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# MARRIAGE, SANCTITY, SALVATION

*Rev. Clarence Kelly*

*You cannot build a family according to the mind of Christ unless you know His plan.*

MARRIAGE IS A DIVINELY established means by which God seeks to guarantee the continuation, of the human race and the protection and true fulfillment of man. Marriage is intended by God to be a powerful instrument of mutual help and an effective means by which the spiritual welfare of those entering it will be protected. To fulfill the first part of God's plan, children must be raised and they must be educated in such a way so as to insure the fulfillment of their lives in a fitting manner. And the number one priority in this fulfillment is that they save their souls. How noble then is this institution of which God is the author. The realization of the nobility of marriage will be heightened as our appreciation of the fact that Christ has raised the marriage contract to the level of a sacrament is made to grow. By raising marriage to the level of a sacrament Christ placed it in the ranks with Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders etc.

The Fathers of the Church saw in Christ's participation in the marriage feast at Cana a hallowing and recognition of Christian marriage, "as they see a hallowing of the water for administration of the Sacrament of Baptism in the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan." Marriage partners who treat this sacrament with reverence and who take their vows to heart and who strive to live according to the pattern established by God will be supplied with the grace and the help and the means by which they can more readily fulfill God's plan in marriage and save their souls. That is what God plans. That is what God wants. But unfortunately such a state of affairs is not realized except in fewer and fewer instances of marriage. What we do have is a situation in which children are led and driven away from Christ; a situation which has turned married life in-

to a source of grave and continual sin against the natural law, a situation in which marriage is a springboard for infanticide, the murder of unborn infants and hence a situation in which marriages are either breaking up all over the place, or in which there is nothing but misery, suffering and heartache and hopelessness.

As to why this situation exists, there are many reasons. And while I do not wish to exclude any of the real contributory causes from consideration, it is at this time impossible to deal with all aspects of this sad state of affairs due to a limitation of time. Therefore instead of trying to touch all bases, I will simply attempt to present what is, a central cause for the breakdown of Family Life and then we will consider the solution to this tragedy according to the mind of God and the unchangeable teaching of His Church. Simply put: This central cause for the breakdown is that men, women and children have failed to pattern that life according to the plan laid down by God. They have disregarded the blueprint and have ended up with something that does not conform to the design of God. True Catholic Family Life does not refer to what the nominal status of the family is, but rather it refers to the quality of life that can be achieved in marriages that are patterned on the teaching of the Church.

Everything that God does is done according to a clear cut brilliant plan. God does not act in an irrational, impulsive, haphazard manner. This is as true with regard to marriage as it is true concerning the laws of physics. For God is the author of both. But men do live by feeling and impulse. Indeed they have been known to fashion intricate systematic philosophical systems to justify lives opposed to reason, lives whose only law is the law of pleasure. We all know that the end product of such

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living is disorder, disaster and destruction. For this is rebellion against God's plan. And it is the central disaster of modern times. The refusal of man to do things according to the Divine Plan is also seen, on a more fundamental level, in the fact that men have changed the Glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to man and thus "God has given them up to a reprobate sense."

We live in a new age of paganism. But the gods of this new paganism are not made of marble. They are made of dishonesty, and lust and drugs and drink. Those who abandon the living God come to live according to irrational impulses and end by serving the god of pleasure. Their destiny is ruination in this life and misery in the next. Ruination in this life because the self-indulgent are miserable. Their souls never find peace or rest. It is the reasonable, disciplined person who acknowledges the living God and who lives by Him who has the measure of happiness in this life, not the man who serves the god of pleasure.

One of the reasons our generation is always searching is because it does not have the security of being rooted in the living God; it is too self-indulgent to find anything beyond those things which satisfy its impulses. People are restless because they are rootless, and they are *miserable* because they live by the law of self-indulgence. Their god is the god of pleasure and this false god cannot satisfy the human heart or intellect. Man was made for God and is restless till he rests in Him. Man was made to live by God's plan and is destined for misery till he acknowledges it, seeks it out and lives by it. But men do not do this. They do not follow the Plan and that disobedience leads not only to misery now but misery in eternity. For Christ is not a sugar sweet humanitarian who has nothing better to do than spout pious slogans. He is the living God.

On Judgment day Christ will exhibit two attitudes and only two attitudes: Mercy toward those whose sins have been washed clean by His saving blood and who follow His Plan. And a precise and exacting judgment towards those who have despised His "blood and death." It all goes back to the original point: when we reject God's blueprint for life, we invite disaster.

And so modern man's rejection of God and His plan for marriage has brought him to a state of moral ruin, has reduced him to a state of confusion and has deprived him of the measure of happiness (even in this life) which Our Lord offers to His followers—that is the peace which the world cannot give. To reject God's Plan is to reject the Cross. People who would resist the Cross do not escape suffering, they only deprive themselves of

the means to conquer suffering. For the Cross is not a symbol of slavery but an instrument of spiritual liberation—the means by which we overcome the world. When we reject the Cross we actually hamper ourselves. We make life more difficult. One can reject the Cross but he cannot escape suffering. Instead of living by God's plan, people act according to how they feel and loose sight of the TRUE standards that must be followed. They are ships without rudders. They are like men who would build a great bridge without plans or blueprints. They act like the person who sets out on a journey to a distant destination without maps and with a determination not to look at highway signs and not to consult other people who know the way. For isn't that equivalent to attempting to build a decent family life without a concerted effort to get hold of and to be guided by, the plan which will enable them to have a chance of succeeding. You cannot build a family according to the mind of Christ unless you know His plan. When you do not know it, it is virtually impossible. This is especially true today for the forces of evil are running loose and are systematically striving to destroy marriage and family life. They know that if you can destroy the family life of a nation you can destroy the nation. It is only logical; if you want to kill someone you aim for the heart. (If you want to destroy the Catholic Church, you aim for the heart of the Church which is the Mass.) If you want to destroy the country you aim for the heart of its life: the family.

