

ARTICLE 12

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage! St Paul again

Husbands, Love your Wives

We now return to St Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he addresses husbands and wives. This time we will look first to what St Paul says to the husbands.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it: That he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy, and without blemish. So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church: Because we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” (Ephesians 5: 25-30)

As Christ loved His Church

Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. So how did Christ love the Church? Well, Christ founded the Church on a sinful man, St Peter, to whom he gave the authority to rule the Church

“And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”
(Matthew 16:18-19).

Serve, Teach, Preach, Do

Christ served His Church: through His teaching, through His preaching, through His deeds. Christ also washed the feet of His apostles on Holy Thursday thereby instructing them in how to exercise the authority which He had given them.

“Then after he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, being set down again, he said to them: Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master, and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. Amen, amen I say to you: The servant is not greater than his lord; neither is the apostle greater than he that sent him. If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them.” (John 13: 12 – 17)

Sacrificial Offering

Finally, Christ willingly accepted crucifixion and death for love of His Church and for the sanctification of all who those would willingly enter His Church and seek to live by her doctrines.

Why did Christ do all this?

St Paul then tells us why Christ did this and therefore he is telling husbands why they are to love their wives as Christ loved His Church. Husbands must love their wives in order to sanctify their wives, cleansing them by the laver of water in the word of life. This phrase “the laver of water in the word of life” refers to baptism and also to living the sacramental life of the Catholic Church. As husbands we are called to help our wives to become holy through our participation in the sacramental life of the Church. That we might present our wives to God glorious and without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish as Christ presents the Church to His Father in heaven.

As You Love your own Body

St Paul then tells men to love their wives as they love their own bodies. Once again St Paul shows his great understanding of the nature of men. If we love our wives as we love our own bodies then we will nourish and cherish them because together we are one flesh. St Paul calls men to a very high standard which is not at all easy to achieve. Ask any married woman!

The context for St Paul's teaching to Women

This then is the type of holy and dignified man a husband and father should be and, even though many men may not try very hard or may fail to live up to this standard (and let's face it, we all fail in this at some time or another) it is in the context of just such a man that we must read what St Paul says to the women in the first part of the quote from the Letter to the Ephesians.

“Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of His body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things.”

Headship as Service to the Family

St Paul tells us that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. So how did Christ exercise his headship of the Church? We have already seen this in looking at how Christ loved the Church and laid down His life for His Church. But the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday gives us the ultimate lesson in how the head of the family must behave. True headship and authority are exercised as a service to the family. Christ told His disciples not to lord it over others because this is an abuse of authority therefore the husband must love his wife by serving her and the wife must love her husband by willingly placing herself under his headship.

Let us aim for this Highest of Standards

Now of course we don't always live up to these high standards but this should never become an excuse for lowering the standard expected of husbands and wives nor does the failure of one party to the marriage excuse the other from striving to live up to the standard.

False Ideology does not challenge us

Modern feminist ideology sees men behaving badly and in ways which are disrespectful of women but, rather than challenge the men to behave better, these feminists want to be free to behave just as badly as those men. This is a recipe for disaster and we see all around us that so many are now failing to live up to the requirements of marriage because they are not being challenged and called to the higher standard. Modern society just shakes a collective head and acceptingly says 'Oh well, it's so sad that your marriage didn't work out, rather than challenging men and women to the higher standard and ultimately to reconciliation and to a better and vastly more rewarding way of life.

The independence of the Marriage Vows

It is also interesting to note that, at their marriage ceremony, the husband and the wife make their marriage vows independently of each other. There is no '*we promise*' but rather '*I John take you...*' and then '*I Mary take you...*'. It is not a case of '*I'll keep my vows if you keep yours*' but rather each person makes a personal commitment before God to keep their marriage vows independently of their spouse. When one spouse neglects or fails to keep the commitment then the other spouse must take up the slack and try as best as possible to persevere in their own marriage vows in very difficult circumstances and in the hope of gaining the other's eternal salvation and for the salvation of any children.

The importance of Marriage as God intends

But when both spouses fully understand and are fully committed to keeping the marriage covenant as God intended it to be, we get happy marriages which are rich in the blessings of God and enrich the whole of society. Thus it is very important that we work together to promote the full understanding of the Church's teachings on Marriage and that we encourage, support and pray for those who are experiencing difficulties in their marriages and to restore their hope.

In the next article we will begin to have a look at the rich history of the Church's magisterial documents which develop and deepen our understanding of marriage.

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