THE OBJECTIVE SUPERIORITY OF CELIBACY OVER MARRIAGE

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Homily of Friday, 19th Week of the Year, August 12, 2011
Josh. 24:1-13, Ps. 115, Matt. 19:3-12

"There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:12).

Today Jesus speaks about celibacy as a state of life dedicated to the kingdom of God. Instead of marrying, celibates dedicate themselves completely to Christ in an exclusive nuptial bond that excludes even a human spouse, so that a man may love God with all his heart, without any division of heart by falling in love with a woman. This state of life of being "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12) enables one to love God with an undivided heart, without the division of heart caused by a human spouse in marriage.

St. Paul teaches that this Christian state of life is higher than marriage. Speaking about marriage, he says, "I wish that all were as I myself am … to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do" (1 Cor. 7:7-8). Concerning fiancés who must decide whether they will marry or not, St. Paul teaches us that it is better if they can remain single: "He who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Cor. 7:38). About widows, he says again that it would be better if they can remain single without remarrying. "If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:39-40). St. Paul comes to the same conclusion concerning virgins, fiancés, and widows—namely that it is better to remain single.

St. Paul's doctrine concerning the superiority of celibacy over marriage is clearest of all when he compares married people to celibates. This is where he teaches us that marriage causes a division of heart that the celibate can overcome. "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about

worldly affairs, how to please her husband" (1 Cor. 7:32-34). St. Paul says he teaches this in order "to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:35).

This doctrine is very important for the Church today, for many Christians today have become secularized by their culture and no longer believe that celibacy is a Christian state in life higher than marriage. Celibacy is a higher state in life because the celibate has the opportunity to have a more exclusive nuptial relationship with Christ, to be able to love him with less division of heart, without being in love with a woman. Surely the loss of this belief by so many of our Christians is one of the reasons for the drastic falloff in priestly and religious vocations in our day. But if we can revive belief in this doctrine, then young people will see the great advantages of the priestly and religious life, of the celibate life, for it will give them the opportunity to have a more intimate, less distracted, and less divided relationship of love with Christ.

The Church has always taught this doctrine of the objective superiority of celibacy over marriage, and it continues to do so. For the relevant citations from recent official Church documents on this, see my website (www.DailyBiblicalSermons.com), under: Other Writings/Generic/The Objective Superiority of the Consecrated Life.