

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 17

HOLY MATRIMONY III

THE PURPOSE

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a young fellow from Brooklyn, where one tree grows, who moves to Fort Worth. He notices that the family next door has a kitchen garden full of all kinds of vegetables. Well, he has a space in his back yard, about 10 feet by 10 feet. And he thinks it would be nice if he had a garden also.

So he asks his neighbor how to go about starting a garden. His neighbor tells him that the first thing he will need to do is buy a garden hoe and break up the ground.

So he goes down to the hardware store and asks for a hoe. Since he grew up in Brooklyn he doesn't know what a hoe looks like. And it just so happens that the clerk he speaks to has also just moved to Fort Worth from Brooklyn and doesn't know what a hoe looks like either. So the clerk asks the manager where to find the hoes.

The manager tells him they are standing in the corner of the storeroom. But the clerk looks in the wrong corner and finds some *leaf* rakes, the kind with the really flexible tines. So he sells one of them to our hero.

Well, when he gets home with what he thinks is a hoe and tries to break up the ground with it, of course it doesn't work. And he is terribly frustrated. So he calls up his neighbor and bawls him out for giving him bad advice.

When a person expects something from marriage which marriage is not designed to produce and it disappoints him he gets frustrated, angry, and bitter. He—or she—looks for someone he can blame. Guess who catches it—his partner.

FALSE EXPECTATIONS

Usually, when two people get married these days, each one is expecting the other to make him happy.

But that does not happen and for the following reason: Since Johnny is waiting to be made happy, his attention is not on his real job which is to minister to Mary's happiness. And likewise Mary is waiting for Johnny to make her happy, instead of serving his well-being. But in the last analysis, only Johnny can make Johnny happy. And only Mary can make Mary happy.

When Johnny discovers that he is not going to be made happy by Mary, he feels frustrated, even cheated. Somebody must be to blame. Who else can it be but Mary. Meanwhile, Mary is feeling the same way. They have indeed been cheated. Our culture has led them to expect the wrong

thing out of marriage.

THE COMMUNITY

There is a false dogma which we have learned at our mothers' knees. That false dogma is that the *basic unit* of society is the *individual*. The truth is that the *family* is the basic unit of society. The basic unit of water is not hydrogen; nor is it oxygen. The basic unit of water is the H₂O molecule which includes both hydrogen and oxygen.

The family is the creature of God just as truly as water is God's creature.

It is impossible to be really human outside of the human community. When fallen human beings are born, they don't know *how* to be human. It is through the institutions of society that individuals learn what it is to be human and also have the opportunity to put into practice being human.

With the rise of romanticism another false dogma has gotten established. It says that all that is wrong with mankind is that he is not free, that he is the prisoner of oppressive institutions, and that if he can be liberated from those institutions his natural goodness will assert itself and his problems will all be solved.

But the fact is that children are born savages. And it is the job of parents to civilize them. Otherwise the children wet on the floor, write on the walls, and tear pages out of the family bible to make paper airplanes.

The romantic notion of the natural goodness of man leads to anarchy, and the result is frustration and hostility in all areas of life.

THE LAW OF COMMUNITIES

Any community which exists only for the benefit or happiness of its members contains the seeds of its own destruction and sooner or later it will self-destruct. The symbol of this law is the story of the tower of Babel.

We are all sinners and self-centered. And sooner or later what you want conflicts with what I want. At that moment, our community seems to be a failure. In fact, for that moment it is a failure, if my happiness or benefit is the community's only reason for existing.

Therefore, the family must have a purpose outside of itself which the members all agree is more important than their own desires or goals.

There is such a purpose, and it has three levels: the natural, the moral, and the spiritual.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

In *natural* terms, the purpose of marriage is to make a family, a community, in which the values of the Gospel can become a fact, and in which children can be raised up to become saints in the Kingdom of God.

In *moral* terms, the purpose of the family is to be a school of discipline.

It is not good to live alone, *because then one can have his own way!* And that results in a person becoming spoiled.

