

The Holy Family
(Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, Year A, B, C)

Colossians 3:12-21—Christian Husbands, Wives, and Children

1. Christian Virtues: above all “love”; context of everything else Paul says (3:12-17)
2. Wives: be “subordinate” (Greek *hypotassomai*) ≠ inferior (3:18; cf. Luke 2:51)
3. Husbands: “love” (Greek *agapaō*) your wives; = sacrificial love (3:19; cf. Eph 5:22)
4. Children: “obey” your parents “in everything” (3:20)
5. Fathers: “do not provoke your children”; i.e., gentleness and justice (3:21)

The Popes on the Teaching of Paul

John Paul II: 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. (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 473)

Pope Pius XI: *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 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... 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... (Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubi* nos. 26-28)*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (The Holy Family, Year A)

1. What do you think of Paul’s teachings that wives should be “subordinate” to their husbands? Or that husbands should “love” their wives? How do most people interpret these verses? What have the Popes taught about the proper interpretation of this passage?

For Further Reading

1. Brant Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*. New York: Image, 2014. See pp. 136-65 on the mystery of Christ’s love for the church as a model for marriage.