

It was interesting when listening to the words from Scripture, to look out, and see who's following along. Every once in a while, we have options for the readings, and so I mixed things up a little this morning. We did the full reading from Colossians, instead of the short reading; we did the short version of the Gospel instead of the long version of the Gospel, because when we read the long version of the Gospel it's more about next weekend than it is about this weekend.

I really wanted us to focus around what it means for us to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. Now, I have to admit, I love today's second reading. It's one of the most controversial readings, because of one of the most controversial lines in Scripture. "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands." I am trolling! But I love preaching about it. Because if we just take that out of context, that's all we hear: "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands!" Done! No, no, no, we're Catholic, we take everything *in context*.

What is Christ trying to tell us through the words of St Paul to the Colossians? "Give thanks to God the Father through Him, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. If you have a grievance against another, bring it to the Lord. And forgive. And over all of these put on love, that is the bond of perfection." That's the context that we're called to hear this in.

But there's another translation of this reading, yes it says, "Wives be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper to the Lord", but the following line is a little different than we heard today. It says, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves His church" Husbands love your wives *as Christ loves His Church*. Wow! I think every husband fails. Because none of us can love anyone as much as Christ loves his church.

And so this isn't trying to set husbands against wives, and wives against husbands. It's trying to put into right relationship who we are called to be as God's people. He's calling us to be more than we can possibly ever be. He's calling us to put everything in perspective of the bond of love. The idea that we are each created in the image and likeness of God is perfectly capsulated in the Feast of the Holy Family.

St Augustine tells us that the bond of love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. What then is the bond of love between a father and a mother? The child. The best way for us and humanity to emulate the relationship between the Father and the Son is to be married, to love each other truly in a self-sacrificial way, because that is the definition of love: to give completely from one to another not expect anything in return. To enter into the mystery of the love of God.

That's what today's second reading is all about. It's not about submissiveness. He could have chosen another word, that could have translated differently when we get it from the original text as well. But many times, we hear Scripture the same way we hear each other when we're upset with each other. We hear that one word, that one phrase, and we turn off everything around it. "You said **what?**" "Let me finish." "No, no you said this." "Yes, but let me..." "No, no, no!" We get to where we build up these walls so that anything that could possibly be good can't get through after we hear this one phrase.

And so when we hear Paul say "Wives be submissive to your husbands," we say, "He said what!? No wonder Paul hated women!" Paul didn't hate women. "But it says that he said...that wives need to be subordinate to their husbands." Okay, let's see the rest of the message. Like Paul Harvey, that's what I'm here to give you today – the rest of the story.

It's all about love. It's all about how we are each called to respond to the love in which we have been created. When we talk about Christ being the head of the Church, and the Church being the Bride of Christ, and we look at this reading, it gives us a different way of looking at it. Because if wives are to be subordinate to their husbands, that also means the Church, the Bride of Christ, is called to be subordinate to her husband, to Christ.

How many times have I told you about how I tried to put my own will above God's will, and how well that worked out for me. It didn't work out well. Every time I try to put my will up here, and don't work with God – Bam, flat on my face, every single time! it's because I'm not working with God, I'm working against him. There's that old saying pride comes before the fall. And what is sin, but the fall of humanity. So pride, me thinking I know better than God, comes before any sin that I commit.

It makes sense if you think about it in those terms. So when I look at this passage, and it says wives be subordinate to your husbands, and it is amazing because from up here you look out and you see all the women going "Grrr!" Do they, do we allow ourselves to hear the rest of the story?

I think many times, when we hear something politically, we think, Yup, there's Trump going off this way. Or there was Obama going off that way. Oh, there's the democrats, oh, there's the republicans. And we automatically characterize them by one word or phrase they say, and we shut ourselves off from the rest of their message. Now in both instances they were probably wrong, but what are they trying to show us? Can we find good in things that we disagree with? I think we can. I think many times in the things we disagree with we can find more good than we can find disagreement.

The problem though, is that we put up this wall, so fast that we have one of two options. To stay in our secluded box, or to peek outside and to say, "Now, is there any validity to this?" I've had that multiple times in my own life, even in the short two and a half years that I've been a priest.

