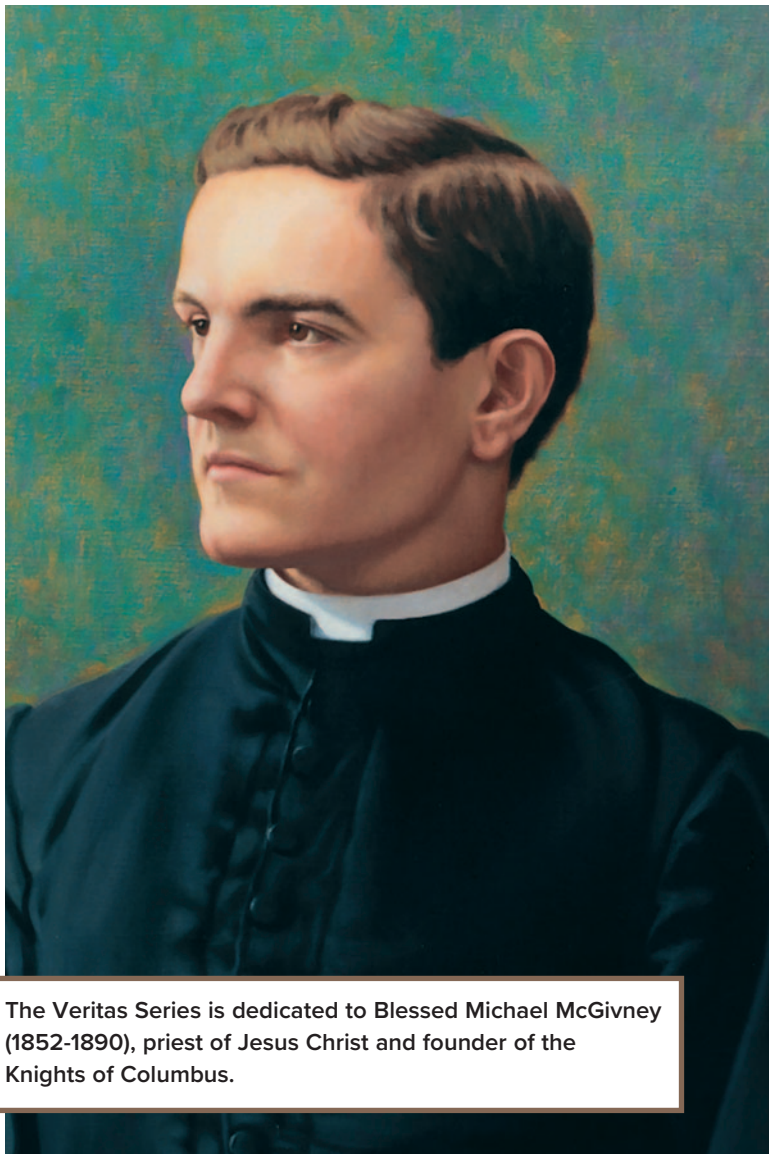




# A Reflection on Priestly Celibacy



Father Gary Selin, S.T.D.



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**Father Gary Selin, S.T.D.**

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Priestly Heart

In late-seventeenth-century France, Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and promised that priests devoted to his Sacred Heart would receive the gift of touching the most hardened hearts. Those priests who are steeped in divine love can readily pour the love of the Heart of Jesus upon others. St. John Vianney, the patron of parish priests, recognized this truth when he said: “The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit aids priests in growth in divine love by giving priestly charisms, or gifts. Celibacy is among these charisms that help priests to imitate more closely the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and to love God and neighbor with a focused, Christ-like charity.

In this small booklet, I will reflect upon the *gift* of priestly celibacy, so that we priests can grow in thanksgiving to God for this treasure. A renewed understanding and appreciation of the gift of celibacy is crucial these days, as we live under the dark cloud of the sexual abuse scandals and increased skepticism on the part of many concerning the moral goodness of Catholic priests.

I will not be addressing current controversies or opinions surrounding celibacy.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I will take a more reflective view of the spiritual roots of this gift. At the end of this reflection I have added an appendix that summarizes the scriptural and historical foundations of priestly celibacy for those who wish to refresh their knowledge of this important perspective.

Many Catholics have defended priestly celibacy chiefly by using pragmatic arguments, such as the feasibility of a parish supporting a celibate priest versus a married priest and his family. Others have argued that a celibate priest is more available for ministry because he has no wife and family. Although such explanations contain valid insights, they do not arrive at the central reason for celibacy: union with Jesus Christ, through whom we have intimacy with the Triune

God. For the celibate priest, God alone is our “inheritance” (see Psalm 16:5). We priests are called to live celibacy first and foremost for the sake of union and intimacy with Christ, within whom and in whom we serve the Church. Ministry follows upon union with God.

A key point in this essay is that celibacy is a gift (charism) given to the priest by the Holy Spirit. Celibacy lived as a gift is not a burden, although the living of this gift involves sacrifice. Celibacy is a gift that frees the priest to give himself fully to Christ and his Church.

The gift, however, needs to be protected, in the way that a precious gem is secured in a safety deposit box. Celibacy is protected by canon law in the Latin Church (see canon 277.1). Therefore, obligatory celibacy for priests is also a *discipline*. Although a discipline, celibacy is first and foremost a *gift* of the Holy Spirit for the priest to love more intensely with Christ’s own love.

The celibate priest is called to be a signpost of heaven, reminding the Church and the world that this earthly life is not our final destination. All of us are created to be with the Triune God forever in heaven, where we will be like God, for we shall see him as he is (see 1 John 3:2).

### **Preliminary Note**

In this reflection, *celibacy* is defined as the willed abstinence from marriage for the sake of gaining greater freedom to love God with an undivided heart. Yet celibacy needs to be perfected by the virtue of *chastity*, which rightly orders sexual desire. *Chaste celibacy* is therefore the virtue by which the priest acquires a wider capacity to love for the building up of the Kingdom of God through sacerdotal ministry. *Continence*, on the other hand, refers to the willed abstinence from sexual relations. Spouses can practice temporary continence (see 1 Cor 7:5), while those who are unmarried are bound to practice permanent continence. As will be shown in the historical section, married clerics from the apostolic times were bound by the Lord’s mandate to practice permanent continence.







## CHAPTER 1

### Configuration to Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest

Over the centuries the frescoes of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel were darkened by the grime from the burning candles. Many people thought the darkness was a dramatic effect intended by Michelangelo. They were accustomed to seeing it in a state that obscured the beauty of the original work, whose warm and bright colors only emerged after the Vatican cleaned the frescoes.

