

Two Rooms

A Reflection on the Place of Men and Women in the Church Today

by Fr. Dave Heney

Introduction

The first story in the bible is a story of a man and woman together and a relationship gone bad. Yet what else could grab our attention so quickly? After all, relationships compel our interest precisely because we so desperately want them to be fulfilling and satisfying. Yet that goal is elusive for we remain somewhat mysterious to ourselves and must often struggle to love well. Despite this, our relationships still remain both the very best and hardest times in our life. We cannot get enough of their goodness and tremble in fear of what they demand. Few events use as much energy, produce such insights and wisdom, or cause as much suffering and joy, as the encounters we make with the people around us. How can it be done well? Over two thousand years ago, in a far away region along the Mediterranean coast, Jesus of Nazareth claimed to have the way and the truth of that satisfying love we seek today.

I believe this kind of love is at the center of understanding ministry. To serve in a Christian way is to love people as Jesus loved, according to His way and His truth. Yet Christianity offers several paths of ministry that seem contradictory if not downright paradoxical. How can we understand the place of celibacy, priesthood, and the roles of men and women in the world today? How can these roles fit together in a coherent whole that does justice to the love that Jesus lived, and also provide a meaningful existence for those living them? Are they relationships gone bad, as in the Garden, or just life choices in need of a second look? This article will reflect briefly on church history, theology, scripture, and especially on our human experience to understand more clearly the way, the truth, and the life of love that Jesus lays before men and women in the Church.

Living for the Kingdom; celibacy and marriage

Jesus calls every person to one single mission in life. All our activities find true meaning in fulfilling this one great task from the Lord. Simply put, we are to *love*; to love God with our all our power, love our neighbor, and love ourselves. Of course, although easy to say it is not easy to do. Yet, our lives are made purposeful with this command. With it, we have a direction in life that is clear. Jesus calls this goal a life lived, "*for the Kingdom of God.*" It brings intentionality to behavior and makes it visible to others. This *clearly recognizable* pattern of *intentional behavior* declares to the world we have a purpose and a meaning to our actions. People can *see* we have a direction or plan to our life, that we know where we are going, and that it makes us happy. Even the Romans commented about the early Church, "See how these Christians love one another." The direction, purpose, meaning, and end of all our behavior is love. Everything the church does must fulfill this purpose.

Some will love as a married person, and focus their ability to care on one special person. As each person exchanges love with their partner, these two people, now become one, also reveal and share their love with the world. Together they make this world a better place by accomplishing a common project *as a couple*, such as raising a family or serving the community. Others will love as celibates, and focus their ability to serve *as an individual* to a whole community of persons, such as a parish. Both married and celibate persons must love with all their power. Together they can complete God's plan. Our Lord recommends *both* life choices in *Matthew 19:12*. Notice in these verses He does not assign a priority to either choice, but affirms the goodness of each. After all, the calling to each comes from God (*v. 11*). It is not important, however, to understand why a specific person is called to this or that state. God calls people to marriage or celibacy for His own reasons.

Celibacy is not simply bachelor-hood or singleness, but a life lived *for* others. In the same way, marriage is not simply cohabitation or living-together; it is a life lived *for* another. Both vocations positively enhance the life of someone else and at the same time advance our own personal fulfillment. While each choice implies a road not taken, each affirms the goodness of the path chosen. Neither focuses primarily on what is given up or sacrificed, but rather on what is freely *given* from ourselves as a gift. Each vocation *does* something positive, not *avoids* something negative. Each provides the chance to truly give of ourselves, using all our talents, abilities, and powers to do some good in the world and make some lasting contribution. Each choice, marriage or celibacy, provides so much of what we need for meaning and fulfillment. One is not better than the other, just different. Each is a noble accomplishment that makes a real difference in the world. Of course, they only work well and provide personal happiness when freely chosen by mature persons.

