

Mass for Consecrated Life - Sunday, January 27, 2013
St. John Gaulbert Cathedral - Johnstown
Homily

Fiorello LaGuardia was the mayor of New York City during the Great Depression of the 1930's and the World War II years of the 1940's. He was a controversial mayor, yet he served three terms in office.

The Mayor of New York had the authority to appoint judges when there was a vacancy in the city court. There is a story told that one evening there was no judge available to hear cases because of illness, so LaGuardia declared that there was a vacancy and then promptly appointed himself to be the judge for that evening session.

It was a bitterly cold evening in January 1935. A tattered old woman was brought before LaGuardia. She was charged with stealing a loaf of bread. LaGuardia asked, "What do you have to say in your defense?"

The woman told LaGuardia that her husband was deceased and she had taken in her daughter and two grandchildren. The daughter's husband had abandoned her 3 years ago. He said he was going far away to look for work, but he never sent her any money and had not been heard from again.

And she told LaGuardia that her daughter had pneumonia and her two young grandchildren had not eaten anything in days, so she stole the loaf of bread. She also admitted taking a couple of pieces of fruit.

Then LaGuardia said to the shopkeeper, "You heard what the woman said. What do you want me to do?" The shopkeeper refused to drop the charges. He said, "Times are hard for me too and it's a bad neighborhood. She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed as he looked at the old woman who by now was trembling and crying as she stood before him. He turned to the woman and said "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail."

But even as he pronounced sentence, Mayor LaGuardia was already reaching into his pocket. He took out 10 dollars and said, "Here is the fine," at which point everyone in the courtroom started to applaud and cheer.

LaGuardia began banging the gavel on the desk and told everyone to be quiet. After order was restored, Mayor LaGuardia said, “For that outburst I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom for living in a city where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat.”

He ordered the bailiff to collect the fine. He moved about the courtroom and collected 50 cents from everyone, including the New York City policemen who arrested the old woman. LaGuardia even ordered the grocery-store owner to contribute. When it was added up, the mayor then presented the trembling grandmother with 47 dollars and 50 cents and then dismissed her case.

Did you know that LaGuardia’s nickname was “The Little Flower?” It wasn’t because he imitated the holiness of the great Carmelite saint of the 19th century, Therese of Lisieux, who is also called “The Little Flower.” It was because LaGuardia’s name Fiorello means “Little Flower.”

There is one more nickname that we should pay attention to during the celebration of this Mass for Consecrated Life. It’s found in the Gospel reading today and it’s a name that is often overlooked.

Did you ever notice that the Gospel of Luke is addressed to someone who is called Theophilus? It says in the opening words of the Gospel:

“Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.”

The word “Theophilus” means “Friend of God.” It refers to someone who is not simply aware of God, but has a relationship with God. The meaning of this name is so significant that Luke doesn’t just say “Friend of God,” but he address this person as “most excellent Theophilus.”

What awesome words of encouragement: to be a “Friend of God” is not just excellent, but “most excellent.”

All of us know that finding a good friend, much less an excellent friend is not something that just happens. But having a friend, an excellent friend is something that every one of us desires. That desire includes friendship with God.

Just a few months after he was elected in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI addressed a group of women and men in consecrated life during a meeting in Rome. He observed that since its origins, in fact, consecrated life has been marked by its thirst for God; in Latin the expression is *quaerere Deum*.

And in an address to women and men in consecrated life at a meeting in Austria in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI said, “By your prayer and intercession, you are the advocates of all who seek God, who are journeying towards God.” *Quarere Deum*.

I am forever grateful for all the women and men religious who have been Friends of God for me and with me. From the time I was a young child and had the opportunity to interact with cousins in my family who were priests and sisters in religious orders, and through 24 years of my education, I have been blessed to have been taught by men and women religious who didn't just teach me about God. They introduced me to the joy and mystery of being a Friend of God.

Throughout 30 years as a priest and almost 2 years as a bishop, I have been blessed to have many co-workers who are in consecrated life, and they are not just co-workers. They are friends; they are Friends of God. And I am so glad that these Friends of God are here for this celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

St. Paul reminds us in the 2nd reading that we are all one body, but there are many unique parts. It is an honor and joy to celebrate this Mass for the women and men of our diocese who are in consecrated life as sisters, brothers, and priests. You are one of the unique parts of this Body of Christ.

I know many of you who are here at this Eucharistic celebration and many who are watching or listening at home know one of these Friends of God. If you don't, get to know them and ask them to introduce you to the joy and mystery of being a Friend of God.

And to those of you present here or watching or listening at home whose friendship with God is consecrated because of your promises, vows, and charisms, I want to finish with a small reminder made by Pope Benedict XVI when he spoke to those in consecrated life during his visit to New York City in 2008. The Holy Father said:

“Dear brothers and sisters, in the finest traditions of the Church in this country, you are to be the first friend of the poor, the homeless, the stranger, the sick and all who suffer. Act as beacons of hope, casting the light of Christ upon the world, and encouraging young people to discover the beauty of a life given completely to the Lord and his Church.”

In other words, be a little flower; perhaps like the little flower Fiorella in New York City who knew that it was not right for a widowed grandmother with a sick daughter and two hungry granddaughters to be without a friend.

Be a little flower; perhaps like the one from Lisieux, whose cloistered friendship with God did not prevent her from teaching and inspiring others to find that same friendship in their lives.

When Blessed John Paul II celebrated the first Day of Consecrated Life in 1997, he said, “This day is meant, above all for you, dear brothers and sisters who have embraced this state in the Church, to be a precious occasion to renew your commitment and rekindle the feelings that inspired and continue to inspire the gift of yourselves to the Lord.”

Please know that as you renew your commitment in our presence here, we renew our gratitude, our prayerful support, and our friendship with you.”