

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

Last week our class on “What We Believe and Why” discussed the seven Sacraments. I begin each session by asking the people in the class if they have any questions about the material they've read for class. This week in both the morning and evening sessions, the first question asked concerned the Church's teaching that only men may be ordained to the priesthood. I wasn't surprised. It's a controversial issue these days and many people cannot understand why the Church cannot ordain women.

The first person to bring it up attends the evening session and she pointed out that according to the Gospels women were obviously important followers of Jesus. Perhaps, she suggested, they were given the same authority as the Apostles but then, since men wrote the Gospels, left out the role of Jesus' women followers. This point of view has been pushed for some time by “feminist” theologians. It was also taken up by Dan Brown in his best seller, *The DaVinci Code*. However, this conspiracy theory, like most conspiracy theories, tries to explain away historical facts that people either don't like or don't understand.

My response to this question was to point out that it is the faith of all Christians that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. We believe that the Holy Spirit guided the authors of the books of the Bible to write what they wrote. Therefore, the Bible is true and without error. To accept the idea that women were “written out” of the Gospels by a conspiracy of first century male chauvinists would also mean accepting that the Gospels are not the Word of God, but only the words of men, and deceitful men at that. If this is the case, then all of Christianity is a sham and we might as well believe all the lies in the *DaVinci Code*. Additionally, if the Gospel writers wanted to write women out of the story they didn't do a very good job of it. After all, according to the Gospels, it is a group of women who first discover Jesus' empty tomb. Additionally, Jesus' female followers come across in the Gospels as being much more faithful than His male disciples are.

The second person to bring it up was a man in the morning session. (Curiously he was sitting in the same chair as the woman who had raised the issue before. To quote the Church Lady: “*Could it be Satan?*” Just kidding.) He suggested that since the beginning of the Church women have always been more faithful to Christ than men have been so it seems unfair that they are not called to the priesthood.

The “fairness” argument is a pretty strong one these days. One of the positive developments of our time is that we are much more sensitive to discrimination in all its forms. When it comes to human affairs, discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender is recognized by most people as unjust. It is on this basis that other Christian bodies have accepted women clergy.

However, when we are talking about the establishment of the Church, we are not talking about *human affairs*. We are talking about what Jesus did and He is the Son of God. Because of Who Jesus is we as Catholics accept the things that He said and did during His earthly ministry as being *normative*. By that I mean they are the *norm* for all time. It is because we see the teaching of Jesus and the Bible as *normative* that traditional churches like ours also still teach that abortion, fornication (sex before marriage) divorce and remarriage and so called “same-sex marriage” are wrong.

The opposite view is that what Jesus said and did was only *relative*. That means that what Jesus said and did must be understood in the context of that time in history. So, for example, if Jesus lived in a more “enlightened society”, say our's for example, He would teach and do more enlightened things. People who maintain this view will that if Jesus lived in our time He would of course see the killing of children in the womb and homosexual unions as “human rights.”

People who hold this view also say that Jesus chose only men to be Apostles because He was afraid of what the reaction would be if He had chosen women. Let me get this straight. Jesus goes around saying that He is the Son of God to people who regarded it as the worst form of blasphemy. In fact, it was for saying such things that they crucified Him. But He is concerned about what people will think if He chooses women to be Apostles? *Fat chance!* Jesus never explained why He chose only men to be Apostles and the first bishops of the Church. But to suggest He did so because choosing women

would have been unconventional is simply silly.

One possible explanation for Jesus decision in this matter concerns His description of His relationship with us, the Church. Jesus refers to Himself repeatedly as “the bridegroom” and the Church as His “bride.” Priests are called to represent Christ the groom, which is obviously a male image. This is just a theory of course, but I think it has some validity.

Another thing to consider is that as much as our society demands equality in everything to a fault, (*we now have laws requiring that “transgender” men, i.e. men who think that they are female, be allowed to use women’s restrooms*) God didn’t make us all exactly the same. *And thank God for that.* There are obvious differences between men in women in the physical order. Women, for example are capable of bearing children. When I said to one class that some men might say that this is “unfair,” a number of the women groaned. Still, for all the pains of pregnancy and labor, mothers have a natural bond with their children that fathers don’t have precisely because the woman can carry the child in her womb. This being the case, could be possible the Lord has also created differences between men and women in the spiritual order as well?

In the end, this side of heaven we will not know why Jesus chose only men to be Apostles. But we do know that Christ calls all men and women to service in His Church. Our roles may different but we are all equally important to Jesus Christ and He wants everyone of us to share His mission.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley