
"CELIBATE FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM"



Before his ordination to the diaconate on November 14, 1999, Ivan Thériault committed himself to life-long celibacy. To the question I asked, "Ivan, are you resolved, as a sign of your interior dedication to Christ, to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom and in lifelong service to God and mankind?" [Cf. *The Rites of the Catholic Church... Revised*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1979. Volume Two, page 52-53] -- Ivan answered freely, "I am." I then told him, "To indicate your resolution, please come forward." The step he then took ratified the gift of his entire being to the Lord.

A MAN FOR OTHERS

Church legislation states that "*Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are obliged to observe celibacy, which is a special gift of God, by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and can more freely dedicate themselves to the service of God and humankind.*" [Coriden, James A., et al. *The Code of Canon Law. A Text and Commentary*. Study Edition. New York: Paulist Press, 1985, Canon 277 no. 1, page 209] A commentary [Université de Navarre/Université St-Paul, *Code de droit canonique*. Édition bilingue et annotée... Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 1990, page 183] states that "*Priestly celibacy is a gift of the Spirit who makes the priest 'the man for others'. The Church is decided to maintain the discipline of such a treasure, even though it is very much aware that this gift is carried in vessels of clay.*"

NUMEROUS STUDIES

Diaconal or priestly celibacy has raised countless discussions in the last thirty years, but despite the serious shortage of priests and urgent requests to ordain married people, the World Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in the fall of 1990 to discuss priestly formation, the teaching of the magisterium, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, reaffirmed this time-honoured legislation: "*It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy,*" says Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Shepherds after My Own Heart*. "*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.*" [Pope John Paul II, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation... on the Formation of Priests... Sherbrooke: Éditions Paulines, 1992, page 77] Today, going back to a reflection made on a day of recollection in May, 1998 with all the priests of our diocesan Church, I would like to reiterate the importance which the Church gives to this subject.

NOT A MONOPOLY

The priest or deacon has no monopoly over celibacy. In today's world there are millions of individuals who are celibate; motivations, though, may differ from one group to the next and one person to another. Priestly celibacy is a choice for service to God and neighbour. If celibacy no longer enjoys the social support it once had, it is important today to find better ways of living it at different stages of one's life. Every deacon and priest must recall and purify the motivations of his celibacy and once again give himself to Christ as he was invited to do at his ordination. He is bid to personally discover how this celibacy is also a personal grace.

PATHWAYS OF GROWTH

In order to better live celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom of God," one must understand the celibacy of Jesus himself and keep one's eyes on him. At the very beginning of the Gospel story we see Jesus intent about "his Father's business," a clue to us regarding the mystery of the celibacy of Jesus. His celibacy is gift of the Father and gift to the world. The love which Jesus had for people led him to the total surrender of his being for the sake of this world of ours. Celibacy is about love, it is truly a special way of loving. There is a Church legislation, but celibacy is first and foremost a choice for the deacon, the priest, and the bishop for their apostolic action. "Celibacy is a choice, for me, for my happiness, for my development, for meaning in my life."

A LOVE STORY

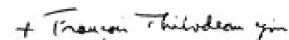
If celibacy is first and foremost a love story with Christ, it is also a love story with the Church. "The Church holds a special place in my heart. I am instrument and expression of Christ's love for his Church." Love sharpens one's vision; pastoral care lies at the heart of the deacon's and priest's celibate life. Celibacy is also a love story with the world: spiritual and apostolic effectiveness is far from neglected, it is expressed in a very special way within our Christian communities. Celibacy is a gift which every deacon and priest makes to the Church. It is the love of God which is found in every deacon and priest, in the strength of the Holy Spirit. "It is this Spirit who makes me love as Jesus loves."

REQUIREMENTS OF CELIBACY

It is in a context of faith and love that commitment to celibacy for the Kingdom of God is rooted. And it is in this context that this commitment must be lived day-to-day, year after year. Such a commitment must be a response to God's call, and it cannot be made without sufficient human, emotional, and spiritual maturity; it requires freedom and willingness. This means that the deacon and the priest must be able to experience solitude while remaining open to their neighbours; they must be able to have friendly and helping relationships with others, and a relationship of solidarity for the sake of Jesus Christ who came to establish a kingdom of peace and love.

PEOPLE'S PRAYERS

The Church is wise when through the bishop at the chrisem Mass she addresses herself to the faithful: *"My brothers and sisters, pray for your priests. Ask the Lord to bless them with the fullness of his love, to help them be faithful ministers of Christ the High Priest, so that they will be able to lead you to him, the fountain of your salvation."* [In: *Sacramentary. The Roman Missal...* Ottawa: Canadian Catholic Conference, 1983, page 215]
Have a good week.



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