

Feast of the Holy Family of Mary, Jesus and Joseph

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
<i>Response</i>	Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
<i>Second Reading</i>	Colossians 3:12-21
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Let the peace of Christ control your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 2:22-40

Welcome back everyone to the Mass Readings Explained. On this Sunday I would like to wish you once again a very Merry Christmas because, although through much of the world Christmas ends on December 25, for us as Catholics we know that the Christmas season extends, and that we're still in the important eight-day period known as the Octave of Christmas. During this octave, one of the most important feasts is the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and that's what we're celebrating today with a very rich selection of readings from the Gospel of Luke, also from the Old Testament and the writings of St. Paul. So without any further ado, let's begin with the Gospel reading for today, which is the famous story of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. So let's look at that, it's from Luke chapter 2, verse 22 through 40:

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord" and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the

child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.¹

Okay, that's a long one. You can see throughout the Christmas season we read, or we hear read, the stories of the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ over and over, and we'll hear them lots of times, but in this case we're moving, as we move through the Octave of Christmas, we're moving into the further accounts of Jesus as he was a child, as He was a baby, and one of the most important ones, in Luke's Gospel, is this Presentation in the Temple.

So, what's going on here, first point is, notice the depiction of the holy family here, Joseph and Mary and Jesus, as obedient to the law, as obedient to the Jewish Law of Moses. Obviously if you know any of my writings, you know that I like to focus on the Jewish roots of Christianity, I like to emphasize that Jesus was a Jew, but it's also important to remember that Joseph and Mary were also Jews; that they

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

practiced the religion of the Jewish people and they were therefore obedient to the law of the Jewish people, which was found in the books, above all in the Torah of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

So the first thing here about the holiness of the Holy Family is that it's tied to their obedience to Scripture and, in this case, Luke tells us about two scriptures in particular that they were following faithfully. The first one is from the book of Leviticus 12, it was the laws of purification for a mother after she had given birth to a child. So if you go back to Leviticus 12, it says that after a mother gave birth to a child she would be, in a sense, sequestered for a certain period of time, she would not go up to the Temple or the sanctuary for either 30 days, if it was a boy or 60 days if it was a young girl, and there are reasons for that that I don't have time to go into right now, but it was ritual purity laws which she would follow. And then after that period was over, she would go up into the sanctuary and bring a sacrifice on her behalf and maybe, it's hard to tell exactly, it could appear that she gives sacrifice on behalf of herself and on behalf of the child. In this case, so Leviticus 12:1-8 tells us that the law of the Lord says that those sacrifices could be a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons if the mother and father were too poor to sacrifice a lamb. So that first verse here shows us not only was the holy family devout, not only were they pious and obedient to the law, they were also very, very poor. In other words, at this point Joseph and Mary don't have enough money to even buy a lamb to offer as a purification sacrifice for following the laws of the book of Leviticus. So this is how we know the holy family was poor.

The second law that Luke tells us about here is Exodus 13, especially verses 2 and following, which says that every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord. Now what is this law about? It's kind of interesting; it's an ancient law, going back to the Old Testament, that basically said all firstborn sons, all firstborn lambs, and all first-fruits, whatever the firstlings were, they always belong to God. So when you harvest the first fruit of your grapes you give it to God; when the first lamb is born, you sacrifice that to God and then also, God says in a special way, that the firstborn son belongs to him but, obviously, you're not going to offer your firstborn son as a sacrifice, so what was developed was the idea that the firstborn son would be redeemed by going down to the Temple and offering some sacrifice on behalf or in place of the firstborn son. This is kind of an interesting practice for a number of reasons, one of which being that to this day many men who accept the

vocation to priesthood are actually firstborn sons, so in the Old Testament, the natural priesthood of the Old Testament was that every father was the priest over his family and the firstborn son was like the successor to that high priesthood, so the first born son was priest by rights; think here of Jacob and Esau, where Esau basically sells his priesthood to Jacob, the younger son for a bowl of stew. Even to this day it's interesting that amongst many priest, lots of them are first-born sons. I was recently at a conference for priests, about 250 priests were there, we were giving a retreat, and it was asked "How many of you are firstborn sons?" And more than half of the men raised their hands, it was really striking. So there's still some kind of natural, inbuilt desire for the first born son to offer themselves as a priest to the Lord. That's basically what is happening here, is that Christ, the baby Jesus, is being consecrated by Joseph and Mary as holy to the Lord; so they are following the law of Moses, both in Exodus and Leviticus, and they are doing so in poverty.

