

CELIBACY

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there's a certain mystery surrounding the grace of celibacy, saying it involves "asking for boldness and trust in the absolute attachment to the person and redeeming work of Christ, with a radical renunciation that can seem confusing to human eyes."

Indeed, Bishop Matthew H. Clark acknowledged, people of all ages frequently ask him how he manages to live a celibate life.

"Basically I like to say that because I believe in it, celibacy is a beautiful charism from God that carries with it sacrifices," Bishop Clark said. "I appreciate celibacy as calling a person who has the gift to relate to people in a loving way, within the boundaries that all of us must observe."

BIBLICAL ROOTS

Christ himself is the model for priestly celibacy, Pope Paul VI observed in *Sacerdotialis Caelibatu*. "It is most fitting that in all things (the priest) should reproduce the image of Christ and in particular follow his example, both in his personal and in his apostolic life," he wrote.

Biblical references to celibacy can be found during Christ's ministry. In Matthew 19, Jesus says: "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 ... Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life."

Although St. Peter, the first pope, appears to have been married (Matthew 8:14 refers to his mother-in-law), Peter is also among the first apostles who renounced all to follow Jesus: "We have given up everything and followed you," he says in Matthew 19:27.

St. Paul endorses celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7: "Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that ... I want you to be free from anxieties." His intent, he adds, is "to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord."

Father Joseph Hart, a church history scholar, noted that while not denouncing marriage, Paul made these statements believing that the end times were near. "It's not ethical, not moral, but a practical matter ... The purpose is to remain absolutely focused on the mission. Quite rightly, when you're concerned about a wife and kids, you can't remain absolutely devoted to the mission," observed Father Hart, a diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center.



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St. Paul promoted celibacy "to secure ... undivided attention to the Lord."

However, Paul also remarked in 1 Corinthians 9, "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" And in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, one of the ideals for a bishop is that he be married no more than once.

The earliest known church legislation affirming priestly celibacy, according to Father Hart, occurred during the fourth century. Around this time, Father Hart said, celibacy was gaining momentum "because the people demanded it. People stopped attending Mass and receiving Eucharist from those who were married. They perceived a difference in the worthiness of the celibate minister."

A chief factor was a purity ideal from the Old Testament, in which sexual intercourse by clerics on the day before celebration of a ritual service was considered unholy. As daily Mass began to grow in the Latin Rite, Father Hart said, it became much more difficult for married priests to maintain this standard of ritual purity. But since the church's Eastern Rite never developed a daily Mass, "It became possible for a priest to keep that regulation," he explained.

The Council of Trullo, in 692, confirmed that Eastern Rite bishops were to be celibates while priests, deacons and subdeacons could be married at the time of ordination but not marry thereafter.

Marriage for all Latin Rite priests was explicitly prohibited based on decisions of the First and Second Lateran Councils in the early 12th century. This edict was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1563 when church leaders issued a dogmatic decree of mandatory celibacy that opposed Martin Luther's proposal for a married clergy.

PRESENT-DAY CHALLENGES

Nearly 450 years after the Council of Trent, priestly celibacy remains a law — a law popularly linked to problems with which today's church is struggling.

Bishop Clark observed, for instance, that five men are due to be ordained as diocesan priests over the next five years, while a much greater number of priests will retire, die or otherwise leave full-time ministry.

"The evidence is fairly clear that ... the requirement of celibacy in the Western church is a barrier to the priesthood for many who might

have otherwise chosen it," Bishop Clark said.

"Our present age glorifies the sexual relationship. In that glorification, many people are fooled into thinking the only way they can be whole, healthy and complete is by way of a sexual relationship," Father Hart added.

Bishop Clark said he doesn't expect the modern world to adapt to the Roman Catholic Church's views of celibacy and sexuality anytime soon. For that reason, the bishop said he "would very much favor a systemic church reflection on celibacy, especially as the discipline lived in the Western church impacts the availability of Eucharist for our people. The Sunday liturgy is of prime importance."

The bishop acknowledged Pope John Paul II's unwavering stance, saying, "It's clear he insisted very deeply this discipline will not change. I mean no disrespect to him or defiance to him, but part of my responsibility is not to ignore the sincere questions of faithful people."

Father Donald B. Cozzens, a Cleveland diocesan priest, urges re-examination of the celibacy rule in his new book, *Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church*. Published by The Liturgical Press and due to be released in late November, the book examines the roots of priestly sexual misconduct and charges that church authorities have not engaged in enough open discussion about celibacy.

Although supportive of dialogue on the subject, Bishop Clark said he does not see a direct link between celibacy and the sexual misconduct of priests — including the seven diocesan priests who were removed from ministry this year.

"There are some who put the blame on celibacy, and I couldn't disagree with that more strongly. The issues are about control, maturity and power," the bishop said. Debating this point, he said, is "a waste of time and energy."

Father Hart remarked that sexual misconduct is an act by adults "who are not whole, not healthy. Our attempt in the seminaries needs to be in the formation of healthy, holy priests."

This attempt has long been under way, Father Hart said, despite some critics' attempts to link sexual misconduct to what they perceive as loosened seminary standards since the Second Vatican Council.

"None of the people in our diocese who have been removed from ministry were in a seminary after the Second Vatican Council," Father Hart said. "Celibacy is in the news not because it's the problem, but because (people are) using the problem as a forum to advance their own agendas."