

## Spiritual Motherhood and the Day of Pentecost: the Apostolic Service of the Canonesses of Prémontré<sup>1</sup>

“The Apostles and disciples devoted themselves to prayer together with Mary, the mother of Jesus...When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...they continued to speak the word of God with boldness. The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.”<sup>2</sup> In these verses describing the foundation of the Church and the way of life the first Christians led around the Apostles, our Norbertine Order finds its particular inspiration and “the highest ideal which ought to distinguish our entire life.”<sup>3</sup> The canonesses of Prémontré, moreover, understand themselves within this context as heirs of the mission of the Virgin Mary, present as Mother in the midst of the Apostles and disciples. As the Holy Spirit overshadowed her on the day of the Annunciation so that she conceived the Son of God in the flesh, Mary implores this same Spirit to come down and bring to birth the Church, the Mystical Body of her Son. “It was the powerful intercession of Mary that obtained that the Spirit of the Divine Redeemer, already poured out at the Cross, should be bestowed at Pentecost with wonderful gifts upon the Infant Church.”<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit listened to the Virgin Mary’s prayer “with special favor because it is an expression of her motherly love of the Lord’s disciples.”<sup>5</sup>

In our previous article,<sup>6</sup> we considered the apostolic service of the canonesses of Prémontré as the First-Fruits offered for the fruitfulness of the life and apostolate of our Order. This article is an attempt to outline in more precise detail the apostolic service of the canonesses within our Order’s overall mission of actualizing and promoting ecclesial *communio*: the canonesses, following in the footsteps of the Blessed Virgin Mary, are to realize the maternal intercession of the Church for the building up of *communio*. Thus, the article will consider the canonesses’ apostolic service from the perspective of the motherhood of the Church, and as a particular expression of the royal priesthood of the faithful complementary to the ministerial priesthood exercised by the canons.

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<sup>1</sup> An article published by the Norbertine Canonesses of Tehachapi in the COMMUNICATOR, a publication of the English speaking Circary of the Order of Prémontré, December 2015, Volume XXXII, Number 2; Cumulative Issue 62.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Acts 1:14, 2:1,4, 4:32 NABRE.

<sup>3</sup> Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of Prémontré (Const.), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 110.

<sup>5</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, May 28, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> “Spiritual Worship and the Canonesses of Prémontré,” *Communicator*, December 2, 2014, pp. 34-41.

## The Motherhood of the Church

The Church “finds her own deepest identity in her relationship with the Lord Jesus: to be a gift of God to humanity, prolonging through the Holy Spirit the presence and the work of salvation of the Son of God.”<sup>7</sup> She carries out the mission of her Lord and Bridegroom in her Liturgy “through which the work of our redemption is accomplished.”<sup>8</sup> In the Liturgy, the Holy Spirit of God is transmitted to men and women so that they are born anew as sons and daughters of God and nurtured to their full stature in Christ. Thus, the Church is called “Mother Church.” She participates in Christ’s redemptive work as a mother, and her “activity and mission is an expression of her Motherhood.”<sup>9</sup>

The Church is a mother through her preaching of the Word and her Sacraments, the offices of the ministerial priesthood. “And truly, through these brothers chosen by the Lord and consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Church exercises her motherhood: she gives birth to us in Baptism as Christians, giving us a new birth in Christ; she watches over our growth in the faith; she accompanies us into the arms of the Father, to receive his forgiveness; she prepares the Eucharistic table for us, where she nourishes us with the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus; she invokes upon us the blessing of God and the power of his Spirit, sustaining us throughout the course of our life and enveloping us with her tenderness and warmth, especially in those most delicate moments of trial, of suffering and of death.”<sup>10</sup>

The faithful likewise participate in the Church’s mission of salvation, and hence in her motherhood, through the exercise of their baptismal priesthood. “For besides intimately linking [the faithful] to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men.”<sup>11</sup> “Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church ‘a kingdom, priests for his God and Father.’ The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king.”<sup>12</sup>

While the Church’s maternal mission was made manifest after Our Lord’s Resurrection – “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>13</sup> – already during His earthly life and passion, the Blessed Virgin Mary was participating as Mother in the mystery and mission of her Son. “The collaboration of Christians in salvation takes place after the Calvary event, whose fruits they endeavor to spread by prayer and sacrifice. Mary, instead, co-operated during the event itself and in the role of mother; thus her co-operation embraces the whole of

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to Pilgrimage from Diocese of Altamura-Gravina-Acquaviva Delle Fonti, July 2, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Secret of the ninth Sunday after Pentecost*, quoted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, November 5, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (LG) of the Second Vatican Council, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1546.

