁵⁶ Second Vatican Council, Lumen gentium, 36
⁵⁷ Letter to Women, no.10
⁵⁸ Lk 1:31, 34
⁵⁹ Mulieris dignitatem, no.5
⁶⁰ cf. Heb 10:5, 7
⁶¹ Mulieris dignitatem, no.19
⁶² General audience, March 22, 1995
⁶³ Lk 1:38
⁶⁴ Mulieris dignitatem, no.5
⁶⁵ cf. 1Jn 4:8
⁶⁶ cf. Redemptoris custos, no.8
⁶⁷ Ibid. cf. no.11
⁶⁸ Ibid. no.39

⁶⁹ Mt 1:20

⁷⁰ General audience, March 24, 1982

⁷¹ Redemptoris custos, no.20

⁷² Apostolic trip Valencia, Spain, November 8, 1982

⁷³ Mulieris dignitatem, no.23

⁷⁴ Address to religious

⁷⁵ Is 54:4-8, 10

[Back to Main Page of Teachings of SCTJM...](#)



Return to main page
www.piercedhearts.org

This page is the work of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary
Copyright © 2010 SCTJM