

Celibacy: What is its Lived Experience Like?

A NO-HOLDS-BARRED INTERVIEW WITH A CATHOLIC PRIEST

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Introduction

This booklet has its origins in an interview a student conducted with Fr Michael de Stoop, a Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The interview was for a research assignment he had been given by his teacher during a unit on world religions.

Since these interview questions were written by a school student doing an International Baccalaureate they are most likely questions that other young people have in our current generation.

Many people have questions about celibacy because it is foreign to the majority of people's experience. Those who are married often cannot understand what motivates a person to be celibate and what celibacy signifies, let alone its benefits. Fr Michael's answers are insightful to those who have questions about these things, or who are just naturally curious, especially given that many of the interview questions ask for candid answers and they focus not merely on celibacy in an abstract, theoretical way, but on its lived experience.

Since many questions were asked in this interview they have been presented in this booklet according to three categories, namely, *general* questions to begin with; secondly, questions which focus upon the *benefits*; and lastly, the *challenges* of celibacy.

The contents of this booklet is also available as a Podcast from the following website under the title, "CELIBACY AND THE PRIESTHOOD - AN INSIDE ACCOUNT": www.xt3.com/library/view.php?id=3061&categoryId=37.

General

1. Why did you choose a celibate life?

I chose to pursue a celibate vocation not because it was primarily my initiative to do so, but in response to God's call. When I first perceived my calling I did not want to be celibate, but since a common characteristic of a calling is that it is like a dripping tap I got to a stage where I knew I could not run from my vocation any longer. I began to ponder that when men and women are discerning a possible vocation to marriage, they often contemplate the joys they will take up. But when men or women are discerning a celibate vocation, society conditions them to think about the things they will have to "give up," not the things they can legitimately look forward to enjoying. I realised that there is something grossly unreasonable about this way of thinking because it means that celibacy is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is, namely, an espousal with the Church which is the Bride of Christ (for consecrated men) and an espousal with Christ (for consecrated women).

Upon praying about my vocation I became more in touch with how the celibate life would be a great way of responding to God's love and even became humbled by the prospects that God wanted my undivided attention.

2. Why did you decide to be a celibate man rather than pursue another kind of ministry?

I chose to be celibate because it is part of a bigger vision, namely the Priesthood. It is not as if I chose to be celibate and then thought of becoming a priest. Although celibacy is mandatory for those who become Roman Catholic priests I did not choose to become celibate with an 'OK, if I must' attitude. Rather, I felt called to be celibate too because I sensed that (i) God wanted me to completely identify myself with him; and (ii) it would make spiritual fatherhood which is integral to the Priesthood more meaningful. The reasons why I was not reluctant to embrace celibacy are best described in terms of some defining moments that put me in touch with my calling. As you will see, all of these experiences are grounded in what I perceived to

be how the Lord is calling me to respond to his love.

The first defining moment took place upon asking Fr Ron Hickman to provide me with some spiritual direction. (He was the Parish Priest of Balmain at the time. He died in January 2010. I have never been to a more moving funeral as he was a very holy priest.) As you may know, spiritual direction is usually only as helpful as what the one seeking direction discloses, unless the one providing guidance is gifted by the Holy Spirit to sense what the one seeking direction has not himself seen within his own heart. Fr Ron indeed had this gift, no doubt due to the wisdom he had accrued over the years because he asked me: "Does it worry you that you think you would be a good husband and father?" And with a twinkle in his eye he said, "...and a good lover?"

At that moment I thought, "Uh-oh, where is he taking me with this?" Then I thought to myself, "Maybe he's right. Maybe he can see what I cannot see. Maybe I'm not discerning my vocation correctly. Perhaps the Priesthood is just a starry-eyed deliberation and that my real vocation is marriage because he perceives in me what I know to be true: that I have all the natural desires for marriage." So I was honest with him and said, "Yes, it does worry me." Upon hearing this, he lent forward, his eyes lit up and his face became visibly excited and he said, "GOOD! That means you will be a great priest!" He went on to say that a priest is not called a "father" for nothing due to the spiritual paternity of his ministry and that just as a husband dedicates himself totally to his bride a priest dedicates himself totally to the Church which is the Bride of Christ.

I could identify with what he was saying as it affirmed the true nature of my calling. I also felt that his guidance gave me an insight into his own fatherly heart. Having encountered Christ in him in such a tangible way I was moved to consider what a privilege it would be if Our Lord could use me as his instrument to help others too.

The second defining moment took place towards the end of my studies for the Priesthood. At that time I heard a talk on the Priesthood by another priest known for his sanctity who asked, "Why did God give us the Priesthood?" We all tried to answer his question. One person put his hand up and said,

“To represent Christ.” Another said, “To reveal God the Father.” Others: “To save us.” “To give us the sacraments.” “To sanctify us...” Our answers were not incorrect, but he drew to our attention that we had not yet identified the main reason. He then went on to explain: “Because,” he said, “Christ wants to identify himself with humanity.” This is indeed true because if God did not want to identify himself with humanity, he would have sent an angel instead.

Not long after that I read what St John of the Cross said about desire: “In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more” (*Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3, no. 28). Having being illumined by these two things I considered that if my desire to portray God’s fatherly love by representing his Son is so great, his desire to identify himself with me in this way must be even greater, for it is through the priest’s humanity that Christ makes himself present. Needless to say, I was very humbled by what the Lord had shown me. How could I not respond?

As you can see, I wanted to pursue celibacy because I could see that it emphasises the role that I, as a priest, would have as a spiritual father. My answer to the next question gives further explanation to the beauty of this kind of fatherhood.

3. Why do you think the Catholic Church embraces celibacy as a lifestyle?

The Catholic Church receives her authority from Christ. Since Jesus spoke about celibacy, the Catholic Church would be contradicting his teaching if she did not embrace it. The reasons why Jesus calls some people to be celibate are as follows:

(i) Celibacy is for the sake of the Kingdom

Jesus said:

“Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can” (Mt 19:11-12).