Celibate and married clergy actually co-existed in the church until the early 13th century. However, the number of married clergy had been decreasing for several centuries prior to that time. There were a number of problems with a married clergy unique to that medieval period. For example, children of some deceased clergy were claiming church grounds and buildings as their inheritance. This was a time before there were clearly developed inheritance laws. Church leadership, for the good order of the community and to avoid inheritance problems, decided to limit clergy to celibates for those mundane and pragmatic reasons. Of course, that ruling can change back at any time, if that change is seen to be for the better spiritual order of the community than the present system. The church must do what fulfills the purpose of the church, which is to show the love of God.

With the rise of more organized legal structures at the close of the Middle Ages, these inheritance problems declined. However, people found spiritual and other practical reasons for retaining celibacy for their clergy. There was a sense that society was becoming more materialistic and a way was needed to offer a counter-sign. The rise of commercial and national enterprises during the renaissance enabled private individuals for the first time to accrue vast sums of wealth and power, sometimes even more than royalty. These national and commercial enterprises, and the people who ran them, sometimes succumbed to the old temptation to use power to subjugate weaker nations and impose policies on weaker people. There was a sense that even personal relationships were taking on a commercial give-and-take nature. In an age when arranged marriages were often just another means of merging family businesses, celibacy was a striking *contradiction* to that commercialization of love. Celibacy was different. After all, a life lived *for others*, and with no spouse specifically promising to return that love was a remarkable statement of the power of *unconditional* love. It was a strikingly non-commercial witness by both men and women of the way all relationships should be. For that spiritual witness value, it remained a custom of the church. It was certainly against the norm. If it was that much an attention-grabber it could serve a useful spiritual purpose. Frequently in the history of the Church, a custom that started for practical reasons, like curbing inheritance problems, would continue in later times under more spiritual purposes. However, even though both men and women might live the celibate life, their actual ministry in the church remained sharply different. The difference is revealed in understanding the events in two rooms that are central to our faith.

Women and Apostles, Two Rooms, Two Different Days

Jesus invited "The Twelve" to the upper room for the Last Supper on Holy Thursday night. The scriptures record a very limited invitation though. *Only* the twelve apostles and Jesus were there. The Last Supper was certainly a closed event for not everyone was invited. *Many* of the believers, however, *both men and women*, were gathered in the *same* room on the day of Pentecost, forty days after the Resurrection. Jesus does not indicate in the scriptures

why there's a difference in attendance between the two rooms. We do know the number "Twelve" occupied a highly symbolic place for Him, and for all Jews. The twelve apostles symbolized the new chosen people, just as the twelve tribes of Israel were the original chosen people by God. The number of apostles here had a more important significance than their gender. However, why only twelve were in one room and more in the next we do not know for sure. We do know the two rooms hosted very different events.

At that Last Supper, Jesus *changed* the Jewish Passover Meal into a *new* event. Jesus never lacked the courage to change or challenge the status quo. He would often quite boldly make changes in various traditional events and customs. (MT. 5:21-43) For example, once every year at the Passover the Jewish people ate a special meal of unleavened bread and lamb to remember their hurried flight with Moses out of Egyptian slavery. It was a "traveling meal" for their Exodus journey through the desert. At the Last Supper, Jesus *identified* Himself with that food and declared they would experience His presence in a special and objective way *as often* as they said His words and did His actions. The Mass became, among other things, their nourishing meal for their journey of Faith. He would Himself be the nourishing and real food to strengthen their ability to love everyday.

After the Resurrection, *all* the believers, including Mary and a number of women (Acts 1:14 2:1) were gathered in the *same* Upper Room. Yet they were still afraid of the Jews and still in hiding. Notice that even after experiencing the resurrected Jesus they remained afraid. The fact of the resurrection did not bring peace, because miracles can never be the primary source of faith, only the Spirit. They still did not have the courage or faith to stand out as public followers of Christ. That would arrive with the Spirit at Pentecost. Finally, while huddling together in fear in that famous room, the Spirit arrived. At their Pentecost, they now *burst out* of the room, and with astonishing courage began to spread the faith by bold words and example. It was the Spirit that called and moved them forth. It was why the Spirit came.