Now in response to that devotion, in response to that piety, we also see two very extraordinary things take place. The bringing of a sacrifice after childbirth will be an ordinary Jewish practice, but what wasn't ordinary about Jesus's presentation in the Temple was the response by the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna. Simeon gets a lot more airtime, so we're going to focus on him first. Basically it says Simeon was a righteous and devout man who was looking forward to the consolation of Israel. In other words, he was looking forward to the prophecies of the Old Testament being fulfilled, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit told him that he would not die until he had set his eyes on the Messiah, until he himself had personally witnessed the Messiah. Now when Jesus' parents bring him into the Temple, to basically perform the custom of the law as Luke tells us, this Simeon takes the baby in his arms and begins to utter this prophecy over the child. Now imagine being Joseph or Mary at this point, right, put yourself maybe in this circumstance. Maybe you've scheduled a baptism at your local parish, you're bringing the child in to have it baptized, which is a wonderful thing, but it's custom, it's part of our lives as Catholics, it's become something that's ordinary, part of Catholic life, and all of a sudden some strange old man takes the child from you, lifts them up and begins to utter a prophecy over the baby. That would be an extraordinary event and that's what Simeon does here, because he basically identifies the child Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, as the one for whom all of the people have waited, and in particular, notice what he says, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

So this is going to be the Messiah, who was long said would one day come and save not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, not only for the people of Israel, but for the nations of the world as well. Then Simeon turns to Mary and then utters an ominous prophecy as well in addition to this prophecy of glory and messianic identity, he also says that the child is set for the fall and the rise of many in Israel, he's destined to be a sign that's rejected because, as we'll see in the gospel of Luke, further on, Jesus is going to save the people but he's not going to do it without the cross. So we can already see the shadow the cross, kind of looming over this mystery of the presentation in the Temple, which makes sense by the way, because think about it, when will Christ actually be consecrated to God? When is he going to be offered not as a symbolic sacrifice but as a real sacrifice to God? Well it's not going to be at his presentation in the Temple, it's going to be at the crucifixion, when Christ will offer himself to the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as a true sacrifice for the sins of the world, for the forgiveness of people's sins.

So Simeon as prophet, in a sense, already sees Jesus, glimpses the shadow of the cross and he also turns to Mary and says a sword will pierce your own soul too, as a kind of anticipation of the fact that not only is Jesus going to die physically and exteriorly, his body will be put to death on the cross, but Mary will also suffer and, in a sense, die with him but interiorly, spiritually because the sword of his crucifixion is not going to pierce her body, it's going to pierce her soul, which is, by the way in the later tradition, why she is called the Queen of Martyrs. This is one of the most important passages in the New Testament about Mary's special and unique participation in the crucifixion and suffering and death of Christ. She shares in it in a unique way and Simeon recognizes that.

Okay, that is Simeon's prophecy, but we also have Anna here who was a prophetess living in the Temple. Unfortunately, Anna here recognizes Jesus and it says that she gave thanks to God and spoke to everyone who was waiting for the prophecies to be fulfilled about the child, but unfortunately we don't have her exact words. We don't get her actual prophecy. For our purposes here, what it shows is that both figures, Simeon and Anna, recognize Christ as the Messiah. How did the Holy Family respond to this? It is fascinating, it says when they had done their duty, performed everything according to law, they go back to their own city and the child grew and became strong. So the fact that he is the Messiah, the fact that he is the

long-awaited Savior, doesn't cause them to think, "well we have to do something different." No, their vocation is to family life. So they return to their homes and they begin to live out an ordinary but holy family life as they await the fulfillment of the words of Simeon and the words of Anna, as the child grows and becomes strong and filled with wisdom. Okay, so that's what we are celebrating on this feast day, that is the Gospel for the day.

