



THE PASTOR'S POST

BOLD SISTERS AND BROTHERS

Dear Parish Family:

Today we celebrate a feast in the life of the Church we do not often celebrate on a Sunday - the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. It is always celebrated on February 2nd, 40 days after Christmas. (For some this is the day the Christmas decorations finally come down!)

It is also the annual World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. On this day, the Church calls us to remember religious sisters, brothers, and priests in religious communities who have dedicated their lives to the service of the Church, in times good and bad, in times of sickness and health in the life of the Church and the world.

We know religious life has changed in these years. I am unsure our diocese would even exist without the contributions of the religious communities. Hospitals, nursing homes, schools, parishes, and so much more have been established by religious communities, particularly religious women. The parish of Saint Brigid is no exception, with a particular recognition of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Throughout the history of the Church, many religious men and women faced disregard or dismissal by Church and local authorities. Consider the courage needed to build hospitals with little to no money or build motherhouses and chapels or protect the unborn and victims of prejudice and discrimination. Often they took on these challenges when no else would. Consider the sacrifices made in responding to God's call for the good of the other. In those times, religious communities had and - to this day - have a bold vision.

Today, for some communities in our country and area, they are adjusting and adapting to the realities of the times of the Church and the world as they always have...often charting a path for others in the Church to follow. There are some religious communities coming to completion, which means they are no longer accepting new members while still encouraging vocations to other religious communities. This is heartbreaking in some ways. At the same time, what bold vision, what trust that God will provide. One community quoting its founder stated, "I resign the present and the future to Him who is the author and conductor of both."

Bold.

It's foreshadowed in today's Gospel, no? Simeon and Anna have been waiting and waiting for this encounter with the Messiah. The Scriptures today show us that Simeon knew he encountered Christ and now he could go in peace, having lived this life for this moment and time. Bold.

The boldness of many religious communities often shakes and transforms the Church and the nation. At times, they are visionaries who lead the Church forward to engage where perhaps the presence of the Church has been lacking. At other times, they are often the prophets to help us see the errors of our ways calling us to a return. Most times, they are doing both. Consider any major moral, social, or religious issue in our time and you are likely to find religious men and women leading boldly, often at great risk.

Are they always right? No. None of us is always right. Even some of the greatest prophets, disciples and Apostles made mistakes -sometimes too bold, sometimes not bold enough. Do they often have the vision that others lack? Yes, indeed.

As we continue in this Jubilee of Hope, as we come through this synodal process in the Church, and as we face times of great trial and concern in our country and world, we need this bold vision. A vision that seeks to discern the presence of the Messiah and even more powerfully to respond even when it includes difficult and painful decisions and negative reactions.

A simple prayer is prayed today for religious women and men with these words, "Strengthen them in their mission, fill them with Your Spirit, and guide them in joy and fidelity. May their witness inspire others to seek You, and their lives reflect Your love to the world." May the same be said, one day, of you and me.

Let us not be afraid of the bold visions offered to us by many who seek to respond to the signs of times. This is true for Simeon and Anna in their time. It is true for so many religious women and men in our country and world. May the same be said, one day, of you and me.

Please pray for me. I promise the same.

