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Pope's Holy Thursday sermon decries 'disobedience' of certain priests

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News reports from the Vatican today say Pope Benedict XVI sermonized on Holy Thursday about the "disobedience" of priests who advocate a married priesthood and women priests. He specifically called out a group of Austrian priests who have made a very public challenge to church practices on these issues. It is called the Pfarrer Initiative (pastor initiative), issued in 2006. It's been around for a while.

In Austria, this group -- obviously distressed about the lack of any real dialogue or progress on these issues in the church -- is concerned about the growing shortage of priests.

Without change, they said parishes will celebrate Eucharistic services without a priest, that they will permit women to preach and that they will continue to speak out on the expansion of the priesthood to married people and women. The group claims to have about 300 priests and deacons as members as well as widespread lay support. Thus far, neither the Vatican nor Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna have attempted to penalize them.

If these priests are "disobedient," so is much of the church in Europe and North America. The majority of lay Catholics support both a married clergy and women priests. And the majority is sick of waiting for the hierarchy to engage them in any real conversation about these issues.

This is not "disobedience." It is a strong way of saying, "Let's get serious about the future of our church."

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