

ABOUT PRIESTLY CELIBACY

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"His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife (indissolubility of marriage), it is better not to marry. He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born this way from their mother's womb; there are some who were made eunuchs by men; some made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it." (Mt 19, 10-12)

"An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in body and spirit. A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. I am telling this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction." (I Cor 7, 32-35)

"And they (the Pharisees and their scribes) said to Him: The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same, but yours eat and drink." Jesus answered them: "Can you make the wedding guests fast while the Bridegroom is with them? But days will come, and when the Bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." (Lk 5, 33-35) And he also told them a parable: no one tears a piece from a new cloak to patch an old one. Otherwise, he will tear the new and the piece from it will not match the old cloak. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. (And) no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, "The old is good". (Lk 5, 36-39)

I. INTRODUCTION

God's promise of a Messiah to be born from Israel, established that marriage was part of the religious covenant of the Israelites, as a People, with God. I.e. The many battles, a long captivity in Babylon, the slavery in Egypt, down numbered the People of God and they were at risk of disappearing from the face of the earth (Dan 3: 26, 27, 29, 34-41-37). For this reason, the Levites established marriage as a religious duty for every Israelite, even among the Levites themselves, as a part of the covenant with God (Lev 21, 1-4 & 7-9; Judges 11, 36-40). Everyone had to be married and have children, for this was the greatest blessing for all mankind (Gen 15, 1-5); the Savior of the world was to be born in Israel. (Gen 15, 2 & 17, 3-8; Ex 13, 11-12) (Luke 20, 28).

Then, every good Israelite that fulfilled the law of God got married when attaining the proper age. The exception to the rule were the Esenians; they were single persons who had to settle outside the community of Israel, to dedicate to a life of prayer and spiritual combat with evil,

like the monks or religious do today. They would not marry and be dedicated to God, just like John the Baptist did (Mt 3, 1-6; Jn 1, 23).

Also, the Virgin Mary had to get married to Saint Joseph, obedient to the laws of Israel though she had planned to remain Virgin, as a Call from God, as it was announced by Isaiah (Is 7, 14), and as referred to in the book of Genesis (Gen 3, 16) and Revelation (Rev 12). She conceived Christ from the Holy Spirit (Mt 1, 18).

When Christ started His public life and chose the Twelve Apostles, they were good men of their time who obeyed the laws of the Old Covenant, just like the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (Luke 4, 38). All the Apostles were married according to the traditions of the Leviticus; except for a teenager among the Twelve, John, who never knew wife and had no children. The Gospel writer referred to him as "the disciple that Jesus loved". (Lazarus, was also referred by his sisters as "the one that you (Jesus) love" (Jn 11, 3)). From the scene of the Last Supper (Jn 13, 22-23) arises a comment about John that reveals the single-heartedness of this young disciple, who was later found at the feet of the Cross of Christ, suffering with him, and entrusted by Him, His Mother, as his own Mother. This does not mean in any way, that the other disciples did not surrender their own lives to Christ, the Eternal Priest and to His Church, to the very last drop of blood. They were all martyred, including John; but John he did not die from the martyrdom, but from old age. For all the Apostles, the Mother of Christ was most beloved as their Mother, and Mother of the Church.

The one and only archetype of priesthood that there is in the New Covenant is Jesus Christ, the "Eternal Priest". Not Simon Peter, nor John, nor any of the other Apostles, for that matter. Christ Himself, In Person, is the Institution and the Grace of Priesthood (Mt 26, 26-29). He is the One and Only Model, and He in Person is the Church's Spouse (Jn 3, 29). We can all corroborate the amazing nuptial language in the Gospels, when Christ describes Himself as the Bridegroom, and when John the Baptist calls himself "the friend of the Bridegroom" (Lk 5, 34-35; Jn 3, 28-30).

Priesthood in Jesus Christ, had been prefigured in the Old Testament as according to the Order of Melchizedek, as the Letter to the Hebrews describes: "a Priest forever... according to the Order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6-10 & 7:1-3) (Psalm 110, 4). The priesthood of Melchizedek was not according to the Order of Aaron, nor the Order of the Levites, who were married. The rite of Melchizedek consisted in the offering of the bread and wine. Only Melchizedek was King-Priest (Gen 14, 17-20). No other priest was king; and no other king, was priest. Melchizedek governed Salem (Jeru-salem/Shalom) for 113 years, having lived in justice, and in virginity. Melchizedek was known as "king of peace", and "king of justice".

Melchizedek's priesthood was celibate. No wife, no children, no lineage, is related to Melchizedek in the Sacred Scriptures. (The Scripture writers used to mention the family lineage: wife, children, relatives, etc. in the case of prophets, kings, priests, fathers in faith. Not in Melchizedek's case). For all the previous reasons, Melchizedek, in the Image of Christ, the Eternal High Priest, prefigures Him. St. Paul knew this, and let the Hebrews to know.

The person of Christ is the Grace for seminarians and priests. And the Blessed Virgin Mary, without doubt, the Mother and Mediatrix (Jn 2, 3-5). The priest's ontological identity is being Christ's Minister (envoy) whom he represents In Persona, before the People of the New Alliance. That is the seal of the sacrament of Ordination. By the command of Christ, the priest is able to repeat His Words and Signs in the Sacraments of Redemption, like the Echo of Christ's voice. Through the priest, Christ brings the Oneness of the One and Only Sacrifice of Him as Eternal Priest, the Eucharist celebrated by Him once in time, and for all time, for the Church.

Paul of Tarsus himself was known to be celibate, as he said to the Corinthians that he was (I Cor 7, 7-9). Paul recommended celibacy to the unmarried, in order to dedicate completely to the Lord. He met the Risen Christ in his way to Damascus, to later become the ardent Apostle of the Gentiles. His First Letter to St. Timothy (I Tim 3:1-13: "A Bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate...") most probably alludes to the person of Peter and the other Apostles, the first Bishops, who were married according to the laws of the Old Covenant, that were the Law of Israel before Christ's manifestation.

In the wedding of Cana, the bridegroom ran out of wine at the wedding feast (John 2: 1 ss). It is very meaningful that in His First Manifestation, Christ brings the New Wine, as the Bridegroom of the Church Who makes all things New, including Priesthood.

Besides priestly celibacy, on one side; another novelty that Christ brings is the institution of Marriage and the Family, as domestic Church. Both now, priesthood and marriage, would be according to the New Covenant. (The Israelites used to make exceptions to Moses' Decalogue: the laws of Levirate not only allowed divorce but also allowed a married man to have his brother's widow, as well, even if he was already married).

Christ, in making all things anew, brings fidelity and the indissolubility of Marriage, to the Pharisees when He says that "from the Beginning" the Creator instituted marriage as one man and one woman (in Mt 19). (He was also defining the natural institution of earthly marriage, human and sacramental marriage, as heterosexual).

In the early community, the Gift of Christ Himself, celibacy, was understood gradually (I Tim 3, 2; I Cor 7, 32-35), since marriage as a religious duty for everyone, including the Levites, was deeply rooted among the Israelites. It was later on, that celibacy was installed as discipline and law, in the Latin Church, as the II Vatican Council declared (Prosbiterorum Ordinis, 16). Celibacy is Christ's own new creation: the priestly form to act In Persona Christi as minister of Christ to His Church.

This meant a revolution in the religious culture of all times. Christ's Gift of Himself to the Church is, total gift, and for all. And so is the priestly vocation.

Celibacy and virginity are a proclamation on earth, of the Resurrection, and of the Kingdom of Heaven to come, where they (men) will not take wife, nor they (women) will take husband, but will live like the angels in heaven (Matthew 22, 30).

The Latin Church nurtures this manner of Gift, according to her own Master. But it took the first few centuries for priestly celibacy to be established, at large. There was no systematic Seminary formation for the candidates, until later. Many Eastern Churches follow ancient traditions. (Some Eastern Churches require celibacy for bishops, not for priests. The Latin Church, on the other hand, requires it for priests, and therefore bishops, but not for permanent deacons. Permanent deaconate brings an ordained ministry for those who are married and are called to serve in a part-time life commitment in the Church, while their spouses, children and family obligations are still their first sacramental duty).

