

**A MARIAN GAZE AT VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT OF RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN LIGHT OF THE WORD**

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Course Description:

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Blessed John Paul II illuminates the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world in a profound and insightful way. He begins the exhortation by teaching that:

“The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one — are made constantly “visible” in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.”¹



A closer look at the elements of this definition in light of the Sacred Scripture passages of the calling of the disciples provides the knowledge and practical applications for young ladies discerning a vocation to the religious life with our religious institute of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

This course will thus focus on the call to consecrated religious life as lived in our Religious Institute of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, as paralleled in the Gospels’ calling of the disciples and as explained by certain writings of Blessed John Paul and our Mother Foundress, Mother Adela Galindo. The course is intended for the young lady who is discerning the vocation to religious life and has expressed interest in continuing her discernment with our Community in a more profound level in preparation for the next period of religious formation which is the postulancy. The course is designed to assist the young lady in beginning to embrace the lifestyle of the consecrated religious, to be introduced to the writings of our Mother Foundress and spiritual father Blessed John Paul II, and as an introductory human and spiritual formation focusing on the joy of a transformation in Christ through our Blessed Mother and simultaneous strengthening in the path of holiness delineated by our charism.

Course Objectives:

At the end of the course, the candidate should be able to:

1. “Value [her] contact with the Word of God in the community, which will lead to fraternal communion and a joyous sharing of their experiences with God in [her life] and will assist [her] growth in the spiritual life.”²
2. Apply the elements from Sacred Scripture passages of the calling of the disciples to her life in concrete ways which she can imitate and joyfully embrace to begin to work on the transformation of heart necessary to live the lifestyle of the consecrated religious.
3. Have discerned whether or not to continue to the next stage of formation (in line with the discernment of the Community).

Course Requirements :

1. Candidates are responsible for all the assigned readings and for completion of all course work and written assignments.
2. Candidates are to have a pastoral meeting at the end of the course with the vocations director.

Grading : Candidates will be graded on their assimilation of the teachings from Blessed John Paul II and our Mother Foundress.

Assignments : Please see the end of each lesson.

Required Course Materials : Holy Bible, *Vita Consecrata*, Blessed John Paul II’s Audiences to Religious,

Letters of Mother Adela Galindo to her daughters, Instrumentum Laboris for The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church

Week 1:

Prayer and Meditation of the Gospels: "The person who hears creates a living space in his heart for the other."³

Before calling the disciples, Jesus was preaching the Kingdom of God in Galilee. This is significant because of many reasons. First, the setting takes place in Galilee, which was the region of northern Palestine, north of the Sea of Galilee, inhabited by the pagan gentiles, the Romans, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus, the son of God, saw their necessity of being gathered together again, announces to them the restoration of the Kingdom of God, the new exodus, how God will retrieve the scattered Israelites, the ones sent to the four corners of the earth (Jer 23),⁴ through those he would then extend the invitation to follow Him - the fishers of men.

Next, it is important to note that first Jesus re-gathers the lost sheep and restores the Kingdom of God before sending them on mission. The significance of the restoration of the Kingdom of God lies in the implications of bringing about the Kingdom of God in the here and now. First, Jesus calls those listening to him "to repent and believe in the Gospel,"⁵ that is, to recognize the need to turn away from sin, to return to God, to believe in the Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises of God, to then seek the righteousness of Christ by observing the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-34). Furthermore, the Kingdom of God has an eschatological dimension because its presence in the world through the Church awaits the hope of the fullness of life to come. These two elements are parallel to dimensions of the vocation to religious life. First, when Jesus extends the invitation to follow him, one experiences a need for conversion to receive the gift, of such a sublime calling, in love, responsibility, and trust in the action of the Holy Spirit to provide the graces necessary to live the vocation. In addition, the vocation to religious life is eschatological because as Blessed John Paul taught, "the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven."⁶ Also, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that "Virgins who, committed to the holy plan of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are betrothed mystically to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of the Church." By this solemn rite (Consecratio virginum), the virgin is 'constituted . . . a sacred person, a transcendent sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of this heavenly Bride of Christ and of the life to come'.⁷

