

## ARTICLE 61

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

#### Marriage a gift from God

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#### Marriage! The Importance of Modesty

##### **The Popes on Modesty**

In order to see how important the virtue of modesty is, and to see just how deplorable the sin of immodesty is, let us look to what some of the Popes have said on this subject. On January 6<sup>th</sup> 1921, Pope Benedict XV, issued an encyclical letter called *'Sacra Propediem'* on the Third Order of St Francis. In it he identifies two dangerous passions that affect people

##### **Pope Benedict XV**

“Now there are two passions today dominant in the profound lawlessness of morals - an unlimited desire of riches and an insatiable thirst for pleasures. It is this which marks with a shameful stigma our epoch; whilst it goes ceaselessly from progress to progress in the order of all which touches the well-being and convenience of life, it seems that in the superior order of honesty and of moral rectitude a lamentable retrogression leads it back to the ignominies of ancient paganism. In that measure, in truth, wherein men lose sight of eternal goods which Heaven reserved for them, they permit themselves to be more taken in by the deceitful mirage of the ephemeral goods here below, and once their souls are turned down towards the earth, an easy descent leads them insensibly to relax themselves in virtue, to experience repugnance for spiritual things, and to relish nothing outside the seductions of pleasure. Hence the general situation which we note: with some the desire to acquire riches or to increase their patrimony knows no bounds; others no longer know, as formerly, how to bear the trials which are the usual result of want or poverty; and at the very hour in which the rivalries We have pointed out set by the ears the rich and the proletariat a great number seem to wish to further excite the hatred of the poor by an unbridled luxury which accompanies the most revolting corruption.” (Sacra Propediem 18)

##### **The Thirst for Riches and Pleasures**

This thirst for riches and pleasures has continued unabated since Pope Benedict XV wrote this encyclical, and in order to maintain a certain level of comfort and to avoid poverty, many will resort to contraception and to abortion because the presence of a defenceless child is now seen as a threat to prosperity. Men have lost sight of the eternal good of the soul of each new child.

Pope Benedict XV, following on from his point about the loss of the sight of the spiritual realm, then speaks sadly of the immodesty of women.

##### **The Blindness of so many Women**

“From this point of view one cannot sufficiently deplore the blindness of so many women of every age and condition; made foolish by desire to please, they do not see to what a degree the indecency of their clothing shocks every honest man, and offends God. Most of them would formerly have blushed for those toilettes as for a grave fault against Christian modesty; now it does not suffice for them to exhibit them on the public thoroughfares; they do not fear to cross the threshold of the churches, to assist at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass, and even to bear the seducing food of shameful passions to the Eucharistic Table where one receives the heavenly Author of purity. And We speak not of those exotic and barbarous dances recently imported into fashionable circles, one more shocking than the other; one cannot imagine anything more suitable for banishing all the remains of modesty.” (Sacra Propediem 19)

## **Men and Women are no longer Shocked by Immodesty**

The sad thing today is that most men and women are no longer '*shocked*' by immodest clothing. We have become so used to it that we no longer blush and avert our eyes from immodesty. Pope Benedict then addressed himself to the Tertiary Sisters of the Third Order of St Francis stressing the importance of '*holy modesty*'.

“In what concerns specially the Tertiary Sisters, We ask of them by their dress and manner of wearing it, to be models of holy modesty for other ladies and young girls; that they be thoroughly convinced that the best way for them to be of use to the Church and to Society is to labour for the improvement of morals.” (Sacra Propediem 21)

## **The Crusade against Immodesty**

Pope Pius XI succeeded Pope Benedict XV and in 1928 he launched a crusade against immodesty. As part of this crusade standards were issued by the Cardinal-Vicar of Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Pompili, on 24 September 1928 which stated in relation to women's clothing.

“A dress cannot be called decent which is cut deeper than two fingers' breadth under the pit of the throat, which does not cover the arms at least to the elbows, and scarcely reaches beyond the knees. Furthermore, dresses of transparent materials are improper.”

## **Those who dress Immodestly should not be admitted to Holy Communion**

What may shock the women of today is that in 1930 a letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Council was issued which stated, “the immodest fashion of dress adopted by Catholic women and girls, which fashion not only offends the dignity of women, but conduces to the temporal ruin of the women and girls, and, what is still worse, to their eternal ruin, miserably dragging down others in their fall.”

The letter was addressed to the whole world and included in the letter were some instructions which included the following.

“The parish priest should command that feminine garb be based on modesty, and womanly ornament be a defence of virtue. Let them likewise admonish parents to cause their daughters to cease wearing indecorous dress.”

“Teachers must not receive in their colleges and schools immodestly dressed girls.”

“Maidens and women dressed immodestly are to be debarred from Holy Communion ... further, if the offence be extreme, they may even be forbidden to enter the Church.”

## **Immodesty is Gravely Offensive to God**

Today there are those who falsely argue for the admission of the divorced and civilly remarried to Holy Communion. How many realise that one should not approach Holy Communion if one is immodestly dressed? If immodesty is a sufficient cause to be barred from Holy Communion, then it is clear that immodesty is gravely offensive to God. How many priests are failing in their duty to the flock and to the salvation of souls by not pointing this out?

## **Catholic Fathers are the Guardians of Modesty in their Homes**

Catholic Fathers, you need to study the mind of the Church with regard to modesty and you need to have a conversation with your wife and with your daughters in order to encourage them to dress with dignity. Catholic Mothers and young women, you too need to study the mind of the Church with regard to modesty and you need to have a good look in the mirror to make sure that you comply with this most important of virtues. Catholic young men, you need to study the mind of the Church with regard to modesty and you need to make sure that you learn 'custody of the eyes' so that you protect your chastity and do not encourage immodesty in the young women that you socialise with.

Pope Benedict XV's words to the Tertiary Sisters apply equally to us. We need to promote modesty by our dress and manner of wearing it. We need to be models of holy modesty for others and together, we need to labour for the improvement of morals.

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