Here Jesus is describing three types of eunuchs. The first are those who were born with defective genitals, while the second type had their genitals castrated. Before we look at the third type, we need to understand why the second type were “made eunuchs by others.” When a King defeated his enemies, he would often capture the survivors and make them into his slaves. Some of these he would make into eunuchs. By doing this, he would be able to entrust his bride (or his harem if he had more than one wife) to the care of his eunuch, knowing only too well that he would not be able to get up to any ‘monkey business’ and mess around!

Having drawn his disciples’ attention to these kinds of eunuchs, Jesus then told them that there is a third type of eunuch, namely, those “who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12). They too would serve their king, however, while this kind of physical mutilation was repugnant to the Jews, Jesus is using the word “eunuch” here metaphorically. Just as a eunuch was a high official who exclusively served the king, so too, these third type of eunuchs are those who are called to dedicate their lives in an exclusive love for Christ our King.

Here Christ’s teaching on celibacy is clearly taken to mean a way of life that is a committed and dedicated life of love because Christ taught us about celibacy within the context of his teaching about the same virtues that are required for couples in marriage (see Mt 9:3-9). Therefore, by saying that some will become eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God it is very clear that they would renounce marriage, not for the sake of renouncement, but for the sake of a higher marriage, that is, to be totally dedicated to his Bride, the Church. There is a lovely parallel in this which helps us to see that celibacy is not repression, but an expression. That is, it is an expression of love for Christ’s Bride.

(ii) Celibacy gives testimony to the origins of our true birth and to whom we ultimately belong

In the Old Testament, what was important was biological generation. It was a terrible thing not to have a progeny. Take Hannah for example (see 1 Sam 1:216). She was praying in the Temple – barren – afraid that she was despised by her husband because another woman with whom he was living had brought forth a child. Another example of how important biological generation was in the Old Testament is that priests were always sons of priests. As you can see, in the order of nature generation is all important.

This emphasis upon generation ends in the New Testament. In the New Testament what matters, is not biological generation, but spiritual generation. Therefore, in this new order we have Our Lord speaking of another kind of progeny. This spiritual progeny can be seen in Christ's response to his mother. Remember when she was worried about him and sent message to him? Here Jesus responded by saying, "Who is my mother?" Can you imagine a son saying that about his mother? I cannot, unless he was trying to make a point. Making a point is what he does do indeed, for notice how he did not answer this question by saying, "He who is a blood-line descendent of Abraham..." Rather, he said, "He who does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:48-50; Mk 3:34-35). In other words, Jesus was making it clear that relationships in the order of blood are subordinate to the order of the spirit.

In stating this, I am not making out that there is no sanctity in having children within marriage. However, the point that Jesus is making is that the most significant form of progeny is spiritual. That is why Jesus called his Apostles, "my children." They were not his children! How could he call James and John his children when Matthew and Mark clearly state in their Gospels that they are the sons of Zebedee (Mt 4:21; Mk 10:35)? Because we are no longer living in the biological order of physical generation, but in the Kingdom of God order of spiritual generation. St John in his letter calls his converts his own children countless times, and St Paul in his letter to the Galatians said, "You are my children and I was in labour with you over and over again until you took the shape of Christ" (Gal 4:19).

Likewise, when he wrote to Philemon about the runaway slave St Paul said, "I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment" (Phile 1:10). Yes, St Paul describes his converts as the fruits of his fatherhood: "It was I that begot you in Jesus Christ, when I preached the gospel to you" (1 Cor 4:15). Likewise, he addressed Timothy as "my own son in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2), and again as his "well beloved son" (2 Tim 1:2).

So, giving birth biologically is not the only way life is generated, for there are 'virgin births.' That is to say, of conversions that come about through the proclamation of the Word of God. St Paul was even emphatic about this, for he said: "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15).

The Apostle St John knew only too well of these 'virgin births' because he said:

"to all who received him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

Likewise, the Apostle, St Peter preached about this spiritual progeny: **"Your new birth was not from any mortal seed but from the everlasting word of the living and eternal God."** (1 Pet 1:23).

Therefore, those who we priests and Religious 'beget' through the conversions that result from the proclamation of the Word are our children. This was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. For example, as regards women first of all, he proclaimed:

"Sing aloud oh barren woman who never bore a child.
Break into cries of joy you who have never been in labour.
For you shall have more sons than she who lives in wedlock"
(Isaiah 54:1).

How beautiful these words are for consecrated women! And for all others who consecrate their lives to Christ. The Prophet Isaiah provided some encouraging words too. Here he foretells how the eunuchs of God's Kingdom would not be fruitless:

"...do not let the eunuch say: "Behold, I am just a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give to them in my house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, a name imperishable for all times" (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Having looked at the Scriptures, what then is celibacy? Celibacy is recognition of a 'virgin birth'; that we ultimately belong to the Kingdom of God and not to nature.

(iii) Celibacy gives witness to the ultimate destiny that awaits us

God's plan from all eternity is to "marry" us (see Hosea 2:19). This plan was foreshadowed "from the beginning" (Mt 19:4) by our creation as "male and female" (Gn 1:27) and our call to become united in "one flesh" (Gn 2:24). Everyone, no matter what his or her vocation, is called to a life of holiness by responding to the call to marital love symbolised in his or her very own body. You only have to look at the bodies of a male and female to realise that we are made for union. Pope John Paul II said that the human body has a "nuptial meaning" because it proclaims and reveals God's plan for marital union between man and woman and, analogously speaking, between Christ and his Church. If you think Pope John Paul II was making this up, listen to St Paul. Firstly, he quotes Genesis, "For this reason a man shall leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Without taking a breath St Paul goes on to say, **"This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and his Church"** (Eph 5:31-32).

While we can readily understand this in terms of marriage, it also helps us to comprehend celibacy. Jesus does not call some of his followers to **embrace celibacy for the sake of celibacy, but "for the sake of the kingdom"** (Lk 18:29). And what is the kingdom? Ultimately, it is the marriage in Heaven. But hang on... did not Jesus say that there are no marriages in Heaven?

"Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection" (Lk 20:34-36. See also Mt 22:25-30 and Mk 12:20-25).

So, why is no one married in Heaven? Because ultimately there is only one marriage in Heaven: the marriage between Christ and his Church, that is, between God and his People. That is why Jesus raised marriage on earth to the level of a sacrament. It is a physical sign of a spiritual reality that awaits us.