In this lesson, therefore, the young lady will learn the importance to pray, to create a space for the Lord routinely and to meditate on Sacred Scripture so as to listen to what the Lord desires of her concretely to bring about the Kingdom of God in her daily life. This will also lead her to discover the truth about herself, to understand her past, with its lights and its shadows, and from these experiences "to build new things."⁸ Finally, a vigilant attention to the voice of God "is a fundamental and permanent attitude of the true disciple of Christ for He will reveal His design of love, He will indicate the path to follow, the conditions to accomplish it."⁹

Assignment: Prayerful reading of Mark 1:14-15 and no.24 from the Instrumentum Laboris on the Synod of the Word. Make a schedule to incorporate more prayer and meditation of Sacred Scripture in your daily life. Write all the areas of your life that you recognize needs transformation. Begin to build a plan of life that aims to look closer at the roots of these areas.

Week 2: The Divine Choice - "As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea... He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John."¹⁰

In this lesson, the young lady will enter more deeply into the spousal and marian identity of a Servant of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In the Synoptic Gospels' passages on the calling of the disciples, they concord with the special election of the disciples: Simon (Peter), James, and John were those before whom Jesus would be transfigured. Jesus chooses them to follow Him more closely and to draw them to a special relationship. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you."¹¹ By virtue of this new bond, the disciples are raised to a new spiritual level by grace. The same occurs in the person called to religious consecration. As Blessed John Paul II explains the

mystery of the religious consecration in light of the Transfiguration,

"Those who are called to the consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: "Lord, it is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the radical nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives! Truly those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as if they were caught up in his splendour: he is "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45:2), the One beyond compare.

Assignment: Prayerfully read Mother Adela's letter no.248 "Our Marian Charism, a Potent and Living Totus Tuus in the Heart of the Church" and letter no.73 "The Hands of a Servant: Marian Hands." Gaze upon an image of our Blessed Mother while praying the Holy Rosary. Write in your journal what grace or graces you desire most to be transfigured into the image and presence of our Blessed Mother.

Week 3: The Goal of our Striving - "Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men'." ¹²

As our Mother Foundress teaches us,

"Jesus calls with a love, a love capable of satisfying, of quenching the most intimate hunger and thirst of the human heart...yes he calls in love because the Father has created us so that one day, at one historic moment of our life, while we are fishing beside the ocean of our realities of life, we might hear the voice of Jesus voice say to us, "*Come, leave everything, and follow me...*" (cf. Lk 5:27) Jesus calls and he shows us the path of a sincere and total response...His call is demanding because it presents a narrow path like as the sure path to live in His will. His call presents us with high goals, elevated choices...He raises us from the dust of our mediocrity, or our fear, our weakness or comfort, and tells us that in His plan of life, the primacy of the love of God and humanity, unconditional service to men, zeal for His kingdom to the point of martyrdom, the Gospel values are the supreme rule of life—all this is its foundation and goal. John Paul II told young people in a message in 1996: "*Jesus is a demanding friend. He points to lofty goals; he asks us to go out of ourselves in order to meet him, entrusting to him our whole life: "Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35)...*" ¹³

In this lesson, the young lady will learn about the goal of the striving of every Christian - holiness - particularly as the radical following of Christ through the practice of the evangelical counsels. She will study more in depth the Marian path of holiness delineated by our charism and spirituality and the action of the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness, in the practice of the evangelical counsels.

Assignment: Read Vita Consecrata no.21. How are the three Divine Persons involved in the call you received to the consecrated life? What strikes your attention the most about our Marian path of holiness? How do the evangelical counsels overcome the three-fold lust of the world?

