

“Recollections”). It is also a language that expresses deep and intellectual contents in a more precise way than modern languages and is especially fitting to convey timeless and deeply intelligent truths. Since it is a difficult language, it is not susceptible to easy manipulation and spontaneous innovation. It is therefore a language especially fitting to emphasize the concept of ritual actions.

On the subjective level, the use of the Latin language as opposed to the vernacular can be a powerful stimulus to dispose a person to enter more deeply into the supernatural order. Just as a holy priest who reverently says Mass can dispose members of the congregation to be more open to grace of God, so the use of an ancient language which everyone cannot easily manipulate or understand can more easily dispose the faithful to participate in the mystery of God in their hearts and souls.

The use of the vernacular at Mass was granted by the Second Vatican Council to encourage participation in this mystery. But the bishops by that fact did not wish to completely do away with Latin in the liturgy. In fact, the council clearly stated: “Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites” (Vatican II, Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, n. 36).

The reason for priestly celibacy

Question: I accessed the Internet recently and discovered the reason that priestly celibacy was imposed by the Latin Church on priests was because of problems of inheritance of land being passed on to the wife if the husband, a priest, died. Is that the reason? Is the Eastern Church practice of making celibacy equal to marriage for priests correct?

Answer: The history of clerical celibacy is a long, interesting and complex story. The

opinion you quoted does refer to a small part of the development of the tradition. But it is by no means an adequate explanation for the discipline. The traditional popular history about the development of celibacy sees celibacy as an exception which the Latin Church made the rule. This history would maintain that married and celibate clergy existed side by side from the time of the early Church. At least a few of the Apostles and one of the popes were married. Proponents of this version of history would say that, though celibacy was recommended, it was not required until the Latin Church mandated it for purposes like keeping the Church’s wealth in the Church. In this view, celibacy is reduced to mere expediency and is not in any sense related to the priesthood as such.

This history is spurious, though, since it is based on the presumption that married clergy meant clergy who were consummating their marriage. “In the patristic period, clerical

celibacy, strictly speaking, meant the inability to enter marriage once a higher order was received” (Roman Cholij, *Priestly Celibacy in Patristics and the History of the Church*, published on the Vatican website). The law of celibacy in the wide sense, however, precluded from the married state. It demanded continence from higher clerics (deacons, priests and bishops) whether they were married or not. This in practice meant that if a married man was ordained, he and his wife had to make a promise never to consummate their marriage.

The origin of this was the practice in the Old Testament of the Levitical priests who had to practice temporary continence during the time of their priestly ministry. The Levitical priest needed to be wholly involved both in body and spirit in his ministry at the altar. In the New Testament, the sacrifice of Christ is not temporary but one and eternal and thus the continence practiced by the priest, married or celibate, is almost a “connatural” requirement based on the nature of the priestly consecration in conformity to Christ, the eternal high priest (Roman Choij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 202). This is the original tradition which dates from the apostolic period and was exalted and legislated in the Patristic Age.

For various reasons, this whole tradition was changed by the Quinisext Synod, or the Synod “in Trullo” in 692. This synod, made up almost entirely of bishops from the East, allowed married priests to consummate their marriage and still celebrate the Eucharist. Nevertheless, this synod and the entire Eastern tradition until very recently demonstrated the necessary connection of continence to the Eucharist because a priest who consummated his marriage could not celebrate the Eucharist for a time (usually three days) and bishops were still bound to perpetual continence since the fullness of the priesthood is found in them. This produced two inter-

esting results: the end of daily Eucharist and bishops being chosen mostly from religious rather than diocesan clergy.

The Latin Church eventually imposed almost universal clerical celibacy (though not until the Council of Trent) as the most efficacious way to ensure this continence. This also served to save women from having to profess perpetual continence if they should be married to a priest.

Recent scholarship after Vatican II has extended the explanation of this perpetual continence to include not only the priest’s role as priest, but also as prophet and king. “Celibacy, therefore, would seem to be the natural state of the priest, for only then could he be considered a minister totally given to his vocation or ‘consecrated’ to God for the service of the Church” (Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy*, 202). Nevertheless, the Latin Church does not impose celibacy on those Eastern Churches in union with Rome but respects the customs of their various traditions. ■

Please send your questions to:
Fr. Brian T. Mullady, O.P.,
Holy Rosary Church
375 NE Clackamas Street,
Portland, OR 97232-1103.

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