

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
16 January, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 2:1-11
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

The newest issue of the Lutheran Witness recently arrived at our house and this month's issue is devoted to the topic of the order of creation. Entitled "Male and Female He Created Them", its goal is to explore the divinely ordained distinctions and complementary nature of male and female. I strongly encourage you to pick it up and read it and engage your children clearly on the issue of male and female. They are being bombarded with confusing, anti-Biblical lies that purposefully lead to devastating confusion.

The divine institutions of marriage and family are under relentless siege from the world. The family, as God instituted it, is central to each individual's identity and understanding of the world in which they live. The family is to be the place where the husband gives his life sacrificially for his wife and she, in turn, receive his love and care and together they provide an unassailable fortress behind whose walls children are protected and raised and taught to know Christ and to love their neighbor. This is why Satan and his world hate marriage and are working tirelessly to destroy it. Parents are deemed threats to their children and the state is heralded as the all-knowing, all-loving father to whom all should look. Men are emasculated and hated because they are the ones God has designed to be the defenders and protectors and providers after His own image.

What I want to focus our attention on this morning is what St. Paul makes abundantly clear in his letter to the Ephesians and what Christ affirms by His first miracle - that marriage and family, the union of husband and wife and everything that flows from that union are reflections of and are rooted in a far deeper and greater reality - the Lord Jesus Christ, uniting Himself in the flesh to His bride, the Holy Christian Church and in so doing redeeming her. That correspondence is not simply a neat coincidence. It is foundational. Marriage is what it is because Christ is who He is and has done what He has done.

Consequently, the way in which we treat marriage and family and children, the way in which husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, and children conduct themselves toward their God-given families, the way we as a Church speak about issues of life and death and marriage and sexuality, the priorities that we as a Church and we as families set for ourselves - these things together are a direct reflection of how we think about Christ and our salvation. The more we understand that and as our own lives, our marriages, and our families are more and more rooted in what our Lord teaches us today, the more we will see our children grow into the faith rather than out of it, and we will sit with our grandchildren in the house of God and hear His Word and receive His gifts.

Certainly the marriage between a man and a woman is a precious gift from God, instituted in the Garden of Eden as the crown of all creation to stand as a reflection of both God Himself and His relationship to His creation. Adam wasn't a complete man until he had his beloved bride, his perfect complement. It wasn't good for Adam to be alone because God Himself is not alone. Yes, one God but three distinct persons who share a singular indivisible life. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them." And the two became one flesh.

But even that wasn't the end. The love shared between Adam and Eve was intended to continue God's creative work and to reflect the wondrous reality that the very nature and fruit of God's love is the creation of life. The God who is love, by nature desires someone to bestow His love upon. He didn't create man so that man could serve Him. It wasn't so that God had someone to fix Him dinner or fetch Him a beer while He watched the game. It was so that He might serve them and bless them and give them life. And so, woven into the fabric of marriage, arguably the central purpose of marriage is the creation of more life to be loved both by God and by parents. The command given to Adam and Eve, to all marriage, is simply "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it." Why? Because the Lord God is the God of life who delights in an abundance of life and who delights in loving that life. The more life the better, because that is more life to love. In the beginning, family was everything. Family was the government. Family was the Church. Adam's existence was to bless Eve's and Eve's was to bless Adam. There was no competition, no clamoring for headship. Adam and Eve didn't think in terms of mine and yours.

This is most definitely NOT how the world understand these things. Our sinful flesh wants to save our time, our money, and our energy all for ourselves. We tolerate others so long as they fulfill our desires and if they don't, we are more than ready to cast them aside. Sadly, this way of thinking has wormed its way in even among God's people. And the effects, across the board, are utterly devastating. Husbands and wives turned against each other. Young people being given the impression that spouses are annoyances rather than treasures and that marriage and children are burdens that should be avoided as long as possible. Children are taught to see themselves as the center of the universe and their parents either as their enemies or as their servants. The elderly are seen as drains on society whose lives should be ended as quickly and quietly as possible. The unborn aren't even considered people so that they can simply be disposed of at our convenience. The world would cast aside the weak, the vulnerable, the broken, the sick, the dying, and the hurting because they need help, because they demand our love, our time, our energy, and our resources and there is no return on our investment.

That is exactly the opposite image of what is placed before us in God's Word. Instead, at Cana, we see the Lord delighting to pour out His entire life for His bride. We see the Lord whose greatest pleasure is to give life, to protect life, to nurture life and keep it. What we see is the Lord Jesus revealing Himself as the true and good husband who has come to purify His bride and to save her, to provide for all of her needs of body and soul, at the cost of His own Blood. He takes our sin and shame and death away from us to cleanse us and make us beautiful, spotless and without blemish as He is. As the good husband, Jesus sheds His Blood by throwing Himself into the jaws of the enemy so that by His death He can protect us against Satan and his legions who seek to destroy us. This is the very essence of the marriage feast of Holy Communion where the wine of Christ's Blood pours out without measure for the forgiveness of all our sins, that we might be purified and saved.