Would you believe me if I told you that without this understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage, celibacy would make little or no sense? Unfortunately many people often think of marriage and celibacy as two totally different

things; things that detract from each other. So how does our understanding of marriage help us to understand celibacy? Let me explain it this way. Do you remember what St John the Apostle describes in the Apocalypse (otherwise known as the Book of Revelation)? This occurs at the very end of the Bible. St John the Apostle is writing what he saw in his vision of what will happen at the end of time:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men...” (Rev 21:13).

What is this “new Jerusalem”? In order to understand what the new Jerusalem is, we need to recall what was significant about the old Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the place where God asked the Temple to be built. In it was an inner-most sanctuary called the Holy of Holies. It was the place where God dwelt. God had signified his presence there by the manifestation of a glory cloud (cf. Ex 40:35; 1 Kings 8:6-11). Here the Hebrew word, “Shekinah” is used to describe this “glory cloud” or the “glory of the Lord,” the same word used to describe the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt into the promised land (see Ex 16:10; 24:16; 40:34; Num 16:42; Ezek 1:28; 10:4). It was seen to be so holy that the only one who could enter it was the High Priest. And he could only ever enter it once a year. What is more, it was common practice that whenever the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, a length of rope was always tied around his ankle. That way, if he had a heart attack and died, the people outside praying would not have to go in. They could drag him out by pulling on the rope! That is how holy this inner-most sanctuary was deemed to be.

John later goes on to provide further imagery which further helps to describe the extent of this union we will have with God. Even though John sees this “new Jerusalem” (which contains the Temple) “come down out of Heaven,” he later goes on to say: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22).

How wondrous! Here on earth, God lives in our bodies as his temple, but in the life to come, we will live in God through the humanity of Christ,

the Lamb who has redeemed us. We will live in God because he will be our Temple! But there's more... This imagery is multi-layered. As God is coming to dwell with his redeemed and resurrected people, John sees that God is intimately uniting himself with us. How intimately? He is uniting himself with humanity just as a bridegroom joins himself to his bride! This is not to say that God wishes to love us sexually, but that the Sacrament of Marriage on earth provides us with a symbol of how we will be intimately united to God in the life to come. This is a radical change because the old Temple, the place where the Lord dwelt, was unapproachable and too holy to enter, but now, at the end of time, God is coming to dwell intimately with his People.

Now if marriage is a foreshadowing; an image; a symbolic foretelling of our eternal unity with God in the life to come, what then is celibacy? Let me explain the answer to this question with the following analogy. Think of marriage as a road sign. Life on earth is the road that leads us to Heaven. To get there, we need to follow the road signs. Marriage is one of the most beautiful signs because unity in the flesh is a sacramental sign of the unity between Christ and his Church, and the ecstasy that accompanies the consummation of marriage is a foretaste of the joy that we will experience in our heart and soul when we possess God in Heaven.

But what happens when, please God, we get to Heaven? Do we need any signs when we get there? If we are already there, why would we need a sign? Even if there is a sign in Heaven saying, "HEAVEN" would you run up, embrace it, smother it with kisses and say, "Look, I found Heaven!" This would be absurd because a sign is no longer needed when you come to the reality. This is not to say that each married couple will no longer be known as "husband and wife" in Heaven. However, the intimacy and ecstasy of their love will no longer be exclusive, for in Heaven they will love everyone else with the same level of intimacy that they loved their spouse on earth, in fact, even more so.

This will happen because in Heaven we will not need one person to fulfil our need for love, because according to what Jesus said, love is perfect in Heaven (see Mt 22:25-30; Mk 12:20-25; Lk 20:34-36). We will know and love one other so closely on account of what it is to be united to God who is the source of love itself. It is for this reason that the celibate vocation gives witness here and now on earth to what loving one another will consist of in Heaven. Marriage can only symbolise what Heaven will consist of in the future. The consecrated celibate lives what love in Heaven consists of now. As you can see, while consecrated celibacy involves a renunciation of sex and

marriage it is in no way a denunciation of sex and marriage. Rather, it is an annunciation of the ultimate truth and meaning of sexuality and marriage. Some people are trying to make out that we can do without celibacy today; that priests should marry; that celibacy is outdated and that we should move with the times. But I cannot think of a time where celibacy is more greatly needed. If you mention the word, “sex” today, more often than not people will think of the Red Light District! Or they will think of images that can be seen on the Internet and in pornographic magazines. Or maybe they will think of what movies often depict: couples jumping into bed before marriage. Think about it... The media and our society in general condition us to think of sex in terms of self-gratification; something that is devoid of God; devoid of marriage; devoid of commitment; and devoid of its significance as a sign of a higher reality, that is, our marriage with God in the life to come.

We are living in an age which is obsessed with sex. This does not make celibacy ‘behind the times’! If anything, it means that celibacy is ‘ahead of the times’ for it is a sign of our eternal unity with God at the end of time. It is counter-cultural, yes, but relevant! For it gives witness to the ultimate destiny that awaits us! In Heaven we will all be united in and with the Lord as his Bride. Celibacy ‘leapfrogs’ the earthly marriage (so to speak) so as to anticipate the reality of what marriage on earth can only symbolise, namely, the marriage between God and humanity in Heaven.

(iv) Celibacy is historical

The following quote is from the website of the Catholic Education Resource Centre:

“Most people assume that the celibate priesthood is a convention introduced by the Church fairly late in history. On the contrary, there is evidence that even the earliest Church fathers, such as St Augustine, St Cyril, and St Jerome, fully supported the celibate priesthood. The Spanish Council of Elvira (between 295 and 302) and the First Council of Aries (314), a kind of general council of the West, both enacted legislation forbidding all bishops, priests, and deacons to have conjugal relations with their wives on penalty of exclusion from the clergy. Even the wording of these documents suggests that the councils were not introducing a new rule but rather maintaining a previously established tradition. In the year 385, Pope Siricius issued the first papal decree on the subject, saying that “clerical continence” was a tradition

reaching as far back as apostolic times. While later councils and popes would pass similar edicts, the definitive promulgation of the celibate, unmarried priesthood came at the Second Lateran Council in 1139 under Pope Gregory VII. Far from being a law forced upon the medieval priesthood, it was the acceptance of celibacy by priests centuries earlier that eventually led to its universal promulgation in the twelfth century.”
www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0014.html).

