

The Mission: Following in the Footsteps of St Winefride – Living a Consecrated Life



Jules and Jenny/flickr Warwick, St Mary's church, Beauchamp Chapel, East Window detail

St Winefride is example of a Christian who decided that marriage and family was not for her, but that she would rather dedicate herself to God.

Many people in today's society find that idea simply odd. We are encouraged to see sex and relationships as fulfilling, and chat about love, sex and relationships is everywhere in popular culture.

But what about a dedication to a celibate, single life? Where does that get talked about as a good, confident and right choice for a person?

In her book, *Single-Minded: Being Single, Whole and Living Life to the Full*, the Rev'd Kate Wharton comments on how strange it is that married people or people in a relationship talk easily about 'my other half' as if they were only one half of a person to start with, and that many pop songs talk about finding someone to 'complete' them as though there was always a piece missing. So it can be easy to view single people, or widowed people, as somehow incomplete, waiting for 'the one', having lost 'the one', or simply missing out on what life has to offer.

And life can seem biased against single people: travel can be more expensive (single person supplement), or it's less easy to get a table for just one in a restaurant. Life can seem designed for couples and families and not for people on their own who are encouraged to join up with others in order to enjoy themselves.

In the Church, single people are sometimes whispered about – they must have a secret life, an undisclosed sexual preference, or are

hiding something, instead of being allowed to be who they are – single, celibate people living their lives faithfully.

Nor is it true that single people who dedicate themselves to living a Christian life without a partner are cold, disinterested, or haters of relationships. Single people are at liberty to fall in love, but also may find fulfilment in loving others as uncles and aunts, siblings, godparents and friends. And single people may love Jesus and want to dedicate themselves to living a faithful life in his service, which is after all what members of religious communities do, undergirding the ministry and mission of us all by praying for the Church and for all Christians every day and working tirelessly in all kinds of ways in the service of God.

So what can people who are married and in relationships actually *learn* from St Winefride and all those who follow a life dedicated only to God? And how could that way of living help us know more about how we grow in faith?

Responding to the Challenge:

- How could we be more like St Winefride in offering our whole selves to God?
- How can we better honour the (other) single people we know and what they have to offer ourselves, our families and the Church? Do we have to say sorry for any gossip or speculation about unmarried people whom we know?
- How can we talk positively about sex and relationships with young people to make space for the possibility that they might wish to remain single? And how can we make space for young people to tell us how they feel about it?
- How can we counter ideas that single people are unfulfilled, incomplete or simply lacking?
- What story do you have to tell about your own single life, or the time when you were single before being married or in a relationship?



Judith Jackson/flickr Single Soul