

Henry,

I really read your article in your website intently and I do sense the honesty of your search for truth. I am also in that journey. I am a young Asian priest. However, I am contemplating of asking for a leave. I have been struggling with my heart. I have been in love with a woman in most of my various stages in my formation, and yet, with faith and good will, continued on with my priestly formation and eventually got ordained. I am proud to say I had no compromise in those formative years. During the three years in the ministry the struggle has always been there. Now it is not a question of asceticism. I believe it is a question of what my heart truly seeks. I am mustering enough courage to ask for a leave. I am gradually having it. As much as I love the ministry and the priesthood itself, in all honesty I am finding it difficult to live it fully. And I mean difficult.

What strengthened (or forced) my resolve is my present situation of loving a woman and, now, having her pregnant. I love her so much and God, how I love the thought of having a child of my own. Yet, the pestering question remains: have I done wrong? The feeling is ambivalent. I know I'm in love. What is wrong with that? But I am a vowed celibate and chaste. That pulls the other pendulum to swing with guilt.

Still I am inclined to leave for this big reason: For my moral integrity and for love and respect of the priesthood and religious life. I cannot live further in compromise. I hope interior freedom will come one day. I admit my confusion in whether my decision is right or wrong. But I do believe that it is not a question of right and wrong. My decision is something good and is not bad. It is also GOOD and is for the GOOD!

Nevertheless, various questions again come into fore: Can I make it? Can I live outside? Can I find suitable work enough to shelter, clothe, and feed myself, my partner and child? Etc. I don't know. It adds up to the fear, confusion, and stress. Now I guess what you said is true. That there is more faith and hope (leap of faith?) involved in this than remaining in my religious priesthood.

I am glad my family supports me in this. Within this week, I will talk to her family as well. Good friends accepted me as I am and understand my heart. They, I hope, would cushion my long fall from the pedestal of priesthood.

I do hope you hear me out in this. Your reply would be very much appreciated.

By the way I am seeking employment via online on various sources. God it is so difficult especially with my country's economic state and my limited qualifications. Are you in any way be of any assistance? It is a long shot I know. I visited the Corpus website. I'm not sure how I could ask for help. But desperate times need desperate pleas! I hope you understand.

My letter of intent of asking for leave still remains in my desk. These days I hope to give it to my superior. Pray for my strength and continuous discernment.

Sincerely yours,

Andres (-- mustering courage to be a transition priest)

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**Below is the encouragement two transitioned priests gave Andres:**

From Lee:

Andres,

I can greatly appreciate your being torn between your love of being a priest and at the same time your God given and wholesome love for the love of your life and at the same time the prospect of being a father. Carlo the reality of your, mine or all of those who have had to come to grips with the decision you face is just that, you can't have both - priesthood and the intimate love of a spouse and best friend - given the laws and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. I realize you know that but the reality of the situation must drive YOUR decision to face reality, no matter how difficult the decision may be at the present time. In my opinion you are totally correct or I can surely relate to your concept of an all loving God, who is just that and not a great thumper, out to get us.

So we have a lot in common. You serve the poor youth. One of the most difficult things for me in leaving the clerical priesthood on 9/2/69 !!! was that it was at the beginning of the school year. At the time I taught, counseled and coached Cross Country (track). Yet, look what happened in my case, I ended up working for 30 years as a Probation Counselor with inner city poor, marginalized and barrio kids. It may take some time but you will find a job that suits you. Believe me we have all been where you are now. I personally felt the pedestal that priests are placed on is like the laity having a mantle piece on which they can place a trophy. I really disliked that image. At the same time I always wanted to be like and/or loved. So, I agree with you. God love you.

Take courage Andres. You appear to me as being genuine and true to yourself. I have no doubt that you will excel and climb to the heights of your potential. Yeah. There is a whole wide world out there waiting to greet, embrace and support you and your new family in the making. Peace my friend.