The Mission of the Pentecost and Eucharist Rooms

This Pentecost experience of "*going out*" is still the main mission of the church. It is, quite simply, why it exists. It is why Jesus brought it into being. By bold words and example believers continue to live the life of Christ with astonishing courage today. *They live and love as Christ lived and loved.* To live as Christ is to be true to our real human nature. Remember we were designed by God to love. This life of service returns us to the harmony and balance of the Garden of Eden, before the First Sin when Adam and Eve were tempted to be selfish and uncaring of each other. They wanted to be Gods themselves. Christ restores our *real* relationship with God. A life of service like the life of Jesus is our salvation, and leads to eternal life. No wonder it is our main mission.

The Mass still remains as a kind of "food for the journey." It is still the true spiritual food for our faith journey in this world, and the strength we need for our mission to love. The community of believers, and only those who believe, gathers to say and do the actions of Jesus, while still on their mission to show Christ to others in the world. The Sacrament of the Eucharist, like all the Sacraments, *like everything in the church*, supports and nourishes our main mission: *"To go out and baptize all nations, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."* (MT 28:18-20)

The Mass is an "internal action." It is a sacrament for those already "on board" the Christian journey. However, the main activity of the Church was and still is evangelization, *or sharing the Christian life among others in the world and living it by word and example as a priest, married couple, or single person, for everyone*. The Christian life is one lived in the true understanding of relationships; loving God, others, and ourselves. Even the common name "Mass," refers to its role as a support for the main mission. This name is from the Latin phrase, "Ite, Missa est," (*Go, you are sent*). "Missa," (*sent*) from which we get the word, "Mass," is also the root of our word "mission." The very purpose of the Mass is to send us out toward the world on a mission to preach, teach, and witness. That task was commanded by the Lord for everyone, men *and* women, so the Mass is extremely important in our faith. We know this because of its place in the life of the Lord. He chose this event as His final act the night before He died. There we receive the presence of Our Lord in a most physical and objective way. The Mass is an action that brings us into the presence of God. It is the source and summit experience of our encounter with Christ in our life. It is our finest preparation for "Going forth, to love and serve the Lord."

Jesus and Women

Jesus related to women *in a way entirely different* from the customs of His culture in first century Israel. Of course, He frequently went against the cultural norms of the day and so often stood courageously against the opinions of volatile crowds. He called people to live a higher moral life, to follow eternal truths, and to accomplish great things. Jesus especially called for a radical shift in the way they treated each another. For example, while women were clearly discriminated against by men in many areas of life at that time, Jesus was frequently surrounded by women followers and had many trusted women friends. Women were not in some kind of second place for the Lord. Even the Gospel of Luke is called the *"Gospel of Women"* because so many of the stories are dialogues or encounters between Jesus and various women. The sheer volume of Gospel stories about women is a testament that Jesus meant for women to have a place in the kingdom that *was very different* from their place in contemporary Jewish, Greek, or Roman society. God chooses Mary Magdalen, for example, as the first of all the believers to bring the news of the resurrection to the others. She was, in a sense, the very first person to live the mission.

Jesus' attitude is consistent with the Genesis accounts of creation. Two accounts are given there of our creation, and also the purpose of creation. The first account (*Gen. 1:27-28*) announces a *simultaneous* creation of men and women, and their purpose of *together* ruling the earth. The second account (*Gen.2:15*) announces a sequence of creation, and affirms the incompleteness and inadequacy of a solo existence for each person. Each one is created for the purpose of *helping* the other, and *caring* for the earth. The Genesis author does not assign a priority to these two accounts, or to the status of either man or woman. Both stories are included in the book because both are truly the will of God. Both men and women are equal in dignity before the Lord and each other. Jesus powerfully fulfilled the original and equal dignity of all people recorded in Genesis. He clearly invites *all His followers* to take responsibility for one another and to follow Him, which fulfills our true God-given human nature.

