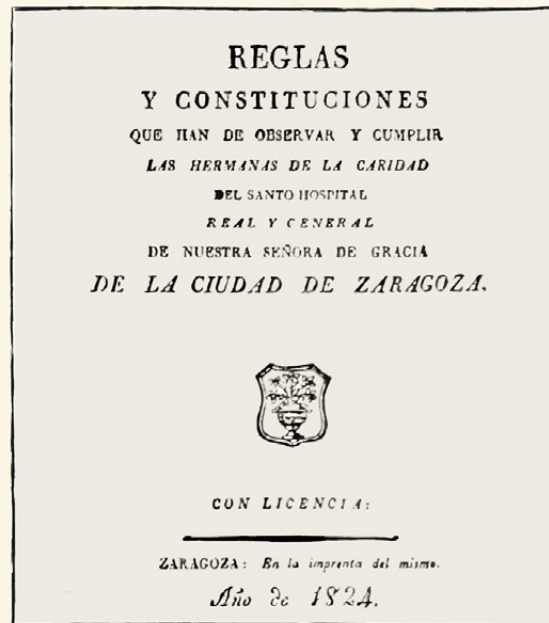


200th Anniversary of the approval of the CONSTITUTIONS OF 1824



EVANGELICAL COUNSELS -THE GIFT OF CHASTITY, PATH TO FERTILITY-

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“And we have known the love that God has for us and have believed in Him.” (1Jn 4:16)

OUR CONSTITUTIONS

Consecrated chastity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a path of radical and fruitful love that identifies us with Jesus, celibate for the Kingdom. This charism not only expresses our exclusive dedication to God, but also frees us to love with an undivided heart, as our Constitutions invite us to do:

“Consecrated chastity is a gift of the Spirit that identifies us with Jesus, celibate for the Kingdom, who, by loving the Father with all his heart, becomes free to love all creatures” (Const. 33).

The Constitutions of 1824 reaffirm that the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne must live this evangelical counsel as a total offering to God:

“Continence is a matter of mere advice for the common faithful, but it is a strict obligation for the Sisters of Charity, who dedicate themselves to God in the service of his poor sick, and offer it to Him in the vow they make for it” (Constitutions of 1824, p. 49).

Total dedication to God and universal service, especially to the poorest and most abandoned, is a hallmark of our Founders and first sisters. This is expressed again in our Constitution:

“Our founders and first Sisters loved God radically, making their lives a universal gift, without borders, welcoming everyone, especially those who suffer from loneliness and abandonment” (Const. 34).



THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON CHASTITY

Consecrated chastity does not imply renouncing human love, but rather a greater openness: loving God with all one's heart and others with the freedom of the Holy Spirit. José Cristo Rey García Paredes explains it masterfully:

“Chastity is only possible thanks to the Holy Spirit, who enables us to love with all our hearts, making possible a united community and an apostolate full of love for the poorest.” (1)

Pope Saint John Paul II also highlighted the transformative witness of this gift in consecrated life:

“The consecrated person shows that what many believe to be impossible is possible and truly liberating with the grace of the Lord Jesus. In Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting Him above all other love, and to love all creatures with the freedom of God.” (2)

In a world marked by hyper-sexualization and the trivialization of human relationships, consecrated chastity stands as a prophetic sign of joy and freedom. It is not simply the absence of emotional ties, but a full commitment that requires personal and emotional maturity:

“Chastity imprints an original style on our capacity to love and is a sign of the power of grace in our fragility.” (5)

The experience of this gift requires ongoing formation, prayer and reflection, as recalled in the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* :

“The joyful practice of perfect chastity is a testimony to the power of God's love in human fragility. The consecrated person feels capable of a radical and universal love, which gives him the strength not to fall into the slavery of the senses and instincts.” (2)

Sr. María Luisa Belsué states that, when speaking of chastity in terms of fertility, we enter into the domain of LOVE , at the same time that we enter into the immense possibility of expression that arises from a discourse that gives value to LIFE :

“Love and Life will be the guiding words of our discourse. These words will give us the measure of the divine adventure in its approach to man. They will also justify the human process in its flight towards God. Both will have been possible thanks to the power of a Word: the Word of the crucified Man, the Word of the God who humbled himself.” (5)

Love and Life converge in History to make it move forward. Some texts taken from the re-reading of the Word have come to light. Through this fact, History becomes a point of reference for understanding both the admirable greatness of the Giver and the astonishing perseverance of the one who receives the Gift. (5)



Love and Life will ask to be experienced by the protagonist of History: the Human Being. This experience, born from a loving call, will pass through the places that fertilize and shape the interior of the one who responds favorably to the call, and makes him capable of performing a divine act: gratuitousness.

