

23 — Unmarried for the Kingdom

Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to ...

- state that celibacy is a sign of our future in the Kingdom of God..
- realize that the celibate is in a full-time relationship with the Lord, as intense as that of a husband and wife.
- realize that a celibate has a close relationship with the Lord and His people.
- recognize that the celibate relationship is a foretaste of the intimate relationship we are all destined to have in the age to come.

For the Catechist

The tradition of the Church presents two lifestyles as having a special relationship to God's Kingdom: marriage and celibacy. Yet, any state in life can be sanctified or cursed by the way we live it. In themselves, marriage and celibacy are particularly holy because they demand a commitment outside of themselves to God or to a spouse. Because they lead us beyond ourselves, these states reflect by their very nature the love of God for us. This is why those who are led to marriage or celibacy must be prepared to live with another as the center of their attention. A single person or a widow may chose the same value for their own lives; and when they do, they also become a sign of God's love.

This lesson focuses on celibacy, the giving up of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Embraced by monks and nuns and also by many priests, celibacy points to the fact that so much of our present life is passing and is not the source of our ultimate fulfillment. Celibacy looks to the future, insisting that our relationship to the Lord is the most lasting and most authentically fulfilling aspect of our lives. Celibates put aside marriage and family life and other attachments to bear witness that our true completion is to come only in the age to come when "*Christ shall be everything, for all.*"

The way a person lives often indicates his or her message. The celibate lives for Christ, and his or her lifestyle points toward God's Kingdom. Regretfully, this lifestyle is rarely honored in our fast-moving world that does not encourage meditation and dedication. Help the students realize that a life of contemplation with few distractions can lead to a full and happy life focused on Christ and His Church. At the end of this lesson are a list of websites that give more information about the celibate life. Encourage the students to research them and bring in information for next week's class.

Materials Needed

Opening Prayer: Vesper folder

Review: Easel or wall pad markers with the objectives listed

Introduction: Paper, pencils

Guided Reading: student text, pens, pencils, paper

Vespers: Folders, prayer sheets, tape or glue, scissors

Activity A: "Journal," and Journal folders and pens or pencils, box of thank-you notes

Activity B: Unit Review

Closing Prayer: Vespers folders

1. Opening Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner and distribute the Vespers folders.
- Pray one of the Litanies.

2. Review

Review the main points of the previous lesson:

- Christ's relationships with others are based on self-sacrifice and service to others.
- Sacramental marriage is the fulfillment of human relationships and the best model of Christ's love for us.
- The crowns in the Mystery of Marriage signify God's dominion over creation which He shares with each new couple.

3. Introduction

- Have the students make a list of questions they would want to ask a person who has joined a religious order. Brainstorm in smaller groups and then share together.
- If your priest is celibate (or if a nun is in your church), ask in advance if he or she would be willing to come to class to answer these questions. Give them the questions before the next class.
- If you cannot arrange to have someone come to class, tell the students to go to one of the websites listed on the last page of their lesson to see if they can find the answers

Alternative:

- Brainstorm different symbolic gestures that we use daily—shaking hands, kissing, waving good-bye, kneeling, standing to show respect

Background Reading (Early Monastics)

"One of the first records of the pioneers of this new movement [the monastic life], 'St. Athanasius' life of the St. Antony the Great,' tells of the ascetic's motivation. One day in church Antony heard the Gospel story of the rich young man (Mt 19:16-26) and in particular Christ's invitation. 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' By taking up the cross of the ascetical life daily, the followers of this movement sought to achieve perfection in their imitation of Christ, as the martyrs had by the shedding of their blood. This ascetic emphasis was often connected with the basic Christian call to live a life of repentance. This would prompt later writers to call monasticism a 'second baptism,' as public reconciliation had been known in earlier days....

"As a young man of twenty (271 AD), Antony becomes one of a growing number of 'devotees,' as they were called, practicing asceticism in solitude not far from their own villages. Antony and those like him embraced the ascetic cross in a most radical way: absolute poverty of goods and abandonment of human society. After over thirty years of increasing solitude and ascetical effort, Antony emerged 'all balanced, as one governed by reason and standing in his natural condition'(Athanasius). The ascetical life had no ill effects on him; on the contrary it restored his inner harmony. Soon others began flocking to share in this life....

"The spirit of these early ascetics shines through the many anecdotes found in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers and other collections" (*ID* 135-136).

- Discuss the following:

1. *How can our spiritual belief be expressed and communicated through physical symbols and dedicated lifestyles? (Making the sign of the cross, prostrations, becoming a celibate)*
2. *How can celibacy as a symbolic lifestyle express our belief in the Kingdom to come? (A celibate relationship is a foretaste of the intimate relationships we are all destined to have in the age to come. That means loving God is most important today and always.)*

4. Guided Reading, Page 116, "Celibacy"

Read this page aloud and ask the students if they ever thought about becoming a member of a religious community. Let them share reasons they have or they have not thought about it.