But this isn't the only rich passage, if you go back to the Old Testament, we have some other extremely rich reflections on family life. This is one of my favorite passages, it is from the book of Sirach. If you go back to the book of Sirach 3, the readings for today are from verses 2-6 and 12-14. I am just going to read them and then I will say a few words about them. They're all about the fourth commandment in essence, honoring your father and your mother. This is what it says in Sirach 3:2:

For the Lord honored the father above the children,
and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.
Whoever honors his father atones for sins,
and whoever glorifies his mother is like one
who lays up treasure.
Whoever honors his father will be gladdened
by his own children,
and when he prays he will be heard.
Whoever glorifies his father will have long life,
and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother;

O son, help your father in his old age,
and do not grieve him as long as he lives;
even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance;
in all your strength do not despise him.
For kindness to a father will not be forgotten,
and against your sins it will be credited to you.

Okay, so what's going on here in the book of Sirach? Well, basically this is a kind of expansion or explanation of the implications of the fourth commandment. So if you go back to the book of Exodus 20, what was the fourth commandment? Honor your father and your mother. Okay, what does that mean? How do I honor my

father and my mother? And what Sirach here is doing is giving us practical, detailed explanations of how to carry this out. So the first thing it says is about honoring our father, let's focus on that. Notice here that it says that a person who honors their father atones for sin. This is really important. There were some righteous deeds in ancient Judaism that were not just seen as good, but as having the power to repair the damage done by sin, as atoning for sin. In contemporary Catholicism we would call these penitential acts. In other words, they are special acts of devotion or piety, that are not just good in themselves, but actually have the power to repair the damage done by sin, to atone for sin. That's how powerful honoring one's father is. So if have a lot of sins to atone for, basically Sirach is saying, "do yourself a favor, honor your father, keep the commandment." It also talks about the fact that whoever does this commandment, whoever honors his father, is going to experience joy. In particular, he will be joyful because he is going to be gladdened by children, by his own children. So why would that be the case? Well there is a kind of natural reciprocity here that if I curse my father who is the source of my own life - that I am his child — that would be at odds with me being blessed with my own children, receiving joy from my children. I think you can actually see this just on a practical level. If you see someone who has a healthy relationship with their own father or their own parents, the likelihood that they'll have a healthy relationship with their children is increased just because of that natural habit of learning to honor the father. That is then going to bear itself out in the habit of having a peaceful and loving family life.

It also says something interesting...that if we want our prayers to be heard by God, then we need to honor our parents, we need to honor our fathers. So when we pray to God the Father, he will hear us if we honor our earthly fathers. And then finally, it also promises longevity — that is kind of interesting — if we honor our parents we will have long life. Why would that be the case? Well think about it. Our parents are the source of our natural life, so if we dishonor our parents or we curse the source of our own life, you can see how one of the effects of that on a spiritual level would be a kind of decrease in our natural powers. If we will bad things for the ones who gave us life, then it would be fitting that our own life would be shortened or taken away. So God is trying to say, positively speaking, if we honor the ones who gave us life, we can also be blessed with long life. And remember, this is the Old Testament, where the promises of God are going to be fulfilled in material, earthly ways as a preparation for the fulfillment of God's promises

through invisible, spiritual ways in the New Covenant. So that's honoring the father.

