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**MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD DAY
FOR CONSECRATED LIFE**

Theme: « *Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find* » (Mt 22, 9)



02nd february 2024

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INTRODUCTION

1. Dear brothers and sisters! On this Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Church also celebrates the World Day of Consecrated Life. Receive all our wishes for this blessed day!

The readings of this day teach us that Christ is the Light that illuminates those in darkness (Luke 2:32). It is this light that guides us, who follow Christ, and gives us the strength to encourage others to walk in the light. Hence, the theme for this year is: **"Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find"** (Matthew 22:9).

2. We celebrate this Feast as we prepare to commemorate the double Jubilee: the 2025th anniversary of the redemption of humanity and the 125th anniversary of the Evangelization of Rwanda. It is an opportunity to reflect on our journey following Jesus Christ and to recommit ourselves to proclaiming the Good News received from Jesus Christ, the Light of the nations. Indeed, Christ is the source of hope, fraternity, and peace, as emphasized by the Jubilee theme.

A. CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE NATIONS

3. As today's Gospel tells us, Christ *"is a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel"* (Luke 2:32). In the prologue of the Gospel of Saint John, we read that the Word was the true light, which enlightens everyone; he came into the world (John 1:9). Jesus himself testifies in the Gospel, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

4. Jesus is the Star that illuminates our path when we seek God and helps us reveal Him to others. At Christmas, we heard how the star guided the Magi from the East to the place where the Child Jesus was born. They testified, saying, *"We saw his star when it rose in the east and have come to worship him"* (Matthew 2:2). This star had also been prophesied by the prophet Balaam, who declared, *"A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel"* (Numbers 24:17). This star remained with them to guide them to Jesus.

Jesus is the true Star that illuminates and guides us towards Him, inviting us to journey with Him, for He declares, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In our walk towards Jesus, He does not abandon us but, on the contrary, guides us, enlightens us, and reaches out to support us.

5. In Jesus Christ, God sends us His light; He comes to us to illuminate us. Through His light, we discern what is necessary to do. That is why His disciples

choose to leave everything behind to follow Him, for there is no one else to turn to but Him. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68).

6. Jesus Christ is the light that illuminates our understanding of Holy Scriptures, and we are called to share this understanding with others. The elderly Simeon, taking Jesus in his arms, recognized in Him the fulfillment of divine promises and understood what he had been waiting to see: the salvation of Israel. Thus, Jesus Christ enlightens us to know the will of God, whether individually or collectively. We can discern what is precious and hear God's voice in the current moments we live.

7. In the early stages of each person's journey, a light from Christ shines, much like the one that guided Saul (Acts 9:3). This light may seem faint at first, but over time, it illuminates everyone, allowing them to understand what the Lord expects from them. Even today, the words of the Second Vatican Council must resonate strongly, affirming that Christ is the Light of the nations (see *Lumen Gentium* 1). In Christ, a true light enlightens people because He is the source of truth.

8. In daily life, we may be discouraged by the darkness caused by misunderstanding, discouragement, temptations, and inevitable difficulties. In all circumstances, it is essential to recognize that those who rely on Christ lack nothing. Even during difficult times, let us remember that we possess an inner light that shines in the darkness.

B. SO THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT (John 1:5)

9. Dear brothers and sisters, those who live in the light are truly the children of God. Receiving the True Light gives us the power to become children of God, as Apostle Saint John affirms: *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12). All are guided by the Spirit of God and bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Apostle Paul teaches us that the fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

10. Another sign of the presence of Christ's light in us is our ability to renounce everything to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-22), demonstrating that Christ is among us, and we are concrete witnesses of His presence in the world. We are also called to be messengers and witnesses of His love towards our brothers.



11. Currently, many Christians stand out for their integrity in faith, ready to fight for good and resist evil. Their commitment deserves recognition. We expect from them acts of charity and the promotion of the Christian culture handed down by our ancestors, a precious heritage that the Church preserves. We express our gratitude to the consecrated individuals who witness their faith, sometimes at the cost of their lives, by helping others and actively engaging in the Christian mission. These concrete examples are signs that the light of Christ dwells in us.

12. However, even if we have embraced faith, darkness persists in our world. This often manifests through prevailing atheism that some Christians fall into, many people succumbing to attitudes such as materialism, leading to a violation of human dignity; superficial religiosity that fails to convert the human heart; a science that turns eyes away from God; conflicts worldwide; the spread of anti-values, etc.

13. Dear brothers and sisters, in these times, Jesus Christ reminds us to anchor ourselves in the light we received at our baptism and in the commitments we made with Him so that we may be the "salt and light of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Let us be people of solidarity, full of hope, teaching others to contemplate Jesus Christ, the Source of hope, fraternity, and peace.

C. GO THEREFORE TO THE MAIN ROADS AND INVITE TO THE WEDDING FEAST AS MANY AS YOU FIND

14. As the Gospel according to Matthew recounts, Jesus continues to call people into His Church. Some feel that this call does not concern them, others reject it due to the challenges of the world, and while still, others fight against it. However, Jesus does not despair; He persists in the hope that those He calls will hear His voice clearly and respond. That is why He continues to send messengers to the main roads today to call those they find.

15. In these times, the consecrated are called to invite others to participate in the wedding feast of Jesus. Our primary responsibility is to guide people in their journey of conversion and to follow the Gospel. The charitable works we perform, through the light of our life witness, are examples that help people love Jesus Christ and follow Him.

16. The consecrated must configure themselves to Jesus Christ, who went to people in their daily lives to encourage them to follow Him. Every day, we encounter people, and regardless of our actions and identity, they need us to speak to them, produce good fruits for them, show them humanity, and welcome them with magnanimity to evoke in them the question of who dwells in us.

Conclusion

17. Dear brothers and sisters, on this Feast dedicated to you, we continue to remind you that you too are the light and are called to radiate it around you. "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

18. May this double jubilee we are preparing to celebrate be a moment for us to give thanks to God for the trust He has placed in us, calling us to be His faithful witnesses. May we continue to be faithful to our vocation and commitments made to God in the Church. May we remain good messengers calling others to Jesus Christ, the True Light, and the source of hope, fraternity, and peace.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word, Mother of Kibeho, and Mother of the Consecrated, intercede for us!

Done at Kigali, 20th January 2024

✠ Céléstin HAKIZIMANA, Bishop of GIKONGORO
President of the Episcopal Commission for Consecrated Persons

