

Part 1: Married vs. Unmarried

Don't we have some married priests now? Why not just open it up?

This is a major difference between the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. Surprise, both are still Catholic! The Eastern Orthodox Church regularly ordains married men, but in the Roman Church married priests are only ordained under very special circumstances. These men were married pastors in a different Christian faith, who later became Catholic and given special dispensation to become priests after becoming Catholic.

It is important to note, and I was surprised to learn, that priest celibacy is not actually Sacred Tradition, but rather a Church discipline. The difference is that Sacred Tradition, is the kind that is unchangeable, and infallible. A discipline is simply a custom or practice that is currently followed. In the early Church many of the priests were married. Would we now say they were breaking the faith? Another example of the difference would be prayer. Jesus taught us to pray. That is Sacred Tradition. Our usage of the Rosary as a type of prayer is a discipline.

If the early church leaders were married, why not now?

Peter and many of the Apostles were most likely married. However, our current discipline, is based on both Christ's and St. Paul's teaching that it is preferable to be celibate in this mission. We'll discuss this further in the "Practical" section.

Part 2: Women vs. Men

Could Jesus have chosen women? Wasn't it just a matter of convenience that he chose men?

Jesus certainly could have chosen women. There were many other religions at the time that had women priests, and it would not have been totally rejected if He chose to do so, especially in the non-Jewish communities. Christ never let himself be bothered by the norms of the time, in any case. He permitted his disciples to gather wheat on the Sabbath, for which he was closely scrutinized. He showed compassion to a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:27) - Samaritans were shunned by much of Judaism of the time. He forgave sins, again suffering the scrutiny of the leaders of the time. He could certainly have ordained women if it was in His plan. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, "If our Lord would have ordained women, He would have definitely ordained His own Blessed Mother, free of sin, but He did not"

Have there ever been any female priests?

One popular myth is that in the 9th Century a woman named Joan Angelicus disguised herself as a man, entered a seminary and worked her way up the ranks to eventually become pope. She was later exposed when she went into contractions and delivered a child. The first accounts of this story do not appear until the 13th century writings of Martin of Opava, 350 years later. Modern analysis of this myth, have found that the dates do not correspond to known papal history and contain other inaccuracies deeming it to be simply a legend. Even if the time frames were changed to a time when it might have been more plausible, especially during the 11th-12th Centuries when anti-popes were common, there is no mention in historical accounts of the time period of a female pope. Surely an event of this magnitude would have been widely documented in the media of the time. Even in the Church's history, there is room for a little drama.

As late as the 6th century, certain areas of the Church were ordaining women priests. However, these were Gnostic sects who's beliefs were later renounced by the Church, and its members excommunicated. One hallmark of Gnosticism is a refusal to see any inherent goodness in the created order. Maleness and femaleness are closely bound to our creatureliness, and Gnostics were unable to

see any meaning infused into such realities. It is understandable, then, that their ministry would be androgynous. The Gnostics also believed in a Jesus who never had a physical body, and that "women are not worthy of life" and "must become male" in order to reach heaven, not quite the kind of teaching today's women would likely subscribe to...

Even today we hear stories of women being ordained by male bishops. However, these ordinations are neither sanctioned nor valid under Catholic teaching. Both these women and the bishops face excommunication for their secretive actions against the Church.

Does this mean that women have lesser roles in the Church?

Let's look at some women's roles in Church history and determine the importance of those roles. Mary Magdalen, was the first to the tomb, and the first to witness Jesus' resurrection. Mary, Jesus' mother, was probably the most prominent woman in the New Testament. What role did she play? It was only through her faith and acceptance of God's will that Christ was brought into the world. By saying yes to God's invitation, Christ entered the world through her womb. Although she knew how babies were made, she still put her trust in God, that a child would be conceived in her womb even though she had no relations with a man. That's a LOT of faith for a 16-year-old girl! Without her faith, we might still be without a Savior.

Later, she plays another important role, as she encourages Christ to perform his first miracle at Cana. Mary sees a potential problem, and she takes action. Not only does she tell Jesus that the wine is running out, she tells the servants to follow his instructions. Doesn't sound like a lesser role to me. Just like most of us, as kids, we sometimes need a little push from our mother to take action.

Finally, she again shows great strength, when she watches her son be crucified on the cross. What mother would not try to intervene, try to stop what we know is an unjust action against our child. Only a mother that knows the destiny of her Son, and understands her role in the salvation of all. She stays with him to the last hour, during which time Christ gives her, as mother, to all of us, saying, "Woman, there is your son." In turn he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27) In this, Jesus sets her apart as mother to all Christians. Quite a task! And I thought my mom had a lot of kids...

Does this mean women are "unworthy"?

Are any of us truly "worthy"? Even the 12 apostles were not model saints. Christ chose them not as a reward for good behavior, but as a challenge and vocation for which they were responsible. Remember, among the apostles, we had a doubter, a betrayer and a denier, not exactly qualities of someone we would consider worthy. The office of priesthood is not about power or self-worth, but about the specific role to which some men are called. Consider the natural order of male and female. Each has a role to play, and one can not take on the role of the other, no matter how much they desire or believe that they should. Men can not bear children, nor can they nurture children in the same way as mothers can while breastfeeding. No matter how much a man may desire to give birth, it is not his role to do so. Women on the other hand, can not create a child on their own either. It is only through each person, performing their proper role that creation is performed.

What is so special about men that warrants this to be a male-only role?

