

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)
August 23, 2009

Wives, be subordinate to your husbands as to the Lord because the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the Church...he, Christ himself, is the savior of the body.

Husbands and men, what do you think about this message?

Do you like it?

Do you agree with it?

Are you thinking, "Finally, the Church actually got something right?

It's about time?!"

Wives and women, what do you think?

Do you like it?

Do you agree with it?

Are you thinking, "The Church finally went over the edge? It's so out of touch with reality that I don't know why I come anymore?"

Well, husbands and wives, men and women, I have news for you all... these first initial reactions and thoughts that you may be experiencing...they may not be completely accurate.

Allow me to clarify myself by delving more deeply into what our

Second Reading – Ephesians 5 – is actually and fully saying.

St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that wives should be subordinate to their husbands as they are to the Lord.

The reasoning for this is because the husband is the head of the household, including his wife and children, just as Christ, the savior of the body, is the head of the Church.

And so, just as the Church is subordinate to the head, namely, Jesus Christ, wives are to be subordinate to their head of the household, namely, their husbands.

Another word commonly translated for “subordinate” is “submissive.” What would happen if we substitute “submissive” for “subordinate?” Wives, be submissive to your husbands as to the Lord.

At first glance, this may seem just as bad if not worse than before when we were using “subordinate.”

But, if we look more deeply into what “submissive” means, then we get a whole new outlook on this situation.

First, let’s break down “submissive:” “sub,” which means “under,” and “missive,” which means “mission.”

All of a sudden, instead of “submissive,” an ugly word to begin with, we have “under the mission of.”

Wives, be “under the mission of” your husbands just as you are “under the mission of” the Lord.

And the “mission of the Lord” was to lay down his life for us so that we might have life ourselves and have life abundantly.

It is this mission that the husband and the man, by nature of him being the husband and the man, is to take on and live out in his life.

In other words, the husband and the man is to adopt the same mission that Jesus Christ lived in his life and communicated to us by the sign of the cross, which is freely and willingly laying down one’s life so that others may have life themselves.

The husband and the man is to lay down his life...to sacrifice his life for the sake and well-being of his wife and his family.

Thus, in the end, what we are surprisingly left with is: “Wives, be under the mission of your husbands and allow them to sacrifice and lay down their lives for you and your family just as Christ sacrificed himself and laid down his life for the Church.”

This is a little different message than maybe what we were thinking a few minutes ago, isn’t it?

But it is the complete message that St. Paul is trying to communicate to us as children of God and followers of Jesus Christ.

The message in Ephesians 5 is not about promoting the suppression of women or denying them the rights and liberty that have been justly fought for over the past century.

Rather, the message in Ephesians 5 is about mutual self-giving love that is not only meant for husbands and wives in Marriage, but that is also meant for each and everyone one of us and our relationship with God.

First, this message of mutual self-giving love is meant for both the husband and the wife, both men and women, because St. Paul tells us to “be subordinate” (or submissive – under the mission of) “to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

We are to be “under the mission of” one another – to allow one another to make sacrifices and lay down their lives for us.

At the same time, we, ourselves, are to be willing to make sacrifices and lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we are to do all this out of reverence and respect for Christ, who was the first to make the ultimate self-sacrifice and lay down his life for us so that we might be freely given eternal life.

Secondly, the message of mutual self-giving love applies to our relationship with God.

God loves us and wants nothing more than to be united with us for all eternity in heaven.

In fact, one could say that God wants to “marry us.” That is, after all, why we were created, namely, to be one flesh with God in the heavenly kingdom.

And in order to make this happen, God took the initiative and made the first move – He sent His only Son to live, suffer, and die for us as well as to rise from the dead and thus, destroy the bonds of death.

Now, it's our move.

Will we be “under the mission of” Christ and allow it to continue?

Will we mutually self-give of ourselves out of love and reverence for Christ?

Will we allow ourselves to be “married to God?”

This truly is a hard challenge and who can accept it?

Fortunately, we all can if we fully and completely believe that Jesus Christ is the “Holy One of God who has the words of eternal life.”