What about our relation with our mother? This gets even more interesting because it says you honor your father, but you glorify your mother. The Greek word here is literally glorify, which is interesting because it's an actual translation, a literal translation, of the word in Exodus. So although most of us learned in catechism that the commandment is honor your father, the Hebrew is actually stronger than that. In Hebrew the word for honor comes from the Hebrew word *kabodah*, which is the word for glory, *kabod* is the glory of God. So we are not just supposed to honor our father and mother in the sense of begrudgingly show deference to them, we are supposed to glorify them. We are supposed to lavish praise upon them, to honor them in an extraordinary way, not just an ordinary way. And so here Sirach takes up that language and says glorify your mother, and when you do this you are going to lay up treasure. Now what does that mean? Well it's laying up treasure against the debt of our sin. A very common metaphor in the book of Sirach is that our sins are like debts that we have to pay off, and our righteous deeds are like credits that can undo the effects of that debt. Jesus actually uses this language in the Sermon on the Mount when he says "lay up for yourself treasure in heaven." Right. Not on earth but in heaven. What kind of treasure is he talking about? He is talking about spiritual wealth. He is talking about the spiritual treasure that we amass from every good deed that we do that is done out of charity and obedience to God. So when we glorify our mothers, we lay up treasure, heavenly treasure so to speak, and we also give joy to our mothers. We just refresh her as the book of Sirach says.

And then finally, the last directives here are very powerful and I think they are a real challenge to us today in a culture that does not see the elderly as valuable. We are to help our parents in their old age. Sirach just focuses on the father figure here, but it can be applied to either father or mother. So Sirach tells us that we have to help our fathers in their old age, and in particular we need to avoid the temptation of despising elderly parents as they start to lose their strength or as they start to lose their mental faculties or their mental capabilities. You can think about memory loss or dementia or Alzheimer's, those are exaggerated examples of what happens to everyone as they age. Our mental faculties grow weak and it is easy for the young to despise the weakness of the elderly, but Sirach is warning us here, do

not do that. Help your parents in their old age. Help your father in his old age. Don't despise them and that if you do this, if you show kindness to a parent in their old age, it will be credited to you against the debt of your sins. So this is very serious business and again, if you have many sins, and you would like to try to repair some of the damage done by that, there are lots of things you can do. You can give to the poor, you can worship God, but you can also perform the fourth commandment faithfully and joyfully, which is honoring your parents, especially when they enter into their twilight years and they get older and they begin to develop some of the weaknesses that we see spoken of here in Sirach. Alright, so that is the first reading from the Old Testament, a very challenging reading. I would really encourage everyone out there to pray about it, how do I honor my father and mother, especially if they are elderly? What do I do for them? How do I care for them? That's holiness in family life.

Alright, the Responsorial Psalm for this week is a wonderful, beautiful bridge. It is one of my favorite Psalms, and it really is just a Psalm about family life and the blessing of the family that fears God. So it says this, Psalm 128:

Blessed is every one who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

And here it is addressing the husband and father:

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
Lo, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

Beautiful imagery here. Actually, this Psalm is how Pope Francis begins his apostolic letter *Amoris Laetitia* on the family. He starts with Psalm 128 and he kind of takes you on a journey through what a pious, holy and joyful family...what does that look like in the Bible? What does Scripture say about a family that fears God? Well it gives certain characteristics here. First, notice they are gathered

around the table. So a family — you hear often times a family that prays together stays together — that eats together also stays together. So in antiquity this was one of the central moments of the day, when the family would gather around the table to eat as a family, to thank the Lord for the life and the food and drink that they've received in sustaining the family. Secondly, notice that their happiness as a family is not rooted in wealth, it's not rooted in possessions, it's rooted in the fear of the Lord. So blessed is the man and blessed is the family that fears the Lord. And I probably said this before, but I will say it again. When you see this expression fear the Lord, it doesn't mean blessed is the family that is afraid of God, like fear and trembling in the presence of God because they think God is a tyrant who is out to get them. No, it means reverence for the Lord, that acknowledges that he is God and they are not, and that he is the source of their life and all the blessings that you get as a family, they all come from God.

