

Cath. Church - Clergy

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THE PRIESTS
OF THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH
THEIR IDEALS, TRAINING;
WHY UNMARRIED.

The true priest is the one
who is faithful to the ideals
and training which the church
imparts to him. Judge the
Priesthood by those who are
loyal to these standards
NOT
by the occasional renegade
who proves **TRAITOR TO**
THEM.

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IDEALS.

It is impossible to give a more official or correct statement of the ideals of the Catholic Priesthood than to quote from the Roman Pontifical which is the official text used by the Bishops in the solemn rite of ordination. Here is an excerpt which clearly expresses the mind of the Church on this subject:

“Dearly beloved children, who are about to be consecrated to the office of Priesthood, strive to receive it worthily, and to discharge its functions in a praiseworthy manner. For it is the duty of the priest to offer sacrifice, to bless, to govern, to preach and to baptize. In truth, with great fear should one ascend to so high a rank, and care should be taken that heavenly wisdom, approved morals and a long observance of righteousness, should commend those chosen thereunto.

As you, therefore, beloved children, have been chosen by the voice of our brethren to be consecrated as our coadjutors, preserve the purity of your lives in unspotted holiness. Bear in mind what you do. Let your conduct be in conformity with the action you perform, so that celebrating the mystery of the Lord's death, you take heed to mortify your members from all vices and lusts. Let your doctrine be spiritual medicine for the people of God; let the odor of your life be the delight of the church of Christ; so that by your preaching and example you may build up the house, that is, the family of God, so that neither we may be condemned by the Lord for promoting you to so high an office, nor you for receiving it, but both may rather be deemed worthy of a reward; which may He himself grant us through His grace. Amen.”

There is no other profession for which such long and careful preparation is required as the Catholic priesthood. After completing the 8th grade the shortest college and seminary course is ten years; the average in the U. S. is twelve years; in some countries fifteen are required. Hence the boy who intends to be a priest usually commences to prepare at the age of thirteen or fourteen. He is one of the good boys who at this early age exhibits a marked leaning towards religion and piety. His desire to embrace the priesthood is actuated only by the holiest and loftiest motive—that of giving himself up irrevocably to the Savior, no matter what sacrifices the step might entail. From his fourteenth to his twenty-sixth year, the character-forming period of his life, he is protected from the world and its temptations, and observes a rule of life that conduces to solid spirituality. Only for his short summer vacation is he temporarily removed from his uplifting environments, but even during this interval he is expected to be as regular at his daily

prayers, daily Mass, daily or weekly Communion, as when at college. Moreover he must return with a testimonial from his pastor certifying to excellent behavior during vacation. Below is a fair specimen of the

DAILY ORDER OF EXERCISES

followed by students preparing for the Catholic priesthood:

- 5:00 A. M.—Rising.
- 5:30 A. M.—Morning prayer and meditation.
- 6:00 A. M.—Mass.
- 7:00 A. M.—Breakfast.
- 8:00 A. M.—Classes and Studies.
- 11:40 A. M.—Bible-reading and prayers.
- 12:00 M. —Dinner followed by recreation.
- 1:30 P. M.—Classes and Studies.
- 4:00 P. M.—Recreation.
- 4:30 P. M.—Studies or classes.
- 5:30 P. M.—Spiritual reading and prayers in the chapel.
- 6:00 P. M.—Supper followed by recreation.
- 7:30 P. M.—Studies.
- 8:30 P. M.—Night Prayers.
- 9:00 P. M.—Retire—Absolute silence until after breakfast next morning.

THEIR MORAL STANDARDS

Besides observing such a rule for years, the candidate for the priesthood is guided by a spiritual director, to whom he makes his confession every week, and who would counsel him to adopt some other profession, did he not seem physically, mentally and morally qualified for the priesthood. He is taught that the virtue for which he must ever be most conspicuous is purity, chastity. This angelic virtue, must not be violated even by a wilful unclean thought, much less by sin of deed. The student's conscience is trained to be so delicate on this point that he would be greatly disturbed if he had wilfully permitted an impure thought or desire to tarry even momentarily in his mind. After such mature deliberation and preparation the student does not act rashly nor bind himself to the impossible when he solemnly vows to take "the Lord as the portion of his inheritance" and to dedicate to Him his body and soul by the faithful observance of chastity.

AFTER ORDINATION

The Church imposes many obligations on her clergy because of the nature of their work for which piety, purity and self-denial are essential. Of course some priests are more spiritual than others, but besides private devotions, all priests must devote nearly three hours each day to religious exercises. This is not commonly known to non-Catholics. Priests say Mass on week-days the same as on Sundays, and must spend some time in prayer both before and after Mass. Then, they must daily recite the Divine Office which is a collection of prayers and scripture-reading, which consumes from an hour to an hour and a half each day.

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THE SCOFFER TO WHOM PRAYER AND FOLLY ARE ANALOGOUS MAY PASS THIS OVER WITH CONTEMPT BUT THE MAN OR WOMAN IN WHOM REVERENCE FOR SACRED THINGS STILL LIVES, WILL GLADLY ACQUIESCE IN THIS—THAT GOD GIVES GRACE AND STRENGTH TO THOSE WHO SEEK IT FROM HIM.