The previously engaged sacrament of Marriage establishes that no one can faithfully care for "two wives and two marriage commitments", with the children and obvious responsibilities. Either one wife will get jealous, or be abandoned for the sake of the other. It is not only because of administrative and practical reasons that priests should remain celibate (i.e. the cost of maintenance of their wives and children to the Church's expense: food, clothes, health, college, transportation, etc.), nor only because there is the reality of the mutual conjugal obligations as spouses, that can easily generate conflicts of interest among the "two spouses", to the expense of the congregation.

There are true ontological reasons, to the being priest. There is the need for years of discernment of the call, and formation, in following the vocation to priesthood; nonetheless, to have the grace to respond to the call for his personal gift of self, in celibacy state, and for the celebration of the Sacrament that seals and consecrates his being to act "In Persona Christi".

The grace of the Sacrament enables the priest to celebrate the Eucharist and pronounce Christ's own words, which is in union with the Father, through the Holy Spirit. The Transubstantiation of the wine and bread into Christ's Body and Blood during Consecration; the pardon of sins in Christ's Name during the sacrament of Penance, take place through the canon of actions and words performed by the priest, and emerge mainly from Christ in the Gospel, and the Tradition that was entrusted to the First Apostles. As is the case of all the sacraments of redemption. Here, it is agreeable to say that the fullness of priesthood is exercised by the Bishop, who is also able to ordain priests, and celebrate Confirmations, all seven sacraments. (Deacons can baptize, as is the case of all Christians, and can be Church witness to the sacramental vows of bride and bridegroom, they (bride and bridegroom) are the active ministers of the sacrament of marriage).

A new sacred relationship with the People of God is created in Christ's priesthood, and also, a new manner-of-being is established at the moment of the Ordination as priest. It is an ontological transformation. A new spiritualization takes place in the person. A thorough discernment, though, and solid formation in the seminary, is necessary: a life of prayer, service and sacrifice, with the grace of God; and the sacrament, assist the priest to live this special union with God, in service to His Church.

Celibacy cannot be lived nor justified, by itself. It can only be lived for the greater cause of God and His Kingdom, given the nature of human sexuality. Celibacy promotes the attitude of

gift of self, total, and to all; in openness to every person (Eph 5, 22-25). Then, it fulfills the priestly heart and the human need of becoming what God calls him to be, in Christ.

There is a profound analogy in the relation Christ-Church, and the relation husband-wife, as total gift of self. It defines the only two great vocations that exist: 1) marriage and family; and 2) virginity & celibacy for the Kingdom of God. In "redemption" terms, the sacrament of marriage takes its measure from this Great Sacrament: the love of Christ and the Church, in total gift of self, even to the point of sacrifice. Both vocations require one total gift, in an indissoluble unity, faithfully lived, that generates new life, in Christ, obedient to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

The Doctrine of the Church is eloquent in proclaiming priestly celibacy, even from the beginning of Christianity. Some of the latest documents can clarify the matter and are included here. This is our faith and in this we assent with the doctrine of the Church.

(NOTE: Women priests? Christ with all His Divine Authority could have first ordained His own Mother, even before the Apostles, as she is the most excellent Woman ever who could be candidate for priesthood. But He didn't. For who, as woman, or even as man, could ever be the other suitable person (besides Christ) for priesthood than her, Our Blessed Mother, since she is the other only person that is able to say in Truth, as Her own words: "*This is My Body, This is My Blood*"?... since Christ's own Body and Blood were 100% from her!

So, in that perspective, it would be impossible for any other person to truly, in priesthood, say: "*This is my Body, This is My Blood*". Only Christ, and His Mother.

But Christ willed to call men, and to make them participants of His own sacramental Priesthood, as Man. And He, and His Father, also willed to call women to another sacred institution, Motherhood, which is a faithful priesthood in its own, in Christ, and is also from the Holy Spirit.