And then finally, it uses two beautiful images here as the wife of the family, the mother, as being like a fruitful vine and then the children like olive shoots around the table. So the comparison here is of the the family to an olive tree, which is an interesting comparison because olive trees grow slowly and they take a long time to bear fruit. I think I mentioned this in one of my previous videos. I was doing a little more research on it the other day, and some species of olive trees take over 10 years before they even bear a single fruit. So the idea is that your children will bear fruit eventually, but they have to grow up first. It takes time. So there's a long-term investment in family life. But if the family fears the Lord, eventually those children will bear fruit. They will be like olive trees carrying on, to this day what we call, the family tree. That is the idea, trees take a long time to grow and to bear fruit. This is a beautiful image here of a holy family in the Old Testament.

Okay, and in this case, because it's a feast day, I will actually take a moment or two to focus on the second reading for the week. The second reading is from Colossians, it is from one of the letters of St. Paul. And because it's a feast day and not ordinary time, it is thematically linked to the other readings for the day. In this case it's focused on St. Paul's teaching for the Christian family from his letter to the Colossians 3:12-21. This a beautiful, beautiful passage. You can find a similar passage in Ephesians 5, that's the more famous version of Paul's teaching for families, but every year at Christmas time the Church puts this particular passage before us to give us an image of not what Old Testament family life looks like, but

what Christian family life looks like in the new covenant. So listen to these words of wisdom from St. Paul. He says this:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Alright, pause there for a second. What has Paul just done? He's given us a list of all the major Christian virtues: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness (that means gentleness), patience, forgiveness, harmony and above all love (agape). Now why does the Church give us that? Do you think perhaps the Church knows that living life in a family is not easy and that is easy to be unkind, impatient, prideful, lacking forgiveness, not having harmony, having discord? Yeah, the Church knows that all of those things afflict family life, especially modern family life, where there has been such a breakdown of the family. So it is wonderful that the Church is giving us this vision of the kind of virtues we need to cultivate if we are going to have peace and harmony in the family. Above all forgiveness, as well as patience with one another, forbearing one another; because families are going to hurt one another. You hurt the people that you are closest to so easily. We need these admonitions from St. Paul to show us the kind of virtue that we have to intentionally cultivate in our family life if we are going to have happiness in our home. Especially gratitude, there notice, it is so easy to complain all the time about the difficulties of family life. Well what does Paul say? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" and do everything with thankfulness. Do everything with thanksgiving in your heart, praising God for the many blessings that come with family life. Now I could stop there and get off easy, but I won't because the next verses are some more challenging verses. And I have done a full presentation on this on a CD called *Wives Do What?! Ephesians 5 & St. Paul's Life-Changing Vision of the Christian Family*. You can check that out if you want an hour long

discussion of the implications of this passage, but for now I want to just keep it short and sweet and highlight here that Paul brings his discussion of the Christian family to a close by giving specific exhortations to four groups: wives, husbands, children and fathers. This is what he says in these last verses:

Wives, be subject [or submissive or subordinate as some translations will say] to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

And then finally, and this was my favorite verse when I was a kid:

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

So I would always look at my parents and think “listen, take it easy on us, It can be tough to be a kid sometimes.” So that's the closing verse here for this exhortation to children. I love this passage from Paul on the Feast of the Holy Family, precisely because it is a specific address to different groups within the family. You don't get that very often, and I still remember, even as a kid at Christmas time, kind of perking up when I heard these verses because it was directly addressed to me as a child. And the same thing with husbands and wives, it is specifically addressed to them. But it can be a cause of some difficulty or consternation because it's not exactly clear what Paul means, especially his exhortation to wives. When he says wives be submissive, subordinate or subject, what does that mean? Is Paul here, through the Holy Spirit, endorsing a kind of chauvinism, in which he's basically giving the husband's license to tyrannize his wife or to abuse his wife or to dominate his wife? Is that with this is, Paul the chauvinist? What does he mean by wives be subordinate? And also too, why does he exhort husbands to love their wives? I mean do we need a command to love one's wife? What's going on here?

