Homily at Saint John Lateran for the Final Vows of a Brother
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Beloved Brother,

To be able to live throughout your life what Saint John lived--his love for Christ--you give yourself totally to Jesus in religious life. You know that Jesus has given you everything and you want to give yourself totally to Him. And you know that religious life gives you the possibility of living by this total gift of yourself to Jesus. This is your greatest desire, and that is why you are going to take these vows. Vows of chastity, obedience and poverty.
You know full well what you are doing, since you have lived this life in our midst. You thirst to bear witness in the sight of all that Jesus has loved you, that He has loved you in such a profound way that you have no other way to respond to Him than by giving yourself totally and radically to Him. He leaves you completely free, of course! Yet you understand that you can do nothing except love Him with all your heart, all your soul, with all your strength, and thus have nothing left that is yours: that what is most profound in you, in your soul, in your intelligence, your capacity to love, in all your affectivity, your sensibility, and your imagination--that all this be seized by Jesus. Saint John is the beloved disciple because he loves Jesus in a jealous way, and if he loves Jesus with jealousy it is because he is loved by Christ in a jealous and unique way.

It is proper to religious life to live by this covenant of divine jealousy under the motion of the Holy Spirit, and to understand that Jesus gave everything for each one of us, down to the last drop of His blood. "There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood" (1 Jn. 5:7). You have received this testimony and you keep it jealously in your heart. And you know that for this testimony to be lived in the most powerful way, everything must be given to Jesus: your whole life, all your intelligence, your entire self. You know that Jesus loves you with a unique and personal love. This choice that Jesus made from the Cross directly concerns you, and you want to respond in the most appropriate way possible, by leaving everything, including your country Canada, in order to find Jesus more profoundly and to bear greater witness to Him that you love Him and Him alone. You cannot bear to share your heart, because Christ has manifested Himself to your heart with too great a force.

And you have understood that it is through obedience that this love which has taken possession of your heart will be able to take root and incarnate itself in your whole life, so that your entire life may be consecrated to Jesus, so that it may be His alone. The vow of obedience is often the most difficult; yet according to the extent that one gives Jesus

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everything, obedience becomes a joy because it enables us to show Jesus concretely that we love Him. "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). If someone says, "Lord, I love you very much, so much," yet as soon as he is asked to make a small act of obedience says, "Oh no, not that"! this proves that love has not been very deeply rooted in him. This proves that his love is a bit romantic. We say that we love very much when it is joyful and agreeable to us, but as soon as it is no longer agreeable to us, it is all over! And yet it is precisely at this moment that we truly obey; it is then that we show how much we love Jesus, because we give Him our entire life. It is at this moment that our whole life is His, concretely. In order to be true, love requires obedience, a divine obedience that takes hold of everything, especially in today's world which has so greatly demolished obedience. We have been led to believe that obedience is something that diminishes us, that prevents us from being adults, that makes us always remain like infants or slaves. But this is not true. Jesus died in obedience and He shows us the way. He leads us to understand that there is nothing greater than obedience in love, going to the end in the demands of love. This is how love draws all its strength and can be conveyed through all the slightest details of our lives.

In order to obey and love, we must strip ourselves, strip away our very selves completely. It is poverty, interior poverty that is conveyed in all the gestures and acts of our lives. It is being poor, not for the sake of appearing poor, not to be a Pharisee of poverty; it is being poor in order to love. Jesus did not hesitate to "eat with tax collectors" (Mt. 9:10-11; 11:19) and to accept the invitation of Pharisees (Lk. 7:36; 14:1): He was free because His poverty was an interior one. It is this poverty that you ask from the Church. It is not material poverty; it is interior poverty that comes from and leads to love.

No one is as free as a contemplative religious who has given everything to God, because in this way he really loves and he continually chooses his love, the One he loves. He chooses Him to love Him more than all the others--this is the spirit of virginity that the vow of chastity will help you live more and more. What is religious life? It is living our Christian life in all its dimensions and as much as possible, following Jesus. "Follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev. 14:4). Living in this intimacy with the heart of Christ. Our vows are three royal pathways that lead to contemplation, that lead to this intimacy with the heart of Jesus. This is what attracts you, this thirst for contemplation and truth. And you understand that the evangelical counsels (which your vows oblige you to follow) are entirely ordered to this contemplation, this contemplation that you desire to live very close to the heart of Saint John, the great contemplative among the Apostles. You desire to live the mystery of the Eucharist with John; to live the mystery of the Cross with John by receiving Mary; to live the mystery of the Resurrection with John by running toward the risen Jesus, with John, faster than Peter (Jn. 20:4) for his

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heart is so aflame, so burning with love, to give everything and to go to the end.

You have discovered that living by the fatherhood of Saint John consists in living in the desert of the Cross, very close to Jesus crucified, in and through the heart of Mary which is the true desert of God. That is why you have knocked at the door of Saint John. What a joy for us to receive you! To live close to Saint John in this intimacy is to realize what the vocation of all Christians should be. You know that it is very great and that you are weak; but Mary is there and you place everything in her hands. May each one of us today understand this. You give yourself with Mary and with your brothers, since you give yourself to Jesus to the very end by giving yourself to your brothers in fraternal charity. And you know that it is Mary who will be there to enable you to fully live this fraternal charity in a very simple and loving communal life, in which your heart will be able to give itself day after day with an ever greater love.

Monday, October 31, 1994
Homily during Mass at Saint John Lateran

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