

# Being content with the faith



Don Blake/CNS

the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephas (Peter)?" There's nothing in the whole of the NT to suggest that Peter had forsaken his marriage vows. Jesus chose married as well as single men as Apostles with good reason. Demanding celibacy from His followers, including the Inner 12, would have been out of keeping within the context of Jewish society. Patriarchs, prophets and priests were married men for the most part. The nascent church was not to be of several classes, but of various gifts, one of which would correspond to an embryonic priesthood. Not a "priestly class" of celibates, but men who, except for the particular gifts given by the Spirit for shepherding, were very much like their fellow Christians, with wives and families.

Sandra Dunn  
Sheridan Street  
Auburn

## Jesus called to holiness

To the editor:

I have to take issue with Father Joseph Hart (Oct. 17 article), not for what he said about clerical celibacy but for what he didn't say and should have. Father Hart says, "Around the fourth century celibacy was gaining momentum be-

cause 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." If this is true, it must be pointed out that the Church at that time was promoting the same codes for ritual purity found in the Old Testament priesthood, codes that Jesus clearly rejected. Instead of ritual purity, Jesus called his followers, men and women, to holiness, prophetic and compassionate lives. The attitude that there is something unclean and slightly sinful about sexual intimacy in sacramental marriage must be challenged.

We are all called to holiness, but is holiness possible for a married couple in the eyes of the Church? Consider this! In the past year for the first time in Church history a married couple was canonized. It was pointed out at the time that this couple refrained from sexual intimacy for the last half of their lives. Upon reading this I asked my wife, "What does this say about the sacrament of marriage?" She answered me with a deeper, more important question, "What does it say about our Church?"

Emmett Neary  
Bakerdale Road  
Rochester

Several people have spoken to me recently about their disappointment in the church. They feel betrayed by the leadership, disappointed in the failure to provide needed renewal of some teachings, upset about the failure of the institution to speak out publicly about important moral issues. I think we all struggle with these kinds of questions at one time or another. As I try to deal with my own approach to all this, I have engaged a few resources that you might find interesting.

Garry Wills has been a vocal critic of the church and bases his new work, *Why I Am a Catholic*, primarily on the creed. It is an interesting piece and may provide some provocative reading for those who enjoy his style. In an interview about the new book, Wills responds to several questions.

In response to "Does your sense of yourself as a Catholic have as much to do with being a part of that culture as it does with the creed?" Wills replies: "Absolutely. It's our concrete experience of the local church that's especially meaningful to us. There's an interesting contrast between born Catholics and converts. Converts are often much more rule-directed. Catholicism isn't something that they breathed in from their childhood, so they think that if you don't toe the line on abstract doctrine you can't be part of the Church. But to a born Catholic, Catholicism means their parish, their priest, their fellow worshippers. It's all very concrete. Papal directives usually seem kind of abstract



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

and unimportant compared to that lived experience."

I'm not as sure as Wills is about the distinction between "born Catholics" and converts, but I am sure that Catholicism is less an abstract exercise as a concrete one, and is less a rule-directed activity than a living interpretation of reality.

When asked, "Do you have an overarching vision for a version of Catholicism that you would be more content with than the Church as it is today?" Wills responds: "Actually, I'm content with it right now. Catholics are living the faith of their shared commitment to the mystical body. Bringing the hierarchy into line with that is just a secondary step. And it's bound to occur. I'm unhappy with the hierarchy, which is not the Church. It's part of the Church — an important part, but it's not the Church. People say the Church is out of touch. Well, it's not out of touch! The Church is the people of God. It's the hierarchy that's out of touch with the people of God, and they've got to get back in touch. But that's their problem."

In preparation for a talk I gave last week, I wrote to my friend Father Vincent McMurray in Baltimore. I asked him to send me a pas-

sage from a commencement address delivered by Father Walter Burkhardt, SJ, at St. Mary's Seminary some years ago. I like this passage for many reasons, but especially because it recognizes that church membership is a little like family membership: It takes us beyond intellectual assent to a set of philosophical doctrines or pattern of appropriate behaviors and invites one to "stay" for deeper, more heartfelt reasons:

"In the course of a half century I have seen more Christian corruption than you have read of. I have tasted it. I have been reasonably corrupt myself.

"And yet I love this church — this living, pulsing, sinning people of God — with a crucifying passion. Why?

"For all the Christian hate, I experience here a community of love.

"For all the institutional idiocy, I find here a tradition of reason.

"For all the individual repression, I breathe here an air of freedom.

"For all the fear of sex, I discover here the redemption of my body.

"In an age so inhuman, I touch here tears of compassion.

"In a world so grim and humorless, I share here rich joy and earthy laughter.

"In the midst of death, I hear here an incomparable stress on life.

"For all the apparent absence of God, I sense here the real presence of Christ."

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

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