

V4_4th_of_Lent= The Duty of Husbands to Their Wives
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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls
O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+++ Jesus, Mary, Joseph +++

VOL. 4=THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

The Duty of Husbands to Their Wives

“For he himself knew what he would do.”— St. John 6: 6.

If husbands as well as wives always knew the duties of their state and fulfilled them properly, what a blessing that would be! There would be then constant peace and unity, and temporal and spiritual prosperity in that state. But if one of the married couple is wanting in these duties, the foundation of contention and discord is already laid; just as in an organ, when one of the pipes is out of tune, the whole instrument is spoiled. If I were to ask the cause of the strife that reigns in many a household, what answer should I get? The husband would angrily throw the whole blame on the wife; the wife would declare herself as innocent as an angel, and would accuse her husband of being the only disturber of peace. My opinion is that they should both take part of the blame to themselves, for they either do not know their duty, or, knowing it, they do not fulfill it as they ought. I shall begin with the duty of husbands, since they ought to have more sense and prudence, and are more frequently to be blamed for the want of harmony in the married state.

- I. *The explanation of the duty of husbands to their wives.*
- II. *Because that duty is not always properly fulfilled, much disunion is caused in the married state, and just reason for complaint is given to wives.*

I. It is true that the husband is the *head of the wife*. St. Paul says: “The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church” (Ephes. 5: 23). It is true that the husband is the *master of the house*: “Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephes. 5: 22). Yet, it must be well understood that if the husband is the head the wife is not therefore to be trodden under foot, as is, unfortunately, only too often the case! Eve, our first mother, was formed by God from the body of her future husband, Adam; but from what part of his body? Not from the head, lest she should assume authority over him; nor from the feet, lest he should treat her in an unbecoming manner; but from a rib which is situated in the centre of the body, near the heart, to signify that he should love his wife as his helper and companion. The husband is certainly master in the house, but the wife is not, therefore, his servant, on whom he can impose all sorts of degrading offices at will; much less is she to be treated tyrannically, as if she were a slave. The authority of the husband over his wife does not consist in treating her haughtily and arrogantly as an inferior, but in caring for her with mildness and tenderness. It is not an authority of cruelty, but of love, and of the same kind of love as that with which the soul governs the body, as St. Paul says: “Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephes. 5: 28).

Such, married people, is the authority that must obtain among you: “Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” “He that loveth his wife, loveth himself” (Ephes. 5: 29). And if men act against that love, have not wives a right to complain, and to ask meekly: Husband, is that the way you treat your own body? Are you so cruel to your own members? Is that the way in which you curse and swear against yourself? For I must tell you, in God’s name, that, according to St. Paul, you must treat me as you treat your own body. “For no man ever hated his own flesh” (Ephes. 5 : 33), or persecuted it. You must love me as you love yourself. “Let every one of you in particular love his wife as himself.” If you tell me to do anything, I must obey; but you must command me as the soul commands the body; that is to say, mildly and lovingly, and with a sincere desire to help me. You should not forget these words: “No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it and cherisheth it” (Ephes. 5 : 29). With what great care does not the soul look after the body, and provide it with everything necessary for nourishment, clothing, pleasure, and delight, so that it may eat, drink, sleep, and be clothed well? Does the body suffer an injury? How the soul is troubled thereat, and how it strives to ward off all hurt from the body and to protect it in every way! How rejoiced it is, on the contrary, if the body is in good health! In the same way men must love their wives. The latter must indeed contribute their share to the support of both; but that is principally the duty of the husband, who is bound to feed and clothe his wife and children decently. Adam alone, in punishment of his sin, received from God the command: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” As a general rule, it is only the wife who, on her marriage, must leave her home, and sometimes her country, and must sacrifice her beloved parents, brothers, and sisters, in order to follow her husband; so that she gives herself up altogether to his love and care as long as she lives. Is it not, then, your bounden duty to be to her as a father, mother, brother and sister; to care for her as a father, to replace by a fatherly tenderness the loving care of her parents, whom she abandoned for your sake, to rejoice with her in prosperity, to protect her from evil, and to care for her as you do for yourself? “Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies.”

St. Paul makes another beautiful comparison when he says: “The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church.” And he adds: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church and delivered himself up for it” (Ephes. 5: 25). Oh, what a perfect pattern of conjugal love! All the figures and symbols that the Prophets use in Holy Writ to denote Jesus Christ, represent him to us as a mild, patient, merciful, peaceful, and loving Master, “whose yoke

is sweet, and whose burden light.” During his life on earth, how friendly and amiable he was with all! While living in Nazareth with his Mother Mary and his foster-father St. Joseph, the people of the town used to say, when they were troubled or annoyed about anything, “Let us go to the Son of Mary,” that He may console us! How mild and patient he was with his Apostles when they were ignorant and rude fishermen; how he bore with their manifold faults and failings! With what love and even trustfulness he treated the wicked and sinful; so that the envious Pharisees who were eagerly looking for an opportunity of finding fault with him, could discover nothing to condemn in him, but that he was a friend and companion of sinners! And they tried thereby to render him contemptible in the eyes of the people, saying: “This man receives sinners, and eats with them.” With what sweet words he addressed even his tormentors while they were scourging him, crowning him with thorns, mocking at and blaspheming him and nailing him to the Cross! How fervently he prayed in his death-agony to his heavenly Father to forgive them!

