

27. October 2020

“True submission”

Eph 5:21-33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since, as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church is subject to Christ, so should wives be to their husbands, in everything. Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy by washing her in cleansing water with a form of words, so that when he took the Church to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because we are parts of his Body. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church. To sum up: you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband.

Whoever is in a living relationship with the Lord will not find this passage of the letter discriminatory against women, even if it could easily be interpreted as such today! This comes from the spirit of the world and not from the spirit of the Lord! We only need to take a moment to understand what true submission to Christ means, to be sure that it is not just a reflection of the spirit of a particular age, but that something else is being addressed!

The Lord and his Church are about a true love relationship! When we look at the relationship between the Lord and the disciples, it is never a demonstration of power, but always a matter of service (*cf. Mt 20:25-28*)! It is not for nothing that the Lord washes the feet of his disciples (*cf. Jn 13:5*) and makes clear to them what true leadership in the sense of God means and how true authority is to be understood! God himself shows us by his own example!

Even if we look into our own life with the Lord and have already been freed from false ideas and fears about Him, we will never experience Him as authoritarian towards us! We know very well that God is always looking after our best and does

not force us! He, who actually has the right to command us and to demand the right thing at all costs, asks for us to follow the path that leads us into the whole truth!

This is how we see the authority of God, which is unrestricted, active in love and effective in service to man. Our subordination happens - it should lead to this at any rate through the guidance of the Holy Spirit - out of love for him, in grateful joy of knowing God and being allowed to serve him! This is what happens, for example, in the development of the gift of piety: Let us become the joy of the Lord!

If we now transfer this to the relationship between man and woman, it becomes clearer what is meant! The Lord wants this love relationship to be reflected in the relationship between man and woman! Here, of course, comes the difficulty! It is a high demand, which actually only comes close to the words of Paul and the views of God if we experience a transformation through the Spirit of God! If we are far from this, then it is easy for an authority - which only develops its beauty when it becomes effective in love and truth - to realise itself with a claim to power that does not spring from the Spirit, but comes from "the flesh", as the Holy Scriptures express it! Then mechanisms of oppression arise, and the woman becomes afraid of her husband! This can then easily lead to an inner rebellion and one consequence could be that the woman no longer honours her husband!

So the key to the right understanding of this text lies in love and truth, which make the right authority a gift! The woman gives herself gladly to a loving husband and looks for his honour! This is analogous to our relationship with the Lord! We gladly serve him and want God to be honoured and loved by all!

In a good marriage we can perceive something of the mystery of God's love for us human beings. After all, the spouses become "one flesh", just as we become one with Christ and the Church as bride with her bridegroom!

Let us not be confused by the spirit of the times! The man must live more deeply his manhood in God, the woman her womanhood in God! Subordination does not mean loss of identity or oppression! If it is done in the right way, it leads to freedom, for who has ever been oppressed by God?

Of course, submission to the Lord has a different quality than the woman's submission to her husband! But if it is done in the necessary freedom and the husband strives to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, then we have before us

an image of God's love that reflects both the order of creation and the special mystery between God and the soul!