

V4_1st_after_Easter= The Duty of Wives to their Husbands

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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

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

The Duty of Wives to their Husbands

“Peace be with you.”— St. John 20:20.

This was the greeting of Jesus Christ to his disciples whenever he appeared to them after his Resurrection: “Peace be with you.” He knew well how much depends on peace. Christian married people, peace be with you! That is the best and most excellent thing I can wish you. For there is nothing more necessary, especially in the married life, than peace, union, and constant love with and for each other. There is no doubt husbands most frequently disturb this peace by not performing their duty as they ought. But it is not always the husbands who disturb peace, love, and union; very often the wives do that also, because they do not know their duty toward their husbands, or do not fulfill it properly. Today

I. I will explain the duty of wives to their husbands.

II. I will show that on account of the frequent neglect of this duty, much misunderstanding and disunion are caused in the married life, and further, I will explain how husbands must act in order to preserve peace in such circumstances.

I. “Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephes. 5: 22). Christian wives, although your husbands owe you love and fidelity as their companions, yet they are the masters of the house, they have authority over you, and you must be subject to them. And this is the first

duty toward your husband which the married state imposes on you, namely, *submissive obedience*.

1. The reason of this obedience is twofold; *it is according to the natural law, and it is a punishment of original sin*. The natural subjection of the wife to the husband is founded on the superiority of the male sex over the female. It is in accordance with reason that where there is question of authority amongst two individuals, the more excellent should have it. Our first father, Adam, came immediately from the hands of God, who himself formed the clay into a body and breathed the soul into it. Eve was made from a rib of Adam. Now, it is an axiom of jurists that a building belongs to the owner of the ground, as well as whatever crops the ground produces. God has given more of the wisdom, prudence, foresight, and fortitude that are necessary to govern to man than to woman (although there are many women who are much more clever than men). It is therefore natural and reasonable that, if one of the married pair is to govern the other, the weaker in understanding should submit to the stronger, and therefore the wife must obey her husband.

In addition to this natural law of subjection, which would also have been observed in Paradise in the state of innocence, there is still another which God imposed upon wives *in punishment of original sin*. Eve was the first to allow herself to be deceived by the serpent and to eat the forbidden fruit in the hope of becoming like to God and of being worthy of adoration. Nor was she content therewith: by her sweet and flattering words she induced her husband to follow her example and transgress the divine command, and thereby she brought destruction on us all. Therefore God said to her: *“In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children”* (Gen. 3: 16). That was *in punishment of her sin*. And immediately afterwards she heard the words: *“Thou shalt be under thy husband’s power, and he shall have dominion over thee”* (Gen. 3: 16). *That was because she had led him into sin*. If Eve before the fall was subject to her husband, according to the natural law, how could the same submission be imposed upon her as a punishment for her sin? Before the fall she was subject to her husband as to a gracious prince, but after it she had to obey him as her master: He shall have dominion over thee. So also St. Paul: “Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord.” Now, what is the difference between the government of a prince and that of a master? A prince commands his subjects according to the general law, and in matters pertaining to the general welfare; a master commands his subjects how, when, and where he pleases. “Such is my will, such my command;” and if you ask why: “My will is sufficient reason.”

But how, in what manner, are they to obey? With fear and reverence, answers St. Paul: “Let the wife fear her husband” (Ephes. 5: 33). Not, indeed, with a servile fear, but with a childlike respect, which springs from love, and in virtue of which a wife should dread contradicting her husband’s will in the least thing. How far must this obedience extend? Lest I should say too much, hear St. Paul again: “As the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things” (Ephes. 5: 24). In what? “In all things.” There you have it all in a word. In all things, provided that nothing is commanded against the will of God. Otherwise there is no exception; they must obey in all things, even against their will, and in disagreeable things. If the husband wishes the wife to hold her tongue, she must obey; if he tells her to remain at home, she must obey; if he commands her to return at a fixed hour, she must obey; if he desires her to undertake a certain work, to dress in a certain manner (provided it is lawful), she must obey; in all things she must submit to the good will and pleasure of her husband. This authority of the husband is even ratified by God to such an extent that God himself almost yields his own right in favor of it. For instance, the wife makes a vow to go on a pilgrimage, or to have so many Masses said, or to give so much to the poor, or to fast on certain days in the week, and so forth, the