Yet there were no women at the Last Supper ritual. Why was that so? There is no reason given anywhere in the written Gospels or in the much earlier Oral Tradition. We cannot say for certain why Jesus did not include any of His women followers. *However, He certainly felt free to go completely against the prevailing cultural norm in every other area of His ministry.* Therefore we cannot say that the Last Supper exclusion of women was due to cultural sensitivity or ethnic habit. Jesus spent a lifetime fighting that. Therefore, it might have been a deliberate choice for some other reason. We are left with guessing at what that is. Scholars and theologians have guessed at some possible reasons for the attendance list of the Last Supper. Perhaps we can take some clues from the example of the early Church.

We do know the early Church was completely focused and dedicated to following Jesus, and following Him exactly in every detail. However, there is no written record of their understanding of the Lord's intentions about persons He invited at the Last Supper. Maybe one day some ancient letter or artifact will be found that reveals a reason, but in the absence of a direct quotation from Jesus on the matter, we can only look to the early church example and practice as reasonable indicators of the mind of Christ. We can do so because we know of their deep fidelity to His style His spirit, and His teaching. Like Christ, they also would not let contemporary cultural gender discrimination intimidate them. *After all, they were already facing death just for being Christians.* In fact, most of the faith was *already* counter to the prevailing Greco-Roman world culture, and even much less the surrounding Jewish-Arab society. The early Christians would not have feared to call women members to the altar no matter what the societal reaction. They would have included women in priesthood if they felt it was from the Lord. From the very beginning, the historical data so far shows the first Christians only called men to the ministry of Eucharistic presider at Mass. They seem to be repeating the example of Jesus. Of course, if some document or other authentic evidence indicated women serving as priests at that early time, the church's understanding would be changed.

What is unique about priesthood that might require limiting it to men? What is it about that work that only men can do? The unique role of a priest is to accomplish two goals. He unifies the community at Mass, and reconciles lost members in Confession. He does this both by his life of love and the rituals of those two sacraments. He works therefore for the *good order* of all so that *everyone can fulfill their mission to love*. He has the Sacrament of *Orders* in that he helps the community be an orderly, close, and loving one. In this role, the priest stands as Christ did before His followers; the bringer of peace. Over one hundred times Jesus mentions peace in the scriptures; “My peace I bring, my peace I give to you.” (*Jn. 14:27*) The mass is an event that brings peace in that it is the actions of Jesus at His passion, death, and resurrection. On the cross, Jesus used His own life and death to break the cycle of revenge, violence and death that came to Him from the legacy of sin of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, and bring peace and salvation to the world. The Mass makes that action of Jesus present precisely to the world, and anyone who would use their life to harm others for selfish gain. The one who says Mass makes visible this saving action of Christ in the prayers and rituals of the sacrament. The one who says Mass is bringing this message of peace. Does it make any real difference if this is a man or woman?

Jesus and Men

We must first ask, “Why was the Messiah a man? God could have chosen either sex for the Savior, and Jesus did choose both to accomplish the main mission of the church. However, can we discover a reason for the maleness of Jesus? We know it could not be for any sense of male superiority, or gender discrimination. The story of Genesis clearly affirms our equal dignity and worth. However, men and women have been considered through the ages to possess different stereotypical attributes or personality differences. They do have somewhat different historical paths. Although equal in dignity, men and women have different ways of being in the world. Whether these stereotypes are the result of biological nature or familial nurturing is an age-old debate, but there is no doubt about their appearance in the *written* history of human society. Certainly the clear testimony of this written history attests to a few general stereotypical male-female attributes. It is to this very human society with its historical gender stereotypes that God makes His appearance in the human person of Jesus, the man from Nazareth.