But when two people are locked together for life, they cannot run away from their disagreements. Someone has to give in. All of us have to learn how to do that sooner or later.

For example, if two single school teachers living together cannot agree on the color of the new curtains, they can split up. When people get married they promise not to do that.

When a couple gets married, they take a vow which expresses their agreement to accept the discipline of marriage for life. That vow is translated as follows:

“I, John, being of age and of sound mind, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, take thee Mary to my wedded wife, knowing full well that you have many disgusting personal habits, and that this is going to cost me all my freedom and more money than I can ever hope to earn.

“Nevertheless, knowing that it will make a man out of me like nothing else can, not even the Marine Corps, I, John, take thee Mary to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, to give in to and to put up with and to make excuses for till death us do part, come hell or high water or in-laws to live with us, so help me God—I’ll need it—and thereto I plight thee my troth.”

Marriage is designed to turn boys and girls into men and women.

There is an irony involved. No one is ready for marriage until he or she is mature. But no one is likely to become mature outside of marriage—or its moral equivalent, such as the military service or a religious order.

St. Benedict of Nursia, who founded western monasticism in the 6th century, said, “If men will live without women, they must not live alone.” So his monastic rule makes the religious order a synthetic *family*, and it builds in the same kind of disciplines as a family has.

For example, at night after the baby has gone to sleep, everybody in the family tries to be quiet so they won’t wake him up. In a Benedictine monastery, from Compline at night until after Mass the next morning, nobody speaks. This is called the “Great Silence”.

In a natural family, sometimes the baby does wake in the middle of the night and has to be changed or fed. So that the monks won’t miss out on “having a baby in the family”, they get up in the middle of the night and spend a few minutes in the chapel praying together. The service is called “Matins”.

Four of the vows which govern monastic life also apply to marriage. They are:

- *Stability in place*. Each Benedictine monk promises to spend the rest of his life at that particular monastery. “We are not going to split when the going gets rough.”

- *Poverty*. Each monk renounces *private* ownership of property. Everything belongs to the community. “Daddy doesn’t have the right to buy a pack of cigarettes until he is sure the kids have lunch money.” The principle is ‘*from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.*’ And that is where Karl Marx got that idea.
- *Chastity*. In marriage, this means that my sex does not belong to me, but under God, to my spouse.

The purpose of my sex, as far as pleasure is concerned, is to give pleasure to my spouse. But if I get that backwards and exploit her for my own pleasure, I will depersonalize her. Then I will feel guilty about it. Then I will project my guilt onto her. If I exploit her on Friday night, by Sunday I will be criticizing her cooking.

There will be much more about sex in the next two lectures.

- *Obedience*. Every member undertakes to put his own interest after that of the community.

For example: Once upon a time, a woman who was an accomplished linguist with several advanced degrees, joined a religious order. The first job she was given was washing dishes. It happened that the order needed to have the dishes washed. At that time, it did not happen to need a linguist. Later on it did, and then she was given the opportunity to use her talents.

The principles expressed by those four vows are basic to Holy Matrimony, and they enable it to function as the school of sanctifying discipline which all of us desperately need.

The *spiritual* purpose of Holy Matrimony is to be a sign.

The following is a condensation of a meditation on sexuality by Fr. Dwight Duncan of St. Matthias’ Church, Dallas, Texas.

“Sexuality is a given fact of God’s creation. The whole creation is male and female from top to bottom. Why? Did God foul up? It seems inefficient. Wouldn’t it be better if we were interchangeable?”

“The resulting struggles make us wish we were all alike. ‘Reuben, Reuben, I’ve been thinking what a grand world this would be if the men were all transported far beyond the northern sea.’ Such thoughts are a sign of the fallen condition of people.

“Why did He do it? Because of the incredible fact that God has taken to himself a bride—you, me, all of creation. This runs through the Bible from beginning to end. The Church is the Bride of Christ, the Body of the Groom. Man comes into this world by way of the body of woman. Jesus, the Groom himself, becomes Man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“The Bible ends with the vision of the Bride adorned for her husband. And she is the one who speaks the invitation to all to come and enter into the joy of heaven.”

The marriage of man and woman is a sign, a revelation, of God’s purpose in creation. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding feast, and we are being brought in through this world, the

kitchen as it were, to *whet* our appetites for God, not to *satisfy* them.

No one woman adequately expresses all of God's nature, but only a small part of it. But one woman is all I can handle. With her I can learn how to be a lover.

In heaven there is no marrying or giving in marriage, because in heaven each of us will be married, not only to our earthly spouse, but also to everybody else—and all of us to God.

Really mature marriage is the closest thing on earth to heaven, and bad marriage is close to hell. A bad marriage is one in which neither is working at it.

In summary, the purpose of Holy Matrimony is to get us ready for heaven.

DIVORCE

Just as Holy Matrimony is a sign, a revelation, so also is divorce.

Jesus was ready to die on the cross, at the hands of his bride, Israel, rather than give up on her. Marriage is a sign of that faithfulness of Christ being lived out among us.

Divorce is a denial of that faithfulness. It is a sign of lack of faith, faith in God.

Divorce says that God cannot help us. Divorce says, "I don't love you!" It says that Jesus doesn't love you. Or else, it says, "Even though Jesus loves you, *I* refuse to love you."

Divorce is a refusal to take up one's cross and follow our Lord. However, whenever we bear a cross in Jesus' name, he bears it with us.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

BACKGROUND

"Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by (according to) the Word of truth that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures."
[James 1:17,18]

God does not change. He is all that he will ever be. That is his own proper name: JHVH, I AM THAT I AM, or I AM WHAT I WILL BE, or I AM HE WHO IS. God is pure act, pure actuality, There is no "going to be" in God, no potentiality.

But the whole created universe is characterized by change. Creatures exist, but they also change into other creatures. That is eggs become chickens, chickens become chicken dinners, and chicken dinners become people. So all creatures are both *active* (actual) and *potential*. They are all capable of receiving new form.

Furthermore, all cultures throughout human history have recognized that the natural world is *maternal*. All living things are born from the womb of nature. The earth is our mother because we take our material existence from her. So we speak of "Mother Nature".

The world of matter is maternal, feminine. In fact the word “matter” is derived from the Greek (and Latin) word for mother, *mater*.

The world of matter receives its form from God, who gives it its pattern. The word “pattern” is derived from the Greek (and Latin) word for father, *pater*.

All religions which worship a transcendent God think of him in masculine terms. Those religions which are pantheistic and worship the processes of nature, for whom God is not *transcendent* but confined to this world (universe), think of their deity, or deities, as feminine.

Matter is *receptive* (rather than passive) to the form it receives. So the act of creation requires the response of the matter to the form which it receives.

Masculinity is the quality of *giving form or pattern* to matter. Femininity is the quality of *accepting form or pattern*. All *creatures* are feminine to God (the Father) except when they are in rebellion.

The Fall of Adam and Eve was the refusal of the human race to be feminine to God, to be content with accepting their moral form from him.

To be feminine is to accept authority. To be masculine is to be author, to exercise authority. The literary author, for instance, imposes form on words.

To be author, to exercise authority, is to *take responsibility* for the form of that over which authority is exercised.

Except in the case of God the Father, all authority is derived from some higher authority to which it is feminine. And so Jesus said, “I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” The Word of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, is feminine to the Father. Jesus is feminine to the Father and masculine to us. [John: 6:38]

Adam and Eve tried to be their own source of form, their own authority. That is the root sin of pride.

Grace perfects nature. It does not destroy it but fulfills it. God creates us male and female, not sexless “Persons” but men and women. He calls us to the fulfillment of our natures as men and women.

MARRIAGE AND AUTHORITY

St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

“Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

“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 be subject in everything to their husbands.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up 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. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

“He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ [Genesis 2.:24]

“This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects (reveres, *phobetai*) her husband.” [Ephesians 5:20-33]

When a woman enters child-bearing, she is giving form to the baby which is growing in her womb. She is, in fact, being masculine in relation to it. But the form she gives it has come from outside herself in two ways: first, from her own heredity; and second, from her husband, including the determination of the baby’s sex. Therefore, biologically, she is feminine in relation to her husband.

