

***Written by Nicole Bettini, Consecrated Virgin, for a parish's bulletin during the 2015 Year of Consecrated Life***

What a gift it is to write a reflection for you during this Year of Consecrated Life on my vocation as a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World. "Consecrated life" refers to those who forego the good of marriage to live a life dedicated solely to the Lord. In most Catholics awareness this is the life of vowed religious sisters or brothers like those that used to so commonly teach in our schools or members of communities like the Franciscans or Jesuits or other religious communities. I think it would be quite easy for many to miss the Year of Consecrated Life. After all, does this year really apply to anyone who is not consecrated? The answer to this question is a resounding YES!

Many have never heard of the vocation of a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World and even among those who have many wonder why I would choose this vocation instead becoming a religious sister. Like religious sisters I have felt called to be espoused, i.e. spiritually married, to the Divine Bridegroom, Jesus. I like to say that for every espousal there is a proposal! I remember the night of our Lord's proposal to me. I was in a garden; there were candles and others around but they really weren't paying attention. This is because they were sleeping! It was Holy Thursday night of 2005, when I was in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament on the altar of repose and Jesus said to me: "Nicole, you know the plans that I have for you." I immediately thought of the words from the Book of Jeremiah: "Plans for your welfare and not your woe..." [29:11]. Jesus stopped me though and replied: "No. For you to be my bride." Oh, what a moment of profound joy and grace as I replied: "Yes, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you! Yes!"

You see growing up in a family bakery in Omaha, Nebraska, I always imagined myself as a bride; I just was a bit surprised when I learned who my Spouse would be! My family would go to Mass every Sunday and I went to weekly Wednesday evening religion classes as I attended K-12 grade public school. I never met a Sister or a Consecrated Virgin, for that matter; but there are two things that I remember from my teenage years. First, I remember thinking that there had to be more to life than I was experiencing; and second, that I was in some way a vessel that had been protected. In time, I would come understand this more deeply. On November 17, 2007, at the hands of Archbishop Flynn, I was consecrated as a sacred person in the Church. I became part of the ancient Order of Virgins, that includes the Virgin-Martyrs like Saint Agnes, Saint Lucy, Saint Cecilia and Saint Agatha to name a few. While this vocation is ancient, it is also as new as the restoration of the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, a fruit of Vatican II. While there was a period of formation before my consecration, I am in fact continually growing into the reality of my vocation and what it means to be His bride, and thus what a grace this Year of Consecrated Life is for me personally!

While I pray that this year will bring with it a deepening of my own espousal with the Divine Bridegroom, I pray too that the gift of Consecrated Life may become an ever greater leaven for the universal Church and in particular our own Archdiocese. After all, each time a "Year" is called by our Holy Father it is an invitation for the entire Church to turn its gaze to ponder more deeply a particular mystery and vocation in the life of the Church. In a culture such as ours, the Church still unhesitatingly holds up the vocations that forego the good of marriage to remind us that there is more to this world than what we can see. My vocation as a consecrated virgin proclaims to the Church and the world that God must be first in our lives. Unlike a religious sister, I live this consecrated life in the world, that is, I have a job like you do. I dress like you do. I have a home like you do. But in the midst of life's difficulties and trials what gets me out of the bed in the morning from the heart of my vocation, what mediates every decision I make regarding use of time or resources from the depth of my vocation is this Spousal relationship with Jesus. In certain ways it is quite a hidden life but one that proclaims a profound truth about the One for whom we are all called to live and the One in whom we find our true hope. Thus, such a consecrated relationship with Jesus is a gift not just for me but in fact also for all of you living in other states of life like marriage. Thus, I pray that God may use this gift of Consecrated Virginity Living in the World – to which I have been called – as a humble reminder to you of your call to live for God now in such a way that you will live with Him forever.



Christ is close!

Nicole Bettini, Consecrated Virgin