4. What is your daily life like? How would it be different if you were married?

If I was married I would not have the same amount of time to pray. I celebrate Mass every day, spend an hour in meditation, pray the Divine Office (the prayers of the Church which consist of Morning Prayer, Office of Readings, Prayer During the Day, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, all of which takes about 45 minutes). I also pray the Rosary every day and spend 30 minutes doing some spiritual reading every day. Studying theology does not cease after a priest is ordained. I keep up with my studies regularly so that I can both review and build on what I learned in the seminary. This I do informally, but I also take opportunities to study formally by attending seminars and conventions. The most recent convention I attended was in the USA. Priests also have an annual retreat where they go away for a week to be in silence and solitude to pray. Much of the inspiration I receive from these things would not be possible on account of the rights that a wife and children would have on my time.

What is more, if I was married I would not have the time I have to fulfil my pastoral responsibilities in administering the sacraments, providing instruction to those wanting to become Catholic, visiting the sick, etc. Many of these duties go well beyond the working hours of the day.

5. If you were allowed, would you get married? Why/ Why not?

No. Christ’s own words, “some make themselves eunuchs” (Mt 19:12) demonstrates the voluntary character of this vocation. It is not something forced upon me. If it was, I simply would not have chosen to become a priest. Some people have the misconception that my free will is not

involved when such words as “mandatory celibacy” are used by the Church. Not recognising my free will in responding to my vocation is just as incongruous as thinking that a married man is ‘forced’ to refrain from adultery. If he did not want to be chaste he simply would not have chosen to marry. Likewise, if I did not want to be celibate I would not have chosen to become a priest.

As you can see, for me, celibacy is not about what I am allowed, or not allowed to do. Rather, it is what I feel called to do. Nor do I see celibacy as something to endure. Rather, I see it as something to give. In its turn it gives great joy and freedom, and it is the source of God’s blessings on my ministry.

6. Did you choose to become a celibate man because you didn’t meet a girl that you wanted to marry?

On the contrary, I was very close to a girl in the parish in which I was living before I entered the seminary. We were both active in the parish’s youth group. We had even talked about getting married. For this reason it came as a tremendous surprise that God would use this very person to whom I was attracted to help me respond to my vocation. For on one occasion when I was driving her home she turned to me and said to me inquisitively, “Michael, I hope you don’t mind me asking you this, but have you ever thought of becoming a priest?”

What she said really challenged me. I am sure it was a big challenge for her to ask this question too because we were in a serious relationship. It was so easy to ‘palm off’ the comments of others, including my friends, grandmother, etc when they told me I should be priest. But when the last person I ever expected to ask this question said this it really made me stop and think. So, the short answer to your question is: No, the Priesthood was not a ‘consolation prize.’ I had every opportunity to marry, but I freely chose to respond to my calling to the Priesthood. Surprised? That this happened even surprises me, but I think it gives testimony to how attractive and beautiful God’s love truly is. I considered that human love and intimacy – as beautiful as it would be – owes its existence to the very source of love itself, namely, God.

Benefits

7. What are the benefits of being celibate?

- (i) Jesus himself said he was the “bridegroom” (Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19), thereby identifying that he was fulfilling what the prophets had foretold (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19) by espousing himself with the Church. Therefore, by embracing celibacy, priests dedicate their lives to the Church as Christ did. What is more, when you consider that the Sacrament of Holy Orders enables “every priest in his own way to represent the person of Christ himself” (Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 12), being celibate as Jesus was helps to exemplify this.
- (ii) Not being married means that I can more easily devote more of my time to maintaining a deep and regular prayer life. Consecrated celibacy is, therefore, not a great sacrifice when you take into account that it enables those who live it to experience the rewards of deep contemplation. St Thomas Aquinas explains this well:

“...the delight of contemplation surpasses every human delight. For spiritual delight is greater than carnal pleasure ... because the love whereby God is loved out of charity surpasses all other love. Thus we read in Psalms, Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, 180, 7).
- (iii) If I was married God would be first in my heart too, but my love for him would be expressed primarily through my wife and children. Celibacy on the other hand enables me to love Christ with an undivided heart, that is, my heart, together with the service I offer is available to all his people. I comment further on this benefit in my answer to Question 8.
- (iv) Celibacy demonstrates to others that I am a priest not for myself, but for those to whom I am called to serve. It also enables me to be more effective in assuring others that Heaven is greater than what all the earth can offer; that Christ deserves everything; that he means more than anything or anyone else; and that I really believe

what I preach because I have staked my life on it. Celibacy also enables me to encourage others to be chaste (that is, to refrain from sexual relations outside of marriage) no matter what their own state is in life without asking them to do more than what I myself am doing to be faithful. If I was not celibate, whenever I try to encourage others in the Confessional to avoid occasions that lead to sins against chastity for example, perhaps they would tend to excuse themselves from such advice by saying, “Father, you don’t know what you are asking!”

- (v) It enables me to be totally present to the needs of those entrusted to my care. When a person is given two important time-consuming responsibilities it usually means that either: (i) one is done well, while the other is done poorly; or (ii) nothing is done well at all. Some married clergy have identified the challenges they face in this respect. For example, Rev D Paul Sullins, who left the Episcopal Church 10 years ago with his wife recently surveyed his colleagues on this issue. “We trust the church’s wisdom regarding the discipline of celibacy,” he said. “A man who is married has two somewhat conflicting sets of commitments. It’s difficult to balance them, and having a family also makes it difficult to move at short notice to another assignment” (“Married priests want to remain exceptions” in: *Religion News Service*, 10 March, 2010). Furthermore, if I was married my parishioners may feel that they are second in priority to my own children or vice versa. In any event, I enjoy being totally available at all hours to my parishioners.
- (vi) It is not uncommon for God to place in the hearts of priests and Religious Brothers and Sisters a great love for those who are entrusted to their care. This is certainly consistent with St Teresa of Avila’s experience of spiritual motherhood. She wrote the following words which articulate how she had a burning desire to love others for God’s own sake:

“I’ve experienced this for some years: as soon as I see a [religious] person who greatly pleases me, with longings I sometimes cannot bear, I want to see him give himself totally to God. And although

I desire that all serve God, the longings come with very great impulses in the case of these persons I like; so I beg the Lord very much on their behalf.”
(The Book of her Life, ch. 34, no. 7).

