

- As a priest I find that there are very few things in life as sacred and beautiful as marriage. While Catholic priests are called to a life of celibacy, we love marriage because marriage is a visible expression of the union of love we strive to share with Christ and His Church.
- Rather than being a reminder of what we're "missing out on", in reality marriage is a reminder of what our Lord is trying to give each of us: an intimate, exclusive, and unbreakable relationship of life and love.
- Marriage is a beautiful gift from God. As marriage forms the basis of family life, and thus the very basis of human society, its importance cannot be emphasized enough.
- As we all know, marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered into by a man and a woman. God specifically designed this sacrament for the procreation and education of children and for the purpose of the spouses' growth in holiness.
- But God also has a way that He wishes us to live out marriage. Our Lord has designed marriage with specific roles for both the husband and the wife.
- The second reading today is St. Paul's famous passage from his letter to the Ephesians that sets out God's design for marriage. As most of you are married, I'd like to focus today on this passage and how it's meant to help you live out your marriages in a godly way.
- Sadly, this particular passage from Ephesians is often frowned upon and disregarded by some because in calling wives to be subordinate or submissive to their husbands, St. Paul seems to be flying in the face of our modern sensibilities with regard to the equality of women.
- But if we look at this passage with an eye toward understanding what St. Paul actually meant rather than reading it through the lenses of our modern biases, we actually see a very beautiful theology of marriage here.
- In fact, this is an extremely important Scriptural passage because in it, St. Paul gives us the blueprint for how husbands and wives are to interact and cooperate with one another in living out their marital vows according to God's plan for marriage.
- As most of us are called to live out our lives in the married state, the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is the primary means for most of us to grow in holiness. Therefore, it's absolutely critical that we understand God's plan for marriage so that we can live it properly.
- Before delving into this passage, I think it's important to understand that in God's eyes, men and women are radically equal in dignity, and both men and women are called to holiness. But even though we are equal in dignity, men and women are not the same.
- If we look at a male and female body, we can see that they are alike in many different ways, but they are not identical. Rather, the physical nature of our bodies reveals that men and women are complementary. In other words, we are meant to go together, to be one flesh!
- We can see this complementarity played out not only in our physical natures, but in other ways as well. Men and women each have their own particular gifts that they bring to the family, to society, and to the Church.
- The point is that while we are equal in dignity, neither gender fully encompasses the best of human potential. Rather, we need each other! And thus God created marriage!
- Because we are by nature different, the roles that men and women play in marriage are necessarily different. And that's the very basic point that St. Paul is making in this passage.
- St. Paul tells us that wives should be subordinate to their husbands. In doing so St. Paul is not stating that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they should be slaves to their husbands. He is stating that wives should be under the leadership of their husbands.

- At the same time, while husbands are called to exercise leadership in marriage, St. Paul makes it clear that they are called to do so through serving their wives, by being willing to lay down their lives, just as Christ laid down His life for the Church.
- As Catholics we believe that marriage is a holy mystery, a symbol of Christ's love for the Church. The very beauty and dignity of marriage is found in the fact that it is an extension of the covenantal love between Christ and the Church.
- But because marriage is a sacrament, it is not simply a symbol of the relationship Christ has with the Church. In this passage St. Paul is telling us that this relationship between Christ and the Church is actually lived out in Christian marriage.
- Thus, Christian husbands are to mirror the love of Jesus by truly loving their wives, by being faithful, and by being willing to do anything necessary to help their wives attain salvation, even to the point of being willing to die for them.
- A husband's leadership, then, is exercised through showing his wife the path to Heaven. This he does not only by encouraging her to lead a virtuous and holy life, but also by providing for her needs and protecting her from harm.
- In turn, a wife is called to follow her husband's leadership, supporting him and encouraging him as he directs the entire family toward God's will.
- Wives are called to be subordinate to their husbands not as a means to suppressing their liberty. The subordination that St. Paul speaks of does not require a wife to yield to unreasonable demands or to anything incompatible with her wifely dignity.
- Rather, wives should relate to their husbands in a way that reflects the Church in her obedience to our Lord. Wifely obedience is meant to be a sign of love.
- A helpful analogy is to see the husband as the head of the family and the wife as the heart. Both are indispensable to life, and both rely on the other in order to work properly.
- As the head the husband sets the direction and leads the way for the entire family, while as the heart the wife is at the center of the family, being the source of strong, patient, and generous love the husband needs so that he can lead as he should.
- As this is God's plan for marriage, and as it is rooted in our God-given natures as men and women, we must do more than just pay simple lip-service to this understanding of marriage.
- As a priest who has worked with a lot of married couples, I find that when one person in a marriage decides to abdicate his or her proper role, or when one person tries to usurp the role of the other person, problems always arise.
- But when both persons in a marriage earnestly seek to serve and glorify the Lord by fulfilling their God-given roles in their marriage, then even in the midst of the hardships of life there is a unity and harmony that enables the couple to weather whatever suffering comes their way.
- Indeed, peace and fulfillment in any marriage can only be found in a proper understanding of who God calls to be as men and women.
- Moreover, it's only when husbands and wives both embrace their God-given roles in their marriage that they grow in mutual fidelity and holiness.
- My dear friends in Christ, marriage is one of the most beautiful gifts that our dear Lord has given to humanity. But it is a fragile gift that requires a great deal of care. Let us pray today that all married people will live out their marriages according to God's plan.
- And let us pray as well that all people will grow in a greater understanding and respect for the sacrament of marriage, for the good of our society, and for the good of our souls.