husband can say: No, I will not allow it; you must remain at home; you must not have Masses said, nor give any more alms; you must eat and drink as usual. And if she gets scrupulous and says: But I have made a vow to do these things, he can answer: I release you from the vow, and free you from all such obligations. But you are not the Pope, to be able to absolve me from a vow! Although I am not the Pope, yet the Sacrament of Matrimony has given me power and right to free you from your vow. And such is the general doctrine of theologians. Such great authority has the husband over his wife!

Ah, Christian wives, do not get angry at what I say. If you were only constant in the practice of that obedience, you could not find a better means of having the supremacy that you perhaps long for and desire in your hearts; for in that way you would in a short time make your husbands subject to you, and rule over them as you please, so that, even if God had not commanded you to obey, and St. Paul had never said a word about it, your own advantage and profit ought to suggest it to you. A young wife went to an old, experienced, and clever man, to ask him how she should live in the married state so as to be always happy. The wise old man answered: "If you wish to rule over your husband, you must obey him," and do what he tells you; "for a good wife rules her husband by being obedient to him."

If there was ever a wife who had authority, it was Livia Augusta, who ruled Caesar, her husband, the ruler of the world. How did she manage that? She told it herself to an intimate friend: "By being very reserved, and by doing all that Augustus wished." In the same way Clotilde, the wife of Clovis, king of France, obtained authority over her husband and over the whole kingdom; she always obeyed the king with the greatest humility. Whenever he asked her to do anything, her answer was: "My lord, I have left my *will* in my father's house; here in France I have no will but that of my husband." And then Clovis used to say: "I have a wife of great understanding and excellent memory, but she has *no will*." In that way she brought matters so far, that once on his return from a battle in which he had been victorious, he publicly declared himself a Christian, and said: "Clovis has conquered his enemies, and Clotilde has conquered Clovis. I now renounce heathenism and embrace the religion that Clotilde has taught me by her example." Christian wives, is not that a fine way of gaining authority over your husbands? "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord."

2. The first obligation brings with it a second, namely, inviolable fidelity and helpfulness in domestic management. Certainly a man is obliged to support his wife and children, but the wife is not to remain idle on that account; she must help her husband according to his desire, and both must take their part in the duties and business of their state. Generally speaking, it is the man's duty to attend to out-door business, while the wife has to look after the house, to care for the children, and bring them up carefully in a Christian manner, to see that the servants do their work properly, to prepare her husband's meals in due time, and to look after all the other details of domestic management. If she is careless in this respect and neglects her business, or if she buys things or gives them away, or makes and receives presents, or otherwise arranges matters according to her own will and pleasure, she would act contrary to the fidelity she owes her husband, who is lord and master of the house, and whom she is bound to help by keeping his house for him as he wills, and not otherwise.

3. Finally, as the husband is bound to love his wife from his heart, so also *must she reciprocate this love*; and she must not only do so really in her heart, but also show it outwardly in her behavior. Hence she must always meet him with the greatest affection and kindness; she must contribute as much as possible to his repose, consolation, pleasure, and enjoyment; she must look after his health, as she would after her own; she must attend to him, if he is weak and

sickly; she must console him in sorrow and affliction; she must be careful of his good name, honor, and reputation, so that he can see by all her words and actions that she loves him sincerely as she loves herself. There are many examples of this conjugal affection on the part of wives related in the Sacred Scriptures: for instance, Michol, the wife of David, when she heard that the soldiers of her father Saul were seeking him, immediately let him down by a rope from a window of the house, and dressed up a wooden image and placed it in the bed, so as to deceive the soldiers and give her husband more time to escape.

