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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

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

The Conduct of Wives Whose Husbands Give them Cause for Disunion

*"They took up stones therefore to cast at him. But Jesus hid himself."*

See the unreasonable anger and rage of the Jews on one side, and the wonderful mildness and patience of Jesus Christ on the other! They accuse him of having a devil! "Thou hast a devil!" He answers, meekly: "I have not a devil!" They prepare to stone him to death, and he, the Almighty God, who with a word could reduce them to nothing, gives way humbly before their rage and resentment and hides himself.

Now, in the Jews we have an example of the injustice of many husbands, who treat their wives contrary to the law of Christian charity. Poor wives! what advice can be given to you in such circumstances? Are you ready to answer your husbands in an unchristian manner, and say to them: "Thou hast a devil," or abuse and revile them, saying: Our husbands are worse than demons? Oh, no; you would not do yourselves any good by such conduct! And what are you to do, then? See how Jesus Christ your Saviour acts: patience and meekness were the arms that he used against the cruel Jews. If I could persuade you to follow the same course, then in a short time peace and union would be restored to you, or at least you would find your cross much easier to bear. At all events, I will now tell you *how wives in such circumstances must behave, how they are to act, so as to preserve peace and quiet.*

I know that this is a great trial for a wife to live continually with a passionate, angry, coarse, quarrelsome, and cruel husband. It is a great trial when, through avarice, he does not give her proper food, clothing, or care; or when, through idleness and laziness, he is unwilling to work, or spends everything in drinking and gambling. It is a great trial to live with a husband who, through hatred and aversion, does not allow her to say a word in the house, or to give any command, and so makes her contemptible in the eyes of the servants and children. A great trial when, in addition, she is ill-treated and beaten by him. A great trial to live with one who forgets conjugal fidelity, leads an impure life, and gives his love to strangers. A great trial to have an irreligious husband, who will not allow her to attend to her soul. And I must also confess that it requires great and rare skill, in such circumstances, to preserve peace, or at least to keep one's own peace of heart. *Yet the knot is tied which no one can loose;* the heavy burden of the married state must be borne, and what cannot be cured must be endured. Plutarch writes that, formerly, it was the custom in Africa for a bride to go, on the day after her wedding, to her mother-in-law to ask for a dish-cloth, which was refused to her with much scolding and abuse. And why was this, my dear brethren? In order that the bride, at the very beginning of her wedded life, might learn to bear the trials and annoyances of her state, and thus not be so easily put out if her husband said or did anything disagreeable to her; for, as it would not be the first annoyance she had to bear, so it would not be the last. With the same thought, Christian wives, must you arm yourselves, as often as your husbands give you trouble. You must summon up all your patience and think: What am I to do? I must bear the yoke for life; this is certainly not the last trial that I will have to bear. As we grow old together, the crosses will probably increase, so that I must humbly resign myself to God's holy will. St. Paul says, speaking of those who intend to marry:

“Nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh” (I Cor. 8:28). And this advice is good for all wives in general. Now let each one hear how she is to act in the different trials already mentioned.

1. You have, then, as you say, a passionate, quarrelsome husband, who gives you neither a friendly word nor a kind look; who must have his way in everything; who curses and abuses you for the least fault. What are you to do? you ask. Listen: If you wish to preserve contentment and peace of heart, you must first take the best meaning out of everything; you must not imagine that your husband’s cross looks and harsh words come from hatred and aversion toward you, for there are men who are stern and serious in their manner, and harsh and unkind in their speech, yet they are not less loving at heart; nay, the harsher their words, the deeper, often, is their love. Think that their unkindness is caused by some bodily indisposition to which one man is more subject than another; or by some annoyance caused him elsewhere which he cannot easily forget. The master of a house has too many things to think of and to look after, to be always able to appear with a smiling face. Think that the cursing and abuse come from an evil habit, as is unfortunately the case with most people, whose mouths are constantly filled with that hellish language, and that therefore he does not mean it seriously. If this anger comes from a want of conjugal affection, and from hatred and aversion toward you, then try to find out the cause of this hatred; if you discover it in yourself, oh, do your best to remove it! There is no better way to extinguish a fire than to remove all inflammable material: take away the cause of his anger, and his aversion will soon cease, and you will be again united in the bonds of love.

2. Again, no matter what is the cause of your husband’s ill temper, be careful, above all, not to answer him back angrily, or contradict him, or give him curse for curse, abuse for abuse.

You must hold your tongue, and give way in everything, until his anger is over; if you make any answer, let it be in gentle words. Forget not the Proverb of Solomon (15:1): “A mild answer breaketh wrath, but a harsh word stirreth up fury;” and as even the meekest are aroused to impatience and anger by contradiction, so there is no nature so rough as not to be tamed when it meets nothing but patience and meekness.

3. Besides using loving words, show him that you have a real affection for him by doing all you can to please him, by having his food ready, looking after his clothing, and otherwise attending to his comforts as best you can. The world has before now seen fierce lions caressing those who drew a thorn out of their paws. There is no one so boorish and ill-tempered as not to be overcome and tamed at last by kind offices. Try that plan with your husband, and see whether he will not be kinder to you after a time. And if, as is very unlikely, your efforts are a failure, then have patience! Offer up your trials to God. He will know how to change your husband’s heart.

4. What am I to do? asks another. My husband is such a miser that he never gives me a penny, nor supplies me with proper clothing, so that I am ashamed to go out and appear amongst my equals, who are far better dressed than I. He hardly allows me sufficient food, or what he does give is of the worst quality, such as very poor people have. This is all the harder for me to bear since I was accustomed to better things in my father’s house, and we could fare much better now if my husband were not so mean and niggardly. The servants in other houses are better off than I and my children; I find that so hard to bear that I cannot live in peace and love with him.

I am well aware of it; it is a hard case enough with poor people who have to toil and labor for their daily bread; their extreme poverty makes them deserving of pity; but it is harder still for a respectable woman to be reduced to such straits through sheer avarice that she has barely enough to live upon.

But if you cannot make matters better, what will you do? Is that a reason for destroying the peace and concord of the married life? By no means; if you did so, you would make your cross heavier, instead of lighter. Think, therefore, in order not to lose your contentment, that it is due solely to the goodness of God that you are more wealthy than others. How many Saints have had far worse food, clothing, and bed than you, although you could have had, and deserved, far better?

As far as your clothing is concerned, if it is not according to your taste or in the fashion, if others of your rank and condition are better dressed than you, it does not follow that their dress is suited to their station or to yours. How many are there who dress above their station? It would be well for most husbands if they were far more economical in this point, and they would put a stop to excessive luxury in dress, and avert ruin from their families. Although your dress is not according to the fashion, still God knows you in it, and men, too, will learn to know you, perhaps all the better. You will not, on that account, be thought poorer or richer than you really are; but by being clad in that way, you will certainly be much richer than you seem to be. Finally, as far as food

and clothing are concerned, it is not always niggardliness on your husband's part if he is sparing with regard to them; it is often a useful and necessary economy. Perhaps there are debts that he has to pay, of which he does not wish to speak to you for fear of distressing you, and he is obliged to reduce his expenditure in order to meet them. Or he may act thus through a fatherly foresight for your interest, that you and your children may have enough to live on comfortably after his death.

5. How am I to act so as to preserve love and union with my husband, who is so idle and lazy that he earns nothing, or so stupid that he does not know how to earn anything; or so sick and feeble that he cannot work, and leaves the whole care of the house on my shoulders, so that I must work the whole day to support him and the children, although it is his duty to support me? Listen: If your husband is unable to work, or knows not how to earn anything, then the difficulty solves itself; he cannot help himself and is not to be blamed. But you must never reproach him with idleness or stupidity, especially before strangers. But if he refuses to work through sheer laziness, what am I then to do? Console yourself with the thought that it is better for your own and your children's eternal and perhaps temporal welfare to have only a little, than to have much. If your husband were industrious and diligent you would certainly be much better off as far as temporal wealth is concerned; but perhaps he would then force you to work harder and would be niggardly in supporting you. Or you might go to unnecessary expense through vanity, and so would have less at the end of the year than you have now, and you and your children would be less able to endure the hardships of poverty, because you would be used to an easy and comfortable life. At least you ought to be satisfied (since a man cannot have every perfection at once), even if your husband is idle, lazy, and good-for-nothing, if he lives in peace and quiet and is always friendly and loving to you. Oh, if every wife had that good fortune! How good would they not all be to their husbands!

6. Ah, says another, I wish my husband was like that; he comes home drunk every Sunday and holyday, and sometimes during the week also, and makes away with all our savings. How can I live in peace and love with him? The best advice I can give you is to take every opportunity of showing how abominable and degrading the vice of drunkenness is; but you must be careful how and when you do so. Most wives do it when their husbands come home drunk at night. That is not the time for reproach or exhortation; there is no use in saying anything when you will not be listened to; for then it is not reason, but strong drink, that is uppermost with your husband.

While he is in that state you should only give him kind words, and be friendly with him. But afterwards you can find an occasion of expostulating with him, when you think the drunken fit is over, or when you see that he has been impressed by a sermon, and has been to confession or to communion, or when he is more friendly than usual with you. Then entreat him with kind words to give up that vice, by which he places his soul in danger of hell; to take more care of his health, which he is ruining, and of his life, which he is shortening; to be more mindful of his honor and reputation, for he brings disgrace on himself among his neighbors and acquaintances by his drunken habits, and to have pity on his poor children, to whom he gives such a bad example and whom he is likely to reduce to beggary. But be careful not to get vexed if he sometimes takes a drop too much at home with others who visit him, although he may spend more than you like, for it is better to bear with a lesser evil than to run the risk of a greater one. If your husband sees in you a constant patience, friendliness, and love toward himself, and you unite fervent prayer to your gentle reproaches, he will enter into himself at last, acknowledge how dreadful the vice is to which he is addicted, break himself of it more and more, and finally give it up altogether.

7. Still more to be pitied are those unhappy wives whose husbands beat and ill-treat them as if they were servants or slaves. How can they live in peace and quiet? But I must ask you one question. Are you thus ill-treated because you are obstinate or disobedient, or on account of other serious faults, or is it simply because your husband is cruel and unmerciful by nature, although you are quite innocent? If the former is the case, then you must acknowledge that you are to blame, although husbands are guilty of sin when they make use of such cruel punishments, for Christian charity and conjugal love should suggest to them a milder form of chastisement and one less likely to interfere with domestic peace and harmony. Correct the fault that you know to be displeasing to your husband, although you may sometimes think you are in the right; be careful not to talk or act in such a way as to incur that ill-treatment again; try to please him and satisfy him in every way, for even the most savage beasts are tamed by kindness.

8. If you suffer innocently, and find that all your patience, mildness, kindness and love cannot save you from ill-treatment, then your innocence itself will be your greatest consolation in the sight of God, if you keep in his

friendship, and remember that he who is innocence itself suffered the shameful death of the Cross for you, and you will be ready to suffer anything, even undeservedly, in order to be more like your crucified Redeemer. This inward consolation of the heart will more than repay you for your bodily sufferings. Act like Christ when the Jews took up stones to throw at him: "But Jesus hid himself." Keep out of the way, and out of the house, if you can, until the storm is over. In that manner, if you cannot have peace with your cruel husbands, you will at least have peace with yourselves, and, what is most important of all, you will be at peace with God.

9. You must also follow the same plan, in order to live in peace and quiet, who have a wicked, irreligious husband, by whom, as you say, you are kept away from your religious duties. It is true that he can now and then prevent you from the outward practice of devotion, but he can never force you against your will to give up real interior piety and the true love of God, no matter how much he may try to do so; he may keep you busy at home every day during the week, so that you cannot go to church as you would wish, nor practice your usual devotions; but you must be satisfied; the fulfillment of the divine will does not consist in those things, and they make a great mistake who imagine that they cannot be pious nor do any good unless they spend the greater part of their time in the church and in the outward practice of devotion. No; the real, true, and genuine piety and devotion of the Christian wife consists in working diligently at home, fulfilling her husband's wishes in all things lawful and bringing up her children in the fear and love of God; it is that which God requires of you before anything else; that is your bounden duty, and that you can do, although you are often prevented from going to church. Your husband may hinder you from saying vocal prayers at home, or he may disturb you when saying them, but he cannot, no matter how he tries, keep you from inward prayer and union of the heart with God; he cannot hinder you from often having holy thoughts, making pious ejaculations, and often renewing your good intention; and that kind of piety is much better and more pleasing to God than long prayers that you read out of your book in the church. During your work, then, and while performing your domestic duties, keep yourself always in the presence of God; cry out to him frequently: "May thy holy will be done, oh, Lord! Give me patience under my trial!" And God will hear your prayer as well as if you made it on your knees before the altar. Every place is pleasing to God; he is always ready to give audience. He looks more to the hearts and the good will of his servants and handmaids, than to their works. Such was the way in which St. Catherine of Siena acted when her parents kept her employed in the kitchen, in order to put a stop to her devotions; the parents lost their trouble, for Catherine, even when a kitchen-maid, advanced rapidly in piety and virtue.

But if your husband tries to keep you away from pious works of obligation, or to lead you into sin, you must not and cannot obey him; you must firmly and earnestly give him the same answer that St. Dorothy gave the emperor, when he told her to renounce the true God and sacrifice to idols: "What," said she, undismayed, "the Emperor of heaven and earth has told me to serve him alone, and I must obey him rather than you." Such also should be your determination, Christian wives, at all times, even if your husbands raved and stormed at you like demons. In that way you will be martyrs for virtue and for the glory of God, and you will be of the number of those of whom Christ says: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew. 5:10). Continue in the fear of God with a childlike confidence, and love him with all your hearts; that is the best and surest means of converting a wicked husband, and bringing him to a better mode of life; as the Apostle says: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife" (I Cor. 7 : 14).

Finally, Christian wives, whatever trials you have to suffer from your husbands, do all you can to be peaceful and contented as far as yourselves are concerned. You will succeed in this if you only know how to give way meekly, and to bear every cross that you cannot avoid, with constant patience and resignation to the will of God. St. Augustine gives us an example of this in his own mother, Monica: She, as he relates, was very harshly treated by Patritius, her husband, yet she never gave him a cross word nor complained of him to others, and thus she brought him over, little by little, not only to be good and kind to her, but also to abandon heathenism and become a Christian. If you are not so successful, remember, at all events, that you have a fine opportunity of increasing your merit in the sight of God. There is no art required to love those who love us, to be obedient to, pleased, and satisfied with one who is all kindness and goodness to us. But to live in peace and love with a husband who often contradicts and annoys you is a sign of real heroic virtue. Remember that this is the ladder by which you have to ascend to heaven. According to the words of St. Paul: "The momentary and light weight of our tribulations worketh for us an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Amen.