There is also another reason, biblically speaking, which must be considered in understanding this question. Women will especially like this one. Christ came to redeem all of the human race, both men and women. But, as a sex, it is principally the male that needs the redeeming. For, throughout history, it is the woman not the man who has been more selfless, loving, compassionate, pious, peaceful, and civilized. In the Gospels, Jesus' teachings and admonitions were primarily directed at man's sin more than it was toward the behavior of women. Hence, Jesus chose men to 'conquer' and to transform them more into the likeness of Himself. Women, for the most part, did not need to address those sins as

much which Christ came to root out: dominance, hatred, violence, greed, irreverence, pride, etc. Thus, male priests represent the sons of God who Jesus has won and conquered with His infinite love. To remove the distinct masculinity of the priesthood is, in essence, to deprive Him of His prize. (John Pacheco - http://www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/19990501/ARTICLES/prst_authority.htm)

Priesthood is a reflection of marriage, but not marriage in the sense that most of us immediately think of, between a man and a woman. The marriage in this case, is between Christ and the Church. Christ is referred to as the bridegroom with the Church as his bride. It is through this union, of Christ and his bride, that we, the fruit of this union, are children of these parents. Priests act as the visible representation of Christ here on earth, and in particular, during consecration: "the priest enacts the image of Christ, in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration." (St. Thomas Aquinas, <Summa Theologiae>, III, 83 1, 3) . As we learned last month, the Eucharist is truly Christ's body, and if the act of consecration were performed by a female, this would distort Christ's human form.

Its only fair. Men can not bear children, so its the next best thing :)

Part 3: The Practical arguments

Who says so?

To start with, lets make a few blunt statements. Because the Church says so, and because Christ says so. The Church is not a democracy, and although it is made up of many people and many opinions, the Church does not create doctrine, simply based on a vote, or on the will of the people. God's will has always been contrary to the will of people, and throughout time, everyone has thought they knew better than God. However, God has a distinct advantage. He can see throughout all of time, the past, the present and the future. Imagine if God had simply let the Israelites do what they wanted, and either go back into slavery in Egypt or to begin worship other gods while in the desert. God's plan transcended their limited vision and understanding. He knew what had to happen, and the time in which it had to happen. Or imagine if Christ had simply bowed to public pressure and stopped teaching, I'll let you think that one through on your own...

The Church does not change often, and the reason is simple. If you make a change, you can't go back and say oops, sorry we made a mistake. In fact the Church has never made a change in regards to those areas of faith that are considered Sacred Tradition. There are definite areas where the Church has changed and clarified its position on certain topics, but these are areas of discipline, not Sacred Tradition. For more of an understanding on which is which, see your Catechism.

Ok, but these are all reasons based on someone's interpretation of scripture. I think from a practical sense, it makes sense to allow priests to marry.

Lets take a look at the practical nature of priesthood. First, lets look at the demands of the job. On call, 24 hours a day, very limited vacations or time off. Priests are the ultimate workaholics, working nights and weekends, as well as every day. Not exactly a formula for a good marriage, unless your spouse is putting all that time and effort into your marriage, which is exactly the case with priests. Their energy is spent working on their marriage (to the Church), and this is the relationship that they foster. Most of us have enough problems with our marriages the way it is, and we only have a limited number of people putting demands on our time. A priest has hundreds if not thousands of people putting demands on their time. Imagine trying to serve both functions, one will always be left out, and in this case, neither one should be sacrificed, the Church or the spouse. Both deserve a loving dedicated, person as their spouse.

Everyone else is doing it, why not us?

Most Protestant churches have entirely rejected the sacramental system of Rome and the Eastern churches and, as a result, have rejected a sacrificing priesthood as well. Instead, they ordain "ministers," a role very different from that of priest. Ministers do not act in the person of Christ and make no claim to do so. And not all Protestant churches ordain women.

Also, the Lord Himself said that some "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12 NIV). Because of the kingdom of heaven. A good reason, yes? And St. Paul pleads, "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs.... But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world...." (1 Corinthians 7:32 NIV). It seems to me, then, that the Protestant religions should ask, not Why does the Catholic Church have unmarried clergy?, but Why do Evangelicals have so few single pastors?

There is a great article written by Jennifer Ferrara who is a former Lutheran minister. One of the big distinctions between Catholic tradition and many other Christian faiths, is the fact that we honor our heroes and saints. This means we have a rich variety of male and female role models in the Catholic faith, which other religions ignore. Only recently have the other Protestant religions begun to allow women into any form of involvement in their faiths. Most, do not recognize Mary as Mother of the Church, nor do they acknowledge any of the contributions of the early Church women. Catholics have always honored our saints and religious regardless of whether they were men or women, priest or lay person. Many of the arguments about women being ordained center around equality with men. Men and women do have similar capabilities in many aspects, but to say we are the same is to deny that men and women ARE different. (see argument about bearing children above). My sister had a great argument in one of her college courses in which they were trying to convince her that men and women were the same, and not agreeing to this, was the same as saying that women were lessor than men. Her response was "No, what you are asking me to do, is to deny that which makes me a woman!"

[One only needs to look at the motive of the majority of the proponents of women priests. Who are these people, and what do they believe? They believe in abortion, contraception, fornication, divorce, homosexual unions, sodomy, and pagan earth worship. The last one is usually more common among their more prominent leaders... The ultimate attack, the 'end game', as military strategists say, is morality itself because if one changes the masculinity of God - a revealed truth - morality is not too far behind.]

With all the scandals and shortages around male priests, shouldn't we consider other options?

Scandals are not unique to the Catholic Church. Every other religion has seen every kind of scandal brought to its doorstep. God gave us all free will, and unfortunately many of us choose to take actions that are not in the best interest of ourselves or those around us. There is no magic in ordination that isolates priests from committing grave sin, just as in other religions, being a married or female pastor does not prevent you from taking inappropriate actions.

As to shortages, this is almost like saying, we have a shortage in the work force, so why not open it up to children? The point is that you do not make a decision to change something as important as priesthood simply based on current circumstances on a given spot in time.

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