So, the Church has no Holy Spirit to ordain women. The Church's role is being faithful to her Lord. And as for Both, Christ and the Church, and therefore their wedded union, and their roles, it is certain that the Bridegroom's and the Bride's are specific roles, harmonious, complementary, life-giving. This "specificity" of roles of Christ and the Church, and of Man and Woman, and of masculinity and femininity, saves the truth of our created beings, from the destruction of de-becoming who we are, as we are created to be: in the specificity of femininity and of masculinity, and therefore: Christ also protects human life, marriage and the family, and the dignity of every human person. (The acceptance of women-priests would mean the acceptance of homosexuality, which is contrary to the Creation of the Father, and to the Redemption from sin, by the Son).

There is nothing more sacred than the Sacraments. Marriage, in the Image of the Great Sacrament that is, the Love of Christ for His Church, remains, to Man and Woman, the greatest and the only one prototype for married, human love, in the divine plan: *the total gift-of-self, as the life-giving love.*

Christ answers another modern question: What about homosexual marriage? ... The response is given: ...not possible as according to the natural Creation of man and woman; and neither as if it were a grace, according to Redemption from sins. It would be a disobedience to God to want to change His Creation plan; and sin cannot redeem us, only Grace, in Christ.

Still some people might ask, and what about homosexual priests? ... This question was directly answered by Christ at the beginning of this article (Mt 19, 10-12). Christ makes a clear discernment: Priesthood and consecrated life is for those who dedicate themselves to God and the Kingdom of Heaven, enabled to do so by God's grace to celibacy/virginity; not out of human respect, not out of psychological trauma, not impeded by created nature.

(The situation of priests that had committed sexual violations (less than 1%, according to statistics), is not attributed to the state of celibacy itself, though some people would like to destroy priesthood with this argument. Celibacy has its own orderly discipline, and on the contrary, promotes dignity, respect, and reverence. Many cases of sexual abuse in priests find its explanation prior to entering the seminary, in sexual abuses in the home and other environments (offenders could be family friends, coaches, teachers, parent, etc). The seminary discipline and policy itself does not promote "equality-of-opportunity-without-adequacy", nor disorder. The required adequacy for candidates is not a social discrimination but a responsible selection that could have its risks, but must be guided by much prayer and the Holy Spirit).

II. VATICAN COUNCIL, DECREE ON THE MINISTRY AND LIFE OF PRIESTS, 16

16. Celibacy is to be embraced and esteemed as a gift. Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, commended by Christ the Lord (33) and through the course of time as well as in our own days freely accepted and observed in a praiseworthy manner by many of the faithful, is held by the Church to be of great value in a special manner for the priestly life. It is at the same time a sign and a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world. (34) Indeed, it is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is apparent from the practice of the early Church (35) and from the traditions of the Eastern Churches, where, besides those who with all the bishops, by a gift of grace, choose to observe celibacy, there are also married priests of highest merit. This Holy Synod, while it commends ecclesiastical celibacy, in no way intends to alter that different discipline which legitimately flourishes in the Eastern Churches. It permanently exhorts all those who have received the priesthood and marriage to persevere in their holy vocation so that they may fully and generously continue to expend themselves for the sake of the flock commended to them. (36)

Indeed, celibacy has a many-faceted suitability for the priesthood. For the whole priestly mission is dedicated to the service of a new humanity which Christ, the victor over death, has aroused through his Spirit in the world and which has its origin "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God (Jn 1:13). Through virginity, then, or celibacy observed for the Kingdom of Heaven, (37) priests are consecrated to Christ by a new and exceptional reason. They adhere to him more easily with an undivided heart,(38) they dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men, and they more expeditiously minister to his Kingdom and the work of heavenly regeneration, and thus they are apt to accept, in a broad sense, paternity in Christ. In this way they profess themselves before men as willing to be dedicated to the office committed to them-namely, to commit themselves faithfully to one man and to show themselves as a chaste virgin for Christ(39) and thus to evoke the mysterious marriage established by Christ, and fully to be manifested in the future, in which the Church has Christ as her only Spouse.(40) They give, moreover, a living sign of the world to come, by a faith and charity already made present, in which the children of the resurrection neither marry nor take wives.(41)

For these reasons, based on the mystery of Christ and his mission, celibacy, which first was recommended to priests, later in the Latin Church was imposed upon all who were to

be promoted to sacred orders. This legislation, pertaining to those who are destined for the priesthood, this holy synod again approves and confirms, fully trusting this gift of the Spirit so fitting for the priesthood of the New Testament, freely given by the Father, provided that those who participate in the priesthood of Christ through the sacrament of Orders-and also the whole Church-humbly and fervently pray for it.