<sup>13</sup> Mt. 28:19.

Christ's saving work. She alone was associated in this way with the redemptive sacrifice that merited the salvation of all mankind. In union with Christ and in submission to him, she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity."<sup>14</sup>

The special relationship between Mary and the Church lies in the fact of her divine motherhood.<sup>15</sup> "Mary, before carrying out her motherly role for humanity, is the Mother of the only-begotten Son of God made man. On the other hand, the Church is a mother because she gives spiritual birth to Christ in the faithful, thus carrying out her maternal role for the members of the Mystical Body. In this way the Blessed Virgin is a superior model for the Church, precisely because of the uniqueness of her prerogative as Mother of God."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Blessed Virgin's participation as Mother inaugurates the Church's participation in the mystery of redemption as Mother. "The motherhood of the Church is established in precise continuity with that of Mary, as her continuation in history."<sup>17</sup> As the Church sees in the Blessed Virgin the "example of that maternal love, by which it behooves that all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men,"<sup>18</sup> the manner of her motherhood will now be considered.

## Motherhood through the Obedience of Faith

The Virgin Mary, "by her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God's messenger."<sup>19</sup> Mary's *fiat* to "the word that was spoken to her by God"<sup>20</sup> opens the way for the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, through whom she becomes Mother of the Son of God.

From the Annunciation to the Cross, Our Lady collaborated in her Son's mission by her unwavering *fiat* to the word of God revealed to her through the Scriptures and through the person and mission of her Son. Standing at the foot of the Cross and inflamed with the same burning love for souls that animated her Son's sacrifice, the Virgin Mary gave her *fiat* to "the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth,"<sup>21</sup> and so realized her motherhood of Christ's disciples - "Woman, behold, your son."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, April 9, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. LG 63.

<sup>16</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, April 13 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, September 3, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> LG 65; *see also* LG 63.

<sup>19</sup> LG 63.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Luke 1:45.

<sup>21</sup> LG. 58. In consenting to the immolation of her Son, the Blessed Virgin Mary abandoned her maternal rights over the body of her Son.

<sup>22</sup> Jn. 19:26.

Mary's obedience of faith on Calvary makes her Mother of the Church and the Mediatrix of Divine Love to men, "the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the Blessed Virgin participates in her Son's mission of redemption as Mother, and her motherhood is the fruit of her obedience of faith, that is, of her contemplative receptivity to the word of God.<sup>24</sup>

As Mother, Mary is helper of Christ the High Priest. "The Heavenly Father wanted to unite to the Redeemer's intercession as a priest to that of the Blessed Virgin as a mother. It is a role she carries out for the sake of those who are in danger and who need temporal favors and, especially, eternal salvation."<sup>25</sup> This "help"<sup>26</sup> of the Blessed Virgin participates in a subordinate way in the one mediation of Christ: Mary is the Mediatrix to men of the divine life of Love, of the Holy Spirit poured out in the holocaust of her Son.<sup>27</sup> In all of this, "Mary, the New Eve, thus becomes a perfect icon of the Church. In the divine plan, at the foot of the Cross, she represents redeemed humanity which, in need of salvation, is enabled to make a contribution to the unfolding of the saving work."<sup>28</sup>

As the Virgin Mary's *fiat*, that is, her total obedience to God's word, is the secret of her fecundity,<sup>29</sup> it is also the secret of the Motherhood of the Church - "the Church...by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother."<sup>30</sup> This Motherhood of the Church is lived in different ways by the faithful according to their state of life. For the consecrated religious, who by profession of vows "conform themselves more perfectly to the Lord Jesus in His total self-giving,"<sup>31</sup> the exercise of their baptismal priesthood has the character of holocaust - the offering of oneself as a victim in union with Christ for the life of the world. Among the various expressions of consecrated life given by the Spirit for the building up of the Church, there are those called to continue in an exclusive and intense manner Mary's mission of contemplative receptivity and spiritual maternity. These are the cloistered contemplatives, who "in living the whole of their life as 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:3), realize in a supreme way the contemplative vocation of the entire Christian people."<sup>32</sup> Contemplative nuns are called in a particular way to "relive and perpetuate in the Church the presence and the work of Mary. Welcoming the Word in faith and adoring

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<sup>23</sup> St. Irenaeus quoted in LG. 56.

<sup>24</sup> St. Paul exhorts the faithful to "offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (*rationabile obsequium*)" (Rom. 12:1). Contemplative receptivity to God's word is the *rationabile* - the interior transformation of one's being by the living word that expresses itself in *obsequium* - the total surrender of one's entire being to the demands of the living word. It conforms the believer to Christ, who loved the Father and was obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8).

