

Sunday Message from Fr William for Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 2024

The 'Other World' continued from 09.06.24

Even as I share these reflections with you on the 'other world', even as I relay to you the many glimpses into the 'other world' given in the words of Christ and the writings of the Bible, even as I turn to wise and Spirit filled guides like John of the Cross, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Karol Wojtyła to help unlock and unpack these words of the Christian scriptures, I'm acutely aware that these insights into the 'other world' can seem remote and abstract. And I'm acutely aware that talking about living our maleness and femaleness to the full in the 'other world' in a way that transcends the sexual intimacy of marriage can seem especially remote and abstract and far removed from our experience in this world. What does it even mean to live our maleness and femaleness in a way that does not involve sexual intimacy??

So let me turn to a phenomenon of this world – consecrated celibacy – a phenomenon whose very existence is designed to throw light on the 'other world', and in particular on how human beings will live their maleness and femaleness in the 'other world'.

I called it a phenomenon. It is in fact what we call a vocation, a calling. Since the time of the Resurrection, men and women have felt called by Christ to imitate him and to forego marriage 'for the kingdom of heaven'. (Matthew 19:12). This vocation is variously known as 'perpetual continence', 'consecrated virginity', 'consecrated celibacy'. Let's call it 'consecrated celibacy'. This vocation to consecrated celibacy is lived in different ways: religious life in community, eremitical life – in other words, the solitude of being an anchorite or hermit, the ministerial priesthood.

Men and women who embrace consecrated celibacy do not become asexual. They do not leave behind their maleness/femaleness. They do not repress it, suppress it, or in any way dissociate themselves from it. They live it to the full, but in a different way to the sexual intimacy of marriage. Remember that He created us male and female not so that we could get married and have children. He created us male and female so that his own nature of self-giving love would be written into our bodies. The vocation to marriage is just one way of living our maleness and femaleness, and is for this world only. We were created male and female so that we would experience in our bodies that we are created for, and orientated towards, self-giving love, in all its other forms too, none of which involve the sexual intimacy associated with marriage.

Consecrated celibacy is therefore said to be an 'eschatological witness'. What we see in the consecrated celibate, and particularly vividly in religious life in community, is an anticipation of the eschaton, an anticipation of 'other world' already in this world, an anticipation of the 'other world' in which men and women do not marry. (Luke 20:35). It is an anticipation of the kingdom of heaven.

And in this eschatological witness, in this anticipation of the kingdom of heaven, we see men and women not leaving behind their maleness and femaleness, but living it in a different way proper to celibacy, and living it to the full, and living it in a way that bears witness to the 'other world'. *examples to follow...*

William 16th June 2024