

CONSECRATED CELIBACY (2/2)

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Criteria for discerning emotional maturity

«No one is born emotionally mature: one is born with the capacity to become so» (A. Cencini).

The following criteria can be useful in assessing whether one is sufficiently free in one's mind and heart to live a life of celibacy which is happy and balanced:

- Seeing the positive side of one's life: being at peace with oneself (accepting one's past), being glad of other people's affection.
- Seeing the disproportion between what one receives and what one gives. Having an attitude of gratitude and simplicity.
- Recognising what is negative in one's life, without worrying too much about it.
- Being a positive person. Not seeking compensation constantly through one's relationships.
- Being sensitive to what is true, good, beautiful. Discovering this in one's own vocation.
- Being certain that one has always been loved and will always be loved. A lack of emotional balance in this area is shown by the following attitudes:
 - always complaining about not having something
 - looking for ways to make oneself loved
 - needing to feel that one is important to someone, and to lean on that person
 - lacking enthusiasm for one's vocation
 - not being able to control one's emotions
 - not being at ease regarding the tension between renunciation and sexual instincts
- Being certain of being always able to love. Emotional balance in this area is shown by the following attitudes:
 - being capable of forming a relationship with a person in his totality, an I-thou relationship.
 - discovering what is lovable about each person.
 - loving others and wishing them well.

Criteria regarding living a lonely life

Loneliness is inherent in the choice of celibacy, whether it is consecrated or not. This does not mean that a celibate should surround himself by it and refuse to communicate with others. It means he has to come to terms with it because it will be an inevitable part of his life. To live in loneliness is to experience the freedom one has received, preserved or regained, which makes one capable of loving and of being loved.

• *Loneliness is a necessary trial in order to discover:*

- what is in one's heart: its real desires and motives; the ability to manage on one's own; the ability to free oneself of emotional dependence.
- the love of God: the ability to live in his intimacy; the discovery of his friendship.

• *Loneliness is a means of checking the emotional stability of one's celibacy:*

- the degree of emotional security and independence; the ability to maintain cordial, frank and responsible relationships.
- the acceptance of the gift of others, of the affection received (friendship).
- the ability to be detached from oneself, to make God the centre of one's life and of one's relationships.
- the ability to love those no one else loves.
- the ability to take a positive view of others and situations.

Some necessary conditions for practising the vow

Present-day society attaches much importance to self-image and lays great stress on the body, in particular in advertisements. Making a vow of chastity does not consist in denying the body, since we are beings that have desires, senses: we are living beings. Being chaste consists first of all in accepting one's body. The body says something about what I am, it is a **message**. We must harmonise our body and this message. The body is also an **intermediary**, a relationship. We need to harmonise the body, the message and the relationship. Finally, the body is a **mystery**: it bears witness to what is unique and fragile in each individual. To be chaste is «to endow human relationships with light and warmth and enable individuals to recognise one other with the most intimate respect» (Claude Flippe, Christus).

To live a chaste life in the state of celibacy has to do, therefore, with the way in which we pursue three fundamental relationships: with ourselves, with others and with God. This implies being aware of the world around us so that our celibacy may be a sign of hope for it today. Here are a few points to bear in mind in this connection.

1. *Understand its ambivalence.* Celibacy is characterised by death and by life:

- death to a special relationship with a woman, renunciation of fatherhood and sexual relations, renunciation of preferential love from another person. This death impinges also on our desire to survive and our affective needs.
- death on account of a life, for a life. A response to the Lord's call: «Go, leave». A desire to relate everything to him, to live with his life and for him. To direct one's whole life (sexuality, affectivity, relationships, the ability to love) towards him. To pass from death to life, to experience the resurrection of the body, without sexual relations. To be capable of giving life without engendering children.

2. *Be clear-minded*

- be aware of what goes on in oneself: words, relationships, feelings, faith

– be aware of what goes on in others when we are in contact with them: reactions, physical attraction, psychological factors, needs, expectations.

3. *Be realistic*

- be aware of one's impulses
- recognise and be able to define what happens to oneself: falling in love, disturbed, frustrated.
- recognise one's weaknesses and limitations, and those of others.
- not be provocative nor lay oneself open unnecessarily: «Relations nowadays often lack reserve. Affectivity plays a primary role in relations, and sometimes this gives rise to gestures or words which create difficult situations or misunderstandings» (Anatrella).
- be able to give oneself pleasure, be good to oneself, especially in times of difficulty: asceticism is useful, but sometimes it is not appropriate in certain situations.
- be vigilant, look out for what can make my heart more free for the Lord and for others: know when to rest (sleep), have fun (leisure) and adopt a balanced lifestyle.
- check the realism and maturity of one's faith: unmask its ambiguities and its illusions.
- be able to renew oneself.

4. *Pick out the blind spots*

- pick out the discrepancies between words and actions, between wishing and doing.
- take an honest look at one's relationships: one's time organised in view of certain persons, worries, dreams.
- examine community life: reason for absences, justifications.
- examine prayer life: impossible, why?
- assess one's service of the neglected, the poor, the weak.
- assess one's availability to do apostolic work.
- face the truth: «I'm in love», «I've had enough of the community», «I'm looking for compensation»...

5. *Recognise what is imagined*

- not to take one's desires for the real thing
- be able to analyse one's dreams
- recognise the fruits of one's imagination.

6. *Talk things over with others*

- for the sake of honesty, do not to adopt a policy of «excluding the third party» (the community can be part of it). Instead, include the «third party». «Where affectivity is involved, one is never fully honest with oneself».
- recognise the good sense of what others say: fellow Brothers, colleagues, spiritual director...
- choose someone who can help you to sort out the wheat from the tare. Do not go around asking other people to confirm his ideas and refuse to consider your personal situation.

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