For example, right or wrong, in history men have been seen stereotypically as leaders in most of the world’s societies and cultures, while women were seen as the nurturers of families. These stereotypical gender qualities have both positive and negative aspects. Positively, both roles contribute to human progress. Negatively, male leadership for instance, can grow to become a harsh kind of domination, and female nurturing can become a destructive form of emotional manipulation. While everyone, we know, both male and female, can turn their life towards those kinds of sin, the negative stereotype involving public violence and domination on a large scale is mainly the legacy of men. The special legacy of violence and brute force among the human family, from Cain down to our time, has been largely the work of men. Al-

though we can be sure that women are just as capable of this sin, tradition and history records and places the majority of great historical moments of organizing violence, the waging of wars, and the fighting of battles, on men. The notion of brute force, military power, and physical coercion, while not limited only to men are nevertheless generally considered stereotypical negative *male* attributes.

A message of peace, a message of non-violence, a message of service to each other would sound more ordinary in the voice of a woman, in whom resides the positive stereotype of loving care. This message would seem only natural in the person of a nurturing female. But it would be extraordinary, and so stand out, in the voice of a man, for it has been men who have borne the history of violence and power in the world. Those acts are seen as traditionally male actions. A man could therefore credibly carry a counter message to those who have traditionally been the perpetrators of these sinful violent actions. *A man willing to sacrifice His life could credibly carry this message to those who so often take human life.* It was significant, therefore, for Jesus the Christ to first be a human being, sharing fully in our human nature, and second, it was significant that this Jesus was a male human person. The revelation of God in the person of this Jesus, this revelation of His deep and abiding and ever unconditional love, comes across loud and clear in this way precisely to those who most need to hear it. Today, a man at the altar and would stand more closely to this male personhood of Christ as he makes present the very actions that challenge a culture of violence.

We must remember that ideas like these are still only scholarly hypotheses. *None are definitive or binding as infallible.* They are certainly very strong teachings that have been repeated many times by Church leaders and worthy of our considerable and sincere reflection. However, since we seek to understand something that *didn't* happen or that Christ *didn't* do, they remain open to future new information. As biblical and historical research understands more about the early Church leaders and their response to Jesus, there may be room for a new understanding of the role of the Eucharistic Presider at Mass.

The theology the Church offers today is an attempt at understanding the will of God for us. *There can be and is no other motive.* After all, the church follows Christ and Him alone. In the end, it matters less what we would like or not like about various issues, *but what is the mind of Christ.* Notice that Church statements always refer to *His* authority when it offers teachings, not some internal Vatican committee or commission. New archaeological information that could be formative can only be insights into what Christ has already taught. Theology is "faith seeking understanding" and it is only Christ we want to understand.

Priesthood and Power, Women and Men

Priesthood is a role of service/leadership, and not an authoritarian rule. It is an active life that reveals our true relationship with God and other people. *The mass was never meant to be place where the presider could accrue power and prestige.* It is precisely the opposite.

After all, the passion of Jesus is a direct challenge to the old ideas of power over people. Rather than using force, fear, or weapons to compel people against their will, Jesus' power came from His credibility as "One with the Father." All authority had been given to Him by the Father yet his power never compromised people's free will. He always respected the integrity of people even when they were weak, selfish, and petty. (Mk 10:17) "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing." That pettiness is a temptation for every person, especially when given some position of power in a community. The temptation to overstep is so easy.

In the church's often tumultuous passage through 2000 years of history, it became easy for that accrual of power to happen. It is the same temptation that fell upon Adam and Eve. For this and other various historical reasons over the centuries, the presider of the Mass took on more and more the role of *institutional* leader as opposed to *charismatic and inspirational* leader. Fidelity to the internal structure of the community and its leaders became more important at times for some than a focus on living the life of Christ and sharing it. Soon, almost all authority and activity were centered on the priest and his actions at Mass or his power in the organization. The Mass especially became *the* Catholic experience. To be Catholic for some people meant you went to Mass, *and that was all*. The Mass began to replace the main mission of the Church, which was to live the life of Jesus. To this day in many places, much of a person's entire religious energy, direction, and focus, centers on the action of attending Mass on Sunday rather than living Catholicism throughout the week.