Married men, there you have a pattern of the love you should have for your wives: that is to say, not merely as long as they are young and beautiful, but also when they are old and feeble; not merely when they are strong and healthy, but also when they are sickly and decrepit; not merely when they are agreeable and pleasing in their manners, but also when they are ill-tempered, peevish, and subject to many faults; not merely when they are ready to obey the least word, but also when they are obstinate and stiff-necked and cause you much annoyance. Nor must you love them as some do, who say: “I have had two pleasant days in the married state: the first was my wedding day, and the second the day on which I lost my wife by death.”

You must love your wives constantly till death, bearing their faults and shortcomings with mildness and patience; you must have a paternal care for them, and help them in all their necessities in a word, you must love them, “as Christ also loved the Church.” Oh, if all husbands were exact in fulfilling this duty, what would you wives then think? Would not many of you be better off than you are now? Would there not be more peace, union, and contentment in the married state than there now is? But, alas! it seems to me that I hear some, and perhaps many of you, sighing and lamenting to yourselves, and that, if you were allowed to do so, you would long since have interrupted me with your complaints. Well, let us bear them.

II. What are they?

1. Oh, God help me, if you were only in my house for a day and saw how my husband treats me! It is all very well to talk of the love that Christ has for his Church, and of his patience, mildness, and amiability! There is not a more cruel, harsh, and ill-tempered man to be found anywhere than my husband. How nice he was to me at first, before our marriage! I thought him an angel! But now I know him better; he has neither a friendly word nor a kind look for me the whole day long. If I say a word, he tells me at once to hold my tongue, and if I continue speaking, he storms at, and curses me. If anything goes wrong with him outside, I alone am to blame for it. If I sometimes commit a fault through carelessness or human frailty, he makes a terrible to-do about it! In fact, I do not know what to do, nor how I am to please him. The only return he makes for the services I try to render him is grumbling, abuse, and scolding. If I give way to tears and show how distressed I am, he treats me like a dog that barks at him in the street; nor is he satisfied if I laugh and enjoy myself. What am I to do? Ah, wretched me, in what a miserable state I am! How can we live in peace and union with each other? How can I have a proper love for such a man?

2. It is easy to talk of the love and care that the soul has for the body (says another)! My husband is a regular miser; he never gives me a penny to buy anything for the house; I have not decent clothes to wear; he hardly gives me and the children enough to eat.

3. My husband, says a third, is a confirmed idler, who never does anything; he is a good-for-nothing who will not work; I have to support him, instead of being supported by him; I must provide him with food and clothing, which he ought to be able to provide me with. If I did not work so hard and had not the children's earnings to help me, we might all starve.

4. Even that is not so bad, says a fourth; I have a spendthrift, drunken husband, who not only brings neither food nor money into the house, nor supplies us with proper clothing, but even makes away with what I try to save for the children from my dowry; what we earn during the week he brings to the drinking-house on Sundays and holydays, and leaves me and the children to suffer hunger and thirst and to pine away in misery. When he comes home drunk he makes such a row in the house that we are all disgraced before the neighbors. How can there be any love and union under such circumstances?

5. It is easy to talk of loving as one's self, says a fifth. My husband does not treat me like a wife, but like a servant-maid, or like a worthless rag that is trodden under foot! I am not allowed to say anything either to the servants or the children in the house; if I tell them to do something, he at once gives them a contrary order, and I have to hold my tongue; he thus makes me quite contemptible before the servants, nay, even before my own sons and daughters, who can see for themselves every day that I have nothing to say in the house, so that they can do as they please without minding me at all. Alas! how could I love such a man as I ought?

6. It is easy to speak of love, says a sixth, when you have, not a mild and patient master, but a cruel and overbearing tyrant, for a husband! It is an every-day occurrence for me to be beaten and kicked and dragged about by the hair. If I remain quiet under such treatment, hoping thereby to move him to pity, he thinks I despise him and becomes still more ferocious; if I cry out and weep, he beats me still worse, so that the neighbors are often afraid that he will kill me; it seems, indeed, as if he were tired of me, and that he will not be easy until I am dead. May God help me!

7. It is easy to speak of love, thinks a seventh, for she dare not say it. My husband hates me and cannot bear the sight of me, although he likes others well enough. Would that I were esteemed even as much as my servant-maid. She has a great deal more to say in the house than I have, and many an insult I have to suffer that I must keep locked up in my breast. Can there be any trial greater than this? Is it possible for true love and harmony to exist under such circumstances?

