

ARTICLE 22

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage a gift from God – through the eyes of the Magisterium

There is nothing new under the Sun.

“A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.

All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us.

There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.” (Ecclesiastes 1:4-11)

All this talk of New Ways

The above quotation from Ecclesiastes is very apt to our present time when we hear much talk of new ways and new approaches to the 'new' problems of our times. There is nothing new under the sun. Man today is the same as the first man after the fall. He has the same needs, the same desires, the same concupiscence, the same virtues and the same sins. **There is nothing new under the sun.**

St Paul writing to the Galatians says to them “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel - not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1: 6 – 8)

God's plan the same yesterday, today and forever

There is nothing new under the sun! God's plan for marriage today is the same as it ever was, one man, one woman, bound together for life for the raising of Godly offspring. It will never change despite all assertions to the contrary and despite all appeals to mercy and compassion which seek to make allowances and exceptions. These appeals to mercy and compassion are due to a false understanding, both of mercy and of compassion. False mercy, seeks to absolve without the requirement to repent and to turn away from sin. False compassion seeks a person's comfort rather than their true good.



Avoiding the Pitfalls

How can we avoid these pitfalls? How can we be sure we are still on the right path? Christ, in His mercy, established His Church to watch over us like a good mother. He entrusted the deposit of faith to the Church which consists of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and He gave Peter and the Apostles, today's Pope and Bishops, the authority to interpret, to teach, to rule and to govern the Church. This authority, to authentically discern and proclaim Catholic teaching, is called the Magisterium and we see it in operation in the scriptural references to the early Church for example when St Paul and St Barnabas returned to Jerusalem after preaching to the gentiles there arose a dispute amongst the early Christians with some former Pharisees insisting on circumcision for all.

“The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” (Acts 15: 6 – 11)

The Magisterium

Here we see the Church's magisterium in action in the early Church which concluded with the sending of a letter to the newly converted gentiles explaining what was required of them.

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell’. So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.” (Acts 15: 28 – 31)

Solemn Magisterium and Ordinary Magisterium

The Church's magisterium is composed of two elements. The Solemn Magisterium, includes infallible declarations of the Popes such as Pope Pius IX's declaration on the Immaculate Conception or Pope Pius XII's declaration on the Assumption of Mary. The solemn magisterium also includes doctrinal declarations made by ecumenical councils such as the Council of Trent's decree on justification or the first Vatican council's definition of papal infallibility.

The other element of the Church's Magisterium is known as the ordinary and universal magisterium. This consists of teachings of the bishops of the Church, in communion with the Pope when speaking on a matter of faith and morals that is universally held to be true by the Church. In the case of the ordinary magisterium there will usually be a long history of pronouncements by bishops, and popes often going back as far as the scriptures and to the apostolic and early Church fathers.

Magisterial Infallibility

Both the solemn and the ordinary and universal magisterium enjoy the privilege of infallibility. “Wherefore, by divine and Catholic faith all those things are to be believed which are contained in the word of God as found in Scripture and tradition, and which are proposed by the Church as matters to be believed as divinely revealed, whether by her solemn judgment or in her ordinary and universal Magisterium.” (First Vatican Council - Dei Filius 8.)

Resolving Disputes

In many cases, as was the case quoted above from the Acts of the Apostles, the magisterium pronounces on a question on which a serious dispute has arisen. We see this particularly in the case of heresies which gain popularity or which are promoted by a well known bishop or priest. The defeat of the Arian heresy is a great example of how the magisterium eventually triumphed after years of wrangling and dispute amongst bishops. It is an exciting and fascinating tale of a great struggle within the Church as she sought to guide the faithful along the narrow path to salvation whilst the tempest was raging all around.

So too with the Church's teaching on marriage. Several times disputes arose and proposals were put forward by leading churchmen which seemed contrary to Church teaching and were therefore opposed by other leading churchmen with the question eventually being resolved by a pronouncement of the magisterium. Does this wrangling about marriage sound familiar? Remember, **there is nothing new under the sun.**

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