

Chastity and emotional stability

Q • Many people have difficulty understanding how others can feel called to live a life of consecrated celibacy. It is believed that it is neither healthy nor possible to live it since a physiological need remains unfulfilled. What do psychologists say?

—A reader

A • The explanation of a total giving of self, of “freely renouncing sex for the sake of the kingdom of God,”¹ lies in the all-absorbing love for God before which all other loves pale in comparison.

Some people believe that there is a connection between sexual abstinence and neurosis. However, it has been scientifically proven that sexual abstinence is absolutely harmless at a psychogenic level as long as sexuality is not simultaneously stimulated and repressed in an obsessive way.

Let me quote just one expert, Carl Jung. “If sexual abstinence is not an escape from the needs and responsibilities of one’s life and destiny,” he once said, “then it is absolutely not harmful. It needs to be freely wanted, and based upon religious convictions. Any other motivation is too weak; it would produce a lack of inner unity and, consequently, neurosis.”

His conclusions can be proven by looking at the characteristic traits of chaste people who feel completely fulfilled and are therefore psychologically mature. Here are some of those traits. Such people are at ease in whatever situation they find them-

selves. They are totally sure of their conviction yet they are open to others. They are youthful at any age. They do not offer dogmatic directives yet after talking to them, a person better understands what he or she has to do. They are happy with themselves but they do not disdain help from others. In this regard they accept themselves the way they are with a healthy dose of humor and objectivity.

It is true that people who live a life of chastity are deprived of certain joys, but it is also true that those who are consecrated experience a different joy that married people cannot know.

I once heard a person describe those who choose consecrated virginity as people who know how to build profound relationships. If they live their dedication in its fullness they become “teachers in loving,” and at this point they are definitely emotionally mature.

In conclusion, it is neither the choice of virginity nor of married life that gives sense and meaning to our life. Only faith and love, resulting in self-transcendence, that is, in the gift of self to God and others, can do that. And that is something we need in order to be fulfilled human beings. On the other hand, here is what Pasquale Foresi² once said to a group of people preparing for consecrated life: “Virginity is the highest fulfillment that we can live on earth because it immerses us both in God and humanity as no other vocation can.”

1) See Mt 19:12; 2) *The first focolarino priest.*