In the same way, many Catholics are accustomed to seeing celibacy through the lens of a darkened understanding of the Church's view of human sexuality. This dark view attributes non-biblical and anti-corporeal features to the Catholic understanding of priestly celibacy. Beneath the "grime" of this misinterpretation, however, there are colorful and bright theological and spiritual supports for the Catholic tradition of priestly celibacy that define it as a charism enabling the priest to minister in joyful service for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

How does one arrive at a proper understanding of priestly celibacy? By first reflecting on its christological or Christ-centered dimension, which is the primary point of reference for priestly identity. It is through his union with Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, that the priest is related to Christ's Mystical Body.

Pope Benedict XVI has written about the christological dimension of priestly celibacy in *Sacramentum Caritatis*:

This choice [of celibacy] 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. 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.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus Christ the Great High Priest (see Heb 4:14-10:18) is the motivation for priestly celibacy. However, it is unfortunate that Christ is often not mentioned in discussions about celibacy. Contemporary arguments tend to focus on the practical or pastoral aspects of the matter. Why is this? The late Cardinal Alfons Stickler writes:

In times of a loss of the sense of faith, the figure of Christ the Priest increasingly disappears from the consciousness of men and of the world and is no longer at the center of Christian life. This image of Christ the Priest goes hand in hand with that of the priest of Christ. In times of living faith, the priest has no difficulty recognizing himself in Christ and identifying himself with Him; of seeing and living the essence of his own priesthood in intimate union with that of Christ the Priest.<sup>4</sup>

The christological dimension guides us to consider first and foremost the nature of priestly celibacy in its relation to Christ. When theology focuses on the life of Christ as the exemplar of the priestly life, then celibacy is more clearly understood as a charism that enables the priest to live more freely in union with Christ, rather than simply as a discipline imposed by Church authority.

In every aspect of his life, the priest is to strive to imitate Christ. Reference to Christ is the key to understanding the reality of priesthood. Although being freed from the demands of domestic life can benefit the priest from a practical standpoint, this exterior freedom should not be the primary motivation for priestly celibacy. Rather, it is the priest's union with Christ that gives life and light to his heart, principally through liturgical and contemplative prayer. A priest who lives celibately primarily to be free from human ties could develop a self-centered lifestyle that spares him the sacrifices demanded by matrimony; this would be a form of clericalism that leads to spiritual poverty and hardness of heart. The outcome of such

a self-centered bachelor existence is seen in the priest who lives a comfortable upper-middle-class lifestyle.

The authentic spirituality of priestly celibacy, on the other hand, opens the priest to a life of selfless service that is motivated by a desire for prayerful intimacy with God. From this prayerful union, the priest is better able to serve the Church in pastoral charity.

An illustration of the “prayer first” orientation of the ministerial priesthood can be drawn from an analogy that the priest is to be a reservoir – filled up first with the fullness of God, and then sharing that fullness with others – rather than a canal that simply transports water without possessing it.

The heartfelt prayer of a priest, in which he finds intimacy with God, leads him to intercessory prayer for his people. In illustration of this, Origen described Moses as a prototype of the celibate priest of the New Testament. As the success of the Exodus depended upon Moses’s intercession, so the fruitful mission of the Church hinges upon the mediation of the priest of Jesus Christ:

[Moses] does not rush to battle; he does not fight against enemies. But what does he do? He prays and as long as he prays his people prevail. If “he should relax and lower his hands” (Ex 17:11), his people are defeated and are put to flight. Thus let the priest of the Church also pray unceasingly that the people who are under him may defeat the invisible Amalachite hosts who are the demons that assail those “who want to live piously in Christ” (2 Tim 3:12).<sup>5</sup>

As Moses could not let his arms of intercession drop, so too the priest of the New Covenant cannot afford to let his arms weaken. His perseverance in prayer is for the salvation of the faithful.

Throughout the centuries Catholics have noted that celibacy facilitates priestly prayer. For example, St. Raymond of Peñafort singled out effective priestly prayer as an important fruit of celibacy:

The reason [for priestly celibacy] is twofold: sacerdotal purity, in order that they may obtain in all sincerity that which with their prayers they ask from God . . .; the second reason is that they may pray unhindered (1 Cor 7:5) and exercise their office. They cannot do both things together: that is, to serve their wife and the Church.<sup>6</sup>

The power of intercessory prayer, therefore, is an effect of divine intimacy with God. Through configuration with Christ Jesus, the priest prayerfully intercedes for others with and in him. Divine charity is the motive force behind this intercessory prayer, particularly in the offering of Holy Mass.

Priestly celibacy, however, must be lived chastely. Priestly chastity is intimately linked with two allied virtues: simplicity of life (poverty) and obedience. Poverty, chastity and obedience form an indivisible unity. A sanctified priestly life depends upon a priest's integration of these three virtues within himself. Benedict XVI wrote about the evangelical counsels in the life of St. John Vianney:

The Curé of Ars lived the “evangelical counsels” in a way suited to his priestly state. His poverty was not the poverty of a religious or a monk, but that proper to a priest: while managing much money (since well-to-do pilgrims naturally took an interest in his charitable works), he realized that everything had been donated to his church, his poor, his orphans, the girls of his “Providence”, his families of modest means. Consequently, he “was rich in giving to others and very poor for himself”. As he would explain: “My secret is simple: give everything away; hold nothing back”. When he lacked money, he would say amiably to the poor who knocked at his door: “Today I’m poor just like you, I’m one of you”. At the end of his life, he could say with absolute tranquility: “I no longer have anything. The good Lord can call me whenever he wants!” His chastity, too, was that demanded of a priest for his ministry. It could be

said that it was a chastity suited to one who must daily touch the Eucharist, who contemplates it blissfully and with that same bliss offers it to his flock. It was said of him that “he radiated chastity”; the faithful would see this when he turned and gazed at the tabernacle with loving eyes.” Finally, St. John Mary Vianney’s obedience found full embodiment in his conscientious fidelity to the daily demands of his ministry. We know how he was tormented by the thought of his inadequacy for parish ministry and by a desire to flee “in order to bewail his poor life, in solitude”. Only obedience and a thirst for souls convinced him to remain at his post. As he explained to himself and his flock: “There are no two good ways of serving God. There is only one: serve him as he desires to be served”. He considered this the golden rule for a life of obedience: “Do only what can be offered to the good Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

The life of St. John Vianney is instructive in showing how the whole spiritual life of the priest forms an integral whole. It is impossible for the priest to compartmentalize his life if he wishes to grow in holiness and pastoral charity.