The story of the women in Weimberg in Bavaria is well known. When Guelph, Duke of Bavaria, was besieged by Emperor Conrad III., with a great force, and was on the point of having his town burnt down, the women of the town sent a petition to the emperor, and asked him to allow them, since they had nothing to do with the war, to leave the town unharmed and to bring with them whatever each one could carry. Their petition was granted. The emperor came to see them leave the town, fully believing that they would bring away nothing but their clothes and a few domestic utensils; but what was his surprise when he saw all, from the duchess down to the lowliest matron, carrying their husbands on their backs out of the town, through the camp. This sight drew tears from the emperor, so that he spared the town and offered peace and friendship to the duke. I think, my dear brethren, that if the same chances were offered to wives in our days, under the same circumstances, many husbands would have to remain at home, or their wives would not carry them far without letting them fall, through want of proper love and affection.

II. It is intolerable for an inferior to usurp authority that does not belong to him, and to try to command his superior. It is unjust when one can expect neither consolation nor help from a person who is bound to assist him in bearing his burden. And it is a most painful thing when one is despised, neglected, and hated by a person from whom he has a right to expect a tender love and affection. Such is the wretchedness and misery of many husbands who have bad wives. Wives are bound to be subject to their husbands, and to obey the least sign, but, to the husband's great disgrace, how often do we not hear that the wife rules the house! Sometimes this happens through the husband's cowardice and timidity, but more frequently still from the obstinacy, pride, and arrogance of the wife, who refuses to obey, and insists on having her way in everything; otherwise she fills the house with murmurs, complaints, abuse, and curses. She goes out when and wherever she likes, remains away as long as she pleases, and follows her own inclination with regard to meals and other details of housekeeping. Is not that enough to exhaust any man's patience?

1. If the wife stops at home, as all decent and pious women should, unless the divine will or necessity requires otherwise, she is often of no more use in housekeeping than a silver goblet that is placed for show on the sideboard. Brought up idle and vain by her parents, she remains so in the married state, and brings up her daughters like herself. Her hands are too soft for her to work in the kitchen, in the garden, or in her room; these occupations are unfit for such a grand lady! She sleeps till late in the day, spends a long time before the looking-glass, receives visits and is glad of the chance to do so, goes to tea parties, and wastes her time in idle amusements which do not bring a penny into the house. If she has none of these things to pass away the time with, she pesters her poor husband, who has serious matters to think of with her vain and frivolous chatter, until he becomes almost distracted. St. Paul describes wives of this class: "And withal being idle, they learn to go about from house to house: and are not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not" (I Tim. 5: 13). These are not my words, they are the words of St. Paul. Nor do I mean to say that all wives are like that; let them take it for whom it is meant.

2. There are others who are too prodigal in spending money on dress, useless furniture, gambling, and often (what a shame for a woman!) on drink. If they see others of their condition well dressed, they must be like them; if others have new-fangled laces and ribbons, they are not easy until they have them, too, and for peace' sake their husbands are obliged to give in and spend their hard-earned money, although they can ill afford it, on those useless gimcracks. If a prudent husband objects to this expense, and disapproves of too great luxury in dress, oh, then it is all up with mutual love! His lady wife has neither a good word nor a kind look for him, and there is nothing but quarrelling in the house. If he tries to reason her out of her folly, he has his trouble for nothing, for there is no reasoning with that kind of vanity; the more reasons you bring forward, the more obstinate will the foolish woman grow, lest she should have to confess herself in the wrong. "I must dress in the fashion, like others of my condition," she says, whereas it is her bounden duty to do as her husband tells her. That is the law imposed on her by God; she must obey it, and not the law of the vain world.

3. And what is the use of all that luxury in dress? I am speaking to you, Christian wife; answer me! For whose sake do you dress in that way? Is it for your husband's, whom alone you must try to please? But he would be very glad if you were not so extravagant. Is it, then, to please others? At least it seems so, for when you are at home with your husband, and do not expect any visitors, you do not care how you dress. Your vain and fashionable apparel is kept for strangers whom you meet outside, or in society, in order to excite their admiration. What must your husband think of that, since he cannot bear to see you trying to attract the notice of others? And it is another hidden thorn in his side when he sees that you are always friendly and smiling with strangers, but gloomy and sour at home. Others, who are free from this vice, are of an obstinate, quarrelsome, and disagreeable disposition. They cannot bear the least thing and must always have the last word. If their husbands make a remark, they are sure to have some snappish answer ready, and then they complain that they are ill-treated and have no peace with their husbands.

