

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The second reading today, from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians says: "**Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord**" (Ephesians 5:22). Somebody should have told St. Paul that this would not be very popular... a good way to drive people from the Church!

Yet, if we believe that God truly loves us, has the best plan for our lives, and wants us to flourish and be happy; and if we believe that the Scriptures really are God's Word to us, then we need to ask God for help to understand this passage as we look at it again.

First I want to make something clear: this passage is NOT saying that wives are supposed to be doormats to their husbands. That is not St. Paul's intention, nor is it the belief of the Church. If you look at the sentence before this controversial line, you will see that subordination to one another is the call of every Christian, not just of wives to husbands ("**Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ**" Eph 5:21). Jesus constantly is reminding us that the last shall be first and the first last, that He came not to be served but to serve, that the life of God – and so the life of a Christian – is not about power and grasping, but service and love and self-gift.

That being said, what does this passage mean for marriage? Let's look at the broader context. In verse 25, St. Paul then goes on to tell husbands, "**love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her.**" Did you catch that? Husbands are called to die for their wives, as Christ died for the Church. This may mean physical death, protecting his wife. More often than not, though, it means that the husband must die to himself for love of her, in little things and in big things. You see, when we look at this passage, it is a call for both husbands and wives to let go of their little "kingdoms," – the "ego-drama" that has *me* as the writer, director and star of my life. We have to move beyond the ego-drama to the "Theo-drama" where God is the writer, director and star. We may not have as big a part, but is a vastly more important "drama" than our own little "ego-dramas." This then means husbands must die to their own wills, desires, pleasures and plans for their wives, and wives must subordinate their wills, desires, pleasures and plans to their husband. As I sometimes tell my couples preparing for marriage, marriage is never "what have you done for me?" but always about "how can I love you." The day one or the other partner takes the attitude "what's in it for me?" is the day that marriage starts to die. So if the wife is subordinating her will to her husband's, and the husband is dying to himself for his wife, they will be constantly building each other up, and marriage will grow!

Is it hard?

Absolutely!

But then again, everything worth doing is difficult, and requires the cross. This is actually the call of every Christian – to die to ourselves. Jesus tells us, "**If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me**" (Luke 9:23). I have shared with you before about the Croatian Marriage Ritual. In it, the couple, as they say their vows, hold on to the Crucifix, knowing that there will be crosses in their marriage, but Jesus can bring them through them to resurrection.

The call to die to self – our ideas about God, our plans for our lives, or even, maybe, our plans for dinner and TV – while painful, truly brings us joy and peace. It is never in seeking self that we find joy, but in giving ourselves away.