My first year preaching for Palm Sunday, I was so overwhelmed by being able to read the parts of Christ. I was so overwhelmed that Jesus' words were coming out of my mouth on this day in this place. I couldn't function when it came to my homily. I was just so overwhelmed by the emotions I was going through. So when I got an email later that night saying "Father I was disappointed in your homily. Father, this is the homily I look forward to every year, because it is what brings us close it make us understand the necessary things that Jesus went through for our salvation. And you made it all about you!"

It could have been really easy to put that wall up. And at first, I did. I said who are you? Are you kidding me? I'm the priest! And then I said "Whoa! Talk about pride! Who am I? Yes, I'm a priest, but that doesn't make me better or worse than anyone." I took it to prayer. I prayed evening prayer that night and I said, God, if there's any validity to this, show me.

That next morning, I woke up at three o'clock, (not with insomnia), and rewrote my homily. Because I realized that there was validity in the criticism that I had heard. But if I had just put up that wall, I would have gone on having an "all about me" message. And that's something that we as priests, as deacons, as preachers, we fall into sometimes talking about ourselves. And sometimes talking about myself isn't a bad thing - as long as it has something to do with the message. That day it had nothing to do with it. And sometimes we fall into that trap. We like to talk about ourselves. I'm not gonna lie. I get

bored talking about myself now, because you guys have to hear this once, but Bonita's gotta hear it three different times, and I've gotta say it three different times, so I try and adapt it a little bit each time, because otherwise it gets really, really boring to preach.

But when we come here to celebrate this feast of the Holy Family, it's all about us recognizing our relationship with God. It's all about us recognizing that without the love of God, the Church would be lost. Without the love of spouses both husbands and wives, family life is lost.

I grew up hearing the phrase, "The family that prays together stays together" and I believe it more and more the older I get. In our family growing up we said the rosary every Sunday. It was tedious. Oh, man as a kid, it was so tedious every Sunday saying the rosary. But to this day, 32 years after I was born, my parents still do a Sunday rosary. If you're at home, if you're in the car with them, "Alright it's time for the family rosary." If you're on a pilgrimage, "Time for the family rosary." "But we've already said three today!" "Doesn't matter, time for the family rosary." Wow, ok mom and dad. They pray together every morning, they pray together every night. When they aren't with each other, they pray for each other.

Inviting God into the bedroom, inviting God into the relationship between man and wife is the most natural thing we can do. My dad had to teach this class on NFP, Natural Family Planning at Bishop McGuinness. About ten years ago my brother was in his class. And he talked about the idea of our will and God's will. Well my parent's plan was to have three children. Number 5 was sitting in the classroom. And he was telling this story, "Yes, my wife and my plan was to have 3 children," and my brother kind of gives a look, and dad says, "Hold on Matthew, hold on." Especially when the fourth child we had was a miscarriage that we didn't want to go through that ever again. So,

when my wife then got pregnant for the fifth time, he would tell the class, we were worried. Because our plan had 3, and we had already had 4, lost the fourth one, but God's plan was different than ours. And we give thanks to God every day that he gave us not only a 4th, but a 5th, and then a 6th.

That's beautiful. That they accepted even though it wasn't in their plan, even though it wasn't in their budget, (believe me it wasn't in their budget!) to have 5 children alive and well, that God still knew what He was doing. That's what it means for us to be subordinate to the husband that is Christ. To be subordinate to love in our lives, to say, this isn't my plan but okay, let's see how this works, because You know so much better than I could ever know, Lord.

But we all fall into that trap I think of thinking that we know better than God, of thinking that our plan is the best. I'd always heard it said that you make a plan and God just stares at you and laughs. And then says, "Okay, now here's how it's gonna work." And many times that's a good thing, because sometimes we're just so far stuck in our own world that if we were to look up we'd be surprised about what's actually around us.

I think many times in life, we get so nitpicky in the things in our lives that we don't recognise that if we aren't doing something to better our relationship with God, and if this thing doesn't have anything to do with my eternal salvation, is it really worth my anxiety? Now, being someone who suffers from insomnia, the newest trick, it's often difficult for us to put those little things by the wayside. But if we're looking at everything as we're called to do in today's second reading, to do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus, to do everything to get closer to heaven, do these little nitpicky things really matter for my salvation or someone else's salvation?

I don't think we think about that enough. I think sometimes we're so quarantined off by these walls we put up we don't realize the filth that we've put around us. It's the old saying that sin begets more sin. And it's hard to make that place, to make room within our hearts that I preached about last week if all we have around us is sin. And by reframing everything that we do around the bond of love around the Holy Family to see okay, how am I acting in this moment out of the love of God, or how am I integrating the love of God into this moment and then how am I showing the love of God to others?

That's how we're called to kind of reprogram our minds and our lives and our thoughts, and our words and our deeds and our actions. And today's the perfect day to start that. Because today, for the 'rest of the year,' all 14.5 hours of it, we can live the life that God calls us to. For this whole year and then do it again next year. Next year's gonna be whole lot harder than this year though.

But can we put in the forefront our mind, for the next 14.5 hours, the love of God? Can we put in the forefront of our actions, the love of God in everything we do? Especially when we get out of the church into the parking lot and someone cuts us off? Instead of waving the bird, we just wave. Instead of cussing we say God bless you! (And I don't mean bless your heart!) Can we truly allow our words actions and deeds to bring us back to that love in which we were created?

As I talked about last Sunday for the Christmas Vigil Mass, we talked about the covenant between God and man, beginning with Abraham. As we have in today's first reading from the book of Genesis, this is right after that whole covenantal experience that Abram had with God. And God says look up! And see the stars of the sky; so numerous will your descendants be. And Abram says well if that's gonna happen it's not gonna be through my wife, because she's 80

years old and way past childbearing. And so Abraham thought: well, if this is gonna happen I've gotta make it happen. He lost trust in God.

Right after the first covenant with God, humanity lost trust in God. He said if I am to have a child, if my descendants are to be as numerous as the stars of the sky or the sands of the seashore, its gotta be through my servant Hagar. And so he goes off and lays with Hagar. Ishmael is there. And God says, "No that's not what I'm talking about. Have faith!" "My wife is 80 years old, how much faith do you want me to have?!" "Have faith. Your wife will bear a child and you will call him Isaac. And from him this promise, this covenant that I've made with you, will succeed."

So when we have difficult things in Scripture, whether it be reading the 42 generations between Abraham to Jesus, whether it be hearing about wives being subordinate to your husbands, let's not just take them at face value. Let's allow them to be an opportunity to dig a little bit deeper and say, it obviously can't just mean what I think it means here - I mean, 42 generations? is that just a list of people? No. It's all about our salvation history, the ups and downs. Okay, wives being subordinate to your husbands, okay, what are you trying to say here to us God?

Well we need to investigate it, because we have many hard teachings in our lives, we have many hard teachings in our church. And they're gonna continue to be hard until we begin to investigate them. It's the old saying you only get what you give. If you put nothing into it, you're not going to get much from it.

One of the most often heard frustrations about Mass that I hear is that Father, it's so boring! I say well obviously you listened to my homily. Because it's not boring (sometimes) But Mass is only as boring as we allow it to be.

I always find it interesting when people are reading through the Scripture and saying, "This isn't the reading that I read when I was preparing for this week. And the readings they're reading, I don't remember these ones." That's a good thing. Because that means you put something into the preparation for Mass. But its even better when you did prepare, and you did read these readings, and then he said something that you missed. That's awesome.

o then we begin to think about it, and we begin to ponder what did father say, what did the Gospel say, what did the readings say. And when we come to the sacrifice of the Mass and we see, in a very visible way bread and wine becoming the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, when we go up and the priest or deacon says, "The Body of Christ," and we say, "Amen," which is "I believe that this truly is the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ, we are being truthful and honest in our words and our actions and our deeds.

But at times when we come here, we fall asleep. But we are called to grow out of that. We're called to use every time we go to Mass as an opportunity to deepen our faith, not only while we're in the church though, but to talk about these things when you go home.

Talk about what I said. Whether valid or invalid, talk about what I say whether good or bad, whether controversial or not, discuss these things. Discuss, "Where was Father going with his homily today? It just took forever!" "Yeah, but did you hear this?" "Oh, I missed that." Allow this to be an opportunity to take what we receive and to use it and to give it.

Because every time we come to Mass, every time we come to this church, God is offering us a plentiful harvest of gifts. But many times we're so distracted by what's around us that we don't see the gift. We don't unwrap the gift. Or if we see and unwrap it we don't use it. So

allow this Christmas time, this time of plentiful harvest, to be a new opportunity to receive the gifts, to unwrap them, and to use them And remember to do everything in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.