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Greetings!

The Church does benefit from the presence of celibate priests, and celibacy is a genuine calling from God. Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Saint Paul and Jesus are all exemplary examples of the celibate calling in Scripture.

As early as the third century, local synods in the West began mandating celibate priesthood in some dioceses, and exemplary celibate callings have been expressed in such great saints as Anthony of the Desert, Jerome and Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Aquinas, and many others.

Yet, the Church needs married priests for the following reasons:

- 1) Christ selected married men for ordination (see Mk 1: 30 referring to Peter's mother-in-law, as well as 1 Cor 9:5). Those who claim celibate priests are somehow superior to married priests are placing their own judgment above the judgment displayed in the actions of Christ. The call to ordained ministry and the call to celibacy are two separate callings that sometimes overlap in the same person, but do not always overlap in the same person.
- 2) The Apostles selected married men as bishops (see 1 Tim 3:2). Those who deny the equal validity of a married priest compared to a celibate priest are denying the validity of Apostolic tradition and Apostolic succession.
- 3) Saint Paul warns against forcing celibacy on a person not called to it (see 1 Tim 4: 1-3). To question the desire of a priests to marry, or a married man to become a priest runs the risk of following what Saint Paul called a deceitful spirit.
- 4) Saint Paul, who praises celibacy, also advises that a man called to marriage should not try to live celibately lest he fall into sin (1 Cor 7: 9). Holding men who are not called to celibacy accountable to a mandatory celibate commitment encourages sin, according to Scripture. While I do not believe that celibacy causes pedophilia, I do believe that mandatory celibacy weeds out healthy heterosexual candidates from consideration for priesthood, and provides an atmosphere where heterosexual priests find little support for living the celibate commitment in a healthy manner. In this sense, Saint Paul's statement seems very timely.
- 5) Married priests were the norm in the early Church and were widespread up until mandatory celibacy was made a discipline in the Latin Rite at the Second Lateran Council in 1139 A.D. Thus, for more than half the Church's history, married priests were the norm, and the matter is still considered one of discipline. The institutional structures necessary to support married priesthood were time tested and can be retrieved. We see that married ministry works well in the Eastern Catholic Rites in union with Rome, as well as among Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Jews and others. In time, the Church can rebuild the support for married clergy that prevailed for over half of our history.
- 6) Even after the Second Lateran Council, the Eastern Rites of Catholicism, who maintain unity with

Rome, have always persevered the practice of married priesthood as a compliment to celibate priesthood. Any argument that these priests are somehow second-class priests to celibates would be an insult to the East and would be theologically unsound if pushed too far. While celibacy is a valid and holy calling - indeed, the highest calling for those called to it - we must remember that marriage is the highest calling for the person called to marriage! The highest vocation for any individual is the calling God gives you!

7) The argument that if we allow married priests, we would have to allow married nuns is false. The canonical and theological equivalent of a nun is not a priest. The female equivalent of a nun or other celibate sister is a monk, friar, or other lay brother. These celibate roles predated celibate priesthood. There is no female equivalent of ministerial priesthood unless women can be ordained.

8) The argument that celibate priesthood provides financial advantage to the Church is false for two reasons. First, the Scriptures are clear that the ministry of the presbyterate is worthy of a just wage (1 Tim 5: 18). It is morally wrong to demand celibacy of a worker in order to defraud the worker of a just wage. Second, the cost of training men who leave the ministry because of the demands of celibacy is probably higher than the cost of paying such men a fair wage to raise a family.

9) The argument that celibate priests have more time for others is false. A married priest would spend no more time with his family than a "religious priest" (i.e. - a Franciscan, Dominican, or other order priest) spends in his community. Indeed, married men who hold jobs that deal with people often interact with as many or more people as the average priest. The availability of priests is not constrained so much by his having a family as by the actual shortage of priests! By widening the pool of priestly candidates to include married men, the priest to laity ratio may be reduced significantly.

10) While the celibate does provide an important witness to the personal relationship of God with individual people, and the celibate witness also witnesses to the possibility of chastity, it can provide a false sense of values as well. Many people mistakenly believe that all sex, including married sex, is somehow tainted with sin. Furthermore, in an even more subtle way, the idea of celibacy as total availability encourages a form of workaholicism among all laymen that is detrimental to family life. Married priests could better witness to the actual "how to" of balancing married and family life with public responsibility.

11) The argument that those who support married priesthood are simply unchaste and sex-starved people caving in to modern culture is insulting and false. The issue is not merely about sex. It is about vocation - and the calling to experience God through a life-partner and the raising of children. The challenge of living celibately is not solely about refraining from sex - which married people are called to do sometimes. Rather, the celibate commitment is about giving up a life-partner and the prospect of children and finding other ways to fill the natural and graced human need for intimacy. Strictly speaking, finding the strength for this commitment is a gift, and not something that can be imposed from without.

12) The argument that celibacy is not imposed on priests, but is freely chosen may very well be false. From all that is said above, it should be abundantly clear that God does call married men to priesthood. For such a person, marriage and priesthood are callings from God - not personal preferences from worldly influences. If such men can be born and raised in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, this means that one of their God-given vocations must be denied. The only question is whether God would permit this to happen, and the voice of many ex-seminarians, ex-priests, and even current priests say this is precisely what is happening! Whether such an individual chooses to forgo priesthood or marriage, a vocation is being denied due to the imposition of a man-made discipline that is anti-scriptural and contrary to apostolic tradition.

For all these reasons and many more, married priesthood should be restored in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church.

Peace and Blessings!

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