

o8. Celibate Love



The central love of Jesus' life was his loving communion with God. His choice not to marry and have a family led his opponents to make fun of him, accusing him of being a **eunuch!** He made this choice, however, 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 19:12).

His celibate love cast into sharp relief the mystery of his communion with God. It also gave a special power to his witness of God's special, personal and unconditional commitment to each person.

As disciples of Jesus each of us is invited to let Jesus love through us.

From the beginning, Jesus invited some to love, like him, in a celibate way. They gave up the intimacy of having a partner and a family of their own, not, in the words of Tony Philpot, to live ‘a grim resentful bachelorhood with lots of built-in compensations’, but to be in the community a sacrament of the total and undivided dedication of Christ in love to the Christian community and to each member of the community without distinction.

The priest is called to be “a living image of Jesus Christ, Spouse of the Church” (J-P II PDV [*I will give you shepherds*] n. 22) and to make his entire life an offering for her.

‘Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest’s service in and with the Lord’ (PDV n. 29).

Celibacy should be a way of loving: an authentic way of promoting one's own and other people's spiritual growth. *Integrity in Ministry* stresses the importance of a celibate being close to the people, calling this closeness 'one of the strengths of the Australian Church'.

- Mature persons are generative. That is, they are able to spend their life in creative communion which is life-giving both to themselves and to those to whom they relate.
- To be generative, a person must have experienced intimacy: the kind of loving and being loved which is experienced as being the fruit of being deeply known and accepted by another whom we intimately know and accept.

- To be truly intimate one must have a sense of one's personal identity: a sense of self that is experienced as being affirmed by another who is significant to us.
- A so-called celibacy which avoids these stages of maturing will never become generative, and so will never become a way of loving.

Henri Nouwen warns us of the dangers of the exercise of power by a person who is frightened of intimacy

‘The temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead’ (*Celibate Loving*).

Nouwen also reminds us that people whose consecrated love for God is lived out in a celibate way of loving can make good leaders.

‘When we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and true witnesses without being manipulative’
(In the name of Jesus).

The best thing for any person to do is the will of God. Central to discerning this will is the discernment of the way in which we are gifted by grace. In practice, therefore, the better and therefore the preferable state for an individual is found by discerning his or her own gift and acting accordingly.

However, the Council of Trent upheld ancient Christian tradition in defending the special closeness to Christ experienced by the celibate person. If a person is given the gift of celibacy, it is a better thing to live it than to marry.

The statement by Trent highlights the special communion in love offered to those who forgo the intimacy of marriage to devote themselves to Christ and to his mission.

‘I wish that all were as I myself am [celibate]. But each has his or her own special gift from God, one of one kind [marriage] and one of another [celibacy] ... I would like to see you free from worry ... Give your undivided attention to the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 7).

Paul commends celibacy for the same reasons that it was lived by Jesus: the ultimate demands made by a life given over to the service of the reign of God. The ultimate nature and urgency of this mission persuaded Paul that it was better to avoid all other commitments to be fully available to go wherever the Spirit of the Lord took him to carry out his mission as herald of the gospel - a mission that meant a 'daily anxiety for all the churches' (2Corinthians 11:28).

‘All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love’ (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 40).

‘By giving a special visibility to the inner sanctum [that sacred centre in our lives where only God may enter], the celibate man or woman wants to affirm and proclaim that all human intimacy finds its deepest meaning and fulfilment when it is experienced and lived as a participation in the intimacy of God himself’ (Henri Nouwen *Celibate Loving*).

Motives for celibacy

1. The person who loves in a mature way as a celibate is a sacrament of Christ, whose way of loving was celibate.

‘Priests have, of their own free choice, accepted consecrated celibacy after the example of Christ’ (Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* n. 16).

‘They intend not only to participate in Christ’s priestly office, but also to share with him his very manner of living [celibate]’ (Paul VI *Priestly Celibacy* n. 23)

‘Priestly celibacy is a communion in the celibacy of Christ ... There arises a desire in those exercising the priesthood to reproduce the same conditions and outlook of life as Christ experienced, in order to effect the closest possible imitation of him’ (*Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 1974, n.14).

Motives for celibacy

2. Celibate love is also a symbol and witness of Christ's complete commitment to his mission to 'draw all to myself' (John 12:32).

John the Baptist: 'The bride is only for the bridegroom. The bridegroom's friend who stands there and listens is glad when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This same joy I feel and now it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow smaller'(John 3:29-30).

Paul's whole-hearted commitment to Christ and his mission required of him that his only children would be those he fathered in Christ (1Cor 4:15; Galatians 4:19).

‘Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a mother feeding and cherishing her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

‘You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.’

Motives for celibacy

3. Celibate love is a symbol and witness of the Church's commitment to Christ:

‘By means of celibacy, presbyters profess their willingness to be dedicated with undivided loyalty to the task entrusted to them, namely, that of espousing the faithful to one husband, and presenting them as a chaste virgin to Christ. They recall that mystical marriage, established by God and destined to be fully revealed in the future, by which the Church holds Christ as her only spouse’ (PO n. 16).

Motives for celibacy

4. Being a sacrament of Christ's love, even of the very manner of his loving, and a sacrament of the response of the Church whose first love is Christ, celibacy is a sign of love and an impulse towards it.

‘One who freely chooses celibacy is affirming that nothing is more important in life than ‘the love of God which comes to us in Christ Jesus’(Romans 8:39).’

It is said that Michelangelo used to contemplate a piece of marble till he could see in it that which he would cause to emerge through the craft of sculpturing. He then chipped away at the stone to release what he had already seen hidden in it.

Love is not a matter of changing people into what you would like them to be. It is more contemplative. The one who loves sees what the other person already is and could be shown to be with the proper attention and nurturing. Love is committing oneself, dedicating oneself to work with the other person to effect that nurturing.

