

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

GOING TO THE CHAPEL...GOING TO GET MARRIED?

I always remember the wonderful experience of my first Mass at Saint Teresa Church 31 years ago. After the tremendous event of priestly ordination the day before, coming back to my home parish to say Mass for the first time was really overwhelming. After the Mass was concluded, there was a reception in the gym. A young man from my first parish at Immaculate Heart of Mary in Scarsdale, David Mensi, was a D.J. and he offered to play music for the party.

As I entered the gym, David decided to play an old record, "Going to the Chapel, Going to get Married." I believe it was sung by a group who called themselves the "Dixie Cups" way back in the ancient days of the early 1960's. In any event, I told him that the song was a little off. For a newly ordained priest the song should have been titled: "Going to the Chapel, Going to say Mass!" Unfortunately, no such song exists. We had a good laugh about that one for years.

I think that most of us know that priests do not get married. We call it celibacy and it is a sacrifice to God. To give up marriage and a family is not a decision that a person takes on lightly; rather it comes after years of prayer, study and preparation in the seminary. When a man assumes the Order of Deacon, he pledges himself to be celibate for the rest of his life.

In our over-sexualized world today, perhaps many people might think celibacy is unnatural or strange. While it is certainly different and most people do not embrace it, celibacy for Christ and the kingdom is an excellent thing!

I am writing about it this week because of the recent synod on the amazon at the Vatican. A synod is a meeting of the bishops of a certain area and the Pope. Because of the declining number of priests in that area of South America, some bishops have proposed ordaining married men to the priesthood to alleviate the shortage. Nothing has been decided yet and Pope Francis is studying the issue.

In the last few weeks there have been several articles on this topic, including one in the Staten Island Advance. While it has been pointed out that some of the apostles had wives-Saint Peter we read in the gospel had a mother in law-the tradition of celibacy goes way back to the very beginnings of the Church.

In the Orthodox churches, it is true that priests can be married but they must do so before ordination. A bishop may never be married. A half century ago, the Roman Catholic Church allowed married men to the Diaconate-"permanent deacons." While these married men exercise ministry within the church, they can not wed again if their wife should die.

Personally, I think that priests should remain celibate. The celibate priest is a great sign of total commitment to the Church. As one young child said to me one time, "Father, it's like you're married to God!" That's not a bad analogy. Just the way a husband and wife pledge themselves to each other for life in marriage, so too does the priest at his ordination offer himself to Christ in a very deep and radical way.

While it is true that a priest does not have children in the physical sense, by his total dedication to Christ and souls, he is meant to have "spiritual offspring"-to bring souls to birth in the Lord. Is celibacy difficult? At times, it can be! Without the help of God's grace though it is impossible.

Please pray for the priests of the Church-pray that we may always love God and remain faithful to our vows for the love of God and his spotless bride the Church!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*