

The Priesthood Series  
Article 6 – Priestly celibacy (Part 1)

One of the biggest challenges to the priesthood today is the discipline of *priestly celibacy*. Priestly celibacy is not a *doctrine* of the Church, but rather, a *discipline*. This means that it could be changed (indeed we already have a few exceptions to the rule in special cases of married priests). However, I want to show why this discipline should not be changed in the universal practice of the Church.

The teaching on celibacy is nothing new, it is written about all over the New Testament. Jesus and St. Paul were both not only celibate themselves, but taught very clearly on this discipline:

As Jesus says: “*There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it*” (Matthew 19:12).

And St. Paul says: “*I wish that all were as I myself am (i.e. unmarried). But each has his own special gift from God*” (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Nevertheless, there are many objections that we hear against priestly celibacy, such as: “It’s unnatural,” “It leads to sexual disorders,” and, “Changing the teaching on celibacy would solve our vocation crisis.” However, the fact is that none of these claims are true.

We can agree that celibacy is not a “natural” desire, however, Christ and St. Paul have shown us that it is *super-natural*, and that it is a *gift* to be received from God (cf. 1 Cor 7:7 and Matt 19:12 above).

It has been shown that celibacy is not the *cause* of sexual disorders, but rather a *catalyst* of illicit sexual behavior for those who *already* have a sexual disorder before making a vow of celibacy. So we need to help people find sexual integrity, not do away with celibacy.

Additionally, in the short term it may solve our vocation crisis, but not in the long term. Indeed, imagine what the face of the Catholic Church would be like if hundreds of thousands of men and women had not “renounced home, spouse, and children” for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. The proclamation of the Gospel and the Church’s mission has rested primarily on their shoulders. So our priest shortage might be helped in the short term by married priests, but not in the long term.

Rather, *the cause of our current shortage of priests flows, not from the discipline of celibacy, but from a loss of priestly identity and the loss of the value of the priesthood*. In fact, the majority of young priests in my generation would not choose marriage even if celibacy became optional, because we understand both the *practical* implications, and especially the *theological* implications of this change. (See previous articles on priestly identity, and also the next articles on celibacy.)

To be continued...