

Homily For Tuesday of the 30th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Oct. 27, 2020

Eph 5: 21-33 "Brothers and sisters, be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Psalm 128:1-5 "Happy is the one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways."

Luke 13:18-21 "The kingdom of heaven grows like a mustard seed, and the birds make their nests in it."

Sacrificial Love

Introduction

It would be very easy to present today's readings in a pleasant summary. The Kingdom of Heaven is a home for everyone. Happy is the one who walks in the ways of the Lord. Honour and love one another as Christ has loved you.

But what if we use different words which are also in these passages? A man sows the mustard seeds. A woman mixes in the yeast with the flour. Happy is the one who **fears** the Lord. Wives be **subject** to your husbands. He is the head. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and **sacrificed** himself for her.

The one view is that God will do everything for us to make us happy. The other is the demand that we must be for each other and for God what we have received. Not so comfortable. Today's Good News is also a tremendous challenge, not just to understand the Christian life, but to live it out.

Luke

In these two images of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus says it is like a mustard seed which grows into a tree, and it is like leaven which is mixed with flour. Almost missed is the fact that a man had to sow the seed and care for it so that it would become a full sized tree with branches as homes for birds. A woman had to mix the yeast in with the flour to make it rise. Essentially, God will build this kingdom out of the effort we will make to give it life, in imitation of what Christ has done to give us life. Now we have to use our bodies in imitation of Jesus, who made the kingdom real in his own body, and wants to do so again and again in his body, the Church.

Psalm

In the psalm, there is this word 'fear' that we come across a lot, especially in the Old Testament. Your happiness will depend on whether you fear the Lord. This does not mean to run away from God in terror. It means to draw closer to him in awe and reverence and piety, and just simply in amazement that the God of the universe has made us for the sole purpose of sharing his blessed life with us.

Ephesians

Now the passage from Ephesians, which challenges all modern sensibilities about marriage and equality of the sexes. Surely this comes either from Paul being a misogynist, or at least him being stuck in a domineering patriarchal society. And, just as surely, we would reject that.

People make a mistake about the Church and about this passage because they don't read the whole context of Ephesians. I understand why modern feminist interpretation hates this passage without that context. It's patriarchal. It's abusive. It's, in today's language, white male privilege.

But here is the difference that changes everything. Paul was speaking to the Christians in a patriarchal culture, that had those issues. He is developing an entirely new family code to transform that patriarchy into the notion of mutual submission, of mutual Christ like love. He is applying that new code to an inherently patriarchal structure.

It's the opposite of our modern critique of it. It's revolutionary, challenging the assumptions every adult Gentile male would have brought to family life. The old code was that he is primarily in a position of power over his wife, family and household. The new way is that he is to use his authority like Christ, in cruciform or self sacrificing love.

The new definition of authority in a family is where the head does everything to nurture his wife and family. Then, being subject to that head is a free and willing submission to a holy authority. The word subject is actually supposed to be

honour and respect. Not only that, it is to be mutual subordination to one another out of awe and reverence and piety.

What does Christ do for those who subject themselves to him? He handed himself over and sacrificed himself for us. Since he did that, showing us the way of love as sacrifice, then we ought die to our selfishness and give ourselves to others, especially to our spouses. This is the way of Christians.

I wondered how this was viewed in the early Church. John Chrysostom, in the 4th century, for example, challenges his hearers like this: Hey, if you want the kind of honour that the Church has for Christ, then take the same care for her as Christ has for the Church. He goes on to graphically describe what this looks like: Even if it shall be needful for you to give your life for her, even to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, or any suffering at all, don't refuse to do that. Even then, you won't have gone as far as Christ did. He gave this kind of love, this kind of subjection, this kind of unwearied affection, even to those who turned their back on him.

Call To Action

A lot of things about our faith are what we call mysteries. I have hope in a kingdom that seems shrouded in mystery. Human relationships are certainly a mystery, especially the marriage relationship. If we had that figured out, there would be no hostility, no divorce, no discord. St. Paul says that this Christ like love is a great mystery. In Latin, it is a sacramentum. That means it makes Christ truly present.

This sacramentum is troubling to me because, as a Christian, I know, or ought to know, what it means to love like Christ. On the other hand, it is inspiring because it is such a beautiful and elevated view of love and of family and marital relationships.

Shall we pray today, as we receive the body that Christ sacrificed out of love for us, that these are the kinds of relationships that become normal in our homes?

Key Scripture Passages

Ephesians: *Brothers and sisters, be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. The husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church, the body of which he is the Saviour ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her ... by cleansing her with the washing of water. Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies (which he) nourishes and tenderly cares for, as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body ... A man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.*

Psalms: *Happy is the one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways ... Your wife will be like a fruitful vine (and) your children will be like olive shoots around your table.*

Luke: *Jesus said: the kingdom of God ... is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed ... It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made their nests in its branches. To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with flour until it was all leavened.*