- (vii) I am made to feel warmly welcome to join the company of just about any Catholic, even those I have never met before, whether it is in their home, in a cafe, or even spontaneously on the street, etc because I am seen as “part of the family.” This kind of adoption is not because I do not have a blood-related family of my own, but because Catholics recognise and embrace the spiritual fatherhood and service that I offer to them. Furthermore, since no other human being vies for my heart I, like all other celibate priests, offer people an innate assurance, coupled with the Seal of Confession, that the intimate details of their lives which they share in Confession will remain between myself and God alone.
- (viii) Since most consecrated celibates live in presbyteries, monasteries, convents, religious houses, etc., they have the great joy of living under the same roof as Our Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament.
- (ix) Not having a wife or children saves me from having to ask for more money to be put on the plate during Mass on Sundays to support them. The first collection goes into the Pastoral Revenue Account which pays for the priest’s expenses. Any surplus goes towards priests who are running small parishes and the priests who are retired. Can you imagine how much more money would be needed if priests were married with children?
- (x) Jesus said to Peter when he was questioned about the joys a person could expect who laid down his/her life:

“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Lk 18:27-30).

Jesus also said that those who “have left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands” for his sake and for the Gospel “receive a hundred times as much in this present age” (Mk 10:29-30). This is certainly consistent with my experience. Although the hundred-fold I

receive in return is not always in material things, but spiritual, they provide a joy beyond comparison to them.

8. What is the benefit of your celibate life for your relationship with God?

A glass that is filled with sand will not be able to hold as much water as a glass that is empty. Likewise, celibacy creates an incomprehensible capacity to grow in intimacy with God; to yearn for his presence, his love, strength, support and inspiration. All the qualities of God are yearned for all the more as a celibate, because in our emptiness, we know more of our need for God.

What is more, when it comes to centering your life on Christ and focusing upon the things of the Spirit, the celibate person is more likely to be attracted, not distracted! That is why St Paul said:

“I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:32-35).

Since love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour the freedom I possess to centre my efforts on pleasing God manifests itself in ways that enriches my relationship with all people. If I was married, I do not deny that I would be enriched by a wife, however, freedom from one good allows freedom for another good. In my case, this ‘good’ is to be able to love all people (as I stated in my answer to Question 7).

St Paul describes the joy he experiences in this respect in his letter to the Philippians: “It is only natural that I should feel like this towards you all, since you have shared the privileges which have been mine” (Phil 1:7). What are the privileges he is referring to here that provide his heart with

such warmth? The privilege of spiritual fatherhood; to love everyone inclusively, rather than a spouse exclusively. St Paul continues: “You have a permanent place in my heart, and God knows how much I miss you all, loving you as Christ Jesus loves you” (Phil 1:8. See also 1 Thess 2:8, 13; 2 Tim 1:1-7; Rom 9:1-3).

9. How important is community to your life of celibacy?

My celibacy enables me to be freely available to all people when they need me (rather than be focussed primarily on an exclusive relationship with a spouse) and it even allows me to have deep relationships (on account of the confidence those entrusted to my care invest in me as a spiritual father). This depth and inclusivity of my pastoral care creates ever greater capacities for me to reach out and make myself available to an ever widening circle of people.

My life is overflowing with communal life because in addition to the Parish entrusted to my care is the larger community of the Archdiocese of Sydney to whom I belong, my Archbishop, my brother priests, my family and my friends.

The central task of human and Christian living is to become persons of charity capable of deep, intimate relationships, for in doing so we truly live according the image and likeness of God who is a Communion of Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Celibacy is, therefore, a way a person can reflect the all embracing nature of God’s love in the world. It is tremendously enriching both for me and those to whom I relate because celibacy is fundamentally and essentially about relationship, not isolation. Therefore, a celibate person like me would not be able live out my vocation without community just as a married man could not live his vocation without his wife.

10. How did your formation prepare you to be celibate?

The seminary prepared me in the following ways: (i) lectures; (ii) a seminar which went for a week every year during which a psychologist would give talks, guide us through case studies and facilitate discussion; (iii) studying guidelines and various Church documents such as Integrity in Ministry so that we would be aware of important protocols; and (iv) seeing a priest to be my Spiritual Director and Confessor who I saw every fortnight.

11. How does not being married mean you relate to female members of the Church? Do you relate better or worse with them?

I am not married, so I cannot comment on whether marriage would make me relate to women better or not. However, I do know that I relate to women well on account of knowing not just one woman, but many given that my ministry puts me in regular touch with their feminine gifts, needs, emotions, unique ways of knowing and communicating, and their God-given dignity.

I also attribute my ability to relate to women to my own personal development. Being married does not guarantee that a man will relate better to a woman as many wives will testify! It has more to do with a person's maturity than their vocation. Jesus, the perfect man demonstrated this for he had relationships with women that transformed them deeply, even in situations that others deemed inappropriate, such as speaking to the woman at the well in Samaria and defending the woman caught in adultery. In turn, Jesus allowed his own humanity to be enriched by women as many followed him among his inner circle of disciples throughout the course of his ministry.

Pope John Paul II has contributed very deep insights into human relationships in his masterful works entitled, *Love and Responsibility* and *Theology of the Body*, and yet he was not married.

Furthermore, being a spouse is not the only way a man relates to a woman. Pope John Paul II stated in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 1995 (emphasis added):

"Thanks to the Redemption, the priest shares in a special way in the relationship of brotherhood offered by Christ to all the redeemed ... In order to live as a celibate in a mature and untroubled way it seems particularly important that the priest should develop deep within himself the image of women as sisters ... This is a universal bond, thanks to which the priest can be open to every new situation, even the most foreign from an ethnic or cultural standpoint, knowing that he must exercise towards the men and women to whom he is sent a ministry of authentic spiritual fatherhood, which gains him "sons" and "daughters" in the Lord (cf. 1 Thes 2:11; Gal 4:19)." (no. 4).