Encourage them to seriously think about their possible vocation.

Guided Reading, Page 117, "Mother Teresa"

Either read this page aloud or divide the paragraphs among the students. Have them share with the class the information that they learned by using a creative presentation—text messages, Facebook, newspaper articles, short skits, e-mail message.

5. Ancient Wisdom for Today

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the information on this page. Have the students write their answers to the questions and share them with the class.

[Suggestions: Focus is important for the proper functioning of the mind; he compares the force of water pressure that bursts upward to the force of our love and desire to be with God if we are not distracted by other activities; if we don't use our energy on meaningless thoughts and activities, we can focus on a straight path to God.]

6. Icon Study

- Have the students read the commentary on the icon of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

7. Vespers

- Distribute the Vespers folder.
- Give each student one copy of the prayer for Mother Teresa (see page 175).
- Ask the students to tape or glue this prayer onto a new page in their Vespers folder.

Background Reading (Celibacy)

"Celibacy is a special vocation ('divine calling') to which God calls some people to live as their way to holiness. 'Celibacy for the kingdom' is much more than simply not having sexual relations. It is a call to live as a gift, uniting oneself completely to God in a way that foreshadows the heavenly marriage to come between Christ and the Church. While earthly marriage points us toward the reality of this heavenly marriage in a sacramental way, the celibate life does so in a way that is even more revealing. Celibacy for the kingdom is all about total self-donation to God and neighbor, showing the world what it means to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Celibacy reveals that the fulfillment of all human longing is the marriage of heaven, not only the marriage of earth" (*Theology of the Body* 127).

8. Activity A: My Personal Journal

For this unit the personal journal page includes a summary of the faith perspectives presented in each of the previous units. This journal entry focuses on Unit 4: Living On in Hope. The students are asked to reflect on these faith perspectives.

Distribute Worksheet A along with pens or pencils. Have the students complete the worksheet in silence (or you can play religious music if available) and place it in their folder. Plan accordingly, but they should need no more than 5 minutes to complete the journal entry.

*****For this activity that asks the students to write thank-you notes, have a box of thank-you notes and envelopes available for anyone who would want to give their note to the priest or other religious in the community. Encourage all students to do this activity.**

9. Activity B:

Create a review game using the questions on this page.

In advance, buy small candy treats to give for each correct answer.

10. Summary

Review the lesson. Ask if they are any further comments or questions about today's topics.

11. Closing Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner.
- Pray the Vespers prayer for Mother Theresa

Venerable Mother Teresa

Mortifying the passions of the flesh, upon your shoulders you bore the cross. You followed Christ in love and joy; the burden seemed light to you; sweet was the yoke you bore; ineffable the delights your soul savored; O venerable Mother, pray to Christ our God that He may grant us his great mercy.

As a disciple of Elijah you ascended in the fiery chariot of your soul toward the God of love whose zeal burned in you. Like the prophet Eliseus, receiving his white mantle, you made it the adornment of your wedding with Jesus. Venerable Mother, pray to Christ our God that He may grant to us his great mercy.

At your name, Carmel cries for joy: like Moses on the holy mountain you formed its law; and in ecstasy like Peter, you cried out: Lord, it is good to be here; let us pitch our tents on Tabor with You! Venerable Mother, pray to Christ our God that He may grant us great mercy.

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My Personal Journal

Unit Four Review

- ✘ In the life to come, our experience of God will go beyond the limits which our bodily conditions now impose.
- ✘ We will be completed and perfected by a profound involvement with God and all His people.
- ✘ Our sexual dimension ceases at death. In the afterlife, “Christ shall he everything, for all.”

Write a thank-you letter to your priest to tell him that you are grateful for his dedication and service for the Lord. Consider writing thank-you letters to all the religious that are part of your parish community.

Unit 5 Review

Lesson 20:

- 1) From whom is our human sexuality given? (*God*)
- 2) Why do men and women support each other? (*To help each other reach fulfillment in Christ.*)
- 3) According to the Fathers of the Church, how does the relationship of man and woman reflect the Holy Trinity? (*The true love, unity, and equality; the companionship; relationships*)

Lesson 21:

- 4) How has the gift of human sexuality been distorted? (*By sin*)
- 5) What can help us eliminate our need to possess or dominate others? (*Our relationship with God in Christ.*)
- 6) How can we be delivered from abusing sex? (*Through our relationship with God and with a healthy relationship with His people*)

Lesson 22:

- 7) What is the best model of Christ's love for us? (*Sacramental marriage*)
- 8) What do the crowns in the Mystery of Marriage signify? (*God's dominion over creation which He shares with each new couple*)

Lesson 23

- 9) Of what is celibacy a sign? (*Our future life in the Kingdom of God*)
- 10) With whom is the celibate close? (*The Lord and His people*)
- 11) When will all of us experience intimate relationships without sexual encounters? (*In the age to come*)
- 12) Whose lifestyle is hinting at the life we will all share in the Kingdom to come? (*The celibate lifestyle*)