This is what husbands and wives are attempting to do in their relationship. This is what parents and teachers are doing. This is the art in which celibates, too, are involved, for they are committed to being sacraments in this world of the way of loving to which Jesus witnessed, sacraments of the love of God which is open to all, available to all, and delights in all. Celibate love aims to release in this world the sacred mystery of human love that respects and encourages, but that transcends sexual union. Celibate love, lived in a generative way, reminds us that the deepest communion to which we are all called is communion with Jesus 'in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18).

John XXIII 1959 to Seminarians

‘Purity of heart is an atmosphere of serenity ... an indispensable condition for disinterested service of one’s neighbour in the sacerdotal ministry.

It is purity of heart that prepares one for the incomparable joys of long colloquies at the foot of the altar, which feeds fervent thoughts of apostolic charity, which breathes unbroken serenity ...

It attracts souls by the very charm of Jesus Christ.’

Guide to the Formation in Priestly Celibacy 1974

‘Celibacy is a vocation to a special kind of love. It must be lived in a climate of friendship and, above all else, in friendship with God in Christ. The priest must live a life of love which can be found only in God as its highest source. He must exercise this life in imitation of Christ, extending it to all without exception and with that sense of responsibility which is an indication of a mature personality.’

Synod on Priestly Ministry 1971

‘If celibacy is lived in the spirit of the Gospel, in prayer, vigilance, poverty, joy, the shunning of honours, and in fraternal love, it becomes a sign which will effectively proclaim Christ to the human race, even in our time.’

When a celibate is truly a sacrament to others of Christ’s love, they can experience how special they are, for they are loved for themselves, free of any desire to possess.

We make mistakes in love. We have to live with the knowledge that we have hurt others, often unintentionally, and possibly at times intentionally.

When we find ourselves in trouble over love, the temptation is to back off, to love less. The art, however, is to love, not less but more. To love more, sometimes we have to discipline our love, to lift our love, to love more clearly and more honestly and more truly.

{The painted lamp stand}

A celibate is a man or a woman, needy of love and longing for companionship. A celibate, like every other person, has to live within the limits of real commitments, made to the community, made in the light: commitments that are real and that have come from the deep place where we are most truly ourselves. To do otherwise is to attempt to escape the real. To love in ways that are contrary to a celibate commitment is to use oneself and others as distractions. To love more, then, is to love as a celibate loves, with all the incompleteness of such a love, but with all its particular mystery and attraction.

Many of us live broken lives, experiencing broken relationships, broken marriages and broken homes. Perhaps one special grace of the celibate is to experience empathy with us, for he or she is also living an 'unfinished' life. A celibate has a heart trained to console, trained to be with others in their aloneness, without pretending, without hiding the brokenness and the hurt and the incompleteness. A celibate who is able to be alone and know peace can help another lonely person come to know that to be abandoned is not to be alone. No one can take God from us.

Motives for celibacy

5. Celibacy is also a symbol of and a witness to the trans

Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, n. 34

‘In the world of man, so deeply involved in earthly concerns and too often enslaved by the desires of the flesh, the precious divine gift of perfect continence for the kingdom of heaven stands out precisely as a singular sign of the blessings of heaven.’

We are all longing for something that no one woman, no one man, no particular children, no job, no situation can satisfy. We long to belong, and we are drawn towards the centre and the unity and the love that holds everything together, the one we call 'God'.

If, whatever our place in this world, we dare to depth reality, dare to make connection, dare to respond authentically to reality, we discover a release of energy that we call grace and know that we will be satisfied with nothing less than infinite love. Celibate love can be, for the celibate and for others, a sacrament of this divine longing.

It is dangerous to attempt celibate love. For love to be real it must belong to the whole person: the psyche, the emotions and the body. Experiencing oneself as a sexual person in the committed relationship of marriage thrusts one into the demands of intimacy and often also of parenting: demands that may be avoided, but not easily and not without failure staring one in the face. The celibate, in transcending such intimacy with its consequent demands upon the whole person, runs the risk of living in an unreal world.

This is not to suggest that some who are so graced should not attempt celibacy. No life lacks risk. There is a price for anything of value. And celibate love is very precious, for to be truly loved by a celibate is to be loved just for what we are, with respect and admiration and affection, free from the kind of desire and the expression of need that rightly belong to a sexual relationship. Risky, but refreshing and liberating.



Everything is holy now Peter Mayer



When I was a boy each week on Sunday we would go to church



and pay attention to the priest as he would read the holy word
and consecrate the holy bread.



Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now



Everything, everything

Everything is holy now.



And when I was in Sunday school, we would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two; Jesus made the water wine.
And I remember feeling sad that miracles don't happen still.



But now
I can't keep track
'cause everything's
a miracle.



Everything, everything, everything's a miracle.



Wine from water
is not so small,
but an even better
magic trick is that
anything is here at all.

So the challenging thing
becomes
not to look for miracles,
but finding where
there isn't one.

When holy water was rare at best, it barely wet my fingertips.

But now I have to hold my breath, like a swimming in a sea of it





It used to be
a world half there,
heaven's second rate
hand-me-down.

But I walk it with
a reverend air
'cause everything
is holy now.





Read a
questioning
child's face,
and say it's
not a
testament.

That'd be
very hard
to say.



See another new morning come, and say it's not a sacrament.
I tell you that it can't be done.



This morning,
outside I stood,
and saw a little
red-winged bird,
shining like
a burning bush,
singing like a
scripture verse.

It made me want
to bow my head.



I remember when church let out. How things have changed since then.
Everything is holy now



It used to be
a world half there,
heaven's second rate
hand-me-down.

But I walk it with
a reverend air
'cause everything
is holy now.