Lee

From Carl:

Andres,

I went through discernment long ago to decide whether my vocation which began as a call to priesthood included marriage and that I would have to deal with the stern consequences of Church discipline directed towards priests who want both priesthood and marriage.

Like me, you sound like someone who consciously and generously embraced a priestly vocation and thought it was your lifetime commitment. Then you met another human who woke up your need for a partner in life and you realized that Church discipline was forcing you either to reject her love or to lose your acceptance as a priest. How does one choose and have peace of mind?

I made a retreat and discovered in the course of it that the rules I had learned to find the right way were upside down. The Church was saying that, if I chose celibacy, I would be more like Jesus and would have to share the misunderstanding and rejection that he faced. And presumably if I chose marriage, I would have the world's approval and pleasure and an absence of rejection. The reverse was true. If I stayed a celibate priest, I would remain on my "pedestal" and wouldn't have to worry about employment or respect or distinction for the rest of my life. In contrast, if I married, I would become just one more ordinary person with worries about supporting my wife and children and I'd probably be viewed by celibate superiors as a weak brother with hot pants and lack of discipline and fidelity to my vocation.

What forged my decision to marry was the recognition that I was choosing between the love of another human being vs. loyalty to an institution that saw marriage of its workers as a barrier to their loyalty and submission to it. The Church likes to see itself as a quasi-person, Mother Church, but in fact it is only another human institution that has no claim on eternity and no call to judgment before God. In contrast, human beings are graced with a destiny of eternity and faced with a judgment on how they used their gifts in this life.

My wife-to-be helped me to see this false dichotomy between love of an institution vs. love of another human. with a simple question. "If the Church decides not to restore a married priesthood", she asked, "will you choose to marry me or will you choose to abandon me and stay with the institution?" It was a fair and defining question. I said, "I choose you." Why would I say this if priesthood meant so much to me?

First, I take the injunction of Genesis seriously. "It is not good for a person to be alone." You need the intimate love of others to help you to grow into the person you can be. You need the test of whether your love is just high-flown rhetoric or something that grounds deeds of service to another human, and marriage puts you to this test. When you meet the person God intends as your life-partner, you either embrace this grace or arrogantly tell God that you know better how you can become the person He dreamed you could be. We don't get "do overs" of these special moments of life.

Second, the Church's insistence that we choose between marriage and priesthood is an arrogant attempt to nullify the injunction of Genesis and create a corps of superhumans who will serve only the institutional Church. Celibacy doesn't date back to the beginnings of Christianity; it's an invention of later ages to create a clerical caste of quasi eunuchs who serve the imperial church without questions. It makes women into the eternal temptresses whose contact sullies the sacred hands and minds of priests. Mandatory celibacy is a rejection of a good created by God, sexual love, that was given to ground human unions and family life.

Finally, since the Church is so wrong about the issue of celibacy, why should I unordain myself, abandon my vocation, just because the Church tries to punish a priest's marriage with dismissal from ministry? If I believe that ordination is forever, then I can and should continue ministry wherever I can and for whomever needs my service. Is this a fatal rebellion that expels one from the Church? Of course not.

The Church's history is rich with members who have followed their consciences against Church officials and whose judgment has proven sounder than the orthodoxy of the given moment. The Church almost always cannonades those it later canonizes. So, I concluded that I had discovered an unexpected vocation to be a married priest, a testing ground that would help the Church to judge whether it should return to the original practice of married priests -- like all of the apostles except Paul.

I hope these reflections will help you to decide with peace of mind to choose marriage and parenthood as additional graces of God. Yes, you face a challenging transition to a secular life of earning a living and learning the arts of being a good husband and father and citizen. You'll need help to translate your pastoral skills into the language of marketable skills, but many have done this before you. In the end, you'll become a priest who understands from your own experience what ordinary people cope with every day and you'll be better armed to translate the gospel into a message of hope and practical worth for those who look to you for religious leadership. And when you find yourself leading a worshipping group again, you'll know that your priesthood is alive and a grace to others.

You have my prayers and good wishes.

Carl