The grace to live chaste celibacy comes principally through the Holy Mass. The Eucharist is the center of priestly life. To support a eucharistic life, we priests also must have a prayer life centered around the Liturgy of the Hours, meditation on sacred Scripture, a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her rosary, and a regular program of penance and fasting. We are to be good penitents by frequenting the sacrament of Confession on a regular basis. Moreover, we are aided in our growth in holiness by engaging in regular spiritual direction with a trusted mentor who guides us on a path of living chaste celibacy, evangelical simplicity, and reverential obedience to superiors. Each priest needs be held accountable by a spiritual father, as we keep in mind the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Anyone who takes himself for his own spiritual director is the disciple of a fool.”<sup>8</sup>

In the spirit of thanksgiving, we priests become aware of the great gift that we have received, but we also grow in knowledge of our weaknesses. We hold God's treasure in vessels of clay (see 2 Cor 4:7). To preserve the beauty of this gift, we avoid all near occasions of sin. Our Lord said: "The eye is the lamp of the body; if your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is not, your whole body will be darkness" (Mt 6:22-23). There are various things that can inflame concupiscence, such as gluttony,<sup>9</sup> music that kindles sensuality, visual media with suggestive or impure images, and idleness or sloth.

The inclinations of affectivity and the urgings of the passions are not removed or modified by the charism of celibacy. However, with the grace of God, the priest works to integrate emotions and passion so that he can achieve a spiritually healthy response to temptations. "White knuckle" celibacy will only get one so far. Fear will never suffice for long-term growth in chaste celibacy. It may help one at the outset of the spiritual life, but this imperfect motive needs to be transformed and purified by the perfect motive of divine love.

Often the root sin of impurity is sloth, which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines as "a form of depression due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart. 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Mt 26:41)" (CCC n. 2733). If a priest is unwilling to embrace the sacrifice of celibacy, he will never be happy. He may try to compensate for his refusal to live the gift of celibacy by focusing on worldly distractions or engaging in unhealthy and sinful human relationships. He will shun prayer and fill his increasing loneliness with constant noise and distraction, and thus become turned in on himself.

To combat spiritual sloth and allied vices, the priest needs to take care of his body by eating a healthy diet and doing manual labor and exercise. But it is not enough to tend to his own body; he must also serve Christ hidden in the poor by loving and aiding them in their material and spiritual necessities, and by himself living a simple and



poor life. Love for the poor unites the priest to those who are loved by God in their destitution.

Loneliness often is a companion to the celibate life. In order to deal with it in a human and healthy manner, the priest needs friendships with priestly companions as well as with the lay faithful, especially families. God, however, sometimes allows the celibate priest to suffer deep pains of celibacy, and a certain type of mourning takes place. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of St. Damien of Molokai: “[He] shut-to, with his own hand, the doors of his own sepulcher”<sup>10</sup> in his priestly service to the lepers. He brought dignity to their persons as he served the hidden Christ in each one of them. Yet at times loneliness oppressed him, for he had no priestly companions. Father Damien himself wrote of his “black thoughts” and the “insupportable melancholy” that arose from his lack of religious companionship.<sup>11</sup> This cross of human loneliness can be a purifying spiritual experience, provided the priest unites himself with Christ Crucified.

Despite any struggles in preserving chaste celibacy, the prayerful and loving priest will have a deep and abiding peace in his priestly life. One fruit of chaste celibacy is a quiet joy that radiates from within. Purity is beautiful and joyful, and it is rooted in our acceptance of the gift of God’s love. St. John the Evangelist expressed it this way: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:18-19).

May we priests abandon ourselves to God and listen to the affirming voice of our Father. Each of us should pray regularly for an increase of this gift of piety. In a hidden but real way, the Blessed Virgin Mary is part of this process of spiritual growth.

In this section we have considered how celibacy facilitates our union with Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, principally through prayer. Our next reflection will focus on how celibacy aids us in our ministry.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **In Loving Service to the Church**

Celibacy is a special means of conforming oneself to the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. This choice has foremost a nuptial meaning: it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride.<sup>12</sup>

The priest's fundamental relationship is to Christ (the christological dimension) but inscribed within this bond is a profound relationship to the Church (the ecclesiological dimension). Through sacramental ordination, the priest's love for Christ leads to a fuller love for his Body, the Church.

As the Eternal High Priest, Christ's relationship to the Church is so rich that many images are needed to express its fullness, such as head, shepherd, servant, bridegroom and father. In this section, we will focus on two images that are contained in the ecclesiological dimension of priestly celibacy, namely the celibate priest as *bridegroom* and as *father*.

Concerning the bridegroom imagery, sacred Scripture refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ, which clearly implies that Christ is the heavenly bridegroom (see Eph 5:25, Rev 19:7). Moreover, Christ used such imagery to refer to himself (see Mt 9:15, Lk 5:34-35), and the Kingdom of Heaven is often compared to a wedding feast (see Mt 22:1-14, Jn 3:29).

In the early Church, several Church Fathers began seeing the bishop as an image of Christ the Bridegroom in that he symbolized Christ's spiritual marriage with the Church. St. Leo the Great further taught that the bishop remained celibate because of his spousal relationship with the Church. As early as the third century, some bishops started wearing rings, signifying a type of marital bond with their people. The bishop, espoused to his diocese, fittingly did not enter sacramental marriage.

As time progressed this spousal dimension of celibacy was extended to the priest, for example in the writings of St. Bonaventure. The nuptial perspective of priestly celibacy remained constant in theological and spiritual writings throughout the centuries and was finally enshrined in the 1967 encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* by Pope St. Paul VI:

The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh” (Jn 1:13).<sup>13</sup>

The nuptial dimension of celibacy signifies and motivates the pastoral charity of the priest. Chaste celibacy strengthens him in fidelity to the teaching of the Church, in following the laws of the sacramental ministry, in shepherding the Bride of Christ with love and charity, and in guarding against doing anything that would hurt her. The priest’s celibacy is for the sanctification of his people, and his free renunciation of marriage and natural parenthood is for the service of Christ and his Church.

The priest’s life of self-donation is beautifully reciprocal with the life of married couples in that spouses can inspire priests to grow in chaste celibacy through their practice of marital fidelity, and priests can help spouses to grow in conjugal chastity through their fidelity to celibacy. Likewise, the celibate priest reminds spouses that marriage is not an ultimate end, but a sacrament through which they are to help each other to heaven through sacrificial self-giving. On their part, spouses can remind the celibate priest that he also is to live in the simplicity of sacrificial service, and not as a comfortable bachelor.

The nuptial dimension, as rich as it is, needs to be complemented by other perspectives, such as spiritual fatherhood. Let us consider briefly the celibate priest as father.

It is interesting to note that in the New Testament, Jesus never referred to himself as “father” and instructed his disciples to call no

man “father” (see Mt 23:9) in order to emphasize that all fatherhood comes from God the Father. Nevertheless, Jesus manifested his own fatherhood in the way he sometimes addressed his disciples: “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mk 10:24), “Little children, yet a little while I am with you” (Jn 13:33), and “My son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5). The Apostles also spoke of their ministry as a paternal one. For example, John called his disciples his “little children” seven times in his first epistle (see 1 Jn 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4 and 5:21) and Peter called Mark “my son” (see 1 Pt 5:13). Paul further wrote to the Corinthians: “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4:15).

In the patristic era, the idea of spiritual paternity was applied first to the desert monks, who fathered others through their charity, instruction and mercy. The writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch contain references to the supernatural paternity of bishops and presbyters, as do the writings of Sts. Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great. In the medieval period St. Thomas Aquinas referred to priestly fatherhood in his discussion on the virtue of piety in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>14</sup> After the scholastic era, several theologians wrote about the spiritual fatherhood of priests, such as Sts. John of Avila and Alphonsus Liguori.

The use of the title “father” for bishops and priests has been part of the Catholic tradition, particularly in the Latin Church. Even the name “pope” signifies “papa” (father). In the thirteenth century the title was used regularly for members of the mendicant orders, and in recent times the Anglo-Saxon world has used the title for both secular (parish) and religious priests.

Magisterial teaching in the twentieth century increasingly emphasized the spiritual fatherhood of priests. For example, the Second Vatican Council teaches: “[Priests] are less encumbered in their service of his kingdom and of the task of heavenly regeneration. In this way they become better fitted for a broader acceptance of fatherhood in Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, St. John Paul II wrote:

The priest is the witness and instrument of divine mercy!  
How important in his life is the ministry of the confessional!  
It is in the confessional that his spiritual fatherhood is realized in the fullest way. It is in the confessional that every priest becomes a witness of the great miracles which divine mercy works in souls which receive the grace of conversion.<sup>16</sup>

Celibacy is a powerful source of spiritual fatherhood. The celibate priest generates children in the order of grace, principally through preaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments and shepherding the faithful, but also through his priestly prayer and penances, his generous service and availability to his people, his simple life, and his obedience to his bishop.

When we priests are tempted to sin against chastity, God always provides the grace to reject the temptation and offer the mortification involved in overcoming evil desires as an act of love for the faithful entrusted to our care, our spiritual sons and daughters. St. Paul said: "To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it" (1 Cor 9:22-23).

Celibacy can be a source of healing in a culture of loneliness. The celibate priest is free from human family ties in order to be present to his people. The breakdown of marriage and family continues to wound human hearts, making so many people feel isolated and sad. The priest remains available to them, for they belong to his family. He strives to be in solidarity with those who are alone, with those who suffer from failed marriages, with those alienated from parents or children, with those who deal with sexual frustration, with those who are driven to despair because of the lack of a loving father or mother. His presence and availability to his suffering people provide a healing and sanctifying balm to their souls. The French poet Paul Claudel profoundly stated: "Jesus did not come to explain away suffering, or to remove it. He came to fill it with His presence."<sup>17</sup>

St. John Paul II recognized the impact that priestly celibacy can have on the People of God. He understood that the inherent desire of the faithful is to be loved in an exclusive way that reflects the exclusive love of Jesus Christ:

It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### For the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24).

In this section, we will focus on the *eschatological* dimension of priestly celibacy, which is founded upon the *christological* dimension (the priest's configuration to Christ) and the *ecclesiological* dimension (his relationship with the Church). The eschatological dimension of priestly celibacy signifies the celibate priest as a prophetic sign of heaven, particularly through his acting *in persona Christi capitis* (in the person of Christ the head) in the offering of Holy Mass.

Priestly celibacy relates to the Eucharist insofar as both anticipate the Second Coming of Christ and the liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. The priest, in celebrating the Mass, anticipates the eschatological realities to which the Eucharist is oriented. Gathering to himself the baptized faithful at Mass, he leads them in making present the future Kingdom of Heaven. Through his celibacy, the priest is more open to be drawn into the heavenly Jerusalem because he is freer from earthly cares that arise from marriage and family. Moreover, the worshipping congregation, led by the celibate priest, is better able to anticipate the future resurrection and the Kingdom of Heaven through the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as to participate in its present reality where there is no marriage.

The graces given to the priest to live a fruitful celibacy are drawn from the Eucharist: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the

activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”<sup>19</sup> In the life of the priest, Blessed Columba Marmion wrote:

The priest is raised to a dignity which is, in a certain sense, divine, for Jesus Christ identifies Himself with him. His role as mediator is the highest vocation in this world. It is worth repeating: if a priest did nothing during his whole life but offer the Holy Sacrifice piously every morning, or even if he were to offer it once, he would have accomplished an act greater in the hierarchy of values than those events which convulse the world. For the effect of every Mass will endure for eternity, and nothing is eternal except the divine.

We must orient our whole day towards the Mass. It is the central point and sun of the day. It is, as it were, the focus from which there comes to us light, fervor, and supernatural joy.

We must hope that, little by little, our priesthood may take possession of our soul and our life so that it may be said of us: “he is always a priest.” That is the effect of a eucharistic life, embalmed in the perfume of the sacrifice which makes us an *alter Christus*.<sup>20</sup>

The Eucharist is the universal source of grace for all the faithful and the goal of all activities of the Church. The charism of priestly celibacy therefore has its source and goal in the Eucharist, wherein the priest unites himself with the offering, and places on the altar his entire life as a holocaust. By a daily dying to himself, the priest will discover an exceedingly fruitful life in Christ, because like him, he loves and dedicates himself to all the faithful.

