

Sr. Concilie Solemn Profession

In a few moments, a member of this Society of Franciscan Pilgrims will take perpetual vows. It's 20 years since the SFP was founded and 10 since my predecessor Bishop Crispian granted it canonical status. I am delighted that this, my first visit here, is such a special occasion. Sr. Concilie, our prayers in this Mass are very much with you, as after a long and prayerful discernment, you vow yourself to the Lord Jesus in poverty, chastity and obedience. What you are doing is not only an inspiration to us, disciples, but a powerful sign to the world we live in.

Thank you for choosing to make your Profession on this 18th Sunday of the Year, for the readings could not have been more impressive! The Preacher of that 1stR lived 24 centuries ago, yet his message is as timely as ever: WHAT DOES A MAN GAIN FROM HIS LABORIOUS DAYS, HIS CARES OF OFFICE, HIS RESTLESS LIFE? We live in a culture obsessed with affluence, pleasure, work and busyness. Yet as Jesus warns us in the Gospel, there are more important things in life: FOOL, THIS VERY NIGHT, THE DEMAND WILL BE MADE FOR YOUR SOUL AND THIS HOARD OF YOURS, WHOSE WILL IT BE THEN? St. Francis of Assisi, betrothed to Lady Poverty, grasped this: that when one day we lie on our death-bed, no HD TV, dream holiday or new kitchen will make a ha'p'porth of difference. This is what the vow of poverty is about. It means being joined to the radical poverty of Jesus dying on the Cross, and thus living life with a new attitude, an alternative life-style, a different set of meanings and values, based on God, on being utterly dependent upon him and on supporting others, particularly the poor and the needy. In this sense, all of us, every disciple of Christ, is called to poverty.

Let me add one more thought, from St. Paul in the 2ndR: WHEN CHRIST IS REVEALED – AND HE IS YOUR LIFE – YOU TOO WILL BE REVEALED IN ALL YOUR GLORY WITH HIM. The early 21C is a time of exciting new developments, yet our world is also marked by inequality, violence and injustice and the waste of natural resources. Without God, life becomes flat, horizontal, meaningless. This is why the Church today is calling us to the work of new evangelisation, to presenting the Person of Jesus Christ and the Gospel call to discipleship; we must put Jesus at the centre and develop a personal-passionate relationship with him. Every member of the Church must espouse poverty, but also chastity and obedience. For chastity, purity and continence, in a world that has redefined what sex means, are countersigns pointing to the Other World. And obedience, by which we willingly put ourselves, our hearts and minds, under the Word of God coming to us through the Church, her Teaching and Tradition, is also a powerful sign of self-transcendence in an era of relativism and personal opinion.

Sr. Concilie, WHEN CHRIST IS REVEALED – AND HE IS YOUR LIFE – YOU TOO WILL BE REVEALED IN ALL YOUR GLORY WITH HIM. We thank you profoundly for what you are doing today. In vowing yourself to the Lord Jesus in poverty, chastity and obedience, you show us that the way to happiness is by self-denial. We pray you will live up to the vows you profess. Indeed, may the Blessed Mother and St. Francis pray for you. May they pray too for the work of the SFP. Indeed, in the enthralling yet toxic secular culture in which we live, may they help all of us find that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which every human heart longs, but which Christ alone can give.