Being a mother is a full time job. A mother is physically and emotionally dependent. A mother is vulnerable. So the husband is responsible, not only to keep her secure, but also to be the link with the larger community. He is thus masculine to his family, morally and spiritually. And he is feminine to the larger community.

Decisions have to be made. e.g. Johnny’s parents live twenty miles to the east, and Mary’s parents live twenty miles to the west. Each set of in-laws wants them to have Thanksgiving dinner at their house. Mary offers to go to Johnny’s parents. Johnny offers to go to Mary’s parents. There is a tie. Somebody has to break the tie. That is Johnny’s job. Accepting responsibility for making hard decisions is a burden. Bearing that burden is Johnny’s service to his family.

As St. Paul says, “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church”.

COUPLES WHO ARE UNABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN

Why is the husband necessarily head of such a family? Because the preparation to be a parent begins in very early childhood. One learns from thousands of observations and experiences of his parents and other parents. The mental and emotional preparation to be a mother is different from the preparation to be a father.

One must know which he/she is preparing for way back in childhood. If one waits until marriage to decide, it’s too late. Furthermore, if both partners in a marriage have prepared to be head of the family—or if neither has—strife or chaos is bound to result.

So the Church, following St. Paul, says the husband is the head of the family, children or not. And boys and girls need to prepare for that relationship all of their lives until they marry.

THE CHURCH AS FAMILY

In the year 115 AD, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote a number of epistles to various churches as he traveled under guard to Rome to be martyred. In those letters he compared the bishop of the church to God the Father and the deacon to Jesus the Servant.

The bishop, and in his absence, the priest, is the father of the family. He is feminine to the greater Church and to God, but he is masculine to the local church.

The local congregation is, in one sense, not only feminine but a mother. Within her the new Christian is born and develops. The relationship between pastor and congregation is a marriage. Pastors must be men who are thoroughly prepared for marriage, even if celibate. They must be *formed* to be husbands and fathers, able to bear the responsibility for the security of a family.

Women should be formed to be mothers and wives. Men should be formed to be husbands and fathers.

To ordain a woman bishop or priest is to give her the job of doing something contrary to her nature, something for which she should not have been trained. Furthermore it is to misrepresent the nature of the relationship between pastor and congregation, as well as to misrepresent the nature of the relationship between God the Father and his creation.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The existence of each human being begins when the sperm of his father fertilizes the egg in his mother's body. During those first nine months his mother is his world. Daddy is completely transcendent to that world. But the day comes when the child is born and begins to live in a larger world. He leaves the womb behind and the family becomes his world. He begins to have fellowship with Daddy, but mother is still by far the most important thing in his experience.

The destiny for which God the Father made that child is to leave this world behind and finally to live in eternity in intimate fellowship with him and with all the redeemed.

The process by which one attains that destiny involves being born over and over again, dying to small worlds in order to be born into ever larger ones. It means cutting apron strings over and over again. It means mother figures turning loose over and over again.

The hierarchy of the Church represents this journey; the father of the family transcends the family as well as being part of it; the father of the parish transcends it as well as being part of it; the father of the diocese, the bishop, transcends the diocese as well as being part of it. As a Christian matures his horizons expand and he becomes more aware of the larger Church.

The Church's job is to keep him headed toward God the Father and away from the womb. But if one of those offices that are supposed to signify the transcendence of God is occupied by a woman, then it sends the wrong message. It says that the journey is not from the womb to God, but from the womb back to the womb.

The sexual revolution is a return to *pantheistic paganism*. It is common among those Christians who have embraced it to speak of God as "she". Although it is usually spoken of as being some-

thing brand new which progress and enlightenment has given us, it is really as old as the hills. And it can only lead to one outcome for those who espouse it, to disillusionment and despair. Mother nature cannot save us. Only God the Father, through Jesus Christ, can do that.

