



How Celibacy for the Kingdom and Sacramental Marriage Explain and Enrich Each Other

By Mary Gannon Kaufmann, MA, MS

As we come to a deeper awareness and appreciation of each others way of life, we begin to see celibacy for the Kingdom and sacramental marriage as unique paths that generate new life in the community and that facilitate a living union with God. Each vocation allows us to fulfill ourselves as males and females and to utilize our energies of heart in response to God's will.

My thirteen year old son, Michael focused his gaze on me. I began, "Mike, through your masculinity, you are called to extend love to others and to allow yourself to be drawn to others in order to gift them." He shot a look of quiet skepticism towards me as I continued, "You have to determine where God wants you to uplift others- are you to be directed outward to the world and into marriage and a family or are you to offer the sacraments as a priest and extend yourself to build God's Church? In both contexts, you can fulfill yourself, utilize your heart's energies, and be life giving to others. The answer to this question ultimately comes from recognizing how God has equipped you to be most personally available to love others."

In my quick discussion with Michael, we can find the challenge that Pope John Paul II offers us in, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A*

Theology of the Body. Pope John Paul II says that both celibacy for the Kingdom and sacramental marriage are "particular responses to the love of Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom." Although distinct callings, celibacy and marriage actually "explain, and complete each other." As each facilitates a living union with God, both continence for the Kingdom and sacramental marriage allow the person to live a type of spousal love that engenders new life within the Church community by the free gift of self. In order to "preserve the unity of the Spirit that calls us each to the same hope and brings us together as one Body in the Church (Ephesians 4:3-4)" as ordained, religious or married persons, we need to come to a deeper awareness and appreciation of each others way of life. "Each has been given their own share of grace, given as Christ allotted (Ephesians 4:7)" it for building the Church, for transforming the world, and for experiencing oneness with God.

In order to understand each calling more fully, we start by examining the contours of the human heart. Together as one body in the Church, as male and female persons, we manifest the image and we hope the growing likeness to God; yet we live in the reality of our personal solitude. Prior to loving others, the Pope challenges all of us to discover ourselves - ourselves as unique and distinct persons or solitudes alone before God.

With this awareness of being uniquely loved by God, we find ourselves filled with gratitude and drawn to share our gifts with others. We discover, as John Paul II suggests, that our human hearts can “accept even difficult demands in the name of love for a person.” In and through their bodies/persons, those who are celibate for the kingdom and those who are married persons, are meant to reflect God’s life giving or conjugal love by making a sincere gift of themselves to others, although in different ways in response to “the grace allotted them by Christ.”

St Gianna Beretta Molla, a physician and mother of four, describes this human drive for sustaining life and presents a particular example of sacrifice and gift of self. In 1962, while pregnant with her fourth child, Gianna developed a large uterine mass and was advised to undergo surgery to remove her uterus. Gianna died after giving birth from complications following a less invasive surgery that would preserve the life of her unborn child. In her diary, she describes her perspectives:

“Every vocation is a call to parenthood, earthly, spiritual or moral. God has placed in us an instinct for giving life. A priest is a father; uns are mothers of the soul. We must prepare ourselves to incarnate or make present here and now, in time and space- the real and invisible charity of God.”

But, how do priests and nuns manifest God’s love with this instinct for giving life, here and now in time and space? I remember what Monsignor Marvin Mottet shared with me. When he arrived at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport, IA to take up his pastorate, the neighborhood surrounding his parish was the worst in the city. There were drive by shootings, and crack houses across from the church. People were afraid to walk the streets or come to celebrate mass. He decided that he could not renew a parish without renewing the neighborhood that surrounds it. His goal became to stir confidence in God’s power through the Eucharist- that social change is possible when actions are animated with prayer. They prayed for the neighborhood at Mass. He gathered the parishioners and invited the Catholic mayor, chief of police and city officials for a neighborhood meeting and religious procession. Carrying a cross, with a young altar boy alongside him, he led the people and the officials from the sanctuary out into the street. With a television crew documenting the event, he and the chief of police entered crack houses and old dilapidated homes.

The film segment appeared on the evening news which set off a reaction within the community at large. The area surrounding the parish was selected as a target neighborhood for urban renewal; so money became available for street and light repair, and for a policemen to ride the beat on a bicycle. Now the Cathedral neighborhood has the lowest crime rate of the inner city. Monsignor Marvin Mottet fulfilled himself by moving past his own fears, by gathering the people, and drawing them from the Eucharist and into the neighborhood. He helped call forth their gifts that allowed them to give witness to the power of God.

Monsignor Mottet’s passionate account brought to mind the words of Bishop James Walsh, a 20th century Maryknoll missionary in China, who spent his last twelve years in prison there. As Bishop Walsh watched a group of Chinese working in the rice paddies, he wrote in his diary:

“I saw them in the rice field. I have lavished admiration and affection on every special object of God’s creation, but I thought I had never even scratched the surface of love before, as I felt the fiery surge that came to me now. It was romance, if you will. I choose you, sang in my heart as I looked at them. I choose you and I dedicate myself to you, and I ask no other privilege but to devote the energies of my soul to such as you.”

From their connection with Christ and in his name, both Msgr. Marvin Mottet and Bishop James Walsh accepted the difficult and unique demands of spousal love. They extended themselves in self sacrifice for their communities and thereby offer a powerful example of authentic masculine love.

But, how do married persons who are immersed in the business of family life discover the hidden invitation from God to union with Him? From the apostolic letter, “On the Dignity and Vocation of Women,” Pope John Paul II says that marriage as a “particular gift” to both the spouses and the Church, reflects the mystery of the communion of love within the Trinity. He suggests that in marriage “love shows itself greater than what the body can express” as the love between husband and wife can mirror to the world the core essence of the sacraments - God’s desire to be one with humanity. By taking up the Pope’s challenge, married persons can make a free gift of themselves to each other and thereby become an icon of the Trinity.

One married woman confided an experience to me that seems to confirm the Pope’s insights into the sacramentality of marriage. She shared that one night during the marital embrace with her husband she felt the Lord’s words in the depth of her heart, “When you embrace your husband, you embrace me.” On another occasion, once again she sensed the words, “Relax, let this unfold, release yourself to this. Experience the initiative of your husband that envelopes you. This is how I want you to receive me. Don’t be focused on the ultimate end, just enter this and let me love you.” As we shake free from the grip of concupiscence, like this couple, we come to see the one flesh union of husband and wife and our human desires or “eros” as a drive to what is good, pure and beautiful – towards union with God.

These experiences confirm the Pope’s ideas that the relationship between husband and wife can furnish us with insight into Christ’s relationship with the Church, and can bring “God’s eternal love into our conscious human awareness.” Likewise, through the witness of those called to celibacy for the Kingdom, we can discover how to make an offering of our whole lives to others and with Jesus in the Mass. By understanding celibacy for the Kingdom and sacramental marriage as mirror image “gifts given as Christ allotted,” we can come to live our distinct vocations more authentically. As St. Gianna suggests, we fulfill ourselves through “prayer, action and sacrifice” as we prepare ourselves to incarnate or make present here and now, in time and space- the real and invisible charity of God.

- John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*; Pauline Books; Boston, MA 2006
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