

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
20 January, Anno Domini 2018
Ephesians 5:22-33
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

A lot of people are crying out against so-called toxic masculinity these days. I'm sure you've all at least heard of if not seen the Gillette razor ad telling men that they can do better than standing around grilling while their boys fight, while bullies chase after another boy, while images of men (primarily from TV and movies ironically enough) catcalling women and generally being obnoxious run through the background. The message is clear "Men you are terrible because you are men".

Understand, the real goal of the commercial is obnoxious and toxic. It wants us to believe that all men are perverts and dummies and brutes. It also wants us to believe that being a pervert and a dummy and a brute is masculinity. The great irony is that the very media and corporate giants who are trying to capitalize through their faux outrage are the very ones who created the problem - selling sex and violence, telling us that being a man is smoking a cigarette, brutalizing others, acting as a vigilante, and treating women like conquests. And now, their actions which redefined men in the absence of their Creator are being pinned on Christianity as though Christians advocate for bullying misogynistic sadists. No shock. Nero blamed the burning of Rome on Christ's people.

But the world can do nothing other than consume itself by its own hatred of the truth. It hates what God has called good and then is appalled by the terrible consequences of chasing after evil. People suffer and even die under the foolishness that the world calls "tolerance" and "equality" and "love". The very same people who gushed over the 50 Shades garbage and couldn't get enough of it, who tell us that pornography doesn't hurt anyone, who insist that divorce is harmless and should be simple, want us to believe that they actually understand what masculinity and love are, that they are the advocates and defenders of women, that they love children, as though they have any clue what love and sex are about. Insanity at its finest.

Yet, as stupid as the commercial is, there is a grain of truth to it. By-and-large, we (and I do mean both the unbelieving culture and, many times, we in the church) have taught our boys that manhood is defined by pride and arrogance and rejection of humility, selfishness rather than selflessness, sauntering around with a hardness to our face and a bite to our voice, an obsession with brute strength, and a view of women that sees them as just something pretty to look at rather than a helpmeet from God to be honored and elevated in the eyes of all. The gentle man who exercises quiet strength of character almost seems a thing of the past. So many men are now either neanderthals or effeminate.

And the examples of real men in the commercial shouldn't cause you or me to balk. These are the men St. Paul speaks of in Ephesians. A real man sticks up for the weak and the vulnerable. A real man lays down his life for others. Men need to be strong and learn to battle because there is wickedness and wicked people all around who need to be fought and overcome - some verbally, some physically. But a real man never uses his strength for himself. He uses it to benefit and protect others - his wife, his children, his country, the poor, the sick, the preborn, the aged. A real man is absolutely opposed to the debased men who make lewd comments and jokes about women, who mock and belittle their wives and refuse to tend their marriages, who lament the

inconvenience of their children. A real man treasures women as a gift from God to be lifted up and honored rather than treated like toys and degraded. A real man rejoices in his sons and daughters and raises them in the faith.

If masculinity is the stereotypes laid out in the commercial, as portrayed on nearly every sitcom on television, as sung about in most modern music, then, yes, masculinity is toxic. In that case it's completely vacuous and useless. But that is NOT actual masculinity. It is a masculinity devoid of the Word of God. It is masculinity that has nothing to do with Christ and His Church. It is the devil's masculinity, a false masculinity erected by Satan in order to inspire a revolt against God's creation, designed to pit men and women against one another. And, oh, how it has worked.

Men, boys - see the Lord Jesus, the true head and husband who laid down His life for the Church, who suffered and bled and died so that she might be cleansed and sanctified and live beside Him and share in His glory. That is what it means to be a man. The office of husband is to be the pre-eminent picture of Christ in this dark and wretched world even as marriage is to be the pre-eminent picture of the relationship between Christ and His beloved Bride. It is no wonder that our Lord chooses the occasion of a wedding celebration to perform the first of His miracles. This was a time of great joy and celebration as it should have been - as it should always be! The great bridegroom has come! He has come to redeem His Bride and to save her from the false and abusive husbands of sin and death. He has come to win her back from her adulterous idolatry and give her life, to take away her sin and cover her in His righteousness, to make her beautiful once again.

Rejoice! Celebrate! Raise a chalice of the finest wine, wine that bears with it the saving Blood of Jesus and drink deeply. This is what salvation is all about - the true man and husband uniting Himself to His Beloved and sharing with her all the blessings of His eternal kingdom. The cost was high - His Body and Blood given into death. But the joy was more than worth it. Nothing causes more rejoicing around the banquet table of heaven than repentant sinners being cleansed of their iniquities by the absolving word of the Lord Jesus Christ and being joined to Him in an inseparable union that He will never deny or abandon.

The God-man didn't not use His headship as a weapon to do harm or a bludgeon to dominate and demand His way. He did not lay His headship aside to focus on Himself. He didn't ask the Bride to do what belonged to His vocation. He didn't complain. He prayed. He taught. He protected. He sacrificed. He gives Himself to His Bride and asks nothing of her in return. He took all of her debt and paid it with His Blood and continues daily to provide for her in every need. He drove off her enemies. He feeds her and desires that she be filled with children born of Holy Baptism who will sit at His table that He might feed them good things as well.

And here you sit, children of this mysterious union born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. You are the cause of your Lord's joy! He has no goals or aspirations. His purpose is your salvation, your eternal life. As members of the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church you are members of Christ. And this Church in love and joy subjects herself to the love of her groom so that she might receive His blessing. This is no burden to her! This is the source of her highest joy - to be with her Bridegroom and to share in His kingdom.

Men, young men, boys - you have not been baptized into Christ so that you can walk in the darkness of vulgarity and terror. You have been set free from such selfishness that you may walk in the Spirit of Jesus Christ - a spirit of humility, gentleness, and selflessness. If you would be a real man, you must first become nothing, acknowledge your weakness and inadequacy, confess

your sins. You must allow Christ to make you a real man - forgiving you and giving you His Holy Spirit that you might be remade in His image.

We men must most certainly repent because we have so often fallen into the world's trap and embraced a false masculinity that is actually cowardice. We traded true strength - strength of character, conviction, and piety - for the weakness of domination and selfish ambition. We have often forsaken what it truly means to be husband, father, and head. We don't want to give ourselves over on behalf of someone else. We don't want to subject our will and our desire to their good. We avoid marriage as long as possible and encourage others to do the same. We view children as expenses and risks rather than blessings. We chase after childish pleasures and forsake our duties as husband and fathers. We have abandoned our chief role of teaching our family the Christian faith and leave it to pastors one hour a week. We are sure to teach our sons how to swing a hammer and turn a wrench and fire a .22, but we have been lax in teaching them to pray, to confess their sins, to read the Scriptures, to love their wives as their own bodies. And the consequences are all around us. Boys who never grow to be men who stand up for women or children. Marriages that crumble apart because men dump their responsibilities on their wives. Thugs and brutes who only seek to exert their will over others and even take pleasure in seeing others suffer under them. Packed, multibillion-dollar stadiums and churches that can barely keep the lights on and the floor swept. Children who are so confused that they begin to even question whether they are boys or girls or something else all together. Women who feel left with no other choice than to take over the headship that men have abandoned. Churches that are no longer places of life and strength and protection and truth but places of empty emotional foolishness and all kinds of demonic teachings. Men, the hard truth of the matter is that the guilt of all of these things lies squarely at our feet.

But don't despair or throw up your hands. Instead, let us seek after God's mercy which He freely gives to us in Christ. True manhood and true womanhood are found in humility, a humility that begins with confession and ends with absolution. We must first recognize that we are not enough, that we have failed, that we have rebelled and sought to live outside our vocations to disastrous consequence. And thanks be to God, the ever-faithful and true Lord and husband, He is slow to anger and abounding in forgiveness. Men, let us repent of following in the footsteps of our father, Adam, who loved himself more than his wife and the Word of God, who remained silent in the face of the devil's lies, and threw Eve under the bus by forcing her to do what God had given to him and then trying to blame her. Women, forgive us for trying to lay the responsibility of our headship upon you and yourselves repent of the fear that would lead you to seek it. Demand that we men lead, teach, provide, and protect. Don't give us a pass. Forgive us when we falter. Pray for us. Encourage us. But do not make it easy for us to lay aside what God has placed upon us.

Men, it is our God-given responsibility to ensure that our wives, our children, and our congregation are cared for. Right now, our congregation is facing some difficult challenges which means you and I and our families are facing difficult challenges. That means that you and I are responsible for them - both for their existence and for their resolution. Our Lord has richly blessed this congregation in many ways. We are approaching the 10th anniversary of the dedication of this building in which God has continued to feed and nourish, baptize, marry, catechize, and bury many of his dear saints. This is truly cause for celebration and thanksgiving! It is also time for all of us to step forward and offer our prayers, our wisdom, our energy, and our offerings. It's not a choice we have. It is a divinely appointed obligation which we are blessed to bear and carry out. None of us are exempt from it.

There are conversations that need to be had and decisions that need to be made, all of them in the joy and confidence that we are Christ's beloved and redeemed people. This is not a time for hand-wringing or finger-pointing or posturing or running. It is a time for repentant humility, for prayer, and for all of us together putting our hands to the plough, to sacrifice time, comfort, and money for the work of the kingdom (which, truly, is no sacrifice at all). We must re-examine ourselves to see that we are seeking first (for ourselves and those entrusted to our care) the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The harvest is indeed plentiful in our area. You are already some of that harvest. But there are other sheep who need to be brought into the fold. And the Lord has granted us the joy and privilege of working in His kingdom that they might be brought and saved and join in the marriage feast of the Lamb.

It is my fervent prayer that God would pour out His Holy Spirit upon us that we might approach these days in the joy and confidence of our Lord's promises, and the strength and willingness to commit ourselves to the work at hand that the Word of God may go forth. The true husband, Jesus Christ, will be as He always has been, faithful to His dear Church. He will not abandon her. May His faithfulness and mercy kindle in us a fervent desire for His Word and Holy Sacraments and may He strengthen us for the work that lies ahead.

In the Name of +Jesus.