4. Worthy, indeed, of pity are the unfortunate men who must live with wives of that kind! It was formerly the custom of the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews for men to purchase their wives from the parents, either by money or by long service; thus, for instance, the patriarch Jacob had to serve Laban for fourteen years in order to get his daughter Rachel in marriage. David had to slay two hundred Philistines, exposing his life to great danger, before he could get Michoh, Saul's daughter, in marriage. It seems also that you must dance attendance for a long time, flatter and do all kinds of service before getting your wives; but perhaps if you had foreseen to what sort of a life they would lead you, many of you would have said: "I will not purchase repentance so dearly!" The words are true: "He that hath found a good wife, hath found a good thing" (Prov. 18: 22). And again: "Happy is the husband of a good wife" (Ecclus. 16: 1). On the other hand, miserable are those who are tied to worthless wives. I will quote a few passages for you: "A man will choose any plague but the plague of the heart, and any wickedness but the wickedness of a woman There is no head worse than the head of a serpent, and there is no anger above the anger of a woman. It will be more agreeable to abide with a lion and a dragon, than to dwell with a wicked woman. All malice is short to the malice of a woman" (Ecclus. 25: 18-26).

How must men act so as to preserve union? Learn, then, that in all quarrels, the more sensible gives way, and the stronger yields to the weaker: "Ye husbands likewise dwelling with them according to knowledge, giving honor to the female as to the weaker vessel, and as to the co-heirs of the grace of life" (I Peter 3 : 7), so as to bear with something from them. Not, however, that you must let them rule over you, for St. Paul does not allow that; he says: "I do not allow the

woman to rule over her husband” (I Tim. 2: 12), but that you may overlook their faults and failings with as much patience as you can, whenever it is lawful to do so. You must often act as if you had neither eyes nor ears, and bear patiently and silently with a fault that is not very injurious to your domestic interests, as if you had not seen it. If your wife is too avaricious and miserly, think that at all events she will not make you poorer, and do you be all the more generous to the children, the servants, the poor and needy, and you will thus atone for her fault. If she is too extravagant, you can easily remedy that by not leaving too much in her hands, saying at the same time, in a friendly manner, that your circumstances do not allow of such expenditure, and therefore you must put a stop to it. If she is anxious to have the upper hand and to interfere too much, be patient with her; tell her often that she is quite right, and afterwards you can do as you think fit. If she is disobedient and obstinate, do not give her any command, but politely ask her to do as you desire, and let her see that you give in to her, not through want of manly courage, but through kindness, conjugal affection, and a love of peace. If she is too fond of talking remember that she is a woman, and do not expect miracles from her. If she is passionate, peevish, and quarrelsome, do not argue with her; if you stir the fire it will blaze all the brighter; be silent and laugh at her in your sleeve; she will soon stop of her own accord. The philosopher Socrates says of himself that he paid no more attention to the constant scolding of his wife, Xantippe, than to the creaking of a wheel. If you wish to get the best in a dispute, keep silent. The victory is complete when one remains silent and gives no answer to the other’s abusive words. If she is sometimes sulky and cross with you, pretend to take no notice, and let her come round of her own accord.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church.” “Let wives be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord.” Be obedient, respectful, helpful, and loving to them! Peace be with you! Oh, if all of you, husbands and wives, were always careful to do your duty properly, what peaceful, pleasant, and happy lives you would have! There is no one in the world without certain faults and failings, which are generally the cause of disunion and strife, even between those who would otherwise love each other dearly. Think that others must bear with your faults. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ” (Galat. 6: 2). Are your wives faulty? Then, husbands, you must bear with them. Are your husbands faulty? Then, wives, you must bear with them; and both of you in patience and Christian charity, for the love of God! May the bond of love unite your hearts in this short life, in order that it may unite your souls in the long life that is to come! Such is my heartfelt wish for you! Peace be with you. Amen.

O LORD, MAKE ME
AN INSTRUMENT OF THY PEACE



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