

Homily –21st Sunday OT; B-Cycle

“Wives be submissive to your husbands in everything.”

Now this reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, is one of those readings that makes us men priests so popular when we preach from the pulpit.

And this is a passage that makes Saint Paul so well loved by feminists.

Feminists hate Paul, and particularly this passage, because Paul talks about submissiveness, and that’s the last thing we want to hear.

After all we’re free, aren’t we? We’ve been liberated. We’re independent.

We’re individuals. We’re Americans. --don’t have to have to submit to anyone.

That’s historically been our attitude as a nation.

Our nation wasn’t founded on submissiveness. It was founded on independence.

The whole reason for the revolutionary war is that we refused to be submissive to the king of England.

The whole reason for the civil war, is that the southern states resented interference from the North in the making of their policies, namely slavery.

So we have a cultural history, for better or for worse, that prides itself on not being submissive.

But over the past fifty years that attitude has been taken to a demonic extreme.

Students won’t submit to their teachers. It is my right not to learn.

Children are not submitting to their parents.

That’s been a problem since antiquity. There’s nothing new in that.

But now, that lack of submissiveness has turned violent.

Now we have young people violently reacting to their parents, to their neighbors, their teachers, to the law. That’s new. That’s scary.

Now we have sanctuary cities, cities refusing to submit to federal law.

And it seems like there is no such thing as a peaceful protest anymore.

To protest these days seems synonymous with bloodshed and destruction.

With the sexual revolution, people refused to submit to God and the Church, namely in the areas of sexual purity.

Then abortion came along, and people stopped submitting to the natural law.

What is more unnatural than a mother killing her child?

Even in the animal kingdom you will be hard pressed to find a species that will hunt and kill one of its own kind, much less its own off spring.

Why has this happened? Because we have gotten so wrapped up in this individualism, that we've forgotten how to be submissive, to anyone.

Which brings us back to St. Paul. Is Paul being chauvinistic by what he says here?

If a woman is married to a wife beater, the Catholic Church teaches that she has to be submissive to that.

If a woman is married to a child abuser the Catholic Church teaches that she has to be submissive to that. NO! Nothing could be further from the truth!

The Church doesn't teach that and neither does Saint Paul!

People who make these claims are ignoring the next lines.

"Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church." And how did Christ love the Church? To death! If that's not being submissive what is?

Paul goes on to say, *"husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself."*

Paul is speaking of a mutual submissiveness; that husband and wife are actually one person.

This was radical talk in a day when wives were considered the property of their husbands! Paul is being radically LIBERAL here!! Isn't that odd?

What was considered radically liberal 2000 years ago is seen as so staunchly conservative today.

I've told you before, this is why its dangerous to put Church teaching into liberal or conservative boxes. Liberal and conservative are political designations.

Church teaching is concerned with truth. And sometimes truth is conservative, and sometimes it's liberal.

Husbands and wives must be submissive to one another in so far as they are being submissive to what the Church teaches about the sacrament of marriage!

Theologian Dietrich Von Hildebrand once compared the husband to the head and in another analogy the body, and the wife to the heart, and in another

analogy the soul. People got angry about that also. Why?
Is the heart less important than the head? Is the soul less important than the body?
Can you live without a heart any easier than you can live without a head?

They reacted because they thought Von Hildebrand was suggesting that women were intellectually inferior to men, and real men don't show feelings.

But that wasn't what Von Hildebrand was saying at all.

Von Hildebrand was saying that we are different. Men and women are different. We're different physically, we're different emotionally, --different spiritually. Several months ago, over the winter, I saw a video on facebook.

I don't know if this guy was a counsellor or motivational speaker, but he was talking about the difference between men's brains and women's brains, and it was hysterical, but at the same time it was so true.

He said, "a man's brain is a series of boxes, and we have a box for everything.

"We have a box for the house, a box for the car, a box for the job, a box for the finances. We have a box for your mother way down in the basement.

"So when you ask us something we go to the appropriate box in our brain, we take that box off the shelf, we open that box, we deal with what's in that box, and when we're done, we put that box back on the shelf being VERY careful to make that sure that box doesn't touch ANY other box!

"The boxes NEVER touch!"

"A woman's brain by contrast is a big ball of wire. EVERYTHING is connected to EVERYTHING else! It's like the internet superhighway!

"And it's all powered by energy we call 'emotion.'

"That's why women remember everything because they attach it to an emotion.

"And that's also why men don't remember anything, because quite frankly, we just don't care.

"So a woman can talk about multiple things at the same time and it makes perfect sense to her, and other women, but a man listening to it gets frustrated because she's mixing up the boxes!"

You know I made the staff watch that video and communication in the rectory has gotten so much better! Our Religious Ed director, Deb Zagorski will just tell me outright now:

“Ok Father, put away the confirmation box and open the first communion box.”

And I don’t get lost anymore! It’s not that men or women are better than the other, or smarter than the other. We’re just different.

We process things differently. Men and women are different, but both vital in their functions.

Husbands and wives, though different, are vital to have a balanced family, which is ONE reason why the Church opposes same sex unions.

Men and women, though different, are vital to have a balanced Church.

And that balance comes through submissiveness.

Christ showed the level of his submissiveness to the Church when he died to give her life on Calvary in love.

Now we, the Church, strive to be submissive to God our husband, by learning his teachings and attempting to follow them in love.

Husbands and wives have to strive everyday to be submissive to one another in love, so they can truly become one person.

Children have to learn to become submissive to their parents, even when they don’t understand, even when they don’t agree, because their parents have the advantage of life experience.

And priests have to learn to be submissive too. We have to be submissive to the will of the Bishop, even when we don’t understand, even when we don’t agree, because they are the successors to the apostles.

When Bishop Tobin first called me to take this assignment he said to me, “So Mike, why do you feel you’re qualified to be pastor in Pawtucket?”

And I said, “I don’t.” “You don’t?!” “No. In fact I was shocked you offered that to a freshman pastor. A merger of two parishes with a history of hostility toward one another and a school to boot?!”

“I was sure you’d give it to a veteran pastor.”

Then the Bishop said, “well, let me tell you why the committee and I chose you.”

And after he gave me his reasons, I said, “OK...If you say so. I’ll give it my best

shot.” And I’m so grateful now I was submissive to my bishop, because this parish has been the greatest experience of my life, and I have all of you to thank for it.

This is the core of the Christian ethic, to strive to be submissive to one another & to God.

That does not mean we should stay silent in the face of evil or injustice.

Being submissive to God means striving to build his kingdom on earth, where everyone’s needs are met, and all are free live in peace with each other.

Submissiveness does mean considering the needs of others as at least as important as our own, if not more important than our own.

Submissiveness means life is not about ME. It’s about WE.

And that’s hard for us Americans, and our rugged individualism.

But if everyone set out to do what Saint Paul outlines for us here, the world would be a far more peaceful place.

In the meantime, let’s start practicing this in our families, and see how peaceful we can make our homes.