

## Sunday Message from Fr William for Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2024

*The 'Other World' continued from 16.06.24*

I described the life of the consecrated celibate as an *anticipation* of the 'other world' in which men and women 'do not marry' (Luke 20:25), as an anticipation of the 'other world' where the maleness and femaleness of the human body acquires its final and ultimate meaning. That word *anticipation* needs to be understood correctly. But first, I promised you a concrete example. And it's an example from my personal experience.

43 years ago, when I was a 17-year-old lad, I wanted, like every other 17-year-old lad, to get married and have a family. But also I had come into contact with this phenomenon that I'm reflecting on with you now – consecrated celibacy, lived in community. I had a powerful sense that this was something of value to the world, that it served some vital function that was difficult to put my finger on, that it served some vital function that went beyond the work that the community did, beyond the praying that it did, and in fact beyond anything tangible. It's only now, years later, through gradually coming to know Christ and his words, with the help of wise guides, that I can name that thing that I powerfully sensed as a 17-year-old lad. What this religious community, and thousands of others like it, gives to the world is what we call an *eschatological witness*. It is a sign, a pointer for the world, pointing beyond itself to the 'other world'. It says to the world, albeit in a very imperfect way: This is what the 'other world' is like. This may explain why people experience something intangible when they stay as guests to a religious community. Despite the ordinariness of the community members, despite their personal foibles, and despite the imperfection of their community life, the very form of their life – celibacy in community – points to the 'other world'.

I realised as a 17-year-old lad that this form of life – consecrated celibacy lived in community – could only endure, as this valuable thing for the world, if young men such as myself, or at least some of us, gave our lives to it. This was the basis of my calling. And this gift of myself to the community felt then, and feels now, very rooted in my maleness. At the risk of gender stereotyping, a man's heart, even a boy's heart, can feel powerfully drawn when he hears or sees the words 'Your Country Needs You'. What was going on in my 17 year-old heart is exactly the same thing that was going on in thousands of young men's hearts when they saw that rallying poster of Lord Kitchener calling them to serve their country in the First World War. I can only speak from my own experience of maleness. I leave it to my sisters in Christ embracing the life of consecrated celibacy to say how their calling is rooted in their femaleness – whether it is the same as what I've described for maleness, or different.

What I'm hoping to illustrate with this personal example is that our maleness/femaleness as human beings is multifaceted, and much greater than just sexual intimacy. It can be the engine room empowering us to serve others, to protect them, to fight for them, to give your life to them, even to give your life for them. Our maleness/femaleness is the way in which we are created in the image and likeness of the Creator, whose very nature is self-giving love.

*to be continued...*



23 June 2024