But if all these forces are directed against you and your families and children, how can you even begin to withstand them? How can you begin to withstand them unless you can tap into and be strengthened by the power of God? You must have recourse to Christ. But to have His strength you must find Him. And to find Him you must know where to look for Him. You must look in the right place.

You will recall that Our Lady and St. Joseph searched for Christ for three days. They did not find Him until they looked in the right place. And where is the right place? He told us where it was when He was 12 years old. He said: "Why did you search for Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Lk 2:49) Christ was not saying to Mary and Joseph that it was time for Him to begin His public ministry, and therefore, they should not have come after Him. No. It was not that. He was saying that if they would have come to the temple first they would have found Him, for it was there that He was engaged in His Father's business—for it was His Father's house. I suspect that this incident might have been

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engineered by Our Lord to prepare His Blessed Mother for *His* Cross and *Her* suffering—to prepare her for the future time when the accomplishment of His Father’s business necessitated that He be tortured and crucified. The Cross appeared in Mary’s life at the presentation in the Temple when Simeon prophesized that her soul would be pierced. It’s shadow grew as Mary searched for Christ for three days. By the time Calvary came, Mary was already a veteran soldier of Her Son marching under His banner—The Cross.

Our sins necessitated the shedding of His blood in atonement. This was His Father’s business. Like Our Lady, we must appreciate the fact that Christ and the Cross are inseparable. We must learn that to find Christ—(and this is especially true in family life) we must seek Him where He is and on His terms. In Marriage He is to be found where you build your lives on God’s plan and pattern. Begin then to strive and to struggle to pattern your married and family life according to this Plan. I would not be so presumptuous or blind as to say that it is or that it will be easy. But I can say that without the Plan and the understanding, it will not only *not* be easy to begin to build and to protect your family it will be impossible. And what is that basic plan?

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians gives what is perhaps the best and most beautiful statement on what the working plan of Christianity is to be regarding the family. He does this by giving instructions to WIVES and to HUSBANDS and to CHILDREN. Speaking to husbands and wives concerning marriage rights he says: —“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Then speaking to wives he says “*Let wives be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; because a husband is head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the Church ... but just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let wives be [subject] to their husbands in all things.*” (Ephesians 5:21-24) St. Paul makes no bones about it. He lays it on the line as to what the situation is to be in a truly Christian Marriage as regards the question of who has the authority. Now if such a clear cut infallible statement (and it is infallible for Paul is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost), of where authority is to be centered in the Christian marriage might it tend to bolster the pride and backbones of men. Take notice that along with this sweeping authority comes a sweeping and clear cut obligation. St. Paul says: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for her, .... even thus ought husbands also to love*

*their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife, loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh: on the contrary he nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ also does the Church ... Let each one of you (husbands) also love his wife just as he loves himself: and let the wife respect her husband.*” (Ephesians 5)

And finally, concerning children: St. Paul says that fathers themselves are not supposed to act like children but rather they are to impose a discipline which is reasonable and not impulsive and irrational. He says, “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but rear them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.*” (Eph 5) What St. Paul is teaching is that a rigorous discipline is to be imposed but it is to be a discipline based on the teaching of the Church and right reason. When parents discipline their children out of impulse they end up being too lax *and* too harsh. The effect of course is that the child is not disciplined but is only provoked to anger and to conspiring on ways to manipulate his parents. Discipline must be reasonable and consistent but it must not be done on impulse or in anger. To children then St. Paul speaking with the authority of God says: “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for that is right. ‘Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother.’*” (Eph 6) He then goes on to point out that this is the first commandment to which God has attached a promise. And that promise is this. If you obey your parents things will go well with you and you shall have a long life. (see Deut 5:16)

A father that does not discipline his children does not love them and is their worst enemy for he shall bring about their ruin. In Prov 3:11 we read “*My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord. Neither be thou weary when thou are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves, he chastises: and He scourges every son whom He receives.*” If a father loves his children he will chastise them and guide them.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, “*Now all discipline seems for the present to be a matter not for joy but for grief: but afterwards it yields the most peaceful fruit of justice to those who have been exercised by it. Therefore brace up the hands that hang down, and the tottering knees, and make straight paths for your feet... .*” (Heb. 12: 7-13) Discipline your children. And discipline yourselves. Put order and right reason and common sense in your family life and in your individual lives. Set out, begin to strive to pattern your married lives on the plan laid down by Christ,

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St. Paul and the Church. And take for your example and inspiration of The Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Seek their help for as the Divine Office for the Feast of the Holy Family says— “When their help is asked for, Jesus, Mary and Joseph will be present within the home, fostering charity, guiding conduct and stimulation to virtue by their example. And by alleviating those hardships which everywhere harass mortal men, they will make them more bearable.”

If you do the things Christ and the Church command, you will be on the road to building up what the forces of Hell are seeking to tear down. If you do not build your married life according to God’s plan then you will have no hope of achieving Family Life as God would have it and as you need it. For as the Psalmist says in the 126th Psalm “Unless the Lord build the House, they who build it labor in vain.” □