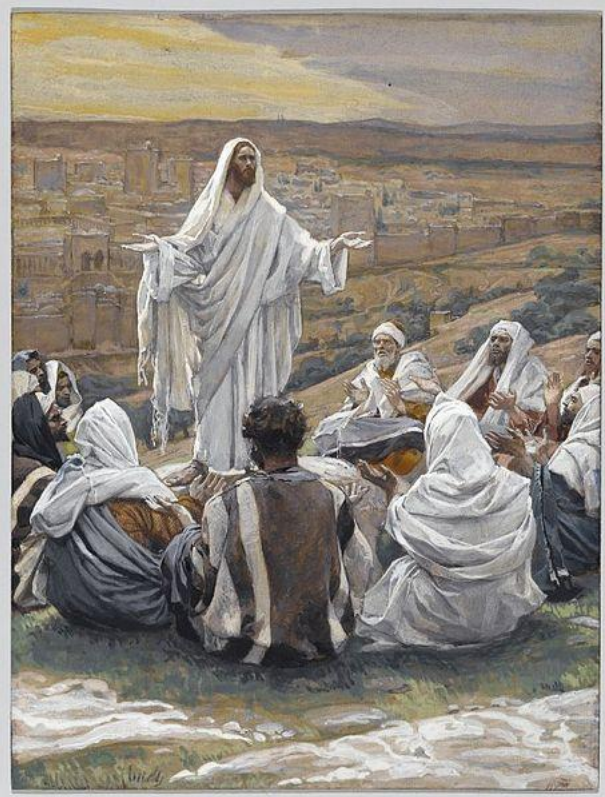


Celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven



“For there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.” Matthew 19:12

Jesus speaking to the apostles says that there are those who have made themselves celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It is from this teaching of Christ that the Catholic Church derives its discipline of the celibate priesthood.

Following the example of Saint Paul the Church says along with Paul, “I want you to be free from all anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world.....I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Protestant Objection: Scripture clearly says that the Catholic Church would fall from the faith and teach doctrines of demons by forbidding marriage and meatless Fridays.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.....who forbid marriage and enjoy abstinence from foods which God created to be received.” 1 Timothy 4:1-3

Catholic Answer: When Paul wrote those words he understood that he was living in the “later times”. Peter tells us that the “last days” began at Pentecost: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, “And in the last days.....I will pour out my Spirit.” Acts 2:16-17

Paul is not referring to a time in the future rather he is referring to a group known as the Gnostics that lived during Paul’s time who taught that all flesh was evil and they forbid marriage and they abstained from the eating of meat and were strict vegetarians. Paul mentions them in 1 Timothy 6:20-21: “Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.”

The Greek word for *knowledge* is “gnosis” and that is where the word *Gnostic* comes from. The Catholic Church doesn’t forbid marriage, in fact, it is a sacrament. Priests voluntarily choose to live the celibate life.

Also, there are married priests who have converted from Protestant denominations and there are married priests in the Eastern Rite of the Church.

Protestant Objection: There is no evidence in scripture of a celibate ministry.

Catholic Answer: In Romans 15:16 Paul says he is in the "priestly service. Paul was unmarried and recommended it so that a person could have more time for the Lord. (Romans 7:32-35)

Protestant Objection: Catholics abstain from meat which is against God's word

In Acts 15:20 the apostle James and the Council of Jerusalem decreed a discipline that was binding on all Christians to abstain from meat that had blood in it. Clearly then, abstaining from meat is not against God's word.

Jesus told us to fast in Matthew 6:16. The Catholic Church is simply following scripture

Protestant Objection: Peter, whom you believe was the first Pope, was married.

Catholic Answer: Yes, we read in Mark 1:30 that Peter was married. His mother-in-law is mentioned however his wife isn't. It is possible that she had already died. But even if she were alive that doesn't contradict the Church's authority to have a celibate priesthood after all it is Jesus who said that there are some who have become celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Protestant Objection: Scripture says that a bishop must be married and the husband of one wife and he must have children. "Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife....He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way." 1 Timothy 2:2-5

Catholic Answer: When the Church was in her infancy the majority of men were married and it was from that group of men that bishops were chosen. Paul is saying that a bishop can only have one wife. We know from history that if the wife died the bishop could not remarry.

In the early centuries of the Church married men were allowed to be ordained priests but they were expected to refrain from sexual relations with their wives that is, complete continence. Although Peter's wife may have been alive and the apostles may have been married it is possible that they completely abstained from sexual relations with their wives.

History of Celibacy

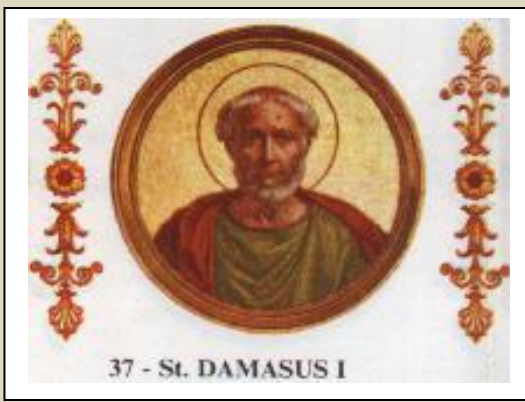
For those that would like to learn more about the history of celibacy I would recommend the book *The Case for Clerical Celibacy Its Historical Development* by Cardinal Alfons Strickler.

Here are some of the points made by Cardinal Strickler:

The belief that celibacy did not begin until the twelfth century is historically incorrect.

Canon 33 of the Council of Elvira which was held in the early 300's states that if a married bishop, priest or deacon had sexual relations with their wife they would be removed from the clergy.

Canon 2 of the African Council held in 390 states that the chastity of the priests must be preserved. Bishop Genetlius stated at the Council: "Bishops, priests and those who are in service of the divine sacraments observe perfect continence...what the apostles taught and what antiquity itself observed, let us endeavor to keep."



Pope Damasus in his letter *Directa* of 385 states that the many priests and deacons who, even after ordination, have children act against an irrevocable law which has bound major clerics from the beginning of the Church.

The bishops of the Roman Synod of 386 interpret Paul's statement that a bishop must be the husband of one wife did not mean that he could live with the desire to begat children: rather the injunction of Saint Paul refers to future continence.

Both Pope Siricius (384 AD) and Pope Innocent I (401 AD) interpret Saint Paul's statement that a bishop must be the husband of one wife to mean that when a married man is ordained to the priesthood he is to observe complete continence

From Scripture

From Tradition we know that married priests were to observe continence with their wives. With that in mind we can see how these verses of scripture can be referring to the Apostles observance of complete continence.

Luke 18:25-30: Jesus said, "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They said, "Then who can be saved?"And Peter said, "Lo, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive manifold more in this time and in the age to come eternal life."

Titus 1:7-8 " For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless, he must not be arrogant.....master of himself, upright, holy and self-controlled."

The Greek word used for "self-controlled" is *egkratēs* and it means: "controlling one's self, temperate, **continent**"

1 Corinthians 9:5: Paul says, "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife as the other apostles and Peter?"

The King James Bible, the Young's Literal Translation Bible, Darby and WEB bible translate this passage as: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

In Greek this verse says "*adelphē gynē*" that is "sister wife." There is no "comma" or "a" in the Greek, it simply says "sister wife." Could Paul be telling us that the apostles and Peter had wives but they were living as with their sister? In other words, it is very possible that the apostles were living with their wives in complete continence.

For the Greek translation of the bible go [HERE](#)

Next topic: Is it against Scripture to call our priest "father?"