

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

01/29/12 4 B

-- There's something about what St. Paul says in our 2nd reading that makes me uncomfortable. I suspect I'm not the only one. Just take the fact that the Revised Common Lectionary, which many of our Protestant friends use, skips on to the next chapter this week, even though it usually follows our pattern for the 2nd readings.

-- I know that being unmarried does not mean I am free from anxieties. And not having the ties of marriage and family does not automatically make one more devoted to the Lord. True, celibacy can be a great opportunity for greater and freer service to people, but it can also be an occasion for greater self-indulgence. I'm aware of that temptation.

-- When I look at many devoted married couples I know, I realize how much they sacrifice for their families and children (and for each other). For example, the small amount of times I've been called out at night to anoint a dying person pale in comparison to the sleep lost by most parents taking care of infants or sick children.

-- Yet, despite all this, there is some truth St. Paul is getting at, even as he makes clear that this is his personal opinion and not from the Lord. Faithful married people give a unique witness to the Lord's love, by their love for each other and their outreach to their family members.

-- But unmarried people—whether clergy, religious, or single persons—can give a unique witness to the Lord's love which married people can't give.

-- When they show God's love, they can point to a love which is greater than even the greatest earthly love. They also witness to the fact that earthly things are passing and will be transformed in eternity. The theological term for this would be an eschatological witness.

-- Paul was very aware of this, since he believed Jesus would come in glory very soon, as I mentioned last week.

-- And remember, he wrote these words in a time when most Church leaders were married men. Today, at least in the western Catholic Church, almost all priests are celibate (although there are a few married priests, most of whom are former Protestant ministers).

-- Some in our Church would like to see more married priests. I myself would be open to that, but I would not want to see it at the expense of a strong contingent of celibate priests. For that type of witness is still needed in the Church.

-- Indeed, the fact that this reading is skipped in many Protestant Churches could be an indication of a lack of comfort with celibacy. Some (though not all) may view unmarried clergy in their ranks with suspicion. If so, that's a tragedy, for they can give a great witness.

-- The bottom line, though, is that we are to be devoted to the Lord. That is true whether a person is married, single, clergy or religious. Devotion to the Lord is something each person in their particular state of life expresses differently, but it is needed in all states of life.

-- I as a celibate priest, I am called to be faithful to the Lord through my ministry to you and my availability without some of the ties married people have. Most of you who are married are called to holiness through the love you express to your spouse and children, and which you radiate to the wider community.

-- Neither is "higher" or "lower," so to speak. Both are sorely needed in our society. Like St. Paul, may we all be faithful servants, devoted to the Lord in our own situation in life.