

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

MARRIED CATHOLIC PRIESTS?...

Recently on a visit home, my mother was reading the *Advance* and she came over to me as I was watching TV and said, "Hey, there's an article in here about Catholic priests getting married." So she got my attention right away! Actually, it was not an article but a letter in the opinion page by a man named John Caufield. Mr. Caufield is a Staten Islander and one very outraged Catholic and rightfully so! The recent sexual abuse scandals have really devastated many of the faithful.

I often wonder how the Church and the clergy will recover from all of this. However, the writer's solution to the crisis within the clergy is overly simplistic. His solution: let priests get married! Of course, that is a suggestion that has been bantered around for a half century, since Vatican II. The comedian Milton Berle was once quoted as saying, "Priests should get married-then they'll really know what hell is like!" (Just a joke).

We all know that marriage, like the priesthood, is a sublime vocation which requires maturity on the part of both partners. Today that maturity is often lacking in our society as we see a very high divorce rate-about fifty percent. A married priesthood would perhaps solve some problems, but there would be other ones created as well!

The vow that priests and religious take is called "Celibacy." At times, kids in religion class will make reference to a priest's celibacy and say, "Father, it's like you're married to God!" And that's not a bad example. Priests and religious who take a vow of celibacy are espoused to the Church in a very singular and dedicated way. In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ made reference to the state of being unmarried. Jesus said: "All cannot accept this teaching, but only those to whom it has been given."

Certainly, celibacy is a gift and it can only be kept faithfully by God's grace. In his *Advance* column, Mr. Caufield wrote: "It is time to face the fact that living a celibate life in our current culture is too difficult, having to withstand the constant bombardment of sex in the media." Actually what he should have said was that "Living a Christian life in our current culture is too difficult." The world we live in today is positively opposed to Christ and His standards.

Actually, the virtue of chastity or sexual purity is incumbent upon all Christians according to their state of life and not just for the clergy and the religious. Is that difficult? Certainly-but not impossible. "For nothing is impossible with God." Celibacy frees the priest to be more dedicated to the Kingdom of God and to the people of God. Celibacy does not mean a priest can be a selfish and pampered bachelor with a lot of time and money on his hands. It means that the priest should serve the Church in a deeper and more committed way.

The late Pope Paul VI wrote: "Priestly celibacy has been guarded by the Church for centuries as a precious jewel and it retains its value undiminished when the outlook of men and the state of the world have undergone such profound changes." Yes, certainly the world has changed a lot especially in the last fifty years. But what has not changed is Christ and His teachings. Often enough, it is we, ourselves, who have to change, to become better and more virtuous people.

This week, please pray for the priests of the Church that we may be faithful to our vows to serve the Lord and His Church!

Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome