

CONSECRATED IN THE TRUTH AND CHANGED BY IT

One of the dates that is evergreen in my memory is 4th October 1999, which is the day I entered Bigard Memorial Major Seminary, Enugu Nigeria and started my Philosophical studies towards becoming a Catholic priest. The first week at Bigard Seminary was our Orientation Week wherein we were educated on what life in the major seminary was all about; we equally attended a Group Fete wherein we were exposed to the various religious and social groups in the seminary as a way of enticing us to join some of them. During the Group Fete, I was drawn to the Charismatic Renewal and to the many Marian Associations. Since there was only one Charismatic Renewal Group, there was no competition; however, there were lots of Marian Groups that I could not make up my mind easily because every one of them was very good and enticing. Since we were given 2 weeks to make a decision, I then decided to spend some time observing the members of the various Marian Associations before making a decision. During my 2 weeks of active observation, a Marian Group which I had never heard of before stood out for me due to the exemplary lives of their members. The members were very humble, prayerful, obedient, helpful to others, simple, happy, down to earth, and unassuming. In my interactions with them, I found them to be positive, and encouraging of each other. That Marian Association is – **Slaves of Love**; and before anyone became a member, he/she must first undergo a 33 Day spiritual journey of Total Consecration to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary, according to St Louis Marie De Montfort.

De Montfort founded this extraordinary Marian Association around 1700 as a way of winning souls for Christ at a time of great spiritual crisis in France and throughout the developed world. De Montfort described his new Marian Association (Slaves of Love) as the most perfect, most profitable, and most efficacious way of consecrating ourselves and everything about us be it past, present, and future, to Jesus through Mary. I started my 33 days Consecration journey on November 5th, 1999, and was Totally Consecrated to Jesus through Mary on December 8th, 1999. This devotion is totally different to others in that it exposes you to the Spirit of the World that must be avoided, empties you of the Knowledge of Self, and fills you with the Knowledge of Our Lady and Jesus Christ. The words of the Total Consecration is profoundly moving; part of it says: **“This day, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body, and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity.”** It is this sense of being totally consecrated to God that we hear about in our readings on this 7th Sunday of Easter.

In our Gospel pericope from John Chapter 17, which is the High-Priestly Prayer of Jesus Christ, we hear Jesus praying to His Father to Consecrate us in the truth as He had consecrated Himself for our sake. The Greek word used there for consecrate is *Hagiazō*

which means to sanctify, to set apart from profane things, make holy, consecrate, and to be dedicated to God. By using the word *Hagiazo*, Christ asked the Father for His disciples to be separated (set apart) from the world by being completely submerged in Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In John's Gospel, the world (Kosmos) has two different meanings; it either means the world that has turned its back on God and embraced evil or the world that has been redeemed by Christ's death on the cross. In this High-Priestly Prayer, Jesus was asking the Father to separate His disciples from the world that has turned its back on God and was willing to destroy His disciples and the Good News. It is to continue this work of preaching the Truth to the world that the disciples chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot in today's First Reading from Acts Chapter 1. It is interesting to note that the disciples were clear that the replacement to Judas Iscariot must be someone who had followed them around and witnessed everything Jesus said and did as well as His resurrection. This is a crucial ingredient since nobody can preach that which he/she has not experienced; no wonder the Latin phrase captured it so well – *Nemo dat quod non habet* – No one can give what they do not have. However, to be effective preachers, missionaries, and agents of the Truth, it must be done in love since God is love as we heard in today's Second Reading.

My friends, Christ prayed for us to be Consecrated in the Truth and to be changed by it. At our Baptism, we were all consecrated with the Chrism Oil and as such, we were set apart from the world. However, have we really set ourselves apart from the world? A curious look at our contemporary world will expose the fact that Christians are now shying away from the Truth. Here in the UK, there is a bill before Parliament to legalise abortion at any point and for whatever reason. At a time when the world's population is going down and we all need to protect every life, yet some Christians are advocating for abortion to be legalised. On the other hand, we have Christians advocating for Euthanasia in the name of Mercy-Killing; when has killing anyone become a merciful act? We also have the issue of FAKE NEWS menacing the world especially as the Church celebrates the 58th World Communications Sunday today. Pope Francis has asked us to look at Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Wisdom of the heart. At a time where social media platforms are giving us various options to edit, filter and recreate ourselves; it has even gotten so bad that so many people do edit and filter out their real selves while presenting fake profiles, fake personalities, and fake humanity online, just to get followers and/or to make quick money. Sometimes, I do wonder if God will even decipher our real selves from our fake selves.

Like St Louis Marie De Montfort who advanced Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary; let us heed the summons to be Consecrated in the Truth and be changed by it.

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Homily for the 7th Sunday of Easter, Year B (12/05/2024)