

The Priesthood of Married Men



by Padre JEAN-PIERRE

The event we are about to live today, that of the ordination to the priesthood of two married men, has aroused special interest. Indeed, some might see in this something absolutely new and even a departure from the celibacy of priests required in the Church of Peter since the 4th century (Council of Elvira). In effect, that is not at all the case, and the current situation presents itself totally differently.

Thus, as the first point to be mentioned here, we must specify that the event we are about to live does not call into question in any way the requirement of the sacerdotal celibacy of religious, or even of secular priests who will be ordained in the Church of John. This practice will still continue to be the normal path which must not only be maintained but also be held dear in a very special way through an adequate formation, the fraternal support of priests and the prayer of all the faithful. Thus, the celibacy of priests remains an invaluable element in a priest's response to the Master's call, "*Come, follow me*" (Mt 19:21), whether he is a religious or a secular priest. This response is the guarantee of the fruitfulness of the priestly ministry while fostering, at the same time, the exclusiveness of the giving of self to God for the benefit of the souls entrusted to the priest's care.

Consequently, the opening up of the priesthood to certain married men must not be confused with any sort of openness to the marriage of priests. With regard to today's ceremony, they are very specific cases which, far from creating a break in the old practice of celibacy which is to be maintained, reaffirm in a way its importance and primacy while opening the way to another form of priesthood which is just as real and complete, but conditioned by the fact that such a priest's obligations are divided and include those of the marital and family state.

If the Church of John is seeing this new reality come into being in it today, that is nevertheless not something unusual with regard to what has existed for a very long time. Thus, we mentioned a few minutes ago the standard practice of the celibacy of priests in the Roman Catholic Church since the first centuries. However, the different Catholic rites do not all have the same legislation in that regard.

For example, the two avenues (that of marriage and that of celibacy) are open to the priests in certain Eastern rites. We should note, however, that most of those priests observe the same sacerdotal celibacy as in the Roman rite.

This goes without saying for the religious who already profess the evangelical counsels in accordance with their religious or monastic life. As for the secular priests in those same rites, a large number of them respond to the Master's absolute call by voluntarily and permanently embracing a priestly celibacy that is similar in all regards to the celibacy practised by their counterparts in the West.

However, another path exists for the secular clergy in those other Catholic rites. In fact, certain men, having heard the call to the priesthood, nevertheless want to get married. This privilege is conceded to them under very strict conditions. Thus, those who aspire to this double vocation of priest and married man must first marry before the ordination to the diaconate. They can then be ordained a deacon and afterwards a priest, but one can never proceed in the opposite manner. A consequence of that practice is that the married priest in those Churches cannot remarry after his wife's death. A similar rule also exists in the Church of Peter with regard to permanent deacons.

Nonetheless, we should reaffirm here that, as ministers of the religious cult, the married priests in those Eastern rites are fully priests, "*alter Christus*", in the same capacity as the celibate priests. However, their ministry is limited by their choice of life.

Thus, on the one hand, a married priest in a Church of Eastern rite cannot, under any circumstances, be assigned a position of major responsibility within his Church such as becoming a bishop or patriarch. On the other hand, the ministry assigned to such a priest is conditioned by his double state of life. This age-old practice in different rites of catholicity is still in force in our day.

But what is the situation in the Church of John? First of all, we must specify that the ordination of married men is not the result of a personal initiative or of a human calculation based on what has been going on from all time in certain Eastern Catholic rites.

In fact, this new form of priesthood coming into being in the Church of John today had already been foreseen many years ago by Mother Paul-Marie. She wrote in effect: "*When Jesus Christ was on earth..., He had to make His choice among married men, priestly or profoundly religious in soul, and among the rare celibates who had remained pure, in order to transform a perverted world.*" And she would specify further: "*So will it be today, because far too many priests no longer understand the sublimity of their priesthood, and they are rejecting it.*" (*Life of Love VII*, p. 223)

Without a clearly formulated orientation having been given in that sense by Mother Paul-Marie on different occasions, no one would have dared or even thought of allow-

ing married men to be ordained to the priesthood.

Besides having given this direction, our Mother also confirmed the calling of the candidates who will come up to the altar today. That was the case for one of them whom she guided towards marriage 35 years ago, telling him then that the priesthood would be for later. It was the same for the second candidate whom she encouraged to wait patiently and lovingly whereas the call to the priesthood was being very strongly felt.

So, we owe this opening to the priesthood of married men to Mother Paul-Marie who “saw” this new form of ordained ministers coming into being in the Church of John. She also left us certain very precise guidelines for the vocational discernment of the limited number of married men called to the priesthood, in accordance with the specific conditions of their response to the divine calling.

Thus, contrary to the Eastern practice, we are not considering ordaining young men who, feeling called to the priesthood, would nevertheless want to found a family. Instead, they will be urged to go towards the conjugal and family life, while sharing in the common priesthood of the faithful along with all the baptized.

Similarly, ordination to the priesthood is not foreseen for young husbands and fathers of families. The great responsibility they already have towards their wife and family and the civil obligations ensuing from this are not suited to the exercise of a fruitful priestly ministry entirely given over to the welfare of souls. If the calling felt is real, then it is fitting that it be nourished discreetly while awaiting the hour set by God.

Consequently, the ordination to the priesthood of married men will always be exceptional and only permitted in specific cases. It will be for mature men who have raised their family, who are now free from the family obligations of the early years of marriage, and in whom the calling felt will have been tested and verified.

Ever-faithful husbands, fathers and grandfathers for many years, the two men who will be ordained priests today, followed, over the last three years, a program of for-

mation to the priesthood which enabled them not only to deepen their understanding of the responsibility of the ministerial priesthood with which they will henceforth be vested, but also to acquire the necessary knowledge to accomplish a fruitful ministry.

The vocation to the priesthood is “a calling” that requires the discernment in prayer of the one who has the responsibility before God of confirming the authenticity of the divine choice. That is why it is incumbent upon the Father of the Church of John to recognize and eventually to approve the candidate’s undertaking. After that, he will encourage him to begin the program of priestly formation, at the end of which, with the assistance and advice of his collaborators, he will be able to confirm the worth and the soundness of the step taken with a view to the priestly life.

In any case, all of us must always remain attentive to God’s will which is expressed through the new ways set out by the Lady with a view to the realization of the divine plan of love in the renewed Church.

The ordination of new priests is the source of a profound joy for the entire Church of John. In these candidates the sanctifying grace of the Total Christ, Jesus Christ and Paul-Marie, will be renewed today. Di-

vine life will be passed on to us through the sacraments they will celebrate. Thus, they will renew the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Total Christ, given over for us. In the name of the Lord and the Lady, they will bless all men and pardon repentant sinners. Finally, they will proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

In closing, how can we not turn our eyes and our hearts to the Sovereign of the Earth who, consumed with Love in her immolation, merited the regeneration of souls and the coming of the Kingdom of the transfiguration? Thus, we are seeing the renewal of the Church in Love within which the sublime priesthood of priests will shine forth once again in all its beauty and spiritual strength. For so many graces, may the Divine Quaternity be praised and adored on this day and for evermore.

Padre Jean-Pierre



Fathers Richard Latulippe (on the left) and Yvan Laprise (on the right) join the concelebrants for the Mass celebrated by Padre Jean-Pierre.