

CONSECRATED CELIBACY

115. The Church sees great value in the way of life of those who renounce marriage so that they can dedicate themselves to serving the kingdom of God. John the Baptist lived in the wilderness. Jesus had no permanent home of his own. Both remained celibate. The Catholic Church holds that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus, consecrating her life to her son alone. Paul found freedom in remaining unmarried for the sake of his work as an Apostle. In the third century, Anthony of Egypt heard the call of God to live a radically simple life of prayer in the desert. Later, Basil and Benedict wrote rules of life for religious communities. Monks, nuns and religious congregations of sisters or brothers have preserved the learning of the ancient world, have founded schools and hospitals, have preached the Christian Gospel to the ends of the earth, and have done great works of charity. More fundamentally, by heeding the personal call of God to a life of prayer and simplicity, and by renouncing wealth, family and personal ambition, they have borne witness to the limitations of all earthly goods and been a powerful source of spiritual renewal for the whole Church.

116. For spiritual as well as practical reasons, the Catholic Church in the West also requires priests and bishops to live lives of permanent celibacy, unless they have been given special dispensation. The priests and bishops of the Church, in following the example of Jesus, the good shepherd, seek to give themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the Gospel. Freedom from special family responsibilities allows them to make a greater commitment of time and energy to the demands of their pastoral role. However, the promise of celibacy would be misunderstood if it were seen only in practical terms. Rather, it gains its meaning from the radical character of priestly consecration as the dedication of the whole person to Christ and as a sign of the world that is to come.

QUESTIONS

Is the celibate state unnatural as some modern thinkers claim? Discuss

Priests and those who take a vow of chastity are meant to consecrate themselves to the Lord in a special way for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Is this relevant in today's world? Discuss.

Do lay people by and large prefer their priests to be celibate? Would a married clergy be more understanding of the day to day struggles of family life today? Discuss

Would married priests, in the group's opinion help to solve the vocation shortage? Discuss