The offering of the Eucharist, however, demands a priestly purity equal to that of the angels, as St. John Chrysostom attests:

For the priestly office is indeed discharged on earth, but it ranks among heavenly ordinances; and very naturally



so: for neither man, nor angel, nor archangel, nor any other created power, but the Paraclete Himself, instituted this vocation, and persuaded men while still abiding in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels. Wherefore the consecrated priest ought to be as pure as if he were standing in the heavens themselves in the midst of those powers.<sup>21</sup>

The offering of the Eucharist is for the priest the source of chaste, radiant, and joyful celibacy. The Eucharist cleanses and makes pure the priestly soul in the state of sanctifying grace, and the fervent reception of Holy Communion can forgive *venial* sins (see CCC 1416). However, even the *stains* of sin, such as impure images still inhabiting the memory, can be taken away, washed out, through a devout reception of Holy Communion.

In addition to the offering of the sacrifice and the reception of Holy Communion, there are other ways in which the Holy Mass can purify the priest's soul, for example, through the prayers that accompany the girding with the cincture, the kissing of the Gospel after its proclamation, and the washing of hands at the presentation of the gifts. Through these prayers and actions, the sacred liturgy indicates the priest's need for continual purification.

Moreover, in the traditional hymn for Night Prayer, *Te Lucis Ante Terminum*, there is a stanza that refers to the preservation of bodily chastity at night: "Let dreams and fantasies of the night draw far away: and bind our enemy, lest our bodies be polluted." This hymn is very realistic about our fallen human condition and recognizes that our dreams may involve sexual images directly related to the previous day's experiences or derive from things that come up from the depths of our memories.

In the spiritual battle to grow in chaste celibacy, the priest knows that his own concupiscence is the foundational reason for struggles with purity. However, the demons can and do exploit weaknesses regarding chastity. For this reason, the priest must be aware of the

workings of Satan: “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8). The celibate priest therefore must not exempt himself from spiritual warfare, and he needs to live in prayerful union with Christ Jesus, under the maternal mantle of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

By walking with Jesus, the celibate priest becomes poor in spirit and totally dependent on the heavenly Father, as Jesus was on the Cross. A humble and Christ-like bearing is our best defense against the virus of clericalism. Cardinal Robert Sarah writes:

The place of a priest is on the Cross. When he celebrates Mass, he is at the source of his whole life, namely the Cross. Celibacy is a concrete means that permits us to live this mystery of the Cross in our lives. Celibacy inscribes the Cross in our very flesh. That is why celibacy is intolerable for the modern world. Celibacy is a scandal for modern people, because the Cross is a scandal.<sup>22</sup>

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A Beautiful Gift**

Priestly celibacy is a beautiful gift given by God to us priests that enables us to pour out our hearts in sacrificial love for the faithful. It helps us to live and love as did Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest. The Second Vatican Council teaches that celibate priests adhere to Christ “more easily with an undivided heart, 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.”<sup>23</sup>

In contemporary discussions about celibacy, we often find a shallowness of insight into this precious gift of God. Moreover, the sexual abuse crisis has made it difficult for many to see the usefulness and holiness of this charism, although an objective study of these sins will show that celibacy is not in itself a contributing cause. It is the privilege and responsibility of all Catholics, and not just priests, to defend with vigor the gift of celibacy to a world that is oversaturated with sexual sin and bogged down by the anxiety and sadness of spiritual sloth. With the gift of sacerdotal celibacy, the Catholic Church has a pearl of great price, which we are to treasure and proclaim to the world. It is my hope that this reflection will help us to grow in appreciation of sacerdotal celibacy in its threefold christological, ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions.

Celibacy, however, is not the only virtue that we priests need in priestly ministry and life. Among other virtues, we need to live a simple life in solidarity with the poor, and to possess a reverence for and an obedience to superiors. Nevertheless, chaste celibacy is a necessary key for obtaining perfection in pastoral charity. It is as St. John Vianney said: “The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.”

The pastoral burden that we priests bear gives us plenty of opportunities to seek refuge in him who is meek and humble

of heart (see Mt. 11:29). From this shelter, we are strengthened to draw others in this furnace of divine charity.

We remember the promises of Christ given through St. Margaret Mary, that priests devoted to his Sacred Heart would receive the gift of touching the most hardened hearts. Priests who are inflamed with this divine love can readily pour out upon others this love of the Heart of Jesus. Father Willie Doyle, S.J., experienced this grace in a special way:

My intense desire and longing is to make others love Jesus and to draw them to His Sacred Heart. Recently at Mass I have found myself at the *Dominus Vobiscum* opening my arms wide with the intention of embracing every soul present and drawing them in spite of themselves into that Heart which longs for their love. "Compel them to come in," Jesus said. Yes, compel them to dive into that abyss of love. Sometimes, I might say nearly always, when speaking to people I am seized with an extraordinary desire to draw their hearts to God. I could go down on my knees before them and beg them to be pure and holy, so strong do I feel the longing of Jesus for sanctity in everyone, and since I may not do this, I try to do what I find hard to describe in words: to pour out of my heart any grace or love of God there may be in it, and then with all the force of my will to draw their hearts into that of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

For the attainment of perfection in this pastoral charity, let us pray for an increasing filial love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through her Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart, we are brought deeper within the burning furnace of charity of the pierced heart of her Son, Jesus.

## **A PRAYER BY ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA**

Mary, Mother of Jesus,  
throw your mantle of purity over our priests.

Protect them, guide them, and keep them in your heart.

Be a Mother to them, especially in times  
of discouragement and loneliness.

Love them and keep them belonging completely to Jesus.

Like Jesus, they, too, are your sons,  
so keep their hearts pure and virginal.

Keep their minds filled with Jesus,  
and put Jesus always on their lips, so that he is the one  
they offer to sinners and to all they meet.

Mary, Mother of Jesus, be their Mother,  
loving them and bringing them joy.

Take special care of sick and dying priests,  
and the ones most tempted.

Remember how they spent their youth and old age,  
their entire lives serving and giving all to Jesus.

Mary, bless them and keep a special place for them in your heart.

Give them a piece of your heart, so beautiful and pure  
and immaculate, so full of love and humility, so that they, too,  
can grow in the likeness of Christ.

Dear Mary, make them humble like you, and holy like Jesus.

Amen.

## **APPENDIX**

### **A Brief History of Clerical Celibacy and Continence**

Celibacy in the Old Testament was not prized as a noble calling and therefore was not an instituted state of life in Jewish culture. Because of the promise that God made to Abraham – that he would become the father of many nations – the Israelites looked upon celibacy in a negative light, with marriage as the true source of fruitfulness and blessing. To remain unmarried and childless was to be the object of shame, while bearing many children was a sign of divine blessing (see Gen 22:17; Ps 127:3-4).

