

For The Record

Plain Dealer Story Trivializes sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders

Subtext: An article in the Sunday, November 13, 2005 edition of the Plain Dealer failed to properly portray the sanctity of the sacraments of Holy Matrimony and Holy Orders.

In the November 13th section pdQ, the Plain Dealer entitled its story “Need a priest? Web site offers list of married ones willing to help.” It is difficult to determine what writer John Campanelli’s motivation was in producing the article, other than to say that it completely neglected the Church’s teaching and understanding of the sacrament of matrimony and the role of the priest in the sacrament. The article focused on a priest, now resigned from ministry, performing a marriage in a Unitarian Church for a woman who was “raised” Catholic.

The Plain Dealer had received a full explanation about this “Rent-a-Priest” concept from the Diocese of Cleveland Vicar for Clergy and Religious, the Rev. Lawrence Jurcak, but included just one quote that such a marriage was invalid in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Here is the full explanation from Fr. Jurcak:

“The Church laws cited by “Rent a Priest” are taken out of context. While a resigned priest is validly ordained and validly celebrates Eucharist, baptizes and anoints the sick; Church law prohibits such acts aside from danger of death circumstances. Marriage and the celebration of the sacrament of Penance in ordinary circumstances require proper delegation. If the priest does not have proper delegation the actions are null and void. For “Rent a Priest” to represent themselves to the public as being connected with the Catholic Church would be disingenuous.

While respecting whatever reasons of conscience may have moved a priest to resign from active priestly ministry and request a dispensation from the clerical state, the priest knows that, although he remains a priest forever, once the petition is granted he loses both the obligations and the rights pertaining to his ordination. He may no longer exercise any function reserved to the ordained and he is prohibited to present himself as a priest. (see Canon 292) Having been granted a dispensation from the clerical state a resigned priest is able to validly enter into a marriage in the Catholic Church.

The law of the Church states that any priest who attempts marriage, even civilly, incurs a *latae sententiae* suspension (a suspension automatically incurred by the commission of a specific action) restricting his exercise of various ministry functions. (see Canon 1333)

In the case of a person in imminent danger of death, that individual may be baptized, confirmed, absolved and anointed in the sacrament of the sick by any priest whatsoever, no matter what his canonical status.

A Mass celebrated by a resigned married priest would be a valid but illicit insofar as it is contrary to the will of the Church. A wedding performed by a resigned married priest would be invalid in the eyes of the Catholic Church because the priest would not have proper delegation.

It is wrong for a resigned married priest to portray himself as someone who is able to continue to offer the sacraments of the Catholic Church aside from danger of death circumstances. If these resigned priests are claiming that they can provide Catholic sacraments to people legitimately, that simply is not true.”

Reverend Lawrence Jurcak
Secretary and Vicar for Clergy and Religious
Diocese of Cleveland
November 8, 2005