<sup>25</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, September 24, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Gn. 2:18.

<sup>27</sup> "The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure" (LG 60).

<sup>28</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, April 9, 1997. See also LG 65.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. LG 63.

<sup>30</sup> LG 64.

<sup>31</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (VC), March 25, 1996. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life *Verbi Sponsa*, (VS) May 13, 1999.

silence, they put themselves at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation, and united to Christ Jesus in his offering of himself to the Father, they become co-workers in the mystery of Redemption.”<sup>33</sup>

We shall now consider the mission of cloistered contemplatives as those especially consecrated to be witnesses of the Church’s maternal love.

## Charity in the Heart of the Church

The particular witness of cloistered contemplatives is to be icons of the Church’s virginal fidelity; they are called to show forth the “exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord, whom she loves above all things.”<sup>34</sup> And, as the Church becomes a mother through her fidelity, contemplatives are also signs of the spiritual fecundity of the Church.

In order to incarnate more perfectly the Church’s virginal fidelity and fruitful maternity, the *fiat* of the contemplative must be the result of an undivided heart entirely focused on Christ, *the One Thing Necessary*. Thus, the whole aim of the cloistered way of life with its separation, silence, and solitude is to attain the “purity of heart that finds its highest expression in virginity of spirit.”<sup>35</sup> This virginity of spirit makes the contemplative a handmaid of the Lord, i.e., one who “loves completely and undividedly, reflecting the purest love of the Blessed Trinity, called by the Fathers ‘the first Virgin’.”<sup>36</sup> This love consecrates the nun for a complete and exclusive dedication to God and at the same time, makes her entirely available as spiritual mother to her brothers and sisters in the world. For, “the choice of a person by God is for the sake of others;”<sup>37</sup> if contemplatives are called to devote themselves exclusively to God, it is in order to love their brethren more. “Thus, the contemplative life is the nun’s particular way of being the Church, of building the communion of the Church, of fulfilling a mission for the good of the whole Church. Cloistered contemplatives therefore are not asked to be involved in new forms of active presence, but to remain at the wellspring of Trinitarian communion, dwelling at the very heart of the Church.”<sup>38</sup>

Motherhood, the transmitting of life and nourishing it to maturity, even on the level of nature, requires from the mother complete self-giving in love: from the moment of conception, the seed of life germinates and is nourished from the very life of the mother. Like the Blessed Virgin, standing at the foot of the Cross, the cloistered contemplative realizes her maternal vocation through her obedience of faith, in which she offers herself as holocaust in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit to the Father for the life of the world. *Love* is the form of the contemplative’s sacrifice. Indeed, “it is charity, poured into their

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<sup>33</sup> VS 6.

<sup>34</sup> VS 1.

<sup>35</sup> VS 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements on Religious Life*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> VS 6.

hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), which makes nuns co-workers of the truth (cf. 3 Jn v. 8), participants in Christ's work of Redemption (cf. Col 1:24), and through their vital union with the other members of the Mystical Body makes their lives fruitful, wholly directed to the pursuit of charity, for the good of all.”<sup>39</sup> This is why St. Therese, Doctor of the Church, understanding the significance of her cloistered contemplative vocation proclaimed: “in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love.” To *be love* is to be a sacrificial offering that others may live; it is to be a mother, mediating grace for the world; it is “to immerse God into the heart of human misery.”<sup>40</sup> A spiritual motherhood that is the fruit of a “spousal existence dedicated totally to God in contemplation”<sup>41</sup> is the apostolic service that cloistered contemplatives render to the Church.<sup>42</sup> They make incarnate the maternal love of the Church who “by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother.”<sup>43</sup> This maternal love, made concrete by the contemplative, is integral to the motherhood of the Church realized through preaching of the Word and the Sacraments, offices of the ministerial priesthood, for love is the soul Church’s mission,<sup>44</sup> of the Church's life and of her pastoral action.<sup>45</sup> We quote again St. Therese: “I understood that the Church has a heart, and that this heart burns with Love. I understood that Love alone makes its members act, that if this Love were to be extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood... I understood that Love embraces all vocations, that Love is all things, that it embraces all times and all places... in a word, that it is eternal!”<sup>46</sup>

We now consider the apostolic service of the canonesses who, as is said in our *Constitutions*, “devote themselves more particularly to the contemplative duty of our vocation, accommodated to the needs of the times and with a truly apostolic spirit, which is equally their own in virtue of their being canonesses regular.”<sup>47</sup>

## **Holocaust with the Eucharist: The Spirit of the Canonesses of Prémontré**

“After her Son's departure, the Virgin Mary’s motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding for all her children.”<sup>48</sup> As mentioned above, at Pentecost, Mary implores the

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<sup>39</sup> VS 7.

