
FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD (2)



On Pentecost Sunday this year I published a pastoral letter on the vocation to celibacy for the Kingdom of God. May this second excerpt help us respect the secret of single people.

CALL TO HAPPINESS

The call to such and such a vocation is first of all a call to happiness and holiness; it can later become a call to some specific service. Just as couples can tell why they chose to marry, singles, too, can question themselves on the reason of their particular state of life. However, it seems to me that for this, the greatest tact and discretion would be called for. No one has to expose the circumstances of one's personal choices. Health concerns, traumatic childhood experiences, love betrayed, secret suffering, hidden motives, or particular paths may have led one to choose the single state. But it can also be that, in more and more cases, the single life is more closely tied to a career choice or special commitment. I believe that it is most important for us to be supportive of our single brothers and sisters.

THE JOY OF VOCATION

It is untrue that the lot of single people is frustration. Such can easily be the case of those who have not made a good life choice or those who have been sorely tried by life itself. People who have a negative self-image or who have been disappointed by life can also be found in the priesthood, the religious life, and marriage. This is not easy for anyone! All the more reason for making enlightened choices so that the people around them exclaim: 'It is obvious that this person is in his/her vocation. He/She is happy, and it shows!' The best of all criteria is the joy which radiates from people who are happy in their vocation.

IMPENETRABLE HEART

Surveys and expressing one's opinion may be the vogue today, but the golden rule will always be to respect the inviolability of every individual. The Psalmist states that the human heart is impenetrable. This may be frustrating to the one who wants to know everything or who investigates everything. However, it is good that the heart remain hidden. No one is obliged to reveal all aspects of his or her experience, and no one can force another to reveal it. It is often a well-guarded secret. The holder of such a secret is free to reveal it to whomever he or she pleases. I must also add that everyone has the right to explain the reasons for one's life choices, out of a concern for being transparent or for demystifying. In his first letter Saint Peter writes: "Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply" (1P. 3:15). In receiving the secrets and confidences of their brothers and sisters, the Christian community can then be in deep communion with their lived experience. Saint Paul's advice is always cogent: "Make my joy complete by your unanimity, possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideals. Never act out of rivalry or conceit; rather, let all parties think of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others' interests rather than his own" (Phil. 2:2ff).

SERIOUS CHALLENGES

If it is a normal and positive thing to do, to discreetly ask the reasons that have led certain people to remain single, it is even more important to let oneself be challenged by the choice these people have made. The promise of celibacy for the Kingdom of God which the candidate to the diaconate makes and which ordained ministers must live by, the vow of chastity which every religious pronounces and strives to live, can challenge us profoundly. What can motivate such and such young person to commit to life in this way, today? What is there in the divine call, that is so radical? How is it that Jesus and his message still resonate so strongly? Who is this Jesus Christ, who can call in this way? Who is this Jesus Christ who can make his call heard daily to bishops, priests, and religious brothers and sisters? What is this call for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD

Such questions as these can come to mind when we meet brothers and sisters who have not become priests, brothers, or nuns but who have remained single. What is it that makes Jean Vanier dedicate his whole life to those with major intellectual handicaps? What is it that leads such and such a woman to spend her whole life in a rectory, a school, a hospital, or a nursing home? Or with youth, or the sick, the handicapped, and the elderly? What draws them, what noble message have they heard, what ideal are they pursuing, who is the cause of this single state, who has accompanied him/her all life through?

A PASSION WITH A NAME

For some, the cause of the Church has been a true passion. For others, the passion felt was for the youth who appealed to them in difficult times and as they developed. For others still, the poverty of some was intolerable, and the misery of others was a constant challenge. Each single person who wishes can name this 'passion', whether a person, group, need, or ideal. For many of our believing brothers and sisters, this 'passion' has a name: Jesus, who is seen in the sick, the poor, the defenceless, the oppressed, and the victims of violence and war. "What you have done to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done to me" (Mt. 25:40).

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