“If the priest, with the help of divine grace and under the special protection of Mary, Virgin and Mother, gradually develops such an attitude towards women, he will see his ministry met by a sense of great trust ... **If this relationship develops in a serene and mature way, women will find no particular difficulties in their contact with priests.** For example they will not find difficulties in confessing their faults in the Sacrament of Penance. Even less will they encounter any in undertaking various kinds of apostolic activities with priests. Every priest thus has the great responsibility of developing an authentic way of relating to women as a brother, a way of relating which does not admit of ambiguity. **In this perspective, Saint Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy to treat “older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity” (1 Tm 5:2)”** (no. 5).

“The relationship of priests to women as mothers and sisters is enriched, thanks to the Marian tradition ... that of service in imitation of Mary the Handmaid. If the priesthood is by its nature ministerial, we must live it in union with the Mother who is the Handmaid of the Lord. Then our priesthood will be kept safe in her hands, indeed in her heart, and we shall be able to open it to everyone” (no. 8).

It is certainly my experience that upon treating women as daughters and sisters that they are able to relate openly and charitably in their own turn on account of knowing that Christ is central to my relationship with them. It also enables me to express appropriate affection for them or receive it from them, and to gain a mutual trust, encouragement and reminds me of their worth as well as mine.

Challenges

12. What are the negatives/difficulties with being celibate?

Choosing the goods of one vocation will always result in excluding the goods of another vocation. A married man cannot enjoy the joys of celibacy and vice versa. I do not deny that forgoing an intimate sexual relationship with a wife and fathering my own biological children is a sacrifice. Another challenge I face is to maintain the balance between my priestly ministry to others and other important aspects of my life, including time for prayer, family, friends, exercise, sleep, etc.

13. Are you lonely?

No. My life is full of people I am close to, including family, friends and my parish community. Furthermore, I actually look forward to being alone. I value the company of others, but my longing to spend time with God in prayer also increases in proportion with each time my pastoral demands increase. Furthermore, I often feel God's presence in moments of silence and solitude. In this sense I agree with St Ambrose who said, "I am never more accompanied than when I am alone." I see that this experience of mine confirms that I have discerned my vocation correctly.

14. Do you miss or long for female company?

I probably would if women were not already part of my life. My mother is still alive, I have three sisters, many women are employed in the Church, and I do not minister exclusively to men. If your question relates to being intimate with women, rather than their company in general, then the answer is yes. If I did not long for intimacy with the opposite sex I would not be human! How impoverished I would be if this was not the case given what the Church teaches about celibacy (see my answers to the Questions 3 and 16).

15. Was it difficult to give up the idea of having a wife and children? (What about the command in Genesis to “Be fruitful and multiply” and “it is not good for man to be alone” (Adam and Eve).

Yes, it was extremely difficult. It took many, many hours of prayer. Once I allowed my response to my vocation to move beyond a mere openness to it to being prepared to embrace it, an incredible ecstatic joy flooded into my heart. The causes of this joy are found in the benefits described in many of my answers to the other questions.

As for God’s command to Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply,” this needs to be understood with the overall context of Sacred Scripture. Every time God established a covenant with his people, whether it was with Adam (Gn 1:28), Noah (Gn 9:1), Abraham (Gn 17:2-6), Jacob, (Gn 35:10-12), or Moses (Lv 26:9), God called them to be “fruitful and multiply.” Even Jesus was to come from Abraham’s seed. For this reason the Jews saw eunuchs (that is, those who could not engage in sexual union) as cursed by God, and even excluded from God’s Kingdom.

So far, there is nothing within the context of Sacred Scripture to inform us that men and women should be doing anything else other than having children. However, Moses asked the Jews to abstain from sex while he ascended Mount Sinai. Although priests in the Old Testament were married, they had to observe continence while they served in the Temple. Furthermore, the Prophet Jeremiah was forbidden by God to take a wife in order that he might fulfil his ministry. To top it all off, Jesus said that that some men and women who are perfectly capable of sexual union would actually choose to abstain from sex “for the sake of the kingdom” (Mt 19:11-12). Christ’s words mark a dramatic shift in God’s revelation. What is more, St Paul actually recommends the celibate life:

“Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage ... Those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that ... The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided” (1 Cor 7:27-34).

This is not to say that all men should be celibate. St Paul explains that celibacy is a calling for some and not for others by saying, “Each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another” (1 Cor 7:7).

As you can see, God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” is a general precept for the human race; it does not bind each individual. To consider otherwise would be to overlook numerous other passages in the Bible that refer to the celibate life, including the fact that Jesus himself freely chose to be celibate. If you exempt him because of his divinity, you still accuse John the Baptist and most of the Apostles, along with all other good single people sinning or at least not answering God’s invitation to the full by not marrying.

Finally, Heaven itself testifies to how celibacy fits within God’s plan because St John the Apostle sees consecrated celibates in there (see Rev 14:4).

Another reason why there is no contradiction to the Lord’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” is this: this is a law of celibate life no less than biological life. Fulton Sheen explains this well:

“The production of new life is generation, a function that does not pertain exclusively, or even primarily to the flesh. God is the source of all generation. Begetting is not an impulse from below, but a gift from above; rather than an evolution from animals, it is a descent from deity.”
The Priest is Not his Own (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2005), p. 57.

Priests are called to give divine life to souls and restore it through the grace God gives through the sacraments. This we have also seen by the testimony of the Apostles Peter, Paul and John in my answer to Question 3.

16. Many men seem to have the inherent desire to be a husband and a father – where is your outlet for those feelings/desires?

Fathers receive satisfaction not merely from biologically fathering their children as they experience greater joy from emotionally and spiritually fathering them. This is why men who adopt children still experience much joy in their fatherhood.

I think priests experience as much fulfilment in their supernatural fatherhood as fathers who are married with children. Why? Let me explain it this way. Fathers experience the joy of seeing their own life reflected in their children. The reflection they behold is not just the likeness of their own physical appearance, but their knowledge, mannerisms, values, family memories, and the like. While this is a real joy for married fathers, as a priest, my fatherhood enables me to see something bigger and broader than myself reflected in those entrusted to my care, namely, the life of Christ.