What weight and what depth this adds to our own marriages and families! How dearly we should cherish and protect them. It is why we ought to be such fierce defenders of marriage, of children, and of all life. How can we not be when we ourselves are the fruit of the eternal marriage of Christ and the Church? We have been given life through our mother the Church in the waters of Holy Baptism and through her our heavenly Father continues to

nourish and feed us with His Word. How truly high and holy are the vocations of husband, wife, and child. Godly marriages should be celebrated and held up as examples. Our children should be taught to rejoice in and seek after marriage as a great blessing. New husbands and wives should learn from those husbands and wives who have weathered the storms and endured. We need to be encouragements to one another toward faithfulness and devotion to our families.

Husbands, in Christ, who has redeemed you, you see what a true man and husband and father is and does. His strength is His weakness and humility. His only concern is serving His bride and children with the good gifts of life and salvation. Everything, absolutely everything, takes a backseat to the eternal welfare of His wife and children. You are the face and hands of Christ to those given by God into your keeping. You have been given the solemn charge of defender and provider. You are to protect them from false teachers and the wolves of the world who would lure them away from Christ with pleasures and consume them. You are to love your wives in no less a way than Christ loved the Church - by dying for her. If you are living for yourself and expecting her to just follow wherever your whims blow you, you are denying Christ, forsaking your vows, and abandoning your vocation.

God has laid upon you the holy and precious obligation to teach your family the faith every day, to pray with them and for them, to bring them to Lord's house, even when they think they don't need it, to receive the full and free forgiveness of all their sins and to lead them to the Lord's Supper. In you they need to see a man of prayer, a man who studies the Word of God, a man who freely confesses his faults and seeks the forgiveness of Christ, a man who is filled with tenderness and compassion and who will stand up to defend the weak and vulnerable. Intimated yet? You should be. If you're not, I'm not sure you fully appreciate what is at stake. As goes the father, so goes the family because God has so ordered it. It's an extremely difficult task especially knowing that the devil, the whole world, and even your own flesh are set against you. But do not be afraid. It is God who has prepared this work for you and you for it, He has called you to it, and He will carry it out in you. And when you fall the Lord Jesus stands here with more than enough forgiveness for you. Don't be too proud or too cool to seek and receive it.

In the same way, wives, you have been called to submit to and receive this love and care and instruction from your husbands as you receive it from the Lord Himself. You are dearly beloved of God and have no need to fear as the world does. It is both sad and disgusting how the world tears down the vocations of wife and mother, trying to convince you that you don't really contribute unless you are driving to a job and bringing home a paycheck. Shame on them! Is there something more glorious than receiving the love and care of your husband as the Church receives the love and care of her Lord? None less than the Lord God Almighty has crowned you with glory and honor as wife and mother and He is pleased with that which the world scorns and mocks. Indeed, it is the seed of the woman, not the man, who crushed the head of Satan. He has blessed you to be the bearer of life and those who nurture and care for His own precious little lambs. Certainly, your husbands will fail because they are sinners. Forgive us, pray for us, and urge us on to be faithful husbands, forgiven and redeemed by God as you have been.

And children, I need you to listen to me as well. I pray you have been listening and learning as we talked about the vocations of husband and wife. Can you see now how blessed you are to be children that you may honor your parents and so honor God? Do you see how God has given your parents the great responsibility of raising you as Christians, to know and trust in Christ who saved you? How much they must love you, indeed, that they have made sure that you are here, now, in God's house, to be fed and taught by God, when they know full well you'd rather be running around and playing! And I'm sure that you don't want to make their God-given responsibilities a burden to them. Rather receive their love and their instruction with joy and thanksgiving. Honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them and forgive them when they fall even as Jesus has freely forgiven you. Give thanks to God for the blessings of faithful parents.

Sadly, in this sinful and broken world, where men, like the first man, have abandoned their vocations, turning from God, spurning His Word and remaining silent in the face of the devil's lies, many people suffer with broken families, unfaithful spouses, divorced or abusive parents, the loss of children, infertility, the spiritual and emotional damage of abortion and a whole host of other heartaches and hardships. These are often forced to struggle with loneliness, guilt, or shame because of their own sin or the sins that others have committed against them. Many find themselves battling addictions or seeking out harmful relationships in a desperate attempt to fill

the vacuum left by a broken family. All the more important that Christian marriages and families shine like bright beacons of hope in the chaos and darkness of this world. They serve as a place of refuge for those fleeing the fallout of the world's lies.

And though our earthly families may have failed us, the baptized children of God have an eternal family whose head is Christ, whose Father is the God of heaven and earth. Their faithfulness and care is eternal and perfect. In the Church we are surrounded by our adopted family, brothers and sisters joined together eternally by the Blood of Christ. Here is the refuge for the weary where none are left hungry, where the weak are received and protected, where the orphaned and widowed find a home, where the dying are given life, and the wounded find rest and healing.

Dearly beloved, here is your home. Here is the family table where the heavenly Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, feeds and nourishes you with the bread of His own Body and the wine of His own Blood. Here you will find rest for your wearied souls because Christ has come with the abundance of His mercy to give to you. May He bless your family and grant you faithfulness in your vocations and may you always know the refuge and peace of this, the body of Christ, your Christian family, the beloved children of God.

In the Name of +Jesus.