The prophet Jeremiah was a divinely established exception to God's mandate for marriage (see Jer 1:4-10), but his celibacy carried the negative sign of God's withdrawal...the Lord God's withdrawal of the covenantal blessing. God commanded Jeremiah to remain celibate in order to prophesy the imminence of Israel's chastisement.

Temporary continence was nonetheless practiced in the Old Testament for specific purposes. Levites and priests were required to practice ritual continence during their time of service in the temple (see 1 Sam 21:4-5), and all Jewish adult men were admonished to avoid sexual intercourse before their communal worship (see Ex 19:15). In later Judaism the unmarried state came to be more highly regarded, as exemplified individually by John the Baptist and communally by the Essene community. Despite this later development, there is no evidence of institutionalized celibacy among the Israelites.

Within the New Covenant, however, there was a fundamental precedent for celibacy as a permanent state: the life of Jesus Christ. While some scriptural passages imply the celibacy of Jesus, the New Testament does not explicitly mention it; rather it is assumed in the traditions concerning him.

For example, the New Testament and the witness of Tradition portray Jesus as having no earthly ties: no family member was

present at his death except his mother (see Jn 19:25). Jesus' lifestyle expressed his mission in that he left his home and family in Nazareth to live as an itinerant preacher, consciously renouncing a permanent dwelling: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). It was appropriate that he whose mission was the spiritual engendering of a new humanity should abstain from bodily engendering; his offspring belong to the order of grace. Also, Jesus came to reveal God's love for all people. If Jesus had chosen to marry, he would have been bound to a particular love that would have obscured his universal mission.

Celibacy, however, was not part of the Jewish culture, and so Jesus began to teach the countercultural blessing of voluntary celibacy. At one point, the disciples said to Jesus, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt 19:10). He responded to them by listing three ways in which one is incapable of sexual activity, the third of which is voluntary: those who have made themselves "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven," that is, for the kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming and initiating. Let whoever can receive this teaching, receive it (see Mt 19:12).

It is in this heavenly kingdom that those sacrificing wife and family will be rewarded with eternal life (see Jn 3:5, 17:3). In this context, a clear difference between Jewish and Christian notions of eternal life should be noted. At least in early Judaism, it was imperative for a Jew to marry because there was no clear understanding of the resurrection of the body. Instead, the Jews hoped to live on through their offspring. With the Resurrection of Jesus, however, Christians could hope for an individual resurrection. Because Jesus rose from the dead and would bring to life those who died believing in him (see Jn 6:40, 1 Thess 4:16-18), Christians could in good conscience forgo marriage for the sake of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' own celibacy is thus seen as a prophetic lifestyle linked to his Resurrection.

As for the Apostles, it is evident that Simon Peter was married because Jesus cured his mother-in-law at Capernaum (see Mt 8:14-15). Paul, however, was celibate (see 1 Cor 7:7-8) as was John, whom several Church Fathers spoke of as being especially “beloved of Jesus” (see Jn 13:23; 19:26) because of his perpetual virginity. Leaving aside Peter, Paul and John, nothing substantial is known about the matrimonial status of the other Apostles. The Fathers believed that the Apostles who were married, after encountering Jesus, gave up their conjugal lives and practiced perfect and perpetual continence thereafter. This apostolic continence enabled them to lead lives as itinerant preachers who looked forward to the great rewards promised by Jesus:

Peter said: “Lo, we have left our homes and followed you.” And Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Lk 18:28-30).

Paul counseled the unmarried faithful of Corinth to remain celibate, as he himself was (see 1 Cor 7:7-8), so that they might dedicate their time and energy to serving Christ in his Church:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided (1 Cor 7:32-34a).

While Paul clearly emphasized that the call to celibacy is a counsel and not a precept, he recognized that it does free one to be concerned about the “affairs of the Lord” and thus “to please the Lord” with the whole heart (see 1 Cor 7:32).

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul included a discussion of marriage and ecclesial ministry, i.e., a candidate for the offices of



*bishop, priest and deacon* must be a “man of one wife” (μίας γυναίκος ἄνδρα; see 1 Tim 3:2, 3:12, and Tit 1:6). The traditional interpretation of “man of one wife” is that a candidate for ecclesial ministry could not have been married more than once. According to several Fathers, this apostolic requirement was instituted for the sake of discerning a candidate’s ability to practice perfect and perpetual continence. That is, the subsequent marriage of a widowed man could point to his inability to live in perfect continence, thus eliminating him from consideration as a candidate for holy orders.

Paul, however, seemed to contradict such a requirement for perfect continence through his apparent plea for the continued use of marriage: “Do we not have the right to take along a sister-woman (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα), as do the rest of the Apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5) In biblical Greek, γυνή generally means *woman*, although it can also signify *wife*. Ἀδελφή, however, signifies *sister* and thus specifies here the type of woman that traveled with the Apostles: a sister-woman or sister-wife. There is agreement among the Fathers that this phrase does not refer to women with whom the Apostles continued to live a conjugal life, but to women who served the material needs of their apostolic ministry, as did the women who followed Jesus (see Mt 27:55-56; Lk 8:2-3).

With the growth of the Church in the post-apostolic era, clerical life also developed. Although ample documentation points to the existence of celibate clerics in the early Church, we also have evidence of married bishops, priests and deacons. There are at least three reasons for this: (1) many of the Christians in the first generations of the Church were Jewish, and celibacy was not part of their culture; (2) widespread sexual immorality existed in the pagan culture in which the majority of Christians lived, which greatly weakened marriage and family life, thus making it difficult for the Church to cultivate an environment in which celibacy could grow; and (3) the heresies of the Encratites and Cathars motivated the early Church to emphasize the dignity of the married state. As Christians

successfully strengthened married life, a culture of virginal celibacy began to emerge.

It is significant that in early ecclesial documents, no bishop, priest or deacon in the Church was ever mentioned approvingly for having fathered a child after ordination. Rather, conjugal intercourse by major clerics – bishops, priests, and deacons – was not tolerated by the Church authorities and was subject to ecclesiastical sanctions.