This never ceases to move me due to my own love for Christ. It is a joy to see Christ in others, and to know that others are becoming more like him as a result of my fatherhood is very humbling indeed. My experience here is consistent with a survey on job satisfaction conducted in the United States, the results of which revealed that the clergy ranked first in both job satisfaction and general happiness (see Tom W Smith, "Job Satisfaction in the United States", NORC/ University of Chicago, 2007).

I do not need to seek any outlet from not having biological children of my own because I see myself just as much a father. I am reminded constantly that I am indeed a father by the number of people who will confide details of their lives in me that they would not even tell those who are closest to them. That I am a father to them is instinctive to their faith because this level of trust is often invested by people who I have never met before.

My supernatural fatherhood takes the fullness of my sexuality as a man seriously, it does not deny it. When I freely and willingly consecrated myself to God in response to his love he took it, elevated it and supernaturalised it so that my natural desire to give myself in a communion of love with a woman is not denied, nor is it undermined or suppressed or repressed, but rather channelled and redirected to the Bride of Christ, the Church so that my love for her may be both passionate and fruitful.

17. Does being celibate make it difficult to control your sexuality? Where/what is the outlet for your sexuality?

I think this question emerges specifically from our contemporary culture and its anthropological assumptions. It is interesting that despite the fact that celibacy has been practiced for many years it is only now that people consider it almost impossible or unnatural. That is more a reflection of our culture and our sense of who the human person is. As you have seen in my answers to the previous questions, celibacy is primarily about expression and freedom, not repression or control. Similarly in marriage, chastity is not about repressing a man's desires for someone to whom he is not married, but an expression of love for his wife.

I think being celibate makes it easier to have sexual integrity for the following reason described by St John of the Cross. He said that when God is known by desire and understanding, carnal knowledge withers. But getting to this point requires constant work to resist the "siren songs" of the world and the flesh. As St John of the Cross writes in *The Dark Night*:

"...For when the friendship is purely spiritual, the love of God grows with it; and the more the soul remembers it, the more it remembers the love of God, and the greater the desire it has for God; so that, as one grows, the other grows also. For the spirit of God has this property, that it increases good by adding to it more good, since there is likeness and conformity between them. But when this love arises from the vice of aforementioned sensuality, it produces the contrary effects; for the more the one grows, the more the other decreases, and the remembrance of it similarly. If that sensual love grows, it will at once be observed in the soul, the other love [for sensuality] becomes cold and is forgotten; for, as the two are contrary to the other, not only does the one no longer aid the other, but the one which predominates quenches and confounds the other and becomes strengthened in itself" (Bk 1, ch IV).

As for the outlets that I find helpful they are noted below. By way of introducing them, St Thomas Aquinas said that a lack of spiritual pleasure can lead one to seek after carnal pleasures (see *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 142, 2,). Hence, I find the most effective outlets are those which help maintain (i) a balance between work and recreation; and (ii) my spiritual life.

(i) Balance between work and recreation

If I work hard for too long without attending to needs for legitimate pleasure (such as adequate rest, exercise, recreation, hobbies, etc) this can sometimes lead to temptations for illegitimate pleasure. On the other side of the coin, ascetic practices are also helpful as it leads to a healthy mastery of my mind and heart, imagination and memory, emotions and instincts. Pope John Paul II wrote about this in *Vita Consecrata*, no. 88.

(ii) Spiritual Life

- Maintaining time for daily contemplative prayer, including devotion to Our Lady, Liturgical Prayer and spiritual reading despite the demands of pastoral work.
- Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the daily celebration of Mass.
- Being transparent with my Spiritual Director.
- Avoiding friendships based mainly on sensuality and sentiment, and the cultivation of friendships based on cultural and spiritual interests.
- Avoiding all occasions of sin (including proximate and unwilled occasions).

Implementing strategies that help undermine carnal temptations. These strategies consist of:

- Being attentive to the interior movements and emotions within my heart. Being aware of these helps me to check whether or not they may be compensatory responses to situations that I find difficult to cope with, or situations of repressed emotions such as a feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, humiliation, over-work, un-appreciation, or from personal stresses and suffering, such as disappointments, etc.
- Being aware of my own emotional responses is important because when a person struggles sexually it usually stems from an emotional problem, not from one's sexuality itself.

I believe humility is the most important virtue required here because without it a person can tend to think, "I don't need to be attentive to what is going on inside me because these things won't lead to anything." Humility, on the other hand prevents us from being blind to human weakness or presumptuous about what strength we have gained, and thus ensures that the necessary precautions are taken.

18. Do you think it should be a personal choice to be celibate or should the Church require it?

From my experience I think the Church does well to require it of her priests because I found it extremely difficult to respond to my vocation during the beginning stages. If celibacy was optional I may have gone ahead and got married which would mean that I would not experience the joys of celibacy as I do now.

19. What would happen if you met a girl you liked or fell in love? What would you do?

Firstly, I would do my best not put myself in a position where falling in love would likely happen. If I fell in love despite such measures, I would not be surprised that strong feelings have emerged for another person. The reason for this is that it is normal for people of the opposite sex to be attracted to one another. While this is true, it does not mean that such feelings have to be pursued. Today's society and many forms of media condition us to prioritise our feelings over our commitments to others. Any attempt to do otherwise is seen to be 'unnatural'! This is unfortunate because people keep commitments in their desire to pursue a deeper happiness.

Secondly, I would question if such an attraction is emerging from a conscious or unconscious way of compensating for any lack of balance in my life. Despite what insights I may gain from my own prayer and reflection I would be transparent with my Spiritual Director. Since my Spiritual Director is also my Confessor I would confess any affections and interior movements in my heart where Christ is not the centre so that I could benefit from the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I would also discuss with him how this situation may have arisen from my failure to nurture my sense of self-esteem as a child of God and a subsequent desire on my part to seek that self-esteem elsewhere. This would enable me to deal with being entranced with the idea that an attractive woman was romantically inclined towards me, rendering me less vulnerable. This would hopefully enable me to focus on being faithful to my vocation, rather than pursuing a feeling.

