

This article was originally printed in the October 2011 issue of New Earth, the newspaper for the Diocese of Fargo.

Different vocations, same call to love others deeply

Father Kurtis Gunwall

As our family finishes a short vacation together, I think about the connection between the vocation of my parents, siblings and their families (marriage and parenting) and mine (priesthood). Most people are created and called to marriage and to the fruitfulness of new life, both physical and spiritual, while I have been created and called to a celibate life for God's kingdom.

Besides the bond of family, I asked myself what unites our vocations - what is the reason we are created, in particular, to express love? Similarly, you can ask God what unites your vocation to others in your life. First and foremost, we are created in the primordial vocation to live in God's love. This is the reason every person was and ever will be created - to receive God's love and to share that same love with others.

Hopefully, you have heard, even if you don't fully understand yet, that this love is sacrificial - the love of God evident in Jesus' incarnation, Passion, death and resurrection. This is why every home should have a crucifix clearly visible; it is the daily reminder of God's love for us and the love we must live out if we truly follow Jesus. We, the members of his body, the sons and daughters of God, are united in this love.

Second, both spouses and celibates, married and consecrated men and women, are called to share this love in life-giving ways every day. One way to describe it is to look at how we are created and called to love - broadly or deeply. We are each called to love both broadly and deeply but one way will be our strength as we live out our vocational call.

The call to marriage is the call to love deeply a smaller group of people - dozens of children and grandchildren. The call to celibate love is a call to love broadly - hundreds or even thousands - all those in a parish, community or order.

Both require sacrifice but the sacrifice also encompasses joy. For example, illness comes but health follows, there are losses but also times of rebuilding, and as mentioned earlier, Jesus' Passion and death prepared the way for his resurrection.

The "other" vocation may look desirable in times of suffering. That should not be a temptation to abandon our commitments but rather an encouragement to persevere. When we suffer, we naturally want to end, but supernaturally - by God's love - we can persevere, trusting that God is doing something great even if we won't see it in this life.

As I experience the joys and struggles of married couples and their families, I am reminded of one reason that I am called to be a priest. The presence of Jesus Christ in and through me as his priest multiplies the joyful times and lightens time of suffering. Likewise, I turn to families in order to keep grounded in concrete, everyday events as well as for short breaks from the daily work of my priesthood.

We are a gift to one another. Even though we are made to love one way more strongly, marriage and consecrated men and women are regular reminders that we have to love both

broadly and deeply. Saints learn to receive God's love and share it with others whether they are married with family or single in service for the Kingdom.

I invite you to thank God for the presence of married couples vowed to one another, who inspire you to love deeply. Also, thank God for the consecrated singles - priestly, religious or other - who inspire you to love broadly. May we grow in love in this life and meet one day in heaven with all the saints living in the fullness of the depth and breadth of God's love for all eternity.

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