



Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church
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December 3rd, 2017

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, I'll start using these "Bulletin Letters" occasionally to answer questions that parishioners have about what we believe or what we do as Catholics. A few questions have already come in to me, and so I'll take a shot at one of them this weekend.

"Why doesn't the Church allow priests to get married?"

This question comes up often because for most people, the experience of giving up the great blessing of marriage and children is unfamiliar to them. And so, it can seem strange that men would give up these blessings to become a priest.

First, I'll make a quick qualification to the question. The Church's teaching that celibacy is required for ordination to the priesthood is not universal. In other words, there are some Catholic priests who are married. In the Eastern Catholic Churches (and there are about 23 Eastern Catholic Rites, apart from our Roman Catholic Rite), celibacy is not required for priestly ordination, although it is required for a priest to later become a bishop. Even in Roman Catholicism, there are occasionally exceptions made that would permit a married man to be ordained a priest, usually because he was a minister in another Christian denomination and converted to Catholicism. I once attended an ordination where one such man was ordained. It was pretty neat to see his wife and children sitting in the first row.

Second, since the teaching is not universal, we know that priestly celibacy is a discipline of the Church, not a doctrine. It is possible that this requirement could be changed (although I don't think it should or will).

So, why does Holy Mother Church require that men who wish to be Roman Catholic priests follow the discipline of celibacy and forsake the gift of marriage? Because Jesus recommended this form of life. Celibacy is the state of life in which a man or woman chooses to remain unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven in order to give themselves entirely to the service of God and to the service of His people. In St. Matthew 19:12, Jesus says this to His Apostles: "Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it." Through a life of celibacy, a priest is able to serve God and the Church with an undivided heart. The sacrifices of priestly ministry would certainly be a great strain on any wife and children.

But even more, celibacy is an eschatological sign; that is to say, celibacy in this life points forward to the life to come. In heaven, there will be no marriage or romantic relationships. Instead, all of us will enter into a relationship with God that is deeper and more intimate than any human relationship. In heaven, the only marriage will be the wedding of Christ to His Church. All of us, who are members of the Church, will become the bride of Christ. Men and women who embrace celibacy in this life through priesthood or religious life or consecrated virginity become an image of this heavenly, eschatological reality. We who live a celibate vocation are to be an image of the love of God that all will share in heaven.

If you have a question that you would like me to answer in the future, please send me an email. Have a blessed Advent Season as we prepare for the Lord's coming at Christmas!

To Jesus through Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Jonathan', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Jonathan
jhemelt@arch-no.org

Advent Evening Prayer starts this week:

The Holy Name Society is sponsoring Advent Evening Prayer during this special time of year. Evening Prayer begins on Monday, December 4 at 6:00pm in Church. (If there is a wedding rehearsal or wedding in the church then Evening Prayer will be held in Vincent Hall, 1324 Moss Street.) Evening Prayer continues every Monday through Friday, during Advent, ending on Friday, December 22 .