Needless to say, I would not do anything to encourage the feelings. For example, I would not phone her, write to her, or read any letters she sends

me. Can you imagine a married man doing otherwise in his effort to remain faithful to his wife?

Being chaste does not simply pertain to refraining from genital activity. It also involves sexual integrity in one's thoughts and emotions. For this reason, if I ever thought of this woman, even if such thoughts were noble, I would say an aspiration to Jesus through Our Lady instead, such as the prayer St Louis De Montfort frequently said: "I am all thine, all I have is thine, O Most Loving Jesus, through Mary, Thy Holy Mother," thus transforming a human affection for a divine one.

20. Do you think that celibacy is a cause of sin? Are men putting themselves unnecessarily in the way of temptation rather than allowing themselves to marry and enjoy sex?

One of the important ways humans differ from animals is the capacity we have for our heart and mind to govern our behaviour. We may have instincts, but unlike animals we are not instinctual creatures. Rather, we are rational creatures. This means that part of the drama of human life and personal and spiritual growth lies in the struggle to master our instincts and desires so that they do not master us. This unique freedom to choose that we possess which enables us to be responsible for our emotions, desires and actions is one of the reasons why human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and animals are not.

It is a struggle – sometimes easier, sometimes harder – but the ability to control our desires so that we can be better people in ourselves and better care for those around us is both possible and real with God's help. Helping other people – doing well at study, sport, or work, nurturing the relationships that are important to us – all require the ability to choose something other than acting on how we feel or what we want at any particular moment. We take this for granted in most areas of life, but when it comes to sex, the message we receive from the culture around us is that it is like a runaway train. There's no stopping it and no way of getting off: you just have to go with it. One of the reasons we need the witness of faithful celibate men and women in the highly sexualised culture we live in today is to show that it is possible to govern our sexual instincts, rather than be governed by them. In this way celibacy supports the witness of faithful married love too, which also depends on governing and not being governed by our sexual desires.

It is not celibacy which is a cause of sexual temptation, but our own sinfulness. As the Apostle St James said, “Everyone who is tempted is attracted and seduced by his own wrong desire. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin” (Jam 1:14-15). If celibacy was a cause of sin, why would Jesus want to call and encourage some people to accept it? Furthermore, why would he say that those who receive it would do so “for the sake of the kingdom” (see Mt 19:11-12)? Far from being a cause of sin, celibacy in these words of Our Lord are said to bring benefits to his kingdom. This is consistent with St Paul’s experience of celibacy because he refers to it as a “gift” (1 Cor 7:7) and he recommends it to those called to this so that they “may be holy in body and spirit” (1 Cor 7:34).

St John the Apostle saw consecrated celibates in Heaven and tells us that they “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” and that they have been “redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God” (Rev 14:4). “First fruits” occurs twenty-six times elsewhere in the Bible. Every single time it refers to the offering of a sacrifice. Celibacy is therefore a pleasing sacrifice to God. This could not be true if it was a cause of sin because “nothing unclean will enter heaven” (Rev 21:27).

It is not just unmarried men who commit sexual sins. Married men also sin against chastity. Those who argue that celibacy is a cause of sinfulness might just as well say the same about marriage. Neither marriage nor celibacy is the solution. Rather, God’s grace is the solution. Christopher West writes:

“There’s also a dangerously misguided approach to marriage inherent in the idea that marriage is the solution to the sexual scandal of some priests. Marriage does not provide a “legitimate outlet” for disordered sexual desire. Married people, no less than celibates, must come to experience the redemption of their sexual desires in Christ. Only then can they love each other in God’s image. If a man were to enter marriage with deep-seated sexual disorders, he would be condemning his wife to a life of sexual objectification.

Celibacy does not cause sexual disorder. Sin does. Simply getting married does not cure sexual disorder. Christ does. The only way the scandal of sexual sin (whether committed by priests or others) will end is if people experience the redemption of their sexuality in Christ.”

www.catholiceducation.org/articles/sexuality/se0114.html).

Allowing priests whose sexual desires are seriously disordered to marry will not eliminate paedophilia. Paedophilia and other forms of disordered sexuality have their own complex causes. They are not caused by a vow of celibacy or by the inability to marry.

The sexual abuse of children is a horrifying and terrible crime. It is particularly disgusting when committed by priests and religious because people expect more from them. Media attention has helped the Church tackle this evil and respond to victims with greater compassion. We need the same scrutiny to expose paedophilia and child sexual abuse wherever it occurs in our society. For example, BBC News quoted a shocking statistic from psychiatrist, Manfred Luetz, who stated: "The father of a family is 36 times more likely to abuse than a celibate priest" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8604800.stm>).

Drawing attention to these statistics is not an attempt to evade the seriousness of sexual abuse by priests, or to minimise in any way their crimes and the harm they have caused to victims. But an awareness of the wider problem of paedophilia and child sexual abuse in our society helps us to focus on the real causes of sexual abuse. Insisting that celibacy is one of the causes runs the risk of distracting us from the true nature of sexual abuse and the suffering it causes – within the Church and outside of it.

The Catholic Church accepts its responsibility to do all that it can to prevent sexual abuse from happening. Church authorities fully understand the gravity of the issue of child sexual abuse by clergy and have taken measures to protect children and to remove abusers from public ministry. The Church is deeply committed to bringing justice and healing to victims of sexual abuse and to doing all it can to eradicate this evil.

21. Do you have female friends to talk to or is that too tempting?

I have female friends, but I relate to them no differently to how a married man would. That is, I do not go into a woman's home if she lives alone, nor eat out with a woman unaccompanied. If I ever have a question as to whether the way I relate to any particular woman is appropriate for me, I do not decide the answer to this on my own. Rather, I bring this to prayer and to my Spiritual Director.

22. Does celibacy get easier as time goes on?

Yes, this has been my experience. Chastity is a virtue and like all other virtues, it becomes easier to live on account of the habits established and the greater openness to God's grace that emerges as knowledge of self increases. This does not mean that my sexuality is totally redeemed. If I ever began to think to myself, "I am not capable of being unchaste because I'm above all that now," I would be in for a disaster!

From my experience, celibacy not only becomes easier, but more rewarding. The Priesthood is better than I ever thought it would be.

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