Women have rightly longed for a more central role in the life of the Church. However, today there are in some dioceses and parishes an incredible poverty of placements or positions of authority to offer. We have let the sacramental ministry of priesthood dominate the life of the Church too much. We have not developed nor given sufficient honor to the main mission of the Church of teaching and evangelizing and being Christ in the world. By limiting the leadership activity of the Church too much toward sacramental life, it naturally became the only place where anyone seeking to offer gifts of leadership could seek a deeper participation. In some places it is virtually the only thing going on. As a result, the roles of power and service have become needlessly confused together, giving a false sense of both. *The Priesthood, however, is not the place to seek power, authority, or influence*. It might have sadly become so, but only for historical reasons that no longer are present and certainly no longer important. But to rightly claim a role of leadership is very different from responding to a call to serve as a priest. Perhaps the future of the Church will see a more gradual return toward *ministerial* servant-oriented Priesthood, while authority and leadership will be shared more with other non-ordained members. Already, in a number of Dioceses throughout the world, important positions of organizational authority are being given to non-ordained Catholics, both men and women, while the position of Eucharistic Presider and Reconciler continues to remain with men.

Each diocese under the leadership of its Bishop calls forth people of proven spiritual ability and ordains them to *unify* and *reconcile* the community that it might better serve the mission from the Lord. Ordination is *never* the result of a personal desire alone. It can never be just our idea. After all, it is not a private affair. The individual's call from the Spirit comes through, and must be verified by, the Church community through its leaders. These leaders should always act in a way that is for the good order and effective accomplishment of that mission. This community can never stray far from the mind of Christ. When this community, in union with its leaders, and in response to the Spirit, while caring for the good order of the community, feels called by Christ to ordain women ... it will.

Can Women and Men Work Together in the Church?

Perhaps there will come a time when women are ordained. Perhaps not. In the meantime, women and men find themselves in the same church and in the same parish, and, if motivated by the Holy Spirit, will want to offer their gifts and talents in the service of their faith. How will they be able to serve in a church that has such role and gender differences for ministry?

First of all, the differences in activity are not differences in dignity. Both men and women no matter what they are doing share in the same equal dignity before God. One is not better or more loved by God because of a different role in the church or by being a man or a woman. After all, there are profound natural differences between the sexes, such as the ability to bear children. None of them affect our dignity before God, but some of them, like pregnancy, have a real impact on our work and life in the world. These sex-role differences demand great understanding between men and women, even though there is no real chance of changing them. Yet, conceiving, bearing, and raising a child are activities that can reflect the very best model of men and women working together in the church. Having and raising a family involves great communication, mutual respect, a huge amount of teamwork, and common goals. Each has a special, appropriate, and needed psychological impact on a child. Each is motivated not by personal desires, but the over-riding desire to see this child emerge strong, healthy, and wise. Of course, it happens best in a climate of love and respect for one another. All this is done in humble acceptance of sexual differences, such as the brute fact that only a woman can get pregnant and carry a child.

In a parish, we are raising a family of faith. Leaders are in a unique position to help conceive, through the action of the Holy Spirit, an emerging faith in a person who perhaps has become jaded on the world, or is selfish, or is confused and looking for answers, or is simply tired and looking for peace. We believe that Jesus is the answer and that a parish is where Jesus can be found. Men and women together, with their unique sex-role differences can work

together as a family does when it raises a child, motivated not by personal desires but the over-riding desire to offer Jesus to everyone. That is a much larger and nobler goal than mere personal ambition. If both men and women working in a parish sense that fidelity to that larger goal in each other, then issues of power and authority begin to recede. The mission remains as the common goal and guiding force for everyone.