<sup>40</sup> Feuillet, Andre, *Jesus and His Mother: The Role of the Virgin Mary in Salvation History and the Place of Woman in the Church*, St. Bede's Publications, Still River, Massachusetts, 1974, p. 240.

<sup>41</sup> VC. 59.

<sup>42</sup> “As an expression of pure love which is worth more than any work, the contemplative life generates an extraordinary apostolic and missionary effectiveness.” *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> LG. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, Message for World Food Day, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers, April 22, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> St. Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, ICS Publications, Washington, DC, 1996, pp. 194.

<sup>47</sup> Const. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (RM), March 25, 1987, 40.

gift of the Spirit, “who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation,”<sup>49</sup> in order to bring to birth the Church which was entrusted to her motherly love as she stood beneath her Son’s Cross on Calvary. Her prayer is heard “with special favor because it is an expression of her motherly love of the Lord’s disciples.”<sup>50</sup>

“The Church lives constantly in the effusion of the Holy Spirit without which she would exhaust her energies like a sailing ship without wind.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, there is need for the mystery of Pentecost to be made continually present for the renewal of the Church’s life. “In the Eucharist, Christ’s sacrifice is constantly renewed, Pentecost is constantly renewed.”<sup>52</sup> It is our Order’s mission to realize communion by continually living anew the mystery of Pentecost through the mystery of the Eucharist.

In the celebration of the Church’s liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Holy Spirit is poured out to realize and deepen the communion of the faithful with God and with one another in God.<sup>53</sup> Like the Blessed Virgin Mary interceding that the Apostles and disciples gathered together in the upper room may “be well disposed to the coming of the ‘Paraclete,’”<sup>54</sup> the Church’s maternal mediation always accompanies the Eucharistic Liturgy, interceding that those who would receive the sacrament be disposed to experience “the full effect of the assembly’s communion with the mystery of Christ.”<sup>55</sup>

Norbertine communities have a mission in Christ as instruments of redemption,<sup>56</sup> especially on account of their canonical character which devotes the canons and canonesses to realize the Church’s Motherhood through proclaiming God’s word and celebrating the Liturgy. Through the Word and the Eucharist the houses of our Order become *ecclesiolae*, communities wherein the Church realizes its “deepest vocation of loving one another and of joining in praising the Most Holy Trinity,”<sup>57</sup> existing as signs and instruments<sup>58</sup> for actualizing among men communion with God and with one another in God.<sup>59</sup>

Within this mission of our Order, the vocation of the canonesses is to incarnate the Church’s maternal mediation. By her spiritual sacrifice offered in union with the Eucharistic Lord, she draws down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, so that the labors of the ministerial priests, in proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments, and of all those

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<sup>49</sup> LG. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, May 28, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli, May 23, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, June 22, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> CCC 1325, 1396.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, May 28, 1997.

<sup>55</sup> CCC 1109; “Grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory.” *Epiclesis*, Eucharistic Prayer IV; See also Eucharistic Prayers II and III.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. LG 9.

<sup>57</sup> LG. 51.

<sup>58</sup> LG 1.

<sup>59</sup> See also Const. 18, 71,75, 15 and 70 on our mission to realize and spread communion.

who toil in the vineyard of the Lord, bear a rich harvest in realizing the *communio* that is the Church.<sup>60</sup> Like the Blessed Virgin Mary at the first Pentecost, the canoness is a spiritual mother who “fosters the coming of the Spirit, imploring his action in the hearts of the disciples, imploring a multiplicity of gifts for everyone in accordance with each one’s personality.”<sup>61</sup> Her prayer is heard insofar as it is an “expression of her motherly love of the Lord’s disciples.”<sup>62</sup> In her maternal mediation, the canoness also realizes her prophetic and royal service to God’s people: The latter in a spiritual motherhood that witnesses to the maternal love that God promises his people,<sup>63</sup> and the former in a life of service that is “a mysterious source of apostolic fruitfulness and blessing for the Christian community and for the whole world.”<sup>64</sup>

The canoness achieves her priestly, prophetic and royal office to the degree that she participates fruitfully<sup>65</sup> in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, ‘offering her life as a living sacrifice’<sup>66</sup> in union with the sacrifice of the Eucharistic Lord. For, “it is a Victim we receive in Holy Communion, and, if there is to be a common union between the Victim and us, we must conform ourselves to the Victim.”<sup>67</sup> The fruit of this union is her spiritual motherhood of souls, and the more profound the union, the more fruitful is her maternity. This offering of one’s life as a sacrifice is “a more concrete and realistic worship a worship in which the human being himself, in his totality as a being endowed with reason, becomes adoration, glorification of the living God;”<sup>68</sup> it is an entire way of being and living, it is the Eucharistic way of life.

