

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 9, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love’s high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the church. Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the church. For you are already married when you act this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated Him. So just as He, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging him, brought her to trust Him by His great solicitude, not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so must you also act toward your wife.”

(Saint John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians)

As we now approach Saint Paul’s famous line, “*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:22), we must return to the historical time period in which Saint Paul wrote. In the time of Saint Paul, the Greco-Roman world, it was common in society for the husband to hold legal dominion over their wives. Biblical and historical commentators are quick to point out the presence of laws in society which upheld this household practice. A rather simple reason to explain this situation – wives were generally, though not always, less educated and much younger than their husbands.

With my own limited knowledge of Greek, there is one thing about Ephesians 5:22, that I had never known until researching this information. There is a subtle difference in our English translation, as opposed to the Greek, as to how Saint Paul addresses wives. In the Greek, as scholars point out, Saint Paul addresses the wives as women who are free—Free to Choose.

Saint Paul’s acknowledgment of the wife being free to choose, for her to choose to be subordinate to her husband, left me questioning so many of my prior interpretations of this passage. Furthermore, as I continued to read, it was stressed that this was not the only time Saint Paul wrote in this fashion. We can read his Letter to the Colossians (3:18-19) and his Letter to Titus (2:4-5) and find similar statements. The key to this context is found in Saint Paul’s continued plea for wives to be “subordinate” or “submissive” and not for wives to simply “obey.”

Please, this idea “submission not obedience” needs to be reflected upon. First, Saint Paul is asking wives to freely choose to submit themselves under the mission of their husbands. He is not telling them to passively obey. He is not asking them to wait for the orders their husbands will soon dictate to them to be followed. And, by likening the active subordination of the wife to her husband to the subordination of the church to Christ, then, we realize that freedom is necessary. Let us ask ourselves this question: Is the church actively seeking to follow Christ its

Head through the purposeful subordination of the wills of the individuals who make up the church? Or does the church just sit back and wait for God to give the orders? My family, God wants us to actively participate in the work of salvation. He wants us to choose to follow Him, placing our wills and our lives under His Divine Mission. Let us recall the countless men and women of prior generations who actively encouraged the daily living out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In their various ways, gifted with their various talents, Christian men and women have offered the world so many improvements and developments, all to live subordinate to the Divine Will of Jesus Christ. A funny thought occurred to me as I considered Saint Paul's teaching. My family, you are currently doing exactly what Saint Paul encouraged wives to do. You are freely choosing to place yourselves and your families under the Divine Mission of Christ the Head. You are engaged in this mission as it is being currently overseen at this time, in this parish, by your parish priest, your pastor. Furthermore, your pastor is freely choosing to place himself under the guidance of the Archbishop of Mobile and his interpretation of the mission of Christ. Not one person here is being forced to follow either where the pastor leads or the Archbishop leads. We are all freely choosing to be submissive.

My family, I do hope this reflection allows us to see the beauty of what Saint Paul wrote. It is not solely directed at wives. It applies to all of us here as members of Christ's Body, His Church, His Bride. I only ask that we take time every day to offer prayers for those who guide us in living out the mission of Jesus. The quote taken from a homily by Saint John Chrysostom, found at the beginning of this reflection, reminds us of the immense duty of the husband, the head (be he a literal husband or in my own case, the head of the parish). May our leaders be both humble and wise enough to follow where our true Head and Shepherd has preceded. May we pray that they have the strength to proclaim His Mission via His Salvific Cross.