

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time B

The Catholic Church in the U.S. and around the world needs boldness and clarity in truth as well as gentleness and tenderness in the pulpit. The "longer form" of the second reading for today is a great opportunity to teach the truth of God through St. Paul and St. John Paul II.

The accuracy of the translation your bible is important. The best translation from the original Greek is the Revised Standard Version (RSV), but our U.S. Lectionary uses the New American Bible version, which is good, but not the best. St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-32 properly translated says: "wives should be **subject** to their husbands **as to the Lord.**" It does not say to be "subordinate," which has a negative connotation or inferior tone in the English language. This must be properly understood that the language is an analogy for Christ's love for the Church. The entire passage must be read and analyzed, not just the first 2 verses, which usually causes walls and defenses to go up. This beautiful section is about the lover and the beloved in the Christian household, the family, as well as the "Great Mystery" of the love between the Bridegroom, Christ, and his Church, the Bride.

This biblical passage does not mean wives are to be used by their husbands or must submit to anything beneath her dignity. It rather means mutual submission, or to be under the mission of the other's mission. St. Paul is talking about the complete gift of self to your spouse, which excludes any behavior or act that is demeaning. The "gift" is that Christ came "not to be served but to serve." He came to lay down His life as a ransom for many. The Holy Spirit (the Divine Author of Sacred Scripture) and St. Paul (His human instrument) are not justifying male domination, far from it. They are actually calling husbands and wives to live the "gift" of God's original plan for us in "mutual love and respect" by being a gift to each other. For us Christians submission or being subject means to submit to one another "**out of reverence for Christ.**" It means a mutual gift of self, which cannot denote any using, abusing or irreverence for one's spouse. Why? Because Christ and the Church do not use each other, but are a mutual gift to each other.

Christ laid down His Life for His Bride, the Church, something Adam did not do for Eve. This is why St. Paul and St. John Paul II in ***Theology of the Body*** are calling us back to our original innocence in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. They are calling us forward to a new holiness rooted in Christ through the “Great Mystery” of the analogy of the love of Christ for His Church that should be reflected in every Christian home and family. St. Paul teaches on the indissolubility and sacramentality of true marriage of man and woman and reciprocity, or exchange of mutual love and honor.

- *Indissolubility*, because Christ will never leave His Bride, the Church nor she dishonor Him.
- *Sacramentality*, because true marital love is the living sign for Christ’s love for the Church, which St. Paul calls husbands to as well.
- *Reciprocity*, because the Church submits her mission to the mission of Christ.

The husband’s mission is to build up his marriage and family, not dominate or demean them. His model is Jesus Christ and His love is unconditional and sacrificial. St. Paul was confronting the prevailing custom of men reigning like tyrants.

As we open to the beauty of true marital love and the analogous “Great Mystery” of Christ’s love for His Church with mutual submission and self-gift, we pray there will be much healing and greater depth of understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony in our country. Amen.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella