

accurately every aspect of virginity. It would be a waste of words to bring this topic up again. I refer you to this book if you want a more detailed discussion, and will close with one final statement. We must strive for self-control . . . St Paul tells us to seek peace and the sanctification without which it is impossible to see the Lord. So whether we presently live in virginity, in our first marriage, or in our second, let us pursue holiness, that we may be counted worthy to see Him and to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, dominion, and honor, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

## HOMILY 20

### On Ephesians 5:22-33

*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.*

A certain wise man, when enumerating which blessings are most important included "a wife and husband who live in harmony."<sup>1</sup> In another place he emphasized this: "A friend or a companion never meets one amiss, but a wife with her husband is better than both."<sup>2</sup> From the beginning God in His providence has planned this union of man and woman, and has spoken of the two as one: "male and female He created them"<sup>3</sup> and "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>4</sup> There is no relationship between human beings so close as that of husband and wife, if they are united as they ought to be. When blessed David was mourning for Jonathan, who was of one soul with him, what comparison did he use to describe the loftiness of their love? "Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."<sup>5</sup> The power of this love is

<sup>1</sup>Sir 25:1.

<sup>2</sup>Sir 40:23.

<sup>3</sup>Gen 1:27.

<sup>4</sup>Gal 3:28.

<sup>5</sup>2 Sam 1:26.

truly stronger than any passion; other desires may be strong, but this one alone never fades. This love (eros) is deeply planted within our inmost being. Unnoticed by us, it attracts the bodies of men and women to each other, because in the beginning woman came forth from man, and from man and woman other men and women proceed. Can you see now how close this union is, and how God providentially created it from a single nature? He permitted Adam to marry Eve, who was more than sister or daughter; she was his own flesh! God caused the entire human race to proceed from this one point of origin. He did not, on the one hand, fashion woman independently from man; otherwise man would think of her as essentially different from himself. Nor did He enable woman to bear children without man; if this were the case she would be self-sufficient. Instead, just as the branches of a tree proceed from a single trunk, He made the one man Adam to be the origin of all mankind, both male and female, and made it impossible for men and women to be self-sufficient. Later, He forbade men to marry their sisters or daughters, so that our love would not be limited to members of our families, and withdrawn from the rest of the human race. All of this is implied in Christ's words: "He who made them from the beginning made them male and female."<sup>6</sup>

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love. St Paul would not speak so earnestly about this subject without serious reason; why else would he say, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord"? Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into

<sup>6</sup>Mt 19:4.

confusion and turned upside-down. When the generals of an army are at peace with each other, everything proceeds in an orderly fashion, and when they are not, everything is in disarray. It is the same here. For the sake of harmony, then, he said, "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord." What? How can He say elsewhere, "Whoever does not renounce wife or husband cannot follow Me"?<sup>7</sup> If a wife must be subject to her husband as to the Lord, how can He tell her to separate herself for the Lord's sake? Indeed she must be subject, but the word "as" does not always express equivalence. Either Paul means "as knowing that you are serving the Lord" (which indeed he says elsewhere, that even if the wife does not obey for her husband's sake, she must do so primarily for the Lord's sake); or else he means, "When you yield to your husband, consider that you are obeying him as part of your service to the Lord." If "he who resists the authorities (governments) resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment,"<sup>8</sup> how much more severely will God judge someone who resists not an external authority, but that of her own husband, which God has willed from the beginning?

Let us assume, then, that the husband is to occupy the place of the head, and the wife that of the body, and listen to what "headship" means: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands." Notice that after saying "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church," he immediately says that the Church is His Body, and He is Himself its Savior. It is the head that upholds the well-being of the body. In his other epistles Paul has already laid

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Lk 14:33, 18:29.<sup>8</sup>Rom 13:2.

the foundations of marital love, and has assigned to husband and wife each his proper place: to the husband one of leader and provider, and to the wife one of submission. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ—and the Church, remember, consists of both husbands and wives—so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands, as to God.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church" (v. 25). You have heard how important obedience is; you have praised and marvelled at Paul, how he welds our whole life together, as we would expect from an admirable and spiritual man. You have done well. But now listen to what else he requires from you; he has not finished with his example. "Husbands," he says, "love your wives, as Christ loved the Church." You have seen the amount of obedience necessary; now hear about the amount of love necessary. Do you want your wife to be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care of her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done. You are sacrificing yourself for someone to whom you are already joined, but He offered Himself up for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him. In the same way, then, as He honored her by putting at His feet one who turned her back on Him, who hated, rejected, and disdained Him, as He accomplished this not with threats, or violence, or terror, or anything else like that, but through His untiring love; so also you should behave toward your wife. Even if you see her belittling you, or despising and mocking you, still you will be able to subject her to yourself, through affection, kindness, and your great regard for her. There is no influence more powerful than the bond of love, especially for

husband and wife. A servant can be taught submission through fear; but even he, if provoked too much, will soon seek his escape. But one's partner for life, the mother of one's children, the source of one's every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience. What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband himself have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not with a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church.

He gave Himself up for her that "He might cleanse and sanctify her . . ." (v. 26). So the Church was not pure. She had blemishes, she was ugly and cheap. Whatever kind of wife you marry, you will never take a bride like Christ did when He married the Church; you will never marry anyone estranged from you as the Church was from Christ. Despite all this, He did not abhor or hate her for her extraordinary corruption. Do you want her corruption described? Paul says, "For once you were in darkness."<sup>9</sup> Do you see how black she was? Nothing is blacker than darkness. Think of her shamelessness; she passed her day in malice and envy, Paul says.<sup>10</sup> Look at her impurity; she was foolish and disobedient.<sup>11</sup> But what am I saying? She was foolish, her tongue was evil, but even though her wounds were so numerous, He sacrificed Himself for her in her corrupted state, as if she were in the bloom of youth, as if she were dearly beloved, and a wonderful beauty. St Paul marvelled at this, and said, "Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that

<sup>9</sup>Eph 5:8.

<sup>10</sup>Tit 3:3.

<sup>11</sup>Idem.

while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."<sup>12</sup> Though she was like this, Christ accepted her and made her beautiful. He washed her, and did not hesitate even to sacrifice Himself for her.

"That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (v. 26-27). "By the washing of water" He washes away her impurities. "With the word" he says. What word? "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup> And He has not merely honored her, but He has presented her to Himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Let us also, then, strive to attain this beauty, and we shall be able to create it within ourselves. Don't expect your wife to have things that are beyond her power. Remember that the Church received everything from her Lord's hands: by Him she was made glorious, by Him she was purified and freed from blemish. Don't turn your back on your wife because she is not beautiful. Listen to what Scripture says: "The bee is small among flying creatures, but her product is the best of sweet things."<sup>14</sup> Your wife is God's creation. If you reproach her, you are not condemning her but Him who made her. What can the woman do about it? If your wife is beautiful, don't praise her for it. Praise, hatred, and even love based on outward beauty come from impure souls. Seek beauty of soul, and imitate the Bridegroom of the Church. Outward beauty is full of conceit and contentiousness; it makes men jealous, and fills men with justful thought. But does it give any pleasure? Perhaps for one or two months, or a year at most but then no longer;

<sup>12</sup>Rom 5:7-8.

<sup>13</sup>Mt 28:19.

<sup>14</sup>Sir 11:3.

familiarity causes admiration to fade. Meanwhile, the evils arising from outward beauty remain; pride, foolishness, contempt of others. However, where outward beauty is of no concern none of this is to be found. The love that began on honest grounds still continues ardently, since its object is beauty of the soul, not of the body. Just think, what is more beautiful than the sky full of stars? Describe any woman's body you choose, and still there is none so fair; tell me about any eyes you like, yet none are so sparkling. When the stars were created, the very angels gazed in amazement, and we gaze with wonder now; but not with the same amazement as we did when we were children. This is what familiarity does; things no longer strike us in their original intensity. How much more so in the case of a wife! And if by some chance disease comes too, then all is immediately lost. Look for affection, gentleness, and humility in a wife; these are the tokens of beauty. But let us not seek lovely physical features, nor reproach her for lacking things over which she has no control. No; let us not reproach her for anything, or be impatient and sullen. Haven't you seen how many men, living with beautiful wives, have ended their lives in misery, and how many who have lived with those of no great beauty, have lived to extreme old age with great enjoyment? Let us wipe off the "spot" and smooth the "wrinkle" that is within, as it is written; let us do away with the blemishes that are on the soul. Such is the beauty God requires. Let us make her fair in God's sight, not in our own.

Let us not seek wealth, nor high social position (these are external things), but true nobility of soul. Let no one marry a woman for her money; such wealth is base and disgraceful. No, by no means let any one aspire to get rich from his wife. "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and

hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."<sup>15</sup> Don't look for great wealth in your wife, and you will find that everything else will go well. Who, tell me, would overlook the most important things to pay attention to secondary matters? And yet, to our sorrow, that is how we behave in practically every case. Yes, if we have a son, we worry about finding him a rich wife, and not about how to develop in him a virtuous nature; we worry how he might acquire money, but not manners. If we engage in business, we don't think about how it might be free from sin, but how it might bring in the most profit. Money is everything now, and so everything has become corrupted and ruined, because we are possessed by this passion for money.

"Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies" (v. 28). What does this mean? He is using a much stronger image and illustration now, much closer and plainer, and much more demanding. Some might not be convinced by his previous illustration, saying, "After all, He was Christ, and Christ is God—naturally He would sacrifice Himself." Paul's method is different now; he says, "husbands should love their wives"—because such love is an obligation, not a favor—"as their own bodies." Why? "For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (v. 29). That is, he takes particular care of it. How is she his flesh? Listen: "This at last is bone of my bones," said Adam, "and flesh of my flesh!"<sup>16</sup> and also, "They become one flesh."<sup>17</sup> So he nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, "as Christ does the Church" (v. 29). He returns here to his first comparison: ". . . because we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (v. 30). How is this true? Because Christ was born from our

<sup>15</sup>1 Tim 6:9.

<sup>16</sup>Gen 2:23.

<sup>17</sup>Gen 2:24.

matter, just as Eve was fashioned from Adam's flesh. Paul does well here to speak of flesh and bones, for the Lord has exalted our material substance by partaking of it Himself: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature."<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that He shares our nature, but how do we share His? How are we members of His flesh? We are truly members of Christ because through Him we were created, and we are truly members of His flesh because we are recreated by partaking of His mysteries. There are some who affirm that He came by water and blood but will not accept that the Holy Spirit enables us to share His same essence, through baptism. Foolish heretics! How can the children who confess His truth and are born again in the water not become His Body? St Paul explicitly says that we are members of His flesh and of His bones. Understand that Adam was fashioned from matter and Christ was born in the same. From Adam's side came the bearer of corruption, but from Christ's side came life. Death blossomed in paradise but was slain on the cross. The Son of God shares our nature so we can share His; as He has us in Him, so we have Him in us.

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh" (v. 31). There is another aspect of marital obligation: Paul shows that a man leaves his parents, who gave him life, and is joined to his wife, and that one flesh—father, mother, and child—results from the commingling of the two. The child is born from the union of their seed, so the three are one flesh. Our relationship to Christ is the same; we become one flesh with Him through communion, more truly one with Him than our children are one with us, because this has been His plan from the beginning.

Don't make excuses for yourselves; surely you realize

<sup>18</sup>Heb 2:14.

that your body has many defects. One person is lame, another has deformed feet or hands, another is sick in one way or other, yet never is anyone so grief-stricken that he cuts off his afflicted member. Instead, he pays more attention to it than to the rest of his body; naturally, since it is part of him. A man should love his spouse as much as he loves himself, not merely because they share the same nature; no, the obligation is far greater, because there are no longer two bodies, but one: he is the head, she the body. Paul says elsewhere, "The head of Christ is God,"<sup>19</sup> and I say that husband and wife are one body in the same way as Christ and the Father are one. Thus we see that the Father is our head also. Paul has combined two illustrations, the natural body and Christ's body; that is why he says, "This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church" (v. 32). What does this mean? The blessed Moses,—or rather, God—surely reveals in Genesis that for two to become one flesh is a great and wonderful mystery. Now Paul speaks of Christ as the greater mystery; for He left the Father and came down to us, and married His Bride, the Church, and became one spirit with her: "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him."<sup>20</sup> Paul says well, "This is a great mystery," as if he were saying, "Nevertheless the allegorical meaning does not invalidate married love." He returns to that subject in what follows.

"However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects<sup>21</sup> her husband" (v. 33). Indeed, of all actions, it is a mystery, a great mystery indeed, that a man should leave him who gave life to him and brought him up and her who suffered in labor and childbirth. For a man to leave those who have favored him

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 11:3.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor 6:17.

<sup>21</sup> φεβήσεται would be more accurately translated, "has in awe."

with so many great blessings, those with whom he has been in such close contact, and be united to one whom he has not always known and who often has nothing in common with him, and should honor her more than all others—that is a mystery indeed. Yet parents are not distressed when marriages take place, but when they don't! They are delighted to spend money lavishly on weddings—another great mystery indeed! And one that contains some hidden wisdom: Moses prophetically showed this to be so from the very beginning and Paul proclaims it now, when he compares it to Christ and the Church. This is said not for the husband's sake alone, however, but for the wife as well, so that he will cherish his own flesh, as Christ does the Church, and that she will respect her husband. Paul is no longer enumerating the duties of love only but of respect also. The wife is a second authority. She should not demand equality, for she is subject to the head; neither should the husband belittle her subjection, for she is the body. If the head despises the body, it will itself die. Rather, let the husband counterbalance her obedience with his love. Let the hands, the feet, and all the rest of the body's parts be dedicated to the service of the head; but let the head provide for the body, for the head is responsible for all the members. Nothing can be better than a union like this, but I know that some will say, "How can there be love where there is fear?" Most especially there, I say: she who fears, also loves, and she who loves her husband respects him because he is her head. Also, she loves him because he is a part of her body, since the head is a member of the body as well. Paul places the head in authority and the body in obedience for the sake of peace. Where there is equal authority, there never is peace. A household cannot be a democracy, ruled by everyone, but the authority must necessarily rest in one person. The same is true for the Church: when men are led by the Spirit of Christ, then there is peace. There were five thousand men in the Jeru-

saalem church, and they were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own,<sup>22</sup> but they were subject to one another; this surely is an illustration of wisdom and godly fear. Notice, however, that Paul explains love in detail, comparing it to Christ's love for the Church and our love for our own flesh, saying that for this reason a man leaves his father and mother, but he does not elaborate concerning fear. Why so? He would much prefer love to prevail, because where there is love, everything else follows, but where love is absent, fear will be of no use. If a man loves his wife, he will bear with her even when she isn't very obedient. How difficult it is to have harmony when husband and wife are not bound together by the power of love! Fear is no substitute for this. That is why he speaks at greater length about the stronger force. So if you think that the wife is the loser because she is told to fear her husband, remember that the principal duty of love is assigned to the husband, and you will see that it is her gain. "And what if my wife refuses to obey me?" a husband will ask. Never mind! Your obligation is to love her; do your duty! Even when we don't receive our due from others, we must always do our duty. Here is an example: Paul begins this passage by saying, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." If your spouse doesn't obey God's law, you are not excused. A wife should respect her husband even when he shows her no love, and a husband should love his wife even when she shows him no respect. Then they will both be found to lack nothing, since each has fulfilled the commandment given to him.

This, then, is what it means to marry in Christ: spiritual marriage is like spiritual birth, which is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh.<sup>23</sup> Consider the birth of Isaac; Scrip-

<sup>22</sup>Acts 4:32.

<sup>23</sup>Cf Jn 1:13.

ture says, "It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women."<sup>24</sup> Her marriage was not one of fleshly passion, but wholly spiritual, just as the soul is joined to God in an ineffable union which He alone knows: "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him."<sup>25</sup> See how he does not despise physical unity, however, but uses spiritual unity to illustrate it! How foolish are those who belittle marriage! If marriage were something to be condemned, Paul would never call Christ a bridegroom and the Church a bride, and then say this is an illustration of a man leaving his father and his mother, and again refer to Christ and the Church. The Psalmist prophesies of the Church when he says, "Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty,"<sup>26</sup> and the Gospel says concerning Christ: "I came from the Father and have come into the world."<sup>27</sup> When it says that Christ "left" the Father, don't imagine that there was a change of place, as there is with people. "I came" is not to be understood in terms of motion, but in reference to the incarnation.

Why does Paul speak of the husband being joined to the wife, but not of the wife to the husband? Since he is describing the duties of love, he addresses the man. He speaks to the woman concerning respect, saying that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church; but to the husband he speaks of love, and obliges him to love, and tells him how he should love, thus binding and cementing him to his wife. If a man leaves his father for his wife's sake, and then abandons her for whose sake he left his father, what pardon can he deserve? Do you not see, husband, the great honor that God desires

<sup>24</sup>Gen 18:11.

<sup>25</sup>1 Cor 6:17.

<sup>26</sup>Ps 45:10-11.

<sup>27</sup>Jn 16:28.

you to give your wife? He has taken you from your father and bound<sup>28</sup> you to her. How can a believing husband say that he has no obligation if his spouse disobeys him? Paul is lenient only when an unbeliever wishes to separate: "But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound."<sup>29</sup> And when you hear Paul say "fear" or "respect," ask for the respect due you from a free woman, not the fear you would demand from a slave. She is your body; if you do this, you dishonor yourself by dishonoring your own body. What does this "respect" entail? She should not stubbornly contradict you, and not rebel against your authority as if she were the head of the house; this is enough. If you desire greater respect, you must love as you are commanded. Then there will be no need for fear; love itself will accomplish everything. The female sex is rather weak and needs a lot of support, a lot of condescension. I am not condemning those who are joined in second marriages. God forbid! The Apostle Paul himself permits them, though indeed he does so as a concession. Provide your wife with everything and endure troubles for her sake; you are obliged to do so. Here Paul does not think it appropriate to illustrate his point with outside sources, as he does in so many other cases. The wisdom of Christ, so great and forceful, is sufficient, especially in the matter of the wife's subjection. "A man shall leave his father and mother," he says; but he does not say, "he shall dwell with," but instead, "he shall cling" to his wife, thus demonstrating the closeness of the union, and the sincerity of the love. And Paul is not satisfied even with this, but goes further, explaining the subjection of the wife in the context of the two being no longer two. He does not say "one spirit" or "one soul" (union like this is possible for anyone), but he says "one flesh." The

<sup>28</sup> Προσηλωσε = nailed.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Cor 7:15.

wife is a secondary authority, but nevertheless she possesses real authority and equality of dignity while the husband still retains the role of headship; the welfare of the household is thus maintained. Paul uses the example of Christ to show that we should not only love but also govern, "that she might be holy and without blemish." The word "flesh" and the phrase "shall cling" both refer to love, and making her "holy and without blemish" refer to headship. Do both these things, and everything else will follow. Seek the things which please God, and those which please man will follow soon enough. Instruct your wife, and your whole household will be in order and harmony. Listen to what Paul says: "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home."<sup>30</sup> If we regulate our households in this way, we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for indeed the household is a little Church. Therefore, it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives.

Consider Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac, and the three hundred eighteen men born in his house.<sup>31</sup> That household was united in harmony and piety, a perfect illustration of the apostolic precept. Sarah respected her husband; listen to her words: "It has not yet happened to me, and I am old, and my lord is old also."<sup>32</sup> He loved her in return and always did what she asked. Their son was virtuous, and their servants were so loyal that they willingly risked their lives for their master, without asking why. The chief servant was so admirable that he was entrusted with arranging Isaac's marriage, and had to go away on a long journey. As with a general whose troops are so well organized on the front that the enemy cannot find a place to penetrate for an attack, so it is with husband and wife: when

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor 14:35.

<sup>31</sup> Gen 14:14.

<sup>32</sup> Gen 18:12 (LXX).



the concerns of everyone in the house are the same, harmony reigns in the family, but if not, the entire household is easily broken up and destroyed.

Let us therefore painstakingly care for our wives and children. By doing so, we are making our obligation of headship an easy task. Thus we will have a good defense before Christ's judgment seat, and will be able to say, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel."<sup>33</sup> If the husband is admirable and the head sound, then the rest of the body will suffer no harm. Paul has precisely described for husband and wife what is fitting behavior for each: she should reverence him as the head and he should love her as his body. But how is this behavior achieved? That it must be clear; now I will tell you how. It will be achieved if we are detached from money, if we strive above everything for virtue, if we keep the fear of God before our eyes. What Paul says to servants in the next chapter applies to us as well, "... knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord."<sup>34</sup> Love her not so much for her own sake, but for Christ's sake. That is why he says, "be subject . . . as to the Lord." Do everything for the Lord's sake, in a spirit of obedience to Him. These words should be enough to convince us to avoid quarrels and disagreements. No husband should believe any accusation he hears from a third party about his wife, and vice versa; nor should a wife unreasonably monitor her husband's comings and goings, provided that he has always shown himself to be above suspicion. And what if you devote the day to your work and your friends, and the evening to your wife; but she is still not satisfied, but is jealous for more of your time? Don't be annoyed by her complaints; she loves you, she is not behaving absurdly—

<sup>33</sup>Is 18:8.<sup>34</sup>Eph 6:8.

her complains come from her fervent affection for you, and from fear. Yes, she is afraid that her marriage bed will be stolen, that someone will deprive her of her greatest blessing, that someone will take from her him who is her head.

When you are tempted to jealousy, think again of Abraham and Sarah's household. While Sarah was still barren, she herself asked Abraham to take her maid Hagar as a concubine. It was her idea alone; Abraham had not so much as suggested it, though they were childless in their old age. He chose to be a father rather than to grieve his wife, yet after all this, what did Sarah say to him once Hagar had conceived? "May the wrong done to me be on you! May the Lord judge between you and me!"<sup>35</sup> Now if he had been anyone else, would he not have been moved to anger? Would he not have said to her, "What do you mean? I had no desire to have anything to do with the woman; it was all your doing, and are you now blaming me?" No, he said nothing of the sort, but only, "Behold your maid is in your power; do to her as you please."<sup>36</sup> He gave up the woman who had shared his bed, who had therefore become one flesh with him, so as not to grieve Sarah; surely he must have valued his wife above everything. More than this, Hagar was bearing his child. What man would not pity a woman who had just conceived his own son? But righteous Abraham was unmoved, and put nothing before the love he owed his wife. Let us imitate his patience.

A wife should never nag her husband: "You lazy coward, you have no ambition! Look at our relatives and neighbors; they have plenty of money. Their wives have far more than I do." Let no wife say any such thing; she is her husband's body, and it is not for her to dictate to her head, but to submit and obey. "But why should she

<sup>35</sup>Gen 16:5.<sup>36</sup>Gen 16:6.

endure poverty?" some will ask. If she is poor, let her console herself by thinking of those who are much poorer still. If she really loved her husband, she would never speak to him like that, but would value having him close to her more than all the gold in the world. Likewise, if a husband has a wife who behaves this way, he must never exercise his authority by insulting and abusing her. Instead, he should show true nobility of spirit, and patiently remind her that in the wisdom of heaven, poverty is no evil. Then she will stop complaining. But he must not teach her only by words, but by deeds. He should teach her to be detached from high social position. If he is so himself, she will imitate him. Beginning on their wedding night, let him be an example of gentleness, temperance, and self-control; and she will be likewise. He should advise her not to decorate herself with golden earrings, necklaces, or other jewelry, or to accumulate expensive clothes. Instead, her appearance should be dignified, and dignity is never served by theatrical excess. Furnish your house neatly and soberly. If the bridegroom shows his wife that he takes no pleasure in worldly excess, and will not stand for it, their marriage will remain free from the evil influences that are so popular these days. Let them shun the immodest music and dancing that are currently so fashionable. I am aware that many people think me ridiculous for giving such advice; but if you listen to me, you will understand the advantages of a sober life-style more and more as time goes on. You will no longer laugh at me, but will laugh instead at the way people live now like silly children or drunken men. What is our duty, then? Remove from your lives shameful, immodest, and Satanic music, and don't associate with people who enjoy such profligate entertainment. When your bride sees your manner of life, she will say to herself, "Wonderful! What a wise man my husband is! He regards this passing life as nothing; he has married me to be a good mother for his children and a prudent

manager of his household." Will this sort of life be distasteful for a young bride? Only perhaps for the shortest time, and soon she will discover how delightful it is to live this way. She will retain her modesty if you retain yours. Don't engage in idle conversations; it never profits anyone to talk too much. Whenever you give your wife advice, always begin by telling her how much you love her. Nothing will persuade her so well to admit the wisdom of your words as her assurance that you are speaking to her with sincere affection. Tell her that you are convinced that money is not important, that only thieves thirst for it constantly, that you love her more than gold; and indeed an intelligent, discreet, and pious young woman is worth more than all the money in the world. Tell her that you love her more than your own life, because this present life is nothing, and that your only hope is that the two of you pass through this life in such a way that in the world to come you will be united in perfect love. Say to her, "Our time here is brief and fleeting, but if we are pleasing to God, we can exchange this life for the Kingdom to come. Then we will be perfectly one both with Christ and each other, and our pleasure will know no bounds. I value your love above all things, and nothing would be so bitter or painful to me as our being at odds with each other. Even if I lose everything, my affliction is tolerable if you will be true to me." Show her that you value her company, and prefer being at home to being out. Esteem her in the presence of your friends and children. Praise and show admiration for her good acts; and if she ever does anything foolish, advise her patiently. Pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honored than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage

is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.