In the fourth century the first conciliar legislation concerning a consistent practice of clerical continence and celibacy appeared in the Latin Church. With the lessening and eventual cessation of the persecution of the Church, provisional councils and synods were convened and recordkeeping became normative. The regional Council of Elvira (in the year 305) produced the first law written in the East or in the West concerning clerical continence. In canon 33, the council required perfect continence for all married clerics under pain of deposition:

It has seemed good absolutely to forbid the bishops, presbyters, and deacons, i.e., all clerics who have a position in the ministry, to have [sexual] relations with their wives and beget children. Whoever in fact does this is to be removed from the honor of the clerical state.<sup>25</sup>

This disciplinary canon dealt with an infraction of an apparently existing ecclesial law. Neither it nor any other canon gave an explanation or justification for the law; it simply demanded obedience. It is unlikely, therefore, that it was an innovation that would have deprived married clerics of a long-established right.

The Second Council of Carthage was convened amidst the crisis of the decline of the Church in North Africa. On June 16, 390, the bishops of northern Africa gathered under the presidency of Genethlius:

Bishop Genethlius said: “As was previously said, it is fitting that the holy bishops and priests of God as well as the

Levites, i.e., those who are in the service of the divine sacraments, to be continent in all things, so that they may obtain in all simplicity what they are asking from God; what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us also endeavor to keep.”

The bishops declared unanimously: “It pleases us all that *bishop, priest, and deacon*, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal intercourse] with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep perfect chastity.”<sup>26</sup>

The presiding bishop, Genethlius, said with the approval of his fellow bishops that this rule binding married bishops, priests and deacons to the practice of perfect continence accorded with *apostolic* tradition. Therein lies the strongest fourth-century witness to the antiquity of the tradition of clerical continence. Interestingly, the consistent presumption remains that, even at the end of the fourth century, many of the major clerics were married.

During the late fourth and early fifth century, several Eastern and Western Fathers contributed to the development of a theology of clerical continence-celibacy that echoed earlier conciliar statements, such as those of Elvira and the Second Council of Carthage. The teaching of St. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310-403) is significant insofar as he, an Eastern Father, gave testimony to the unity of the Western and Eastern Churches on the matter of clerical continence, rooting it in divine revelation:

[The Church] does not accept as deacon, priest, bishop and subdeacon, be he the husband of a single wife, the man who continues to live with his wife and to beget children; the Church accepts him who, as monogamist, observes continence or widowhood.<sup>27</sup>

During this period, several Fathers in the Latin Church began to write in defense of consecrated virginity, as well as of clerical continence and celibacy. These teachings helped to strengthen the

magisterial authority of the popes during this time. Among these Fathers, St. Jerome (c. 347-420) stood out for his defense of clerical continence. In a letter against Jovian, Jerome interpreted *unius uxoris vir* in accord with the tradition and likened an incontinent bishop to an adulterer:

[The Apostle] does not say: “Let a bishop be chosen who has one wife and sires children,” but a man who took to himself one wife and keeps his children well disciplined in all things. You certainly would admit that he cannot be a bishop who continues to sire children during his episcopate. For if this is discovered, he will not be considered a husband but will be condemned as an adulterer.<sup>28</sup>

Jerome seems to have accused the married bishop of adultery because the latter had acquired through ordination a new spouse, namely the Church. This spousal paradigm buttressed the argument for clerical continence and celibacy.

In the fifth century, Pope St. Leo the Great reinforced the apostolic tradition of clerical continence by making it clear that married clerics were to live Paul’s exhortation: “live with [their wives] as if they did not have them” (1 Cor 7:29). In most cases, it seems likely that these clerics had to separate from their wives, the latter being supported by the Church, either upon their entrance into a convent or a specific community of women.

Until the first half of the sixth century, most magisterial and patristic pronouncements on this issue dealt with clerical continence rather than celibacy because many bishops, priests and deacons were married. Around this time, however, an increasing number of bishops were selected from the celibate clergy in both the Eastern and Western Churches. As legislation took hold in the universal Church, regulations dealing with clerical marriage and continence began to be directed principally to priests and deacons.

Despite the gradual turn toward selecting celibate candidates for the episcopacy, the popes still had to deal with incontinent bishops. The early medieval period also saw the widespread phenomenon of the lay investiture of bishops who were uncatechized and worldly in their lifestyle. These bishops lived with their wives or concubines in plain sight and allowed their priests to live in marriage as well. Many of these married priests, living in the countryside and mired in poverty, supported themselves by means of farming and were helped by wives and children. A type of hereditary priesthood developed when these priests willed their benefices to their sons.

Clerical celibacy in the early Middle Ages thus declined somewhat with many clerics living with either wives or concubines. However, around this time the Celtic Churches' *Penitential Books* opposed this trend by upholding the obligation to continence for those major clerics who had been previously married and imposing penalties on those who had conjugal relations with their wives after ordination.

The Eastern Church introduced the first legislation permitting *periodic* continence for married clerics at the regional Second Council of Trullo (691-692). This council upheld the traditional discipline that required bishops to be unmarried, or if married, to live apart from their wives, and continued the ban on remarriage for all major clerics whose wives had died after their ordination. However, the bishops introduced a law that was unprecedented in previous local or ecumenical councils. Canon 13 mandated that married priests, deacons and subdeacons were not permitted to separate from their wives and were to observe periodic rather than perpetual continence. The reigning pope, St. Sergius I, a Syrian by birth, did not accept the Trullan canons on clerical marriage, however, nor did his successor, Pope John VII (c. 650-707).

In contrast, the Latin Church's various councils and synods mandated strict continence and banned major clerics from living with women. Clerics who refused to separate from their wives were laicized. Moreover, children fathered after ordination were declared

illegitimate and thus ineligible to receive orders. This legislation helped put an end to the hereditary priesthood.

The Second Lateran Council (1139) declared that marriages contracted after ordination would be null and void. In doing so, the council reemphasized the law of clerical *continence* and the prohibition of the single cleric to marry or the married cleric to marry again after ordination. Often Lateran II is wrongly interpreted as having introduced for the first time the general law of *celibacy*, with unmarried men being the only candidates for priestly ordination.

