

Year of Women Religious begins Feb. 2

Submitted by Sister Martha Feder, O.S.B.

Feb. 2, 2012 has been designated by the Vatican as a World Day for Consecrated Life. In the Diocese of Covington Bishop Roger Foys has announced a further step by proclaiming the year 2012 to be a Year of Women Religious with the opening Mass Feb. 25. The date Feb. 2, the official opening date, is significant since it is the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Why is this an appropriate feast to begin a year of celebrating the lives of the Women Religious who have served so well in this diocese and throughout the world?

Basic to the lives of Women Religious is the fact that they, too, like Jesus, were presented to God in the Church (the Temple) at their baptism. Women Religious have furthered their call by presenting themselves before the Church and community to profess their vows to God. They vowed to be messengers of God's Word through community, a life of prayer and service. In other words, Women Religious are to be a light that shines out to all the world that Jesus is in the midst of all people.

Light is significant on this feast day because it is also called Candlemas Day — a day on which candles for use in the Church's liturgies are blessed. Women Religious,

like all Christians, received a lighted candle at baptism and ever since candles are important liturgical symbols for them. For example, in this writer's monastic community the sisters carry a lighted candle in procession as they ready themselves to pronounce their vows during a religious ceremony. This same candle follows them at significant times, such as celebrations of jubilees marking the years of profession. Also at their dying bedside and for 30 days after the death of a sister, the same candle is lighted in the dining room in her memory.

Since the feast of the Presentation of Jesus signifies Jesus as the light of the world Women Religious accept the challenge to keep the light of Christ burning. They have committed themselves to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Each of the communities of Women Religious located in the Diocese of Covington has a long history extending from their founders, whose traditions have been the foundation upon which each has built. Based on their founder's rule and their present constitutions approved by Rome, their members have continued to respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to a life of holiness and service through faithfulness to the Gospel.

The Women Religious of this Diocese are very appreciative of the support of their families, friends and members of the various parishes. They resolve to keep all in their prayers.



2012
YEAR OF

Women
Religious

40 Hours with Jesus Christ

Father William P. Saunders

The Forty Hours Devotion is a special 40-hour period of continuous prayer made before the Blessed Sacrament in solemn exposition. Of course, the focus of this devotion is on the Holy Eucharist. As Catholics, the words of our Lord burn in our hearts: "I myself am the living bread come down from Heaven. If anyone eats this bread, He shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

Affirming our belief in the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, the Vatican Council II taught that the Holy Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." ("Lumen Gentium," #11) While the Mass is the central act of worship for us Catholics, an act which participates in the eternal reality of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection, Vatican Council II upheld and encouraged the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. Of course such devotion derives from the sacrifice of the Mass and moves the faithful to both sacramental and spiritual communion with our Lord. ("Eucharisticum Mysterium," #50) As Pope Pius XII taught in "Mediator Dei," "This practice of adoration has a valid and firm foundation."

The number 40 has always signified a sacred period of time: the rains during the time of Noah lasted 40 days and nights; the Jews wandered through the desert for 40 years, our Lord fasted and prayed for 40 days before beginning his public ministry. The Forty Hours Devotion remembers that traditional "40-hour period" from our Lord's burial until the resurrection. Actually in the Middle Ages, the Blessed Sacrament was transferred to the repository, "the Easter Sepulcher," for this period of time to signify our Lord's time in the tomb.

The Forty Hours Devotion begins with a Solemn Mass of Exposition, which concludes with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and a procession. The Blessed Sacrament remains on the altar in a monstrance. During the next 40 hours, the faithful gather for personal or public prayer in adoration of our Lord. The Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the tabernacle for the daily Mass, and then returned for exposition after Mass. At the end of the devotions, the Mass of Deposition is offered, again concluding with a procession, Benediction and final reposition of the Blessed Sacrament. While the 40-hour period should be continuous, some churches break up the time, reposing the

Blessed Sacrament at night because of security or other reasons.

The Forty Hours Devotion can be seen almost like a parish mini-retreat or mission. A guest priest may be invited to give a series of homilies. Confessions should be offered and encouraged. Consequently, an appropriate time to schedule Forty Hours is either Advent or Lent.

While the Forty Hours Devotion nurtures the love of the faithful for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, three special dimensions have also surrounded this devotion: the protection from evil and temptation; reparation for our own sins and for the poor souls in purgatory; and deliverance from political, material or spiritual calamities. Here the faithful implore our Lord to pour forth his abundant graces not only for themselves, but their neighbors, not only for their own personal needs, but for those of the world.

Father William P. Saunders is a priest for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia. This article first appeared in the Arlington Catholic Herald and is reprinted with permission.

Forty Hours Devotion

Marking the "Year of Women Religious," the Sisters of Notre Dame extend an invitation to join them during their annual Forty Hours Devotion at their Provincial House Chapel in Park Hills.

Friday, Feb. 3

8:30 a.m. — Holy Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
9:15 a.m.–7 p.m. — Time for Adoration
7 p.m. — First Friday Holy Hour followed by Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Saturday, Feb. 4

8:30 a.m. — Holy Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
9:15 a.m.–4:45 p.m. — Time for Adoration
4:45 p.m. — Evening Prayer, Rosary followed by Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Sunday, Feb. 5

9:30 a.m. — Holy Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
11:30 a.m. — Closing of Forty Hours with Benediction

Visit www.sndky.org for information.