

**August 2, 2015**  
**21st Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands,  
for the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is head of the church”**

*Is this teaching from Ephesians appealing or appalling?*

It doesn't appear that I always choose the easiest passage from scripture on which to reflect! Clearly, this passage from Ephesians does not fit that category, which is a good reason to look at it.

To begin with, the epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians and II Thessalonians are of disputed Pauline authorship. The best scholarship says that these epistles were most likely written a generation or so after Paul's death, but under his name. This was not an unusual practice either in the Old Testament times or during the first generation church. Take Isaiah for example. His name stood for a school of prophets, whose writings span a time of over 100 years.

**How do we understand this passage from Ephesians?**

Some suggest this reflects a controversy about the role of women in the early Church.

Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book, *“The First Paul,”* offer this compelling explanation: *“Ephesians places a far heavier burden on husbands than on wives. This probably means that if there is a religious persecution, husbands must be ready to die if that would save their wives. It is surely sad that subsequent Christian tradition demanded subjection from wives rather than demanding self-sacrifice from husbands.”* We are to subordinate ourselves to each other as Christ subordinates himself to the Church.

Jesuit Fr. Dennis Hamm, SJ, from Creighton University in Omaha points out that the language of submission came from the English translation of the original Greek. In the Greek, “head” has nothing to do with domination. *“Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her”* means, as one commentator put it, that the husband is the wife's “first servant.” Ephesians teaches that all Jesus' followers are to be in service to one another ([Mk 10:43-45](#)) even to laying down of one's life for another ([Jn 13:34-35](#)) as Jesus did for us. The hardness in this saying has to do mainly with mutual subordination, not with the gender struggle. We are to subordinate ourselves to each other as Christ subordinates himself to the Church.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk in Gethsemane who almost single handedly reintroduced the contemplative tradition back into the life of the Church, illustrates this point in his “Conjectures of a Guilt Bystander”: *“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even*

*though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. . . . This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. I have the immense joy of being [hu]man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now [that] I realize what we all are. If only people could see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time.”* We are to subordinate ourselves to each other as Christ subordinates himself to the Church.

Pope Francis illustrated this in an address to community organizers from around the world in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, July 9, when he listed many of the ills of modern society, and behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea, one of the church's first theologians, called “the dung of the devil,” namely - the unfettered pursuit of money. Farmworkers find this pursuit intolerable, laborers are finding this pursuit intolerable, communities are finding this pursuit intolerable, people are finding this pursuit intolerable. The Earth itself -- our sister, Mother Earth, as St. Francis would say -- is more and more finding this unfettered pursuit of money intolerable. Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy, it is a moral obligation. For Christians, it is a commandment." We are to subordinate ourselves to each other as Christ subordinates himself to the Church.

Islamic leaders from 20 countries illustrated this point four days ago on Aug. 19th in a two-day symposium in Istanbul when they launched a rallying call Tuesday to combat climate change. Their declaration states that “*The pace of Global climate change today is of a different order of magnitude from the gradual changes that previously occurred throughout the most recent era, the Cenozoic. Moreover, it is human-induced: we have now become a force dominating nature. Our species, though selected to be a caretaker or steward (khalifah) on the earth, has been the cause of such corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger ending life as we know it on our planet.*” We are to subordinate ourselves to each other as Christ subordinates himself to the Church.

What does it mean to subordinate ourselves to each other  
as Christ subordinates himself to the Church?

It's called “love.” Not “Eros,” the Greek word for romantic love; not “Philos,” the Greek word for friendship; but “Agape,” the Greek word for self-giving love. It's the love we see on the Cross. The Cross was not about punishment for sin, it was about Jesus giving everything he could, including his own life, out of love for our well-being. This is being subordinate to each other - giving of ourselves for the well-being of another and of all creation. This is what we all long for - the giving and receiving of each other. This is the longing of the human heart, it's universal - including America, Italy, the Middle East, South America and Asia, and Africa.

## **Sr. Jane Francis from Uganda**

We have as our guest here today, Sr. Jane Francis from Uganda. Let us welcome Sr. Jane. I would like to invite you now, Sr. Jane, to come here now to sing your song which expresses much more beautifully what we have been trying to do with words. It's called, "Okwagala Kukila Byonna." I was going to type out its entire text for you, but thought it might be more helpful if I provided its translation into English.

Sister, your song . . .

*"Love surpasses everything we think of in this life and the life to come.  
Jesus showed us the way. We must love each other as God loves us.  
For God resides in our fellow people. There must be no conditions in  
love. We must love the way God loves, if we want to reign with him now  
and in the life to come. Oh, I will sing of God's love, kindness and  
mercy to me. Oh, God is inviting me to do the same though I am weak. I  
know his mercy will hold me to do it. I surrender to God's love to  
love..."*

**Wives should be subordinate to their husbands,  
for the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is head of the church**

*Subordinating ourselves to each other as Christ does for us  
is an act of love. It is not appalling, it is appealing*