Collaboration and cooperation are words very much in vogue today and used to describe the manner in which people accomplish parish activities. Both are useful and needed, although at different times and for different purposes. Each is used as needed depending on what everyone understands is the best way to accomplish the mission to which everyone has already been committed. For example, cooperation involves inviting others to work on your project. You have already set the goals and objectives and you simply need additional hands to help you accomplish them. The others are cooperators. Collaboration involves several people working equally together on a common project. The goals and objectives are set together by consensus and from them evolve a general agreement on what should be done and how to do it. However, in both cases, it is the goodness of the mission that should be the controlling authority. Otherwise, personal goals can surface and derail the direction of the parish. Unfortunately, this temptation is extremely common and easy to find in parishes today. After all, it is the oldest story in the bible.

How can men and women work together in a way that prevents personal agendas from derailing parish goals? Many successful couples today never let a week go by without spending quality time together without distractions to talk with each other about their relationship. They know that life can be hectic and disorienting so they reconnect with each other *on a regular basis*. They tell stories about their week that includes their fears, hopes, joys, concerns, victories and failures, and plans for the future. All of this fosters intimacy, which connects them in a tighter bond of love. They are then ready to face the next week confident of their common goals. This weekly event is modeled on the command of God to “Keep holy the Lord’s Day.” Even God needs a regular time with us at Mass where we can each tell each other our most personal stories. We reconnect with God and our intimacy grows too. This frequent “reorientation” can help keep parish workers on track and faithful to the larger parish mission.

Frequent review about “How are we doing?” is immensely helpful. Those parishes that have a spirit of evaluation, feedback, and review have a built in safeguard against going astray. For example, on Monday, the parish staff could gather to discuss the previous Sunday’s events with a series of questions. Did everyone accomplish all that was planned for the liturgy or after liturgy event? Did we do what we said we should do? How could it improve for next time? Was it the right thing to do at all? Is there something else that would be better instead? On Friday they could meet to review the last few weekdays as well as a final look at the plans for the coming weekend.

The weekly event can take the form of well-led meetings where everyone is free to speak their mind about what is going on in the parish. When everyone feels they are working

to serve the larger mission there can develop a spirit of *welcoming* a review of one's activities because everyone has a strong desire to improve. After all, the mission is important and everyone wants to do it well. There is an eagerness to find out what might be getting in the way and remove it. You cannot know unless you look.

This practice fosters a profound sense of cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork among men and women working together. It helps to raise a parish family of faith. It goes a long way to avoiding the issues of authoritarian power that can poison any parish as well as the relationship between men and women.

Final Thoughts

The behavior of Adam and Eve produced a legacy of tension and uncertainty in relationships between men and women. While the salvific acts of Jesus gave us the possibility of overcoming them, and living in harmony with God and each other, the history of His followers revealed even more human stubbornness. Today we know both that the predictions of Genesis have come true, as well as the saving grace brought by Jesus. Yet our history continues as a mixed story of incredible heroism and faith alongside base selfishness and pride. In this Kingdom the weeds and wheat grow side by side. The one shining light throughout our journey has been the desire to follow Christ, and to follow Him more closely. The essence of our faith has always been Christ Himself who is the way, the truth, and the life that reveals joy, a joy that is complete (*Jn. 10:10*). We believe God placed the desire for that joy deep within our hearts, and the very best impulses in the Church have always been those that seek to base our life and behavior in the Lord. But trying to understand and make sense of the role of men and women in ministry in the Church is difficult enough without having to wade through complicated historical, cultural, and personal agendas. Ministry only makes sense when lived like Jesus. Only He knew how to do it well.

These notes have reflected on the place of two important rooms from the scriptural accounts of the Last Supper and Pentecost. They are metaphors for the different roles of the Church in the world. One room sanctifies, while the other inspires. While each has its purpose and unique role to play in our salvation, neither must exclude the other. Both are needed today. Working together they have the power to change the world.

Fr. Dave Heney

818-575-9535

Daveheney@stmaxchurch.org