This sacred synod also exhorts all priests who, in following the example of Christ, freely receive sacred celibacy as a grace of God, that they magnanimously and wholeheartedly adhere to it, and that persevering faithfully in it, they may acknowledge this outstanding gift of the Father which is so openly praised and extolled by the Lord. (42) Let them keep before their eyes the great mysteries signified by it and fulfilled in it. Insofar as perfect continence is thought by many men to be impossible in our times, to that extent priests should all the more humbly and steadfastly pray with the Church for that grace of fidelity, which is never denied those who seek it, and use all the supernatural and natural aids available. They should especially seek, lest they omit them, the ascetical norms which have been proved by the experience of the Church and which are scarcely less necessary in the contemporary world. This Holy Synod asks not only priests but all the faithful that they might receive this precious gift of priestly celibacy in their hearts and ask of God that he will always bestow this gift upon his Church.

33. Cf. Mt 19:22.

34. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Nov. 21, 1964 n 42: AAS 57 (1965) pp 47-49.

35. Cf. 1 Tim 3:2-5; Tt 1:6.

36. Cf. Pius XI, encyclical letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* Dec. 30, 1935: AAS 28 (1936) p 28.

37. Cf. Mt 19:12.

38. Cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34.

39. Cf. 2 Cor 11:2.

40. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, Nov. 21, 1964, n 42 and 44: AAS 57 (1965), pp 47-49 and 50-51; Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, Oct. 18, 1965, n 12.

41. Cf. Lk 20:35-36; Pius XI, encyclical letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* Dec.20, 1935, AAS 28 (1936) pp 24-28; Pius XII, encyclical letter *Sacra Virginitas*, March 25, 1954, AAS 46 (1954) nn 169-172.

42. Cf. Mt 19:11.

III. JOHN PAUL II, PASTORES DABO VOBIS, # 50.

The spiritual formation of one who is called to live celibacy should pay particular attention to preparing the future priest so that he may know, appreciate, love and live celibacy according to

its true nature and according to its real purposes, that is, for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives. The virtue of chastity is a premise for this preparation and is its content. It colors all human relations and leads "to experiencing and showing...a sincere, human, fraternal and personal love, one that is capable of sacrifice, following Christ's example, a love for all and for each person."(151)

The celibacy of priests brings with it certain characteristics thanks to which they "renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 19:12) and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the new covenant; they bear witness to the resurrection in a future life (cf. Lk. 20:36) and obtain the most useful assistance toward the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry."(152) And so priestly celibacy should not be considered just as a legal norm or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination, but rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd and spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry. Celibacy is to be considered as a special grace, as a gift, for "not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:11). Certainly it is a grace which does not dispense with, but counts most definitely on, a conscious and free response on the part of the receiver. This charism of the Spirit also brings with it the grace for the receiver to remain faithful to it for all his life and be able to carry out generously and joyfully its concomitant commitments. Formation in priestly celibacy should also include helping people to be aware of the "precious gift of God,"(153) which will lead to prayer and to vigilance in guarding the gift from anything which could put it under threat.

