

Why Celibacy?

Written by Rev. H.T. Burke

Our Lord was a priest (Heb. 4:14); He was also celibate and called others to do the same. "And Peter said, 'Behold, we have left all and followed You.' And He said to them, 'Amen I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or parents, or brothers, or *wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God*, who shall not receive much more in the present time, and in the age to come life everlasting.'" (Lk. 18:28-30) Abraham was called to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22); through celibacy the priest is called to sacrifice not just his son, but his wife. Our Lord teaches that not all can be celibate, but those who can should do so for the sake of the kingdom: "His disciples said to Him, 'if the case of a man with his wife is so, *it is not expedient to marry.*' And He said, "*Not all can accept this teaching; but those to whom it has been given -there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let him accept it who can.*" (Matt. 19:10-12)

Celibacy is also a sign of the resurrection; we will all be celibate in the next world. Jesus says: "When people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but live like angels in heaven." (Matt. 22:30) In imitation of Christ the priest is called to live this way here and now in this world. Elijah and John the Baptist, the two great prophets of the Old Covenant, were celibate. St. Paul even encourages celibacy among the laity. He writes: "It is good for the man not to touch woman. Yet for fear of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband - *For I wish that you all were like me*; but each one has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that - Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be freed. Are you freed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you take a wife, you have not sinned. *He who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please God. Whereas he who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided.*" (1Cor. 7)

A champion of celibacy for the priesthood, Vatican II said: "Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven was recommended by Christ the Lord. This Sacred Council approves and confirms this legislation so far as it concerns those destined for the priesthood, and feels confident in the Spirit that the gift of celibacy, so appropriate to the priesthood of the New Testament, is liberally granted by the Father. *And the more that perfect continence is considered by many people to be impossible in the world of today, so much the more humbly and perseveringly in union with the Church ought priests demand the grace of fidelity, which is never denied to those who ask.*"

Celibacy is not unnatural, it is supernatural. It is a special grace from God. Our Lord created manhood, and as a man he lived it fully and naturally, as a celibate male. Celibacy is a sacrifice of the good of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God. It is not for men who have no attraction for women. It is for men who do like women. If they don't then there is no sacrifice in giving up marriage. Celibacy is unpopular with the world today because it is a sacrifice, and sacrifice for God is not what a hedonistic culture wants. The opinions of this world do not worry Our Lord who said: "My kingdom is not of this world." (Jn. 18:36)