



From a Bishop's Journal 606

For the Kingdom of God (4)

For the fourth consecutive year at Pentecost, I have been writing about the Christian vocation. This year, the topic is celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. May the following testimonies show us the richness of this vocation.

A Mastered and Fulfilling Lifestyle

Would celibacy be a rather special vocation? We say that responding to a vocation is answering a call. One can ask whether celibacy is a vocation even if the majority of singles have never actually said: "I am choosing celibacy for life." Why is it that we find ourselves single, at 40, 50, 60... years of age? I personally think that it is because of life, and life's conditions. What is important for me is to be happy and to make others happy. When this happens, I believe that it is a sign that one is well in the lifestyle to which God has called one. Since I believe that I am a happy person, I believe that today I am accomplishing what God expects of me. Jean Vanier said that singles look at married couples and say: "How lucky they are, these married couples!" And married couples look at singles and say: "How lucky they are, to be single!" Every vocation has its own strengths and beauty, but also its difficulties and challenges. I myself believe that the most difficult part of a single person's life is most certainly the absence of a spouse and children, and solitude. To fill these important lacks, your love and affection must be directed to others, otherwise yours would be a sad life. On the other hand, the single lifestyle brings with it the freedom and availability that have allowed me to dedicate more time to my family, my profession, the Church, my community, and to become involved in a number of organisations and causes, using my talents for service to God and neighbour. I realise today that many of my professional achievements, especially in volunteer work, would have been impossible to achieve if I had had a family. I have given much love and time to youth, and the education of children has always been dear to me, although I have also been involved with youth and Weekend Jeunesse. I always gave them my best, as if they were my own children. I have a question: As a baptised Christian, how do I live the single life? As far as I am concerned, a single lifestyle focussed on oneself is meaningless. Like all the baptised, I, too, must share in the mission of Christ which is to build up his Kingdom of peace, justice, and love. I must offer my talents, energy, and time to the Church, community, and society. The more I become involved, the more I help bring happiness to others in the world and the more I make this a better world, the more also does my life have meaning, and I myself find happiness. To be a witness in the world, one must radiate inner beauty and reflect the Source which quenches our thirst, by spreading around light, joy, love,

kindness, and compassion. It is these signs of happiness that point out people who are happy in their vocation, for whom “celibacy can be a special mastered and fulfilling lifestyle.” In closing, I believe that celibacy is a vocation, a state of life you accept and live out on a daily basis. I also believe that “celibacy acquires its fullest human and spiritual meaning in the imitation and following of Christ.”
Ghislaine

Recognizing Continent Celibacy, or Abstinence

In this section of my pastoral letter I want to study with you the question of continent celibacy or abstinence for the Kingdom of heaven, that is, celibacy as total self-giving to God to the exclusion of all sexual relations with another. *Théo*, a French Catholic encyclopaedia, has the following concerning celibacy: “While in the modern world the number of single persons is on the rise, society as a whole, and especially the Catholic Church, have difficulty considering celibacy on its own merits (for itself). However, men and women are born celibates! And some of them remain so. Some choose to remain celibate throughout their lives. This can have religious significance: we then talk of celibacy “for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:21). The Church calls to this form of celibacy especially all the bishops and priests of the Latin rite, and consecrates deacons in this celibacy.”

Various Tendencies

Théo continues: “However, one can decide to remain single for other than religious reasons. What does Christian tradition think of this wanted and accepted celibacy? There has been little study on this subject and the question of celibacy has often been broached only as it relates to religious and priestly celibacy. This debate nevertheless shows tendencies. One such tendency does not understand celibacy or considers it evil, or at least as a lesser evil. It is true that Saint Augustine, in writing against the Manichaeans who considered sexuality evil, clearly states that marriage is superior than celibacy (although elsewhere in his writings he holds contradictory positions). In his wake, the Lutherans have often argued against clerical celibacy which pretended, among other things, that the fact of living alone promoted idleness and sexual immorality. However, an altogether different current in the Church defended celibacy. At the beginning of the Church, in the primitive community, Saint Paul asked the Christians to remain in the state they were in before their conversion. He therefore would like them to remain single. If we study closely his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7) it seems that in the community there were Christians who had contracted what today would be called ‘white marriages,’ in order to remain celibate at a time when there was no legal status for the single adult woman. Even if Saint Paul finds the framework of marriage inappropriate for living a celibate lifestyle, he does not reject celibacy: far from it. Altogether, his advice has prevailed through the centuries.”

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