Through his celibate life, the priest will be able to fulfill better his ministry on behalf of the People of God. In particular, as he witnesses to the evangelical value of virginity, he will be able to aid Christian spouses to live fully the "great sacrament" of the love of Christ the bridegroom for his spouse the Church, just as his own faithfulness to celibacy will help them to be faithful to each other as husband and wife. (154)

The importance of a careful preparation for priestly celibacy, especially in the social and cultural situations that we see today, led the synod fathers to make a series of requests which have a permanent value, as the wisdom of our mother the Church confirms. I authoritatively set them down again as criteria to be followed in formation for chastity in celibacy: "Let the bishops together with the rectors and spiritual directors of the seminaries establish principles, offer criteria and give assistance for discernment in this matter. Of the greatest importance for formation for chastity in celibacy are the bishop's concern and fraternal life among priests. In the seminary, that is, in the program of formation, celibacy should be presented clearly, without any ambiguities and in a positive fashion. The seminarian should have a sufficient degree of psychological and sexual maturity as well as an assiduous and authentic life of prayer, and he should put himself under the direction of a spiritual father. The spiritual director should help the seminarian so that he himself reaches a mature and free decision, which is built on esteem for priestly friendship and self -

discipline, as well as on the acceptance of solitude and on a physically and psychologically sound personal state. Therefore, seminarians should have a good knowledge of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, of the encyclical *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* and the Instruction for Formation in Priestly Celibacy published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1974.

In order that the seminarian may be able to embrace priestly celibacy for the kingdom of heaven with a free decision, he needs to know the Christian and truly human nature and purpose of sexuality in marriage and in celibacy. It is necessary also to instruct and educate the lay faithful regarding the evangelical, spiritual and pastoral reasons proper to priestly celibacy so that they will help priests with their friendship, understanding and cooperation."(155)

151. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, (Jan. 6, 1970) AAS 62 (1970), 354.

152. *Optatam Totius*, 10.

153. *Ibid.*

154. Letter to all the priests of the Church on Holy Thursday 1979 (April 8, 1979): *Insegnamenti* 11/1 (1979), 841 - 862.

155. Proposition 24.

IV. BENEDICT XVI, SACRAMENT OF CHARITY, 24- 25

The Eucharist and priestly celibacy

24. The Synod Fathers wished to emphasize that the ministerial priesthood, through ordination, calls for complete configuration to Christ. **While respecting the different practice and tradition of the Eastern Churches, there is a need to reaffirm the profound meaning of priestly celibacy, which is rightly considered a priceless treasure, and is also confirmed by the Eastern practice of choosing Bishops only from the ranks of the celibate.** These Churches also greatly esteem the decision of many priests to embrace celibacy. **This choice on the part of the priest expresses in a special way the dedication which conforms him to Christ and his exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God.** 75) The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. **Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life. This choice has first and foremost a nuptial meaning; it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride.** In continuity with the great ecclesial tradition, with the Second Vatican Council (76) and with my predecessors in the papacy, (77) **I reaffirm the beauty and the importance of a priestly**

life lived in celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the Church and to the Kingdom of God, and I therefore confirm that it remains obligatory in the Latin tradition. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for society itself.

The clergy shortage and the pastoral care of vocations

25. In the light of the connection between the sacrament of Holy Orders and the Eucharist, the Synod considered the difficult situation that has arisen in various Dioceses which face a shortage of priests. **This happens not only in some areas of first evangelization, but also in many countries of long-standing Christian tradition. Certainly a more equitable distribution of clergy would help to solve the problem**. Efforts need to be made to encourage a greater awareness of this situation at every level. Bishops should involve Institutes of Consecrated Life and the new ecclesial groups in their pastoral needs, while respecting their particular charisms, and they should invite the clergy to become more open to serving the Church wherever there is need, even if this calls for sacrifice. (78) **The Synod also discussed pastoral initiatives aimed at promoting, especially among the young, an attitude of interior openness to a priestly calling**. The situation cannot be resolved by purely practical decisions. On no account should Bishops react to real and understandable concerns about the shortage of priests by failing to carry out adequate vocational discernment, or by admitting to seminary formation and ordination candidates who lack the necessary qualities for priestly ministry (79). An insufficiently formed clergy, admitted to ordination without the necessary discernment, will not easily be able to offer a witness capable of evoking in others the desire to respond generously to Christ's call. **The pastoral care of vocations needs to involve the entire Christian community in every area of its life**. (80) **Obviously, this pastoral work on all levels also includes exploring the matter with families, which are often indifferent or even opposed to the idea of a priestly vocation. Families should generously embrace the gift of life and bring up their children to be open to doing God's will. In a word, they must have the courage to set before young people the radical decision to follow Christ, showing them how deeply rewarding it is**.

(75) Cf. *Propositio* 11.

(76) Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16.

(77) Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia* (1 August 1959): AAS 51 (1959), 545-579; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* (24 June 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 657-697; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 29: AAS 84 (1992), 703-705; Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 2006): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 December 2006, p. 6.

(78) Cf. *Propositio* 11.

(79) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 6; Code of Canon Law, can. 241, § 1 and can. 1029; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, can. 342 § 1 and can. 758; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 11, 34, 50: AAS 84 (1992), 673-675; 712-714; 746-748; Congregation for the Clergy, Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests *Dives Ecclesiae* (31 March 1994), 58; Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders (4 November 2005): AAS 97 (2005), 1007-1013.

(80) Cf. *Propositio 12*; John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 41: AAS 84 (1992), 726-729.

Note:

(The conversion to Catholicism of many Anglican traditional groups because of the increasing deviation from their own protestant reform (i.e. women bishops, homosexual bishops, etc.), has introduced new questions: *Are married Anglican ministers going to serve in the Catholic Church? Shall married protestant ministers that enter the Catholic Church be automatically recognized as priests? Shall then the Church admit married priesthood?* These are the kind of questions that one should rather the Pope and the communion of all Bishops in the Church, and are being answered already by their Magisterium and how the Holy Spirit guides the Church.

New dialogues are undergoing in Rome to review the instances in this matter, since the Church always looks for the Unity of Christians ("*One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.*" as St. Paul reminds us). -without compromising the Faith, the Doctrine, and the Moral. The new "*Ecclesiola*" or Prelature structure built within the "Catholic umbrella", to protect the Anglicans, created by Benedict XVI and supported by the Church, in no way undermines the apostolic tradition of two Millennia from Christ on the Rock of Peter and the Apostles, and has been found the solution pointing towards the desired unity of Christians.

If the sacrament of Ordination according to the Church, as one of the Seven Sacraments of Redemption which, are not as acceptable to the Church of Reformation as they are Canons in the Catholic Church, (i.e. the sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance, the sacrament of Marriage, the sacrament of Priesthood...); therefore, it seems that the sacraments are not celebrated within the same spirit, meaning, interpretation, acceptance, structure, origin, tradition, as in the Catholic Church.

From the origin of the Anglican Reform, the Anglican bishops are not in full communion with the Pope nor the Bishops of the Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, therefore priestly and Episcopal ordinations cannot be "automatically valid", without first a full communion in the faith, at large.

In the Catholic Church, priesthood has specific requirements, discernment, formation, and the sacrament of Ordination can only be provided by a Bishop in Communion with the Church, according to Rome's Mandate.

Even though two or three English Catholic Bishops would personally agree to desire the approval of these married men to become Catholic priests, and who were ministers in the Anglican tradition of the Reform, the English Catholic Bishops would have to continue to submit themselves to the law of the Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, in its integrity; or maintain themselves under the new Prelature. This matter is not local, nor for national decision, but rather, a matter that affects the law, discipline and faith of the Universal Church.

As fully converted men to Catholicism, the ex-Anglican married ministers could qualify to the Permanent Diaconate given the specific conditions and the specific formation that is required from those who are to receive this sacrament, without any doubt. This must not to be interpreted as a "first new step" in the Church, towards making married priests.

On the other hand, statistics reveal that there is a high rate of divorce among married protestant priestly ministers, because many times they end up adhering, preferably, to their congregation and to its service, rather than to their wife, children, professional work, and other responsibilities that they committed in their marriage vows. This could be a reason why some homosexuals or divorced persons are accepted as Anglican ministers, so there is not the family impediment.

Many of the protestant married ministers who serve their congregation, found out later that they needed to solicit a secular job outside their congregation, because monies paid by the congregation were insufficient to sustain them and their own families, and therefore, they had to abandon the ministry, forced by circumstance).

(Pray for more new, young, numerous, and saintly vocations to priesthood. Pray for the families, since the family is the source and nourishment for all vocations: to married love of man and woman, and the family; and to priesthood and religious life!).

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