THE EXERCISE OF RIGHTFUL AUTHORITY

- Authority can be exercised properly only by those who know themselves to be under authority and are content to have it so.
- The one in authority must make no rules for his own private benefit.
- Authority needs to be *perceived* as being for the benefit of those who are under it in order for it to be effective.
- Those who exercise authority must leave room for those under them to exercise their own authority. Do not meddle in a subordinate's work unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Know what authority you are under. Decide now that you are going to be under God's authority and thus under the proper authority of his One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

When one has to make decisions, he needs principles in terms of which to make them. Where are such principles to be found? The world cannot give them to you. It has no place from which to get adequate principles, because it has rejected God's authority. Such principles can only come from God who gives them to us through the Church.

HOW HUSBANDS AND WIVES ARE TO LOVE EACH OTHER

- God is creator. Man is made in God's image. And so all human beings are creative. And the most creative thing anyone can do is to give birth to a child.

By the time the baby is born, the mother has thoroughly identified with it. And when the baby is born, the center of the mother's attention shifts from her husband to her baby. It needs to do so.

The mother needs to be protected from danger and freed from having to be concerned about the family's relationship to the larger community (as distinct from social contact with friends). So the emphasis of the husband's love needs to be in making her secure, in giving her the assurance that he will always be there. In this way he enables her to be herself.

St. Paul's injunction "Husbands love your wives" means for them to demonstrate their affection frequently every day, day in, day out, with kisses and embraces, etc.

- Men have a problem which women usually do not have: it is hard for men to maintain a sense of their manhood.

On the other hand, a woman has her baby for years and years to tell her she is a mother. And even her physiology reinforces her sense of being a creator.

However, men's "babies" live but for a moment and die. For example, after I have preached a sermon, I have to start getting ready to do it all over again next Sunday. And no matter how well I may have done it last Sunday, there is always the question, "Can I do it again?" Actors and comedians notoriously suffer from this anxiety. All men do.

Men are also in competition with other men. Every time a man loses in that competition it is a blow to his self-esteem, to his sense of being adequate.

For example, when a husband is laid-off, even because of a recession and through no fault of his own, it still demoralizes him. The longer his unemployment lasts the worse it gets and the harder it is for him to believe he can ever get a job again.

Wives, then, need to make their husbands feel like men. A man needs to feel like he is a conquering hero in the eyes of his family. By being a husband, a man is a candidate for combat. It is his duty to be ready and willing to die for his wife, even as Christ laid down his life for his bride the Church. Thus, for example, when there is a strange noise in the middle of the night, it is *his* duty to go investigate.

Therefore, "let the wife see that she reverence (revere) her husband." Let her do things like serving her husband first at dinner, etc.

THE HIERARCHY OF THE FAMILY

The Christian family is a hierarchy. "The husband is the head of the wife (and the family), even as Christ is the head of the Church." [Ephesians 5:23] And he must bear that authority in the same way that Christ did.

- The husband is the prophet of the family. He is responsible for the intellectual and cultural life of the family and for its moral standards. In his absence his wife has this responsibility.
- He is the priest of the family. He is responsible for its spiritual life, its worship and its prayers. He is the one who says the blessing at meals—not the children. In this way the children learn that it is grown-up business which they will get to do when they grow up, rather than child's play which they will outgrow. He is responsible for the family's stewardship of the things which God has entrusted to it.

At night he gives his children his blessing as well as when they are sick. He lays his hand on their heads and says, "May God bless you." This custom goes back nearly 4,000 years to the Hebrew patriarchs.

In the father's absence, the wife is responsible for these things. And when he reaches puberty, the oldest son begins to share some of these responsibilities in his father's absence.

- The husband is the king of the family. In former times he actually received a crown as part of the wedding ceremony. The husband rules in the same way that Christ did, *by being the standard, the rule.*

This does not mean he is in any sense to be a tyrant, any more than Christ was. Rather he is to be the servant of his family, ready even to lay down his life for his family if necessary.