

V4_3rd_after_Epiphany= The Dispositions of Those Who Receive the Sacrament of Matrimony
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U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

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

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

Volume 4 - THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Dispositions of Those Who Receive the Sacrament of Matrimony

“Jesus saith to him: I will come.” Matthew 8: 7.

The Centurion did not ask Christ to come to his house, since he thought himself unworthy of that honor, saying with the greatest reverence: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof.” He merely represented briefly to our Lord the illness of his servant: “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented.” And Jesus was ready at once: I will come. How much more ready will he not be to go where he is invited and pressed to go, by humble and fervent prayer? My subject on last Sunday was, that if a marriage is to be happy, Jesus must be invited to it beforehand; long before any one intends embracing the married state, he must pray to God for light, and take counsel from him, to know if that is the state in which, according to the divine vocation, he can best attain his last end; and that, especially, on account of the many difficulties of this state, which cannot be overcome without special grace and help from God, Christians who are about to get married, if you invite Jesus in that way, I can assure you that he will say to you: “I will come.” But it is not enough to invite Jesus beforehand, because—

Jesus himself must come to the marriage. And how is Jesus to come to the marriage? He must come to you

I. In a pure conscience;

II. In a pure intention;

III. In a pure love.

The Catholic Church, acting on the command of Christ, looks upon the marriage-tie, when once fully contracted, as holy and as utterly indissoluble in any and every circumstance, even though the happiness of the whole world depended on its dissolution. Matrimony is a sacred and holy bond, raised by Christ to the dignity of a Sacrament: “Remember,” says St. Paul, “that marriage is honorable in all” (Hebr. 13: 4).

Look at it as you will, you will find it holy in all circumstances. Holy in its Founder, holy in its signification, as being a figure of the union and espousals of the divine Word with human nature, and of Christ with his Church, and of the Holy Ghost with the souls of the just. Holy in its matter, which consists of human bodies that are called, by the same Apostle, temples of the Holy Ghost. Holy in its effects, which are sanctifying grace, that is thereby increased in the soul, and actual grace, by which married people are strengthened and helped to fulfill the duties of their state. Holy in its end, which is to multiply the children of God, and to bring them to eternal salvation. Holy as a Sacrament instituted by Christ, and indeed, as St. Paul says in praise of it, a great Sacrament: “This is a great Sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church” (Ephes. 5: 32). Hence Jesus must come to the marriage in the pure consciences of those who are about to get married. Holy things must be treated holily. You would not take a precious diamond and throw to the fowl on the dung-hill, or a pearl and cast it before swine. Matrimony is a great and holy Sacrament, and therefore it must be received in the state of sanctifying grace; hence it would be a grievous sacrilege and a new sin to receive it with a conscience burdened by mortal sin. All Catholics know that it is a sacrilege to receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist without purity of conscience and the proper dispositions. This is no less true of all the Sacraments of the living. Is matrimony worthy of less respect and honor than the others? Is it not also instituted by Christ, the Saviour of the world? Has it not the same power, through the merits of his bitter Passion and death, to confer sanctifying grace like the others? May not all that can be said in praise of the other Sacraments, also be said of matrimony?

But if I could see into the hearts and consciences of those who are preparing for this Sacrament, should I always find Jesus there? How many should I not see who are far away from Jesus, and who have invited the devil to occupy the principal place at their marriage feast? For, how is this holy Sacrament generally treated? How great the difference that we make in our imagination and judgment between this and the other Sacraments! For the latter, people prepare more or less carefully, as for a supernatural work, while the former is looked upon as a mere natural and worldly business, the only sanctity of which consists in the ceremonies of the Church, the prayers that are read by the priest, and the blessing given by him. Thus, there is very little devotion, or reverence, or preparation of the soul for such a great Sacrament.

And how is that day sanctified, on which such a great, holy, and sacramental mystery is accomplished? Is Jesus present at every wedding? Can he be found in the midst of abuses and licentiousness that so often take place? Can he be found in the midst of impure pastimes and discourses; amid dancing and revelry; amid immoderate eating and drinking? Is there any real difference between such marriage feasts and the license of the carnival, which has come down to us from pagan times? I am filled with confusion when I think that the Jews in the Old Testament, when matrimony was not a sacrament, as it is now, put to shame the majority of Christians in this respect. We read in the eighth chapter of the Book of Tobias, that the younger Tobias, on the day of his marriage, said to Sara his bride: “Arise, and let us pray to God today, and tomorrow, and the next day: because for these three nights we are joined to God... For we are children of the Saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God.” “So they both arose, and prayed earnestly both together” (Tob. 8: 4). It is not forbidden to be merry and rejoice, but Jests must be present in the pure consciences of the merry-makers. The Scripture says of the marriage of Tobias: “They went to the feast;”—but in what manner—“but the marriage feast they celebrated also with the fear of the Lord” (Tob. 9: 12).

Theologians teach that when a person receives the Sacrament of Matrimony in the state of mortal sin, he is guilty of a twofold irreverence, since he is the minister as well as the recipient of the Sacrament. The parish-priest, although he is present, and blesses the newly married couple, does as little toward the Sacrament of Matrimony as the two witnesses. He is there only as the representative of the Church; the contracting parties alone administer the Sacrament to each other.

How can there be any blessing or happiness in such a marriage, from which Jesus is, so to say, driven away with contempt, in which the first step in the married life renews and increases enmity with God; in

which the married couple, instead of receiving the sacramental grace that is so necessary for the fulfillment of the duties of their state, bring down upon themselves the curse of God?

II. The married state must be entered on with a pure intention. The younger Tobias prayed: "And now, Lord, thou knowest that not for fleshly lust do I take my sister to wife, but only for the love of posterity, in which thy name may be blessed forever and ever" (Tob. 8: 9). So also prayed Sara, his wife: "Thou knowest, oh, Lord, that I never coveted a husband, and have kept my soul clean from all lust. . . . But a husband I consented to take, with thy fear, not with my lust" (Tob. 3: 16, 18). Christians who are about to get married, there you see the end and object of the married life, and the pure intention you must have in entering on it. There are, indeed, other motives which are lawful and even meritorious. There are many who fear that, on account of their frailty, they will not be able to preserve holy purity amidst so many dangers, and who get married in order to avoid offending God. This end is not a bad one in itself. "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is good for them if they so continue, even as I. But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7: 8).

But the true end and object of the married state, which ought to be first in the intention of all Christians who are called to that state by God, must be the bringing up of children, and that, too, through a supernatural motive, that they may multiply souls who can know, love, and serve God; according to the intention of Tobias: "In which thy name may be blessed forever and ever" (Tob. 8: 9). Therefore, the Christian bride and bridegroom must thus resolve within themselves: I will serve my God as long as I live; for this end I am in the world; but I will not do that alone, I must have others with me to help me in the praise and service of my God, namely, my children, whom I will train and educate for that end, and thus by my zeal and diligence increase the glory and honor of God here on earth, even in the souls of others; if my children die in their infancy, after receiving a new birth in God, by Baptism, they will be made friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ in the eternal joys of heaven, where they will bless God and pray for me; or if they live a long life, they will, after my death, serve God on earth. This is the proper end and object of the married state. This should be the intention of all pious married people, if they expect happiness and blessings.

How few are there who can truly say with Tobias: Lord, thou knowest, for thou canst see my heart that I am not looking for any sensual gratification, but for the accomplishment of thy will according to my vocation, and for thy greater honor and glory? Therefore, all who are about to get married should follow the beautiful advice of the angel Raphael to Tobias: "Take the virgin with the fear of the Lord, moved rather for love of children," and with the intention of bringing them up for God and for heaven, "than for lust" (Tob. 6: 17). And then Jesus will be present at the marriage, by purity of intention. Again, if the marriage is to be happy, Jesus must be present at it by a pure love.

III. How few marriages there are at which Christ is thus present! When he first came into the world there was no place for him at any of the inns of Bethlehem. I am afraid that if he were to go about seeking admittance to marriages, he would find no room in very many of them! For what a multitude of sins often accompany the bride and bridegroom to church, who thus enter the holy state of matrimony after having stained their virginal purity! How many marriages are not the actual result of unchastity? How often is it not the case that lost honor compels consent to marriage? Many go even so far as to think that a mere engagement is enough to make all things lawful to them. They keep company with each other, away from the eyes of their parents; they correspond, laugh and joke together, as if they were already married. The terrible day of divine justice will disclose a vast mass of sins which have been committed by thought, desire, and deed, and of which they who commit them take no account, because, they say, we are married in the sight of God. You will see that; and many parents, too, will learn what a fearful responsibility they incur by leaving their children alone with those whom they are about to marry, and by not preventing secret meetings and company keeping! They will learn, too, what a strict account they must render for having too long deferred without cause the marriage of their engaged children, and for having thus left the

latter in the proximate occasion of sin. In a word, as far as impure love and pleasure is concerned, not a whit more is allowed to those who are merely engaged than to other unmarried persons.

You wonder sometimes why there are so many unhappy marriages. To tell the truth, I wonder that there are not more of them, which end most miserably in continual quarrelling and fighting, in jealousy and suspicions, excited by the infidelity of one or other of the parties, so that there is no rest day or night; in frequent losses sustained in business, and in losses caused by the death, sickness, infirmities, disobedience, and ill-conduct of children; in continual impatience, discontent, trouble, and despair at the trials incidental to the state; and that they thus end miserably in time and in eternity. Then the unfortunate people sigh and moan and bewail their lot, without help, or advice, or consolation, or hope. But let them think for a moment how they entered on the married state, and how they lived before their marriage. Their sins are the torturers who now punish them.

The only consolation and advice that I can now give to you who have sinned in this way, is to make a virtue of necessity, to convert your present sufferings into eternal joys, and even to lighten your burden, if not to remove it altogether, when you have sufficiently atoned for your fault, by saying, with the penitent David, humbly confessing your sins and resigning yourselves to the will of God: "Thou art just, oh, Lord, and thy judgment is right" (Ps. 118: 137). Christians, if you are sincere in this, you may be certain that he, of whom David says: "A contrite and humbled heart thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 1: 19), although you have sinned against him, will not allow you to remain in your misery and suffering without consolation. If there are any who, having prepared the way for their marriage by sin, yet find things prospering with them, I cannot prophesy much good for them unless they truly repent, live more carefully, and fulfill the duties of their state exactly.

For you, single people, who think of getting married, the conclusion to be drawn from this instruction is evident enough. It rests with you now to profit by it. Bring Jesus to your wedding by purity of conscience and by preparing properly for such a holy Sacrament. Bring him with you by a pure intention, suited to the holy state of matrimony, and to insure his presence bring with you a pure and virginal love. Whenever you are assailed by an impure temptation, think to yourselves: Must I then give up all the happiness and blessings of my future state for a momentary pleasure? If you find yourselves in danger of sin, get married at once, so as to cut off the danger. If you are in those dispositions, I can assure you that Jesus will also say to you: "I will come," and bring with him the happiness and blessing which I wish you from my heart. Amen.

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