

Instructions for Wives and Husbands (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Ephesians 5:21-32—“Wives Be Subject,” “Husbands Love Your Wives”

1. **Mutual Subjection:** “be subject (Greek *hypotassomai*) to one another” (5:21)
 - a. Not “inferiority,” but “*ordered under*” (e.g., leadership, headship)
 - b. Jesus was “subject” (Greek *hypotassomai*) to Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51)
 - c. Christ will be “subject” (Greek *hypotassomai*) to the Father (1 Cor 15:28)!
2. **Wives:** Be “submissive” or “subject (Greek *hypotassomai*)” (5:22-24)
 - a. **Head:** Husband is the “head” of the wife
 - b. **Analogy:** like Christ is “head” of the “Church”
 - c. **Total:** “be subject in everything,” as Church is to Christ
3. **Husbands:** “love” (Greek *agapaō*) your wives (5:25-30)
 - a. **Analogy:** “as Christ loved the church” (5:25)
 - b. **Sacrifice:** “gave himself up for her” (5:25)
 - c. **Sanctification:** “that he might sanctify (make holy) her” (5:26)
 - d. **Baptism:** “washing of water with the word” (5:26)
 - e. **Body:** “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies” (5:28)
4. **Great Mystery:** Christ and the Church are model for Christian marriage (5:31-33)
 - a. **Marriage:** “two shall become one” (5:31; cf. Gen 2:24)
 - b. “**Great Mystery**” (Greek *mysterion mega*; Latin *sacramentum magnum*)
 - c. **Nuptial Mystery:** “Christ and the Church”

The Living Tradition

John Chrysostom: *Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love’s high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the church.* Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. *Even if you suffer all this, you have still not done as much as Christ has for the church.* For you are already married when you act this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated him. (St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians 20:5:25*).

Pope Pius XI: The Apostle commends in these words: “Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ is the head of the Church.” *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*

The Mass Readings Explained

rights on account of their lack of mature judgment, or of their ignorance of human affairs. (Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubi* nos. 26-28)

Pius XI: 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.* Again, this subjection of wife to husband in its degree and manner may vary according to the different conditions of persons, place and time. In fact, if the husband neglect his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the family. *But the structure of the family and its fundamental law, established and confirmed by God, must always and everywhere be maintained intact.* (Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubi* nos. 26-28)

Husband

Head of the Family

Chief Place in Leading

Wife

Heart of the Family

Chief Place in Love

Pope John Paul II: This relationship [between spouses] is nevertheless not one-sided submission. According to the teaching of Ephesians, marriage excludes this element of the contract, which weighed on this institution and at times does not cease to weigh on it. *Husband and wife are, in fact, “subject to one another,” mutually subordinated to one another.* (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 473)

John Chrysostom: 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* (Greek *mikra ecclesia*). Therefore, it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives. (John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, pp. 60-61.)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time)

1. How does the Nuptial Mystery of Christ and the Church shed light on Christian marriage and the relationship between husband and wife?

For Further Reading

1. St. John Chrysostom. *On Marriage and Family*. Trans. C. P. Roth and David Anderson. Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.
2. Pope Pius XI. Encyclical on Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubii* (1930). Available at www.vatican.va.
3. Pope Francis. Apostolic Exhortation, The Joy of Love, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016). See nos. 1-290. Available at www.vatican.va.