



Resurrection, Selflessness, and Married Life

Fr. Joseph Kentenich, March 20, 1961, OME #20, 207-209

What was St Paul's standpoint when he wanted to answer Christian questions or questions concerning daily living? His starting point was always: We are children of God and members of Christ. What is appropriate for a child of God, what is appropriate for a member of Christ? No matter whether he was dealing with the question of freedom, or all sorts of questions about the sexual life, he always solved problems from the one starting point: We are children of God and members of Christ.

It would be easy to examine this again. We would have to let Paul design a complete morality of marriage from the point of view that we are members of Christ. This evening I want to say just one or the other thing about it, but I don't want to develop the subject so that afterwards we can remain with practical questions.

When did we become members of Christ? At baptism. What does it mean to be a member of Christ? These are things we have almost all forgotten today. To be a member of Christ means being drawn into the death and resurrection of Christ, or to put it another way, to be drawn into the life of the dying and resurrected Lord (see Ro. 6,1-11). This is true of baptism, but it is also true in a new way of every sacrament. That is to say, through each of the sacraments our participation in the life of our dying and risen Lord is deepened. And Paul then teaches that this happens in a particular way through marriage. He deduces his entire morality and asceticism for marriage from this thought: Through marriage we become members of the dying, transfigured and risen Lord in a unique way.

Just as our Lord died for the Church - that is his great train of thoughts - so must the husband die for his wife (see Eph 5,25). In practice this means that love for his wife must be a selfless love; selfishness must die in the process. The generally valid answer is then: Christ's love for his Bride, the Church, must be the ideal for the husband and wife. You see, Christ gives himself up selflessly for his Church, he sheds his blood for her. And the Church has the obligation to surrender herself selflessly to her Spouse.

Do you understand how Paul transfigures and offers a new explanation for everything to do with marriage from the thought that we are members of Christ?

So, if I now ask: What is the meaning of marriage? I can give two answers. In general it is the oneness of the two partners in selflessly sacrificial love. However, when I think of Christian marriage, then this oneness of the two partners is in Christ, in God. In practice this means that the bond of love uniting husband and wife must be a bond of selfless, richly sacrificial love - just as Christ sacrificed himself for the Church and the Church gives herself selflessly to Christ.

When you think back on all that we have discussed in principle from the beginning, a saying may still resound in your ears: Marriage is a unique school of heroic love. If we see it in this way, and think of how it finds expression in practice: At first it is mostly a selfish love. This selfish love must gradually be purified until it reaches the highest degree of selfless love for each other. Most marriages break down because the partners never get beyond the first degree of love. ■