So real quickly here, first and foremost, let me look at the wives subordinate passage first. Here what I'd like to do is not just draw on the wisdom of the tradition, but on the teaching of the popes themselves. What does the Church say about this passage? How have the Popes interpreted it? And for this case I draw on two popes in particular. First, St. John Paul II in his famous Theology of the

Body, he actually addressed the meaning of submission in Paul's letters. And he pointed out that although in Colossians we don't see this specifically brought up, in the parallel passage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes clear that the kind of submission he's calling for in marriage is not one-sided, it is a mutual submission by which the spouses, the husband and the wife, offer themselves in submission to one another. So John Paul II said this, and I am quoting him here:

This relationship is nevertheless not one-sided submission... Husband and wife are, in fact, “subject to one another,” mutually subordinated to one another. The source of this reciprocal submission lies in Christian pietas and its expression is love.²

So the first point John Paul makes here is that however you are going to interpret Paul's specific directives to wives and husbands after this, we always need to remember that the overarching context of his instruction is mutual subordination and mutual love between husband and wife. So it is not as if because Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives, wives don't have to love their husbands; or because Paul exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands, there is no subordination of the husband to the wife of any kind. No, there is a mutual subordination and there's a mutual love because of the reciprocity of the husband laying down his life for his bride and the wife giving herself as a gift back to the husband. That's what marriage is all about, this covenant relationship of love. But within that context of love, Paul does give specific directives that are particular to the wife and to the husband, and they are unique to each of those roles. And Pope Pius XI in his beautiful encyclical on Christian marriage, called *Casti Connubii*, that came out in 1930, he actually explains what this means and what it doesn't mean. So what does Paul mean when he tells wives to be subject to their husbands in a specific way. Listen to the words of Pope Pius XI, he says this:

This subjection, however, does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband's every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to wife; nor, in fine, does it imply that the wife should be put on a level with those persons who in law are called minors, to

² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 473

whom it is not customary to allow free exercise of their rights on account of their lack of mature judgment, or of their ignorance of human affairs...

Alright, pause there. Notice what the Pope is saying here. Contrary to what many people assume when they hear Paul's words, "wives be submissive," the text does not mean that she has to obey her husband's every request if it's not in harmony with reason or in harmony with the dignity due to her as a human person. Nor does it mean that she is on the same level as the children. That is really important. The spouses have a different relationship than the children. So what does it mean? Well Pius XI concludes by saying this:

But it [St. Paul's teaching] forbids that exaggerated liberty which cares not for the good of the family; it forbids that in this body which is the family, the heart be separated from the head to the great detriment of the whole body and the proximate danger of ruin. For if the man is the head, the woman is the heart, and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love...³

In other words, what Paul there is doing is calling husbands and wives, and wives in particular and husbands in particular, to live out their vocation not just in mutual subordination, but in such a way that the family forms a living organism, with the husband as spiritual leader or as head of the family, and with the woman as, in a sense, the emotional leader or the relational leader as the heart of the family. I always like to tell students, which one is more important, your head or your heart? Which one can you live without, the head or the heart? If you cut off the head, the body dies. If you cut out the heart, the body dies. Both of them are needed in the family, but they function in different ways. They have different roles in the relationship within the family in order to give order, harmony and peace to the family. And that's really what Paul's talking about, he is exhorting husbands to choose their wives, to love their wives, to lay down their lives for their wives; and he's exhorting wives to respect their husbands, and in particular to respect their role as the spiritual leader of the family. Which by the way, to all you men out there, if that's not a role that you're taking yet, this Sunday reading should challenge you. If you want to be the natural leader of your family, you need to lead in the supernatural as well. If you want to be the financial leader of your family, then you

Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubii* nos. 26-28

need to be the prayerful leader of your family as well. Scripture calls a man to be the spiritual head of his household, and so to take the reins and to initiate that spiritual leadership is essential for having harmony and peace within the family. He is also calling children, last but certainly not least, to obey their parents and for parents not to be overbearing on the children, to be gentle, to be patient, to be firm to be sure, but not to beat children down to where they lose hope or they lose heart as they go through that process of growing, like olive shoots, which grow slowly, to one day bear fruit as Christians and in Christian families in their own right.