

***Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Mass of Pope St. Paul VI)  
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)***

***July 2, 2023***

***Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant  
Part One***

*“This subjection, however, does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband’s every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to a wife; nor, in fine, does it imply that the wife should be put on a level with those persons who in law are called minors.” (Pope Pius XI, On Christian Marriage [Casti Connubii] #27)*

Over the past few months, I have become aware of a growing debate involving various Podcast and YouTube Catholic personalities concerning the interpretation of Chapter 6 in Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, specifically Ephesians 6:21-31. Without having a Bible present, some may wonder what this selection is seeking to address. In short, it is the famous “wives be subordinate to your husbands” passage. To refresh your memory, allow me to read this passage to you. After, it is my intention to both reflect upon and offer a thought which might assist if/when any here encounter someone speaking upon this selection of Saint Paul’s great works.

*“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’” (Ephesians 6:21-31).*

We must begin our reflection by examining the historical period in which Saint Paul lived. In the Greco-Roman world of Saint Paul’s day, the basic social structure was not the nuclear family. Rather, as is found still in certain parts of the Middle Eastern world, the basic unit was a Household. A household would consist of more than just the nuclear family. Within the household compound, one could find families all related to each other,

servants and slaves, laborers and business partners, guests and possibly tenants. The household was more than just a family. It was an economic unit involving all members assisting to care for and provide for the needs of the household. A household, normally, would be led by one man as its head. Through Sacred Scripture, we know of households which were run by women. In Chapter 16 of the Acts of the Apostles, we can read of the conversion of Lydia who, after being baptized, saw to it that her household would also become believers and be baptized. It is within this historical period that Saint Paul wrote his letter.

Before addressing the relationship of husbands and wives, Saint Paul writes that Christians should “submit” to one another out of reverence for Christ. Saint Paul would write something similar in his Letter to the Galatians. He would write that Christians should be servants (slaves) to one another out of love. (Galatians 5:13). Placing these two passages together, we can rightly propose that mutual humility and love were key determinants to Saint Paul’s understanding of Christian relationships. If I were to say – out of love and humility, children should submit to their parents; I believe we would all be in agreement. If I were to change the order of persons, I would now say – out of love and humility, parents should submit to their children; would that now seem very odd? Yet, to continue reading Saint Paul’s letter demands that we must agree that this is equally as important. Why? For a Christian, either in Saint Paul’s time or our own, to exercise authority over another, one must do so with both humility and love. This is because they are serving someone of the highest rank. They are serving a beloved member of Christ’s Body.

Next week, we will continue reflecting upon Saint Paul’s teaching as it applies to husbands and wives. However, as we proceed further next week, I suggest we remember mutual humility and love. I believe these two will be foundational in our understanding of Saint Paul’s exhortation to husbands and wives.