In answer to the Protestants who called for mitigation or abolition of the rules for clerical continence and celibacy, the bishops of the Council of Trent in 1563 upheld the apostolic tradition. In session 23 they directed the establishment of seminaries to prepare young men for the priesthood and for the celibate life (canon 18), which proved to be a key strategy for enforcing strict celibacy. In session 24 the bishops reaffirmed the prohibition of clerical marriage (canon 9) and rejected the thesis that the marital state was superior to the celibate state (canon 10).<sup>29</sup>

Although these Tridentine decrees did not have an immediate impact on priestly formation, they helped gradually to establish the universal practice of ordaining only unmarried men. Mandatory celibacy was due in large measure to the foundation of seminaries and great improvements in priestly formation. Canon 18 of session 23 of Trent obliged all dioceses to establish seminaries for the education of future priests and allowed for the admission of boys as young as twelve years. This monumental decision was gradually implemented throughout the Church and, for the most part, it steadily eliminated married men from the priesthood in the Latin Church.

In 1917, Pope Benedict XV promulgated the first universal code of canon law for the Latin Church, which included a canon on the obligation of clerical celibacy: "Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligation of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are guilty of sacrilege."<sup>30</sup>

However, starting in 1951, Pope Pius XII began granting dispensations to Lutheran and Anglican convert ministers, allowing them to be ordained as Catholic priests without having to separate from their wives. This pastoral decision of Pius XII was remarkable in that the practice of the Latin Church until that time required the separation of spouses if the husband was to be ordained.

In 1980, Pope St. John Paul II approved the *Pastoral Provision*,<sup>31</sup> which allows convert Episcopalian ministers to be ordained as Catholic priests without having to separate from their wives. In granting this indult, John Paul II wanted to make a pastoral adaptation for converts who had exercised a ministry as Episcopalian priests prior to their entrance into the Catholic Church, while at the same time safeguarding the law of mandatory celibacy for priests of the Latin Church. Despite such pastoral indults, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* has reaffirmed the discipline of mandatory celibacy for priests in the Latin Church (see Canon 277.1).

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> St. John Vianney, *Catechism on the Priesthood*, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/instructions-on-the-catechism-1273>, n. 9.
- <sup>2</sup> Pope Francis has said: “Personally, I think that celibacy is a gift to the Church. Secondly, I would say that I do not agree with permitting optional celibacy, no” (from an in-flight conference, January 28, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007): [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html), n. 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Alfons Maria Cardinal Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations*, trans. Father Brian Ferme (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 84.
- <sup>5</sup> See Origen, Homily 6 in *Homilies on Leviticus* 1-16, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley, *The Fathers of the Church, A New Translation* (Patristic Series) 83, ed. Thomas P. Halton (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 128.
- <sup>6</sup> See Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 50.
- <sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars,” (2009), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20090616\\_anno-sacerdotale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090616_anno-sacerdotale.html).
- <sup>8</sup> St. Bernard, Epistle 87, cited in James Cotter Morison, *The Life and Times of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, A.D. 1091-1153* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1863), 83.
- <sup>9</sup> Aquinas lists five forms of gluttony: eating too soon (*praepropere*), eating too expensively (*laute*), eating too much (*nimis*), eating too eagerly (*ardenter*), and eating too daintily (*studiose*). See *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 148, 4, in *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Second and Revised Edition, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3148.htm>
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, from his letter to the editor of the *Sydney Presbyterian* (October 26, 1889).
- <sup>11</sup> “Saint Damien of Molokai”, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/saints/damien-of-molokai-539>.
- <sup>12</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> St. Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967), [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_24061967\\_sacerdotalis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis.html), n. 26.
- <sup>14</sup> St. Thomas teaches: “A person who, in some way, exercises providence in one respect, partakes of the character of father in a particular way, since a father is the principle of generation, of education, of learning and of whatever pertains to the perfection of human life,” *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 102, a. 1, in *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Second and Revised Edition, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3102.htm>.



- <sup>15</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 16. Translations of Vatican II documents are from Flannery, Austin, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello, 1998).
- <sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 86.
- <sup>17</sup> See Father Patrick Briscoe, "A Priest Explains Celibacy," <https://aleteia.org/2019/07/07/a-priest-explains-celibacy/>.
- <sup>18</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Pastores Dabo Vobis (I Will Give You Shepherds)* (Boston: Pauline, 1992), n. 29.
- <sup>19</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ: The Ideal of the Priest*, translated by Matthew Dillon (London and Glasgow: Sands & Co, 1952), 196.
- <sup>21</sup> St. John Chrysostom, On the Priesthood, Book III, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/19223.htm>.
- <sup>22</sup> Cardinal Robert Sarah, "'As a bishop, it is my duty to warn the West': An Interview with Cardinal Sarah," *Catholic Herald* (April 5, 2019), <https://catholicherald.co.uk/as-a-bishop-it-is-my-duty-to-warn-the-west-an-interview-with-cardinal-sarah/>.
- <sup>23</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 16.
- <sup>24</sup> <https://fatherdoyle.com/2014/09/11/thoughts-for-september-11-from-fr-willie-doyle-5/>
- <sup>25</sup> Council of Elvira, canon 33, in E.J Jonkers, ed., *Acta et Symbola Conciliorum Quae Saeculo Quarto Habita Sunt* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 12f; translation is mine.
- <sup>26</sup> Council of Carthage, *Corpus Christianorum*, 149,13; translation is mine.
- <sup>27</sup> St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, ed. Holl, 367; translation in Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1988), 20.
- <sup>28</sup> St. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* I, *Patrologia Latina* 23, T. 2-3, 257a; translation is mine.
- <sup>29</sup> The Council of Trent has taught definitively: "If any one says that the married state is to be placed above the state of virginity or celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema," canon X in *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony*, session 24; translation is mine.
- <sup>30</sup> *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law in English Translation with Extensive Scholarly Apparatus*, ed. and trans. Edward Peters (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 68.
- <sup>31</sup> See Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration* (1981), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19810401\\_chiesa-episcopaliana\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19810401_chiesa-episcopaliana_en.html).

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## **A PRAYER FOR PURITY BY ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

Dear Jesus,

I know that every perfect gift, and especially that of chastity,  
depends on the power of your Providence.

Without you a mere creature can do nothing.

Therefore, I beg you to defend by your grace  
the chastity and purity of my body and soul.

And if I have ever imagined or sensed anything  
that could stain my chastity and purity, blot it out,  
Supreme Lord of my powers, that I may advance  
with a pure heart in your love and service,  
offering myself on the most pure altar of your Divinity  
all the days of my Life. Amen.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Father Gary Selin was ordained a priest in 2003 for the Archdiocese of Denver. He received his doctorate in sacred theology from The Catholic University of America and serves as a formation advisor and theology professor at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver.

*"Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response."*

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34  
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission  
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

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