

## ARTICLE 23

### Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

#### Marriage a gift from God

First Published in *'The Catholic Voice'*, Ireland, October 2014



#### Marriage! Virginity a higher calling

##### God provides the Grace.

The recently concluded Synod on the Family was a very exciting event which has an important bearing on marriage as seen through the eyes of the Church's magisterium. Several people whom I was in contact with during the synod were very worried about the possible outcomes of the synod, given that, certain seemingly heretical positions were in the ascendancy and seemed to have the backing of a large number of bishops and even cardinals. My general response to these people was, that God always provides us with sufficient grace to become holy, that is, to become saints. If we do not become saints by the time our earthly course is run, we most certainly cannot blame God, we cannot blame the Pope, we cannot blame bad bishops, bad parents or bad governments. For if God gives each one of us sufficient grace to become a saint, regardless of what tempests assail His Church, then we have only ourselves to blame if we do not make sufficient use of those graces in order to become holy and to become saints.

Sure we cannot do it on our own! We first and foremost need the divine assistance, provided to us by God, through His Church particularly through the grace of the sacrament of baptism. We also need the assistance of other men, fellow travellers along life's difficult highway to heaven. But to start worrying, as if somehow the Church of Christ has lost its way or can ever lose its way, seems to me, to put one in danger of giving in to one of the devil's smartest tactics which is to divert us from the universal call to holiness. *“Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10: 41-42)*

##### Look to our Duties

My own sphere of influence in a world with almost seven billion people, is so minuscule as to be almost laughable. I have no influence over who the next pope will be or over who the next bishop of my diocese will be. I do however, have control over whether or not I become a saint, and whether or not I become a saint, will have a direct influence on those who know me for good or for ill and may be a determining factor in their becoming saints as well. In fact, there is no other purpose to my life other than that of becoming a saint. It is why God created me and it is what He expects of me. Nothing less will suffice.

Church history is full of examples of crisis, of schismatics and of heretics. St Jerome, writing of the Arian heresy famously said “that the whole world woke up one morning, lamenting and marvelling to find itself Arian”, and yet here we are, more than two thousand years after the resurrection, professing the same faith as Peter and the apostles. God does not abandon His Church!

##### Jovinian the Heretic

Let us now turn to a man named Jovinian. Jovinian was a priest and a monk who lived in the late fourth century dying in the year four hundred and six. He became fed up with the austerities of the monastic life and looking at the world around him, it is also possible that he became somewhat jealous of married people who may have seemed to be enjoying life more than he. He began to spread the notion that the virginal state of life was no better than the chaste life of married people.

It was said of him that his writings even encouraged consecrated virgins to marry. Jovinian eventually arrived at the logical conclusion of his own erroneous opinion, and he stated that Mary lost her virginal state in giving birth to Jesus.

### **Not a Chance**

Poor Jovinian, he hadn't a chance. He lived at the same time as three of the doctors of the Church who would take his opinions to task, St Ambrose, St Augustine, and St John Chrysostom. The Pope at the time was Pope St. Siricius who, sometime between the years three eighty nine to three ninety two, called together a council of the Roman clergy at which he denounced the writings of Jovinian and excommunicated him and several of his followers. Jovinian then fled to Milan, so Pope St. Siricius sent a copy of the sentence to bishop Ambrose who condemned Jovinian in a Synod held in Milan. St Augustine wrote two beautiful works against the Jovinian heresy, 'De Bono Conjugali' on the good of marriage, and 'De Sancta Virginitate' on the good of the virginal state. St John Chrysostom also wrote on this topic and was followed by St Jerome who wrote another two books specifically against Jovinian.

### **The Virginal state is higher than the Married state.**

The basic declaration of these Church fathers and of Pope St. Siricius was that the virginal state is of an order far superior than the married state. This teaching has been confirmed again and again throughout Church history and was definitively promulgated at the Council of Trent. Here we see the Church's magisterium at work which protects the faithful from error.

What is most interesting about this heresy is that it clearly shows us one of the paradoxes of the Church as regards marriage. Christ used paradox to emphasise certain truths such as when he declared in Luke 17:33 "Whosoever shall seek to save his life, shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose it, shall preserve it." The paradox that we learn from the Jovinian heresy is this; if we want to defend marriage and family life the starting place is not marriage, rather, we must first and foremost defend the exalted position of consecrated virginity for, it is only by defending the greater good of virginity that we can protect and defend the lesser good of marriage.

### **A Difficult Truth**

Now for those of us who are married this, at first, may seem like a very difficult truth to understand. However, I believe the key to understanding this truth lies in allowing God to be God and in not trying to conform God to our own limited understanding of the universe. It is God who exalts the virginal state over the married state, and it is the same God who confers the blessings on the married state. All consecrated virgins have parents. Our Lady's parents were St Joachim and St Ann. St Thérèse's parents were blessed Louis and Zélie Martin.

We find another beautiful key to this mystery from St Thérèse herself when she describes herself as 'the little flower'. She explains that God's garden would be diminished if it were filled with only Roses. The other flowers, though perhaps not as beautiful or majestic as the Rose, such as the violet and the lily and even the humble dandelion, give a variety and a character to God's garden which it would not otherwise have. Should the dandelion complain because it is a dandelion? That would be absurd for the dandelion is how God created it to be.

Neither should those of us who are married be dismayed on account of the fact that there are vocations which are superior to ours. We should rather rejoice in the calling given to us by God and we should realise that the higher state of consecrated virginity enhances our own vocation. We will look a little deeper at this magisterial teaching in the next articles.

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