

Jesus Chose a Married Priesthood

By Father John Catoir – Sept. 5, 2018

The sex-abuse scandal must be rooted out, and the time has come for the Church to reexamine some of its policies. Jesus Christ required His priests to be men of faith; celibacy was not a priority. The clerical system we now have in place was instituted in 1139 A.D., at the Second Lateran Council. The bishops decided to split the Church into two categories: the clergy and the laity. Henceforth, the priesthood would consist of single men who were duty-bound to renounce marriage. This meant that a commitment to celibacy became a requirement for all future priests. The Council of Trent ratified this decision in 1563. It was understandable, single men were easier to control than families. Wives and children complicate things.

But by trying to solve one problem, did we create a bigger one? I think so. The sex-abuse problem must be rooted out. Child-abusers must be prevented from hiding secretly in the shadows. This horrific scandal has been going on too long and must be stopped.

Members of the hierarchy have been urging Pope Francis to create a blue-ribbon committee of the laity to help the hierarchy in searching for a solution. For too long the laity has been kept out of the decision-making sessions, where Church policy is decided. We need to enforce a non-tolerance policy, this means: one strike and you're out.

We need to return to the broader plan instituted by Jesus Christ and eliminate the celibacy requirement. Here's why! 1. We can simplify the vocation problem. Many men feel called to the priesthood but are discouraged by the celibacy restriction. 2. The role of women would be increased. Their wisdom would be much more available in the life of the Church, and they would be more respected. 3. Church unity would be given a boost. Many believe that the Protestant reformation was precipitated by the creation of clericalism, with all its pomp and circumstance. 4. The humility of Jesus would be emphasized in Church life, and titles like Your Excellency and Your Eminence would become passé.

It will take time to get all the wrinkles out, but many people are beginning to agree: drastic problems require drastic solutions. It can be done!

Celibacy attracted many holy men, but in the mix there were a small number who were not so holy, a small minority who had other things on their minds. We must do a better job, a flawless job of eliminating them. Jesus knew what he was doing. There's an old saying: a man is as good as the woman in his life. It may not be universally true, but there is enough truth in it for us to reexamine the necessity of celibacy in the life of the Church.

At 87, I'm not pushing to marry off our present crop of celibate priests, and I do understand that all this change might seem to be going too far for some tastes, but I think it doesn't go far enough. It would solve the vocation problem immediately and help us to begin the process of weeding out pedophiles. This will all take time, of course, but we would be returning to the system Jesus instituted, and that seems like a promising idea to me.

May the Lord be your strength and your joy as we weather this storm together.