

There are two broad divisions *within* the Roman Catholic Church (CCC, 1200-1203):

1. The **Latin Church**, most of which is associated with "**The Roman Rite.**"
2. The **Eastern Churches**, each of which has its own associated **rite**, liturgical language, customs, spirituality, region and particular name. Each of these **Roman Catholic Churches** has its own history, legal tradition, and culture. According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the principal families of **Eastern rites** are:

**Byzantine** - Ruthenian, Hungarian, Melchite, some Slavs, and Greeks  
**Alexandrian** - Coptic and Ethiopian  
**Antiochene** - Maronites, Syrians, Malankarese  
**Chaldean** - Chaldean and Malabrese  
**Armenian**

"All the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, **with the exception of permanent deacons**, are normally chosen from among men of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain celibate 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (PO 16). ... In the Eastern Churches a different discipline has been in force for many centuries: while bishops are chosen solely from among celibates, married men can be ordained as deacons and priests. ... **In the East as in the West a man who has already received the sacrament of Holy Orders can no longer marry**" (CCC, 1579-80).

The proper way for the two sacraments to be united is therefore **marriage first** and **ordination afterward**. Apart from one short aberration in one part of the Church the early Middle Ages, the Church has *never* allowed ordained men to marry.

**No one is forced to be a priest. Being a priest is not necessary for salvation.** All men in the Latin Rite who have received Holy Orders did so as a voluntary act, with full understanding that this meant that they could not marry. I am baffled that so many Latin rite priests speak as though some injustice has been done to them. *They "renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven"* (Mt 19:12). No one took anything away from them against their will.

St. Paul explains the **spirituality of celibacy** in 1 Corinthians 7. Being single for the Lord means that the person (male or female, ordained or not) is free of the anxieties associated with married life and can devote themselves more fully to the work of the Lord (vv. 32-35). Both Jesus and Paul were "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom" (Mt 19:10-12).

By way of dispensation from the ordinary laws of the Latin rite, **the Church has ordained married men who served as priests in the Anglican Church** and who have converted to Roman Catholicism. (This special dispensation could lead to a new rite within the Church. Time will tell.)

The association of ordination with celibacy in the Latin rite developed over many centuries and was only firmly established around the year 1000. The Church could change this *discipline* at any time if it wished to. Vatican II changed the rule of celibacy in the Latin rite for deacons so that married men could be ordained as deacons.

**The Bottom Line: The Roman Catholic Church ordains married men as priests. Most of them are in the Eastern rites. A few serve in North America or in other countries where pastors from other Christian bodies convert along with their congregation. The Church also ordains married men to be deacons.**

Please distinguish:

1. **Dogma:** irreversible teaching of the Church.
2. **Discipline:** authoritative decisions about how the Church will do things.

The *practical decision* (discipline) to associate priesthood with celibacy in the Latin Rite is **NOT DOGMA**. It could be changed if the Church decides that it would be more **prudent** (*wise*) to ordain married men in the Latin rite.

The *Eastern rites* are **part of the Roman Catholic Church**. *Eastern Orthodox churches* separated from Rome in 1054 AD. Many of the Eastern rites resemble **Eastern Orthodox** churches--with the same liturgical language, vestments, customs, rituals, holidays, saints, etc.