If you are inclined to entertain and give dinner parties, there should be nothing immodest or excessive about them. And if you should find some poor, saintly man who just by stepping into your house would bring God's blessing upon you, invite him. Now I'll add one more thing: none of you should look for a rich woman to marry, but a poor one instead. You'll get no satisfaction from her money, since if she is rich she will annoy you with her taunts and demands. She'll be disrespectful and extravagant, and will frustrate you by saying things like, "Don't complain about all my clothes! I haven't spent anything of yours; I'm still wearing my own clothes bought with the inheritance my parents gave me." What are you saying, woman? Still wearing your own clothes? What can be worse than this sort of language? You no longer have a body of your own (since you gave it away in marriage), yet you have money of your own? After marriage, you are no longer two, but one flesh, and are your possessions still divided? Love of money! You have both become one person, one organism, and can you still say, "my own"? This cursed and abominable phrase comes from the devil. Things far nearer and dearer to us than material possessions God has made common to all: we can't say "my own light, my own sun, my own water." If all our greater blessings are held in common, why should money not be? Let the riches be lost ten thousand times over! Or rather let not the riches be lost, but that frame of mind that doesn't know how to use money, but holds it higher in esteem than all other things.

Teach her these lessons along with the others I have indicated, but do it with much compassion. The virtuous life has in itself much that is difficult to follow, so whenever you have to lecture her on the meaning of true wisdom, be sure that you humble yourself and that your words are full of grace and kindness. Above all, remove from her soul this notion of "mine" and "yours." If she

says the word "mine," ask her, "What things do you call yours? I honestly don't know what you mean; for my part, I have nothing of my own. How can you speak of 'mine' when everything is yours? I am yours!" These words aren't meant to flatter her, but they are full of wisdom and will soothe her anger, and end her disappointment. It is flattery when a man acts dishonorably with an evil motive in mind; this, however, is the most honorable of motives. When you say, "I am yours," you are repeating St Paul's own advice: "For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does."<sup>37</sup> Say also, "If I have no power over my own body, but rather you do, how much more power is yours over my material possessions?" By speaking this way you will put the devil to shame, and will firmly unite her to yourself. Thus you will teach her, by your own manner of speaking, never to speak in terms of "mine" and "yours."

Finally, never call her by her name alone, but with terms of endearment, honor, and love. If you honor her, she won't need honor from others; she won't desire praise from others if she enjoys the praise that comes from you. Prefer her before all others, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. She will in this way be persuaded to listen to none that are outside, but to disregard all the world except for you. Teach her to fear God, and all other good things will flow from this one lesson as from a fountain and your house will be filled with ten thousand blessings. If we seek the things that are perfect, the secondary things will follow. The Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."<sup>38</sup> What sort of person do you think the children of such parents will be? What

<sup>37</sup>1 Cor 7:4.

<sup>38</sup>Mt 6:33.

kind of person are all the others who associate with them? Will they not eventually be the recipients of countless blessings as well? For generally the children acquire the character of their parents, are formed in the mold of their parents' temperament, love the same things their parents love, talk in the same fashion, and work for the same ends. If we order our lives in this way and diligently study the Scriptures, we will find lessons to guide us in everything we need! In this way we will be able to please God, and to pass through the course of this life in virtue and to gain those blessings which He has promised to those who love Him, of which, God willing, may we be counted worthy through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, and power to the Father, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

## HOMILY 21

### On Ephesians 6:1-4

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and your mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise) "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." (Eph 6:1-3)*

St Paul develops his theme in an orderly fashion: he has spoken first concerning the husband, then the wife, who is second authority; now he proceeds to the next rank, namely the children. The husband is the head of the wife, and husband and wife together have authority over the children. Listen to what he says: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is the first commandment with a promise." He will not speak here about Christ, or other lofty subjects, but will direct his words to young minds; that is also why this passage is very short, since children have a short span of attention. Nor does he speak here about the kingdom to come, since children would not be able to understand, but he tells what a child's soul wants to hear most—how to have a long life. If anyone wonders why he doesn't speak about the kingdom of God, but simply gives them the Old Testament commandment, it is because he addresses the children on their own level, and because he is well aware that if husband and wife order their lives according to God's law, their children will also submit willingly to the same law. The most difficult element