We do not mean to say that no priest was ever untrue to his vows. There are grave defects here as in all things human. As there have been fallen angels, fallen apostles, fallen preachers and fallen ministers so also is there the occasional unworthy priest. The few guilty ones, are they who cause the occasional press scandal, or after being cast out of the ranks of the clergy write such books as "Thirty Years in Hell" or lecture on "priests and nuns" for a living. "Corruptio optimi pessima est" is true in their case; the corruption of the best becomes the worst. In the rather graphic language of Thomas A' Kempis "Stars have fallen from heaven; they that did eat the Bread of Angels, I have seen delighted with the husks of swine."

BUT WHY AN UNMARRIED PRIESTHOOD?

The priest is required to observe celibacy especially for two reasons: (1) To imitate Christ more closely and attain to higher perfection; and (2) to give his undivided attention to the work of God and of souls.

1. Christ would have a virgin mother; His precursor, John the Baptist, whom He eulogized so highly, was unmarried; His most beloved Apostle was "the virgin disciple"; virgins are represented (Revel. XIV, 4, 5) as following the Lamb; Saint Paul, the model Apostle, who bids us "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ," remained unmarried, and he tells us (I Cor. VII, 7-8) that he would have us imitate him in this particular. In Math. XIX, 29, Christ says: "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." In the same chapter, V 12, Jesus recommends virginity to some: "And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Now, who should follow this recommendation if not the clergy, whom St. Paul denominates "other Christs?"

CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS

The same Paul assures us that a married clergy cannot be wholly occupied with God and the work of saving souls: "But I would have you without solicitude. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but

he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." (I Cor. VII 32). Whilst the words of Saint Paul, "A bishop should be a man of one wife" are sometimes quoted in support of a married clergy, they cannot have that meaning because this very Saint Paul was a bishop and yet he was not married. The Apostle's meaning is that any man who was married oftener than once could not become a bishop.

A child can plainly see the logic of St. Paul's declaration, and hence Christ made celibacy, or at least the relinquishment of one's wife a condition for the apostleship; the Apostles had to "leave all things." St. Peter calls the Savior's attention to this: "Behold, we have forsaken all things and followed Thee." (Matt. XIX, 19). We do not read of a single Apostle being associated with a wife in the exercise of his ministry. Celibacy is also favored by Heb. V, 1; "For every high-priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God." He therefore belongs to the people first, and not to a family, the care of which must demand considerable of his time and attention.

UNMARRIED CLERGY RENDER MORE EFFICIENT SERVICE

Experience corroborates what common sense teaches—the better service which an unmarried clergy is enabled to render to religion. Catholic foreign missionary work is far more successful than Protestant, the principal reason being that the Catholic priest is not prevented by human ties from giving himself up wholly to his work. In times of pestilence the good shepherd must be ready to lay down his life in order to minister to the spiritual wants of his sheep. The unmarried priest, with no one dependent on him, does this readily. Even lepers have souls, and must be ministered unto, but who other than a Catholic priest ever sacrificed himself for them?

Hence, whilst the Bible does not say in so many words: "Priests are not permitted to marry," it exalts virginity over marriage for those who can faithfully observe it; moreover it counsels it especially for those who are occupied with the things of the Lord.

FOR THE ONE INCLINED TO DRUNKENNESS WHICH IS PREFERABLE, TOTAL ABSTINENCE OR MODERATE USE? EVERY ONE WILL ANSWER TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

In the light of actual facts—apply this to the celibate Catholic clergy and the married Protestant minister. Our sensational daily press permits no scandal to escape exposure, yet without wishing to be unkind, we can challenge the reader to produce one scandal in which a Catholic priest is concerned to twenty scandals in which married ministers are involved. Listen to what impartial and informed men, like Maitland, (Protestant), have to say:

“It appears to be the testimony of history that the monks and clergy were in all times and places better than other people.”

Is your unmarried brother or maiden sister necessarily unchaste? Is every widower or widow? Is every man or woman who for a few months is away from husband or wife? If not, then how much easier for one to live chastely who has consecrated his life to God by vow? For him who from purely spiritual motives takes this step after years of reflection and training? For him, who, knowing that he is not allowed to marry, puts the matter entirely out of his mind and does not voluntarily permit his thoughts to be occupied with the idea for even an instant?

CATHOLIC LAITY CENSORS OF CLERICAL INTEGRITY

The Catholic laity, knowing the obligations of their clergy are keen to observe his conduct in this respect. For him, moral laxity would not only be a mortal sin but also a sacrilege. Fathers, mothers, children, the Nuns and Sisters, all classes in the church know this. Hence in all their dealings with their priests, at the church, in the confessional, at their homes, the laity are watchful censors of his conduct.

AND YET WHEN SOME PLATFORM OR PULPIT PREVARICATOR TELLS THEM THAT CATHOLIC PEOPLE BELIEVE THEIR PRIEST CAN DO NO WRONG.—CERTAIN PERSONS WILL SWALLOW THE WHOLE PUTRID THING WITH EVIDENT SATISFACTION. ARE THEY ALTOGETHER BRAINLESS? IF NOT, WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THEIR MORAL DISEASE?

On the day of judgment, God help the deceivers; but as to those who are blindfolded, deceived by them, we can but repeat the words of our Lord upon the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

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