Chastity is not a virtue acquired by our own efforts, but a Gift from God. The origin of God's Gifts is the nature of divinity, and this nature is Life, Life in superabundance. Therefore, when we speak of chastity, we must necessarily speak of fruitfulness because, like every gift, chastity springs from the Life of the one who gives it. (5)

The Life of the One who gives! Let us go back to the beginning. Let us place ourselves before the One who, by giving his Life, makes life fruitful. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the community of Saint John, who was faced with the same concern for searching as we are. Let us follow the account of that sublime moment in John 19:28-30:

"Afterward Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, cried out (in order that the Scripture might also be fulfilled), "I thirst." Now a jar of vinegar was there; and the soldiers put a sponge soaked in vinegar on the end of a reed and held it to Jesus' mouth. Jesus tasted the vinegar and said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

Out of love, Jesus went to the end in fulfilling the mission that the Father had entrusted to him. Jesus, out of breath, cried out: *"I am thirsty"*. What happened next? What follows will take the form of a gesture.

Indeed, in the Gospel of John we are told that as soon as he drank, Jesus exclaimed: *"It is finished"*. Yes, now everything is finished because the human being has been able to perform a divine act: to give without expecting to return. For what could the soldier expect from a man condemned to death? We can say that the gift "of his own" by the soldier brings gratuitousness into where, until then, *"giving-in-order-to-receive"* had governed the relationship between men. (6)

"It is finished". The human being is capable of giving life or, as St. Thomas Aquinas says: "Man is capable of God." (6) In this way, in Jesus, the dynamic of the Gift introduces us:

- **In the depths of God** , where the will to give himself is manifested in a desired and free act: *"bowing his head "*. The active form of this verb testifies to the perfect mastery that characterizes Jesus in the fulfillment of his mission.
- **In our very depths** , where the will to give of ourselves is manifested in a free and gratuitous act: *"Let it be done to me according to your word"*. The passive form of the verb testifies to the availability that characterizes the religious, who follows Jesus, in the fulfillment of the mission that has been entrusted to him: to give the Spirit to the world, to give Life, and this, until the end.



The dynamics of the gift introduces us both into the depths of God and into our own depths, where the act of giving ourselves becomes a free and generous gesture: *“The human being is capable of God.”* (6)

CHASTITY-AFFECTIVITY

In order to live chastity as a path of freedom and fertility, integral and ongoing formation is essential. This includes the development of affectivity, introspection and the integration of our sexuality in the context of consecration. (7)

“Without prayer there can be no chastity, because the fundamental relationship of love with God is missing.” (7)

Furthermore, formation must help to counteract the challenges of our culture, such as the trivialization of sexuality, changing gender identities and superficial relationships. This is what will lead us to the development of our sexual being, consecrated by the vow of chastity. Because love is a force in life, but also a happiness to be conquered. In the rich human personality, balance must be lived on three levels in order to obtain this harmonious whole where we can experience happiness:

- **At the level of the intimacy of the body,**
- **At the level of the spirit and affectivity,**
- **At a deep level of commitment and responsibility.** (8)

I love according to my sexual condition as a woman or a man, but my love does not depend on desire, because the latter has been overcome. This invites us to reflect on the importance of developing personal and emotional maturity, taking into account that affectivity and sexuality are two aspects that, in the maturing process of a person, not only go together, but also complement each other, enhancing our capacity to love, which is self-giving and relationship as sexual persons. The human being is one and, in response to this, this must be realized in gratifying human relationships within the community and social context in which we live.

Psycho-affective and sexual evolution is a human reality. Affectivity, like sexuality, is a dynamic that depends on the circumstances and experiences of each person, conscious and unconscious. This shapes the world of affections and tendencies of each individual. An attitude of introspection and care is required to realize one's own limitations and possibilities and, from there, continue to cultivate oneself in the different areas of personality. (8)

Indifference, rejection, exaggerated shyness, anxiety disorders, various somatizations, latent or manifest aggression, aggression towards norms, evasion,



among others, are indirect manifestations of the affective-sexual drive when it does not have the appropriate channel. The experience of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience can be paths of personal authenticity that, from self-transformation and inner self-affirmation, lead to personal fulfillment. (8)

Consecrated chastity is a path of authenticity and personal transformation. It is a gift that enables us to fully live the love of God and to be witnesses of his presence in the world. (9)

“Following the celibate Christ, we center our lives on his love, which seduces us and frees us from selfishness, and enables us to live our vocation of Charity” (Const. 34). (9)

FOR REFLECTION:

1. Read and meditate on the texts: Jeremiah 31:3, Mark 12:30, John 13:34-35.

What do they teach us about God’s love and our response?

2. What personal or social obstacles do you identify to living the vow of chastity?

3. What means help you to deepen the experience of this gift?

4. We write a headline that summarizes our understanding of the vote and send it to the Delegate for Formation and Spirituality of the Province/Delegation.



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