8. It is easy to talk, says another, of loving one's wife as Christ loves the Church! I have a wicked, vicious husband, whom I cannot induce to practice his religion; he never goes to church or to a sermon; I never see him say an Our Father; he will never listen to anything good. God knows whether he ever goes to confession and Communion, even at Easter! If he would only allow me to serve God as I wish! He cannot bear to see me pious; he keeps me and the children from practicing devotion; with the exception of Sundays and holydays, he will not allow me to go to church. If I wish to say my morning and evening prayers at home, I must do so stealthily, or he will snatch the prayer book or the rosary out of my hands! I am strictly forbidden to give alms, although we can well afford it; he curses and swears so fearfully that even the children are horrified and expostulate with him. He buys lost and stolen goods, and cares not whether it is right or wrong to do so; I must look on at that and dare not hope that I shall ever be allowed to make any restitution. I am afraid that he will thus drag me and the children down to hell with him. What sort of peace or quiet can I have with a man like that? I acknowledge that, if what you

say is true, and your husbands alone are to blame for it—and I must believe you until I know something to the contrary—you are indeed very badly off, and I pity your miserable condition from my heart. How you are to act in such circumstances, and how you can at least perform your duty as far as peace, contentment, and union are concerned, I will tell you for your consolation next Sunday. Meanwhile, have patience! Seek consolation from God.

But *woe to you, wicked husbands*, who thus ill-treat your wives; who thus renounce the love that God so emphatically commands you to have for them; who make their lives so hard and so despairing! You burden yourselves with countless, terrible sins, make your houses dwelling-places of the devil, and turn the holy state of marriage into a hell of confusion and despair! You should act the part of a tender father to your wives, who for you left house and home, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and you treat them like galley-slaves who are driven with blows to their daily labor! They have given themselves up to you by the bond of marriage, that they may find help, comfort, and joy in your company during life, and now they find that they have fallen into the hands of murderers, who, if they do not kill them, at least embitter their lives and torture them daily, nor can any good Samaritan come to their assistance! God has placed you as head over your wives, that you may support, comfort, and assist them, and you are instead of that, their butchers, who try to take away their lives! For what difference does it make whether you put them to death at once by the sword or by poison, or wear away their lives by continual persecution, so that they are forced to long for death as a relief from their sufferings? You are joined together that you may help each other in the service of God, and bear the trials of your state so as to attain your last end, the kingdom of heaven, but you act the part of devils to your wives, and try to bring them along with you from a temporal to an eternal hell!

But *woe to you!* How hateful and unbearable you make yourselves to the Lord God! He is a God of mildness and patience, a God of love and mercy, who has commanded us to love even our worst enemies and to treat them with mildness and kindness. How much more does he not command a husband thus to treat the wife that is given him by the Church, a wife that he takes with the promise to look upon her, not as a servant or a slave, but as the companion of his life, whom he is to love sincerely!

Woe to you again: “A hard heart shall fare evil at the last” (Eccles. 3: 27). And if the meek, the peaceful, the merciful are blessed, then there is no surer sign of reprobation than to give way to a hard-hearted and cruel nature. The sentence is already pronounced by the Judge against such people: “Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy” (James 2: 13). If this is true of all those who do not perform the works of charity and Christian mercy to their neighbor, although the latter may not be in any way connected with them, how will it be with those who are hard and cruel to their own wives, with whom they ought to have one body, one spirit, one heart?

Let no one try to excuse himself by saying that he cannot bear with his wife’s peevish humor. If you are not pleased to adapt yourself to her humor, why did you marry her? If you are so very sensitive that you cannot bear the least annoyance, why did you enter the married state? For, as a matter of course, something must now and then occur in that state which requires patience and meekness to be borne with. If your head is made of wax, you must not stand in the sun. I do not say that you must pass over all your wife’s faults in silence, nor let her rule over you as she pleases; by no means. And well I can imagine, too, that the husband is not always to have the whole blame, but that the wife must have her share also, in causing strife and disunion. It may often occur that she has to be warned and corrected; but the husband must correct his wife in the proper manner; not with shouting and roaring, not with abuse and foul language, nor with cursing and swearing; much less should he have recourse to beating and striking.

“Husbands, love your wives;” love them, “as your own bodies,” which you are afraid to injure in the least, and which you care for and look after most diligently. Love them, “as Christ loves his Church,” that is, at all times, in all circumstances, in sickness and health, in youth and old age, in riches and poverty, in fruitfulness and sterility, in prosperity and adversity, in constant peace and union with each other. If some of you have been hitherto harsh, cruel, and unmerciful to them, and are now ready to atone by a true and worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance, for the sins you have committed in a most inexcusable manner, against the express command of God, they are now ready to pardon you and forgive you from their hearts. Be reconciled again to each other, and replace your former harshness by a greater mildness, amiability, and love. Thus, Christian married people, must you love one another, until death separates you, and when you have both left this life an indissoluble bond of love will unite you again in the land of the living, where peace, repose, and union reign without disturbance and end. Amen.



Sin no more.

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