Week 4: The Demands of Discipleship - "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." ¹⁴

In the Gospel according to Mark, we experience the urgency of Jesus and his promptitude to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven. The time is at hand and the response to follow the Messiah is immediate. As our Mother foundress explains with the same urgency,

"Today, like yesterday, Bl. John Paul II tells us that it is necessary for us to be willing to risk everything to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and that we are capable of doing so. We must sail the ocean; we must go out into the deep. To stay on the shore considering what the other side would be like or if I have the capacity to row, or if it is convenient for me to cross, or if it is the moment to leave everything and climb into the boat before doing other things...all this is the cause of a nostalgia, or sentimental longing, that only ends in a profound existential depression.... We must launch ourselves in obedience to the voice, to the call, of Christ and go out into the deep, for only in this way will there be a miraculous catch in our own life, and then in our mission. We must enter the ocean to walk on the water. It is the conviction and determination necessary to respond to the risk of following Christ wherever He leads us. But in this

case, the risk is not to lose one's life in an accident, but to lose it in the total donation of self, which in the end is the most fecund way to gain it."

In this lesson the young lady will examine what it entails in her life to leave everything behind to follow Jesus, including the separation from her family.

Assignment: What are the demands of discipleship that pertain to your life?

Week 5: Fraternal Life in Community - "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."¹⁵

The Church is essentially a mystery of communion, "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit". The fraternal life seeks to reflect the depth and richness of this mystery, taking shape as a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons. The fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion.¹⁶

Consecrated persons, who become "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), experience an interior call to share everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service.¹⁷

The young lady will learn about the elements of living fraternal life in community and will examine the factors necessary to go from an attitude of the "I" to that of the "We."

Assignment: Read Mother's letter no. 123 "A Choice of Love." What attitudes in your life do you see you have to elevate to foster a joyful witness of fraternal life?

Week 6: Missionaries of the Church - "The Harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."¹⁸

As Pope Paul VI taught us in the dogmatic constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, "the Church-- that is, the kingdom of Christ--already present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world."¹⁹ The kingdom of God is made present through the Church. Furthermore, since the religious consecration binds the religious to Christ, it consequently involves a special tie with the Church, for She receives the vows of the religious and thus incorporates her into the life of the Church. Additionally, Blessed John Paul II teaches us that "the consecrated life has not only proved a help and support for the Church in the past, but is also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission."²⁰ Thus, it is very necessary for the religious to deepen the indispensable connection between religious life and the Church.

In this lesson, the young lady will learn about the different apostolates entrusted to our Community and explore her gifts and talents which may be put at the service of the Church.

Assignment: On what is the apostolic fruitfulness of religious dependent? Reflect upon: "What you do is important, but what you are is even more important."

Week 7: Total Marian Availability, Identity of a SCTJM (Significance of Habit)

"May our lamps always be burning in order to respond with a solid, mature, and responsible love to such a precious gift, to the valuable treasure and the precious pearl of our religious vocation."²¹

¹ Blessed John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*. n.1 Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. March 25, 1996.

² XII Ordinary General Assembly. Instrumentum Laboris. The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2008. No.90.

³ XII Ordinary General Assembly. Instrumentum Laboris. The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2008. No. 24.

⁴ Cf. Hahn, Scott. "The Gospel of Mark." CD Track 2.

⁵ Mark 1:15

⁶ Blessed John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*. n.1 Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. March 25, 1996.

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church. no. 923

⁸ Cf. Rev 21:5

⁹ Galindo, Mother Adela. Reflection to her daughters “A Profound Gaze at Vocational Discernment Contemplating the Heart of Bl. John Paul II. January 21-22, 2012.

¹⁰ Mark 1:16, 19

¹¹ Jeremiah 1:5

¹² Mark 1:17

¹³ Galindo, Mother Adela. Reflection to her daughters “A Profound Gaze at Vocational Discernment Contemplating the Heart of Bl. John Paul II. January 21-22, 2012

¹⁴ Mark 1:18

¹⁵ Matthew 18:20

¹⁶ John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*. n.41 Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. March 25, 1996.

¹⁷ John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*. n.42 Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. March 25, 1996.

¹⁸ Luke 10:2

¹⁹ Lumen Gentium. no.3

²⁰ Blessed John Paul II. *Vita Consecrata*. n.3 Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. March 25, 1996.

²¹ Galindo, Mother Adela. Reflection to her daughters “A Profound Gaze at Vocational Discernment Contemplating the Heart of

Bl. John Paul II. January 21-22, 2012

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