

THE ROAD TO CELIBACY IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SEMINARY

Pope Benedict on October 18, 2010 addressed a letter to Seminarians...

But that is not true, Pope Benedict said. "You have done a good thing," in entering seminary, he told the future priests. "Because people will always have need of God ... They will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God who gathers us together in the universal Church in order to learn with him and through him life's true meaning and in order to uphold and apply the standards of true humanity." The Pope's letter included a detailed and often personal exhortation to seminarians on the role of the priesthood and the spiritual maturity that it requires. The priest must first and foremost be a "man of God," who is willing to grow in self-knowledge and "humility" through prayer, the Pope said. He encouraged the seminarians to cultivate an "inner closeness" with Jesus through the sacraments, especially the sacrament of Penance. This sacrament is vitally important to the spiritual formation of priests, he said. "It teaches me to see myself as God sees me, and it forces me to be honest with myself ..." the Pope said. "Moreover, by letting myself be forgiven, I learn to forgive others. In recognizing my own weakness, I grow more tolerant and understanding of the failings of my neighbor." The Pope also urged seminarians to foster "the right balance of heart and mind, reason and feeling, body and soul, and to be humanly integrated." "This also involves the integration of sexuality into the whole personality," he said. "Sexuality is a gift of the Creator yet it is also a task which relates to a person's growth towards human maturity. When it is not integrated within the person, sexuality becomes banal and destructive." "Recently we have seen with great dismay that some priests disfigured their ministry by sexually abusing children and young people," the Pope added. "Instead of guiding people to greater human maturity and setting them an example, their abusive behavior caused great damage for which we feel profound shame and regret." "Yet even the most reprehensible abuse cannot discredit the priestly mission," Pope Benedict stressed, "which remains great and pure."

I would like to comment as an 18-year-old, celibate, young man who feels a calling to the priesthood, to a life of celibacy and sacrifice. The inability to satisfy romantic or sexual desires for the celibate is, doubtless a great cross to carry, but remember that our Lord said "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take his cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23) It is truly the greatest hypocrisy for a Catholic to call any suffering "unreasonable, unnatural, and excessive," for we should know that "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." (Luke 6:21) Remember that the Greek word for love used in the new testament, agape, does not mean romantic (that is liking the way a person makes you feel), or sexual love, but self-sacrificial love, which we must have for God and man and is the Christian ideal, not those other notions which we call love in English. I ask you also to recall the lives of various Saints who lived in celibacy and suffering, taking joy in enduring trials for Christ. Did St. John of the Cross grumble when he was thrown into jail? No, he was overjoyed that God had blessed him with such a cross that brought this Saint even closer to Him. St. Benedict, we are told, once stripped off all his clothes and jumped into thorn bushes to fight off the destructive passion of lust. And let's not forget the martyr for the Faith described in St. Jerome's documentation of the life of Paul the Hermit who, after being tied down by the pagans to be tempted by a prostitute, "Unconquered by tortures he was being overcome by pleasure. At last with an inspiration from heaven he bit off the end of his tongue and spat it in her face as she kissed him. Thus the sensations of lust were subdued by the intense pain which followed." (I do not wish in any way to compare myself to these Saints, I am a sinner who relies on God's mercy and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary daily, and am regularly in need of God's forgiveness.) That is not to say that marriage is somehow bad, marriage is a sacrament, like that of Holy Orders, defended by the Apostle Paul in the 7th

chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, the Church Fathers and reaffirmed by the Magisterium in the modern day.

It is important to note that in all the centuries of priestly celibacy it was during the times of widespread disobedience of the Church's policy on keeping sex sacred (rather than make it a tool for self-centered pleasure) in the 1960's and 80's, and in the very institutions (schools, seminaries, etc.) that were the most opposed to the teachings of Holy Mother Church in the first place. The answer to the crises is not to give into the ways of the world, but to adhere more faithfully to the teachings of the Church and the words of Christ in the gospel. I would suggest the book "The Courage to be Catholic," by George Weigel who explains the situation with much more understanding, and depth of knowledge than I can.

October 21, 2010 **Synod on priestly formation.** Rome

The only person who has made public statements on celibacy has been Cardinal-designate Antonios Naguib, patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, Egypt, the synod's general-relator. On Wednesday, in response to journalists, the future cardinal and pastor of the Catholic Coptic Church said that admitting married priests "will not resolve the problem of vocations, and it will not resolve the good or bad behavior of a priest."

Archbishop Michel Abrass, auxiliary bishop of the Patriarchate of Antioch of the Greek-Melkites of Syria, explained in reference to the situation in the Middle East that "in regard to the formation of seminarians, in the first place is the problem of their selection...It cannot be denied that at present the greater part chooses the ecclesiastical 'career' and not the vocation, and this to achieve a socially eminent position or for economic considerations," he stated: "Saïd Azer from Egypt, a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, intervened as an auditor to assert that outstanding among the challenges that the clergy must address is the lack "of human and spiritual formation, which at times is unacceptable, and frequently scandalous."

Submitted by Fr. Jim (not verified) on Nov. 04, 2010.

I bought into the celibate mystique pretty much all the way through 13 years of the seminary. During the last few years ago I was taken advantage of sexually by a faculty member. The worst of the abuse, though, was being told that I was special and nobody else was like me. Then a younger, cuter, blonder version of myself came along.

Around that time I began to look around and realize that not that many guys were actually celibate . . . and certainly not any of the attractive, creative interesting guys. During the nearly quarter century since ordination I've found that I'm much more emotionally healthy during the times of relationship and intimacy, including sex.

Now everything is better; prayer, preaching, exercise, diet, etc., and there's less tendency to abuse alcohol. Mood is much better, sleep is much better. Having successfully and thoroughly demythologized celibacy I'm a better priest, a healthier man, and a holier person (and not in that order).

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“This is another symptom of the many sexual “maladies” that permeate a clerical system that mandates celibacy, ordains only males, refuses to even discuss ordination of women, bans all forms of “artificial contraception”, mishandles homosexuality & divorce and feeds the youthful egos of young priests with a clericalism that distances themselves from their own humanity and that of the people they serve. I feel sorry for M K and all of us who are caught up in the pathologies of a corporate hierarchical structure that is in deep crisis—but is too fearful and arrogant to even admit the depth of the crisis.”