In a work entitled *La vierge norbertine et la très Sainte Eucharistie*, Mere Marie de la Croix, the foundress of the Norbertine Abbey of Bonlieu, describes the spirit of the canonesses of Prémontré as “a more particular and complete reproduction of the Eucharistic life of our Lord.” Abbot General Thomas in his article “*Ternura de Eucaristia*,”<sup>69</sup> described the Eucharistic life as “Being-in-Christ that must express itself in concrete living.” “Being-in-Christ,” is having one life with the Eucharistic Lord, living by His own Spirit of

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<sup>60</sup> “It is, besides, easy to understand how they [cloistered contemplatives] who assiduously fulfill the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labor in tilling the Master’s field; for unless the former drew down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, the evangelical laborers would reap forsooth from their toil a more scanty crop.” Pope Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution, *Umbratitem*, July 8, 1924.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, May 28, 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, May 28, 1997.

<sup>63</sup> As expressed for example in Is. 66: 13-14: *As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort. You will see and your heart shall exult, and your bodies shall flourish like the grass.*

<sup>64</sup> VS 7.

<sup>65</sup> “The Church’s great liturgical tradition teaches us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one’s life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world” Ibid, 64. In the words of St. Gregory Nazianzus: “No one can participate in the Sacrifice unless he has offered himself as a victim.” Oratio, 2, 95.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:1.

<sup>67</sup> “Walking with God” an article by Fr. Kilian J. Healy, O. Carm., at CatholicCulture.org.

<sup>68</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, January 7, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Published in the December 2014 issue of the Communicator, pp. 50 – 59.



worship, of self-gift, of laying down his life to become food for his brethren. This “being-in-Christ” concretely lived is “*having one heart and one mind*,” it is the *Vita Apostolica*. If “being-in-Christ” means to lose one’s life for the sake of Christ and of the brethren, then its concrete expression is to have one life, one Spirit with Christ and the Brethren. “The sacrifice of Christians,” our Holy Father St. Augustine writes, “is that we though many are one body.”<sup>70</sup>

In her role as spiritual mother, the canoness, like the Blessed Virgin at the foot of the Cross and on the day of Pentecost, is helper of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is in this reality that lies the complementary roles of the canon and canonesses of the Order. As the priest-canon acts in the person of Christ, Our Head and High-Priest, the canonesses incarnate the maternal mediation of Mary<sup>71</sup> as continued by the Church; these two roles complement one another and are ordered to one another. The canoness as spiritual mother is related to all priests as “helper” on account of her spiritual maternity. Her particular bond or rather, her more intense bond, with the canons of the Order lies in the fact that they make the same profession, that they have a common Father, St. Norbert, and are devoted to realizing the same ideal of *communio*.

## Epilogue

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the fathers of the Council of Vatican II emphasized that the conscious and zealous participation by all the people in the liturgy “*is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit*.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed the Council itself, and the magisterium following the Council, saw in the renewal of Christian life the way of the New Evangelization – the missionary effort aimed at bridging the gap that exists between the Gospel and the culture of modernity. Through the Church’s Liturgy, the faithful in Christ are transformed into saints and witnesses of the faith, whose lives, as living reflections of the Face of Christ, witness to the truth of man’s dignity in God’s love for him, and to his call to a transcendent and divine destiny. This witness of a transfigured life powerfully draws those who behold it to seek the God who works such marvels in frail humanity. Our Norbertine Order, on account of the heritage received from our holy founder as Apostle of the Eucharist, seems to be called to be on the forefront of the New Evangelization. The canons thus are called to participate in this New Evangelization through the celebration of the Eucharist, their witness of Apostolic Life, as well as through their instructing the faithful on the great evangelical power of fruitful participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The canonesses participate in the New Evangelization<sup>73</sup> above all by a fruitful spiritual

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<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine, *De civ Dei*, 10,6:PL 41,283.

<sup>71</sup> See *supra* footnote 24.

<sup>72</sup> SC 14.

<sup>73</sup> See generally Feuillet, pp. 225 – 243 for a treatment of the participation of women as spiritual mothers in the mission of the Church.

participation<sup>74</sup> in the Eucharistic sacrifice, as spiritual mothers for the People of God, and by their witness “to the mystery of God” and their “foreshadowing of the eschatological Church”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See *supra* footnote 64.

<sup>75</sup> VC. 7.