

THE DIGNITY OF MOTHERHOOD

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DIGNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN WIFE AND MOTHER

There is a song which is so sweet and tender and at the same time affects us so powerfully that from the earliest times it has always charmed the ear of man, deeply penetrating the hearts of all throughout the centuries. This is the glorious song of a mother's love. Like a melody out of fairyland it surrounds our tender childhood, in later years it penetrates our souls, admonishing and conquering us, and when old age has come upon us, it comes back once more from the days of our childhood, nostalgic and sad. Nay, when hearts have grown hard and feelings blunted, the sacred melody of a mother's love still exerts a magic power over us and, as we listen, there rises up before our minds an image of the ideal woman embodied in our own good mother; and if we should ask what is most noble and glorious, nay most sacred, unequalled in value, in the whole world, even the silver haired old man will answer: a mother.

People are right to look up to the mother with reverence and esteem, nay with a certain holy awe. We especially have every reason to look up to our mothers with genuine esteem, for when we see our mothers in the light of our holy religion, we must bow in reverent awe before the high dignity of our mothers. For it is God Himself who transfigured and ennobled the motherhood of our women, casting upon it a supernatural light. From the Godhead above we see a light shed upon the motherhood of our Catholic women. This light reveals to us the high dignity of the mother proceeding from her origin, all that she stands for and her far-reaching significance.

In order to convince ourselves of the profound dignity of Motherhood in the Christian sense, let us consider it from its first beginning, from its ultimate source. Our Christian motherhood has its place in the world whose Creator is the Lord God. We see in it no mere natural event of nature, nor the result of a slow, gradual evolution from the animal kingdom without any higher intervening power. No, our faith shows us that human motherhood originated in a very different way. We see at the beginning of man's history two human beings, and we observe how the Lord God gave to Adam a helpmate, not a slave, perceiving her destiny in the name that was bestowed upon her; for this name means "Mother of all the living." In the womb of the first woman lay the first foundation, the root of the future generations. This first woman was to be a mother in accordance with her chief destiny. And God Himself had given her this task.

Here lies the foundation of all motherhood, the source from which springs all motherhood to the present day. This fountain is no other than the Lord God Himself. It was the omnipotence of God that founded motherhood in the first woman in the world, and that, through the laws of nature, lets the stream of life continue to flow through every woman who becomes a mother in accordance with His will. For in its origin motherhood is profoundly anchored in the eternal foundations of the Godhead.

But surely that which comes from the sublime Divinity must of necessity be something high and noble, something glorious and holy? Must it not, furthermore, receive a supernatural consecration from this source? If every mother were ever conscious that she also becomes a mother only by the omnipotence of the Lord God what profound reverence and esteem she must have for herself! With what love she would devote herself to her high calling! How conscientiously she would carry out the duties of the office to which God Himself has called her!

Thus we perceive the dignity of the mother as holy and sublime when we only consider her origin alone. How much greater it becomes when we consider what she signifies, when we consider her inmost being!

THE MOTHER AN ALTAR OF GOD

The following expressive words are to be found in one of the oldest Christian books: "Let the mother know she is an altar of God." How beautiful and how appropriate when applied to every truly Christian mother! Is not every mother actually an altar of sacrifice on which she must continually offer herself up? Oh, Christian mother, what has made you truly a mother of your children? Did the Lord God take some earth and with it make a little human body, and imparting to

it an immortal soul, lay it at your breast, saying: "Behold, here is your child! Now, you shall be a mother!" But no. Not from the lifeless earth did He make your child, but from your own living flesh and blood. You had to give a part of yourself, to sacrifice something of yourself; then through the united love of you and your husband, the new human life came into being mysteriously, beneath your heart. During nine months you had to give blood from your heart to provide nourishment and life for your baby. Thus your womb became an altar on which a great sacrifice was offered up for your child's well-being.

But in this sacrifice lay a marvellous power. Through this sacrifice you became the giver of a new life. By means of this sacrifice, giving from your own life to your child, you shared in the Divine Omnipotence which operated in you and through you, and let a new human life come into being within you. A feeling of profound awe filled your heart, perhaps, when in quiet hours hopes filled your breast as you became aware of great things passing within you:

"To me it is so wonderful!
It is as though I have become
Truly the workshop of God!"

In those days you were truly the workshop of God. The divine breath of life had awakened a new life within your womb. Nowhere in God's wide world does the Eternal Omnipotence operate more gloriously, more sublimely than in the womb of a young mother who looks forward to her baby. There the All-Holy has, indeed, set up a workshop in which He Himself by the breath of His omnipotence forms the highest work of art. There stands also the altar of sacrifice on which the sacrificial fire of maternal love burns unceasingly, night and day. Hence the whole being of the expectant mother is wrapped in reverence and awe because great things are done in her. Hence it is that she spreads a veil of seclusion over the mystery of a babe being formed beneath her heart; hence her countenance is transfigured by the sweet, modest joy of the expectant mother. What a sad error is made by those mothers who feel ashamed of their pregnant state, who fear that the miracle of Life may be fulfilled in them!

While it is a sublime task to aid the Divine Creator in forming the human body, many sacrifices must be offered up to this end on the altar of the maternal heart. But to what heights must the maternal dignity soar when one considers that she is also destined by God to be the moulder of her child's soul! Not only that this Divine spark which sprang directly from the Divine life, first rested hidden within her womb, but that the Lord God has entrusted this treasure to her above all others, to be faithfully guarded and reared. In order to fulfil this task her heart must be truly an altar on which she must daily offer up sacrifices to the All Highest for her children. Christian mother, you have been given the sublime task of bringing up your child—not first of all for this world and its claims, but for the Eternal God Whose image your child bears in its soul, for Him Who entrusted your child to you to keep for Him and to give back to Him at the end of his days in this life. You are a faithful servant of God, a trustworthy servant of the Most High. He has placed in your hands the highest and best in the whole creation of the world, the immortal human soul whose home is God Himself. Behold how God has chosen you, entrusted you with this task, honouring you, especially, by making you His deputy.

When you ponder over all this and realise clearly what a high dignity the Lord God has decreed shall be yours, making you capable of imparting your own flesh and blood to your child, entrusting to your faithful care the soul of the child, then your heart should be filled with holy thanksgiving, then in hours of quiet thought you, too, can rejoice with her who was most blessed: "He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His Name." For His Spirit touches every mother and lets what is holy happen to her. Hence it is that there is something great about a mother. Every mother is clothed with a sublime and glorious dignity.

MOTHERHOOD AND PRIESTHOOD

But we have not yet said everything that appertains to the glorious greatness of maternal dignity. The subject has not yet been completely exhausted. If the dignity of motherhood is sublime on account of its origin and what it consists of, it

is equally sublime and sacred on account of its significance. The mother's calling has often been compared with that of the priest; it has been said that after the priest, the mother is the most important person in human society. This is true. What the priest is for the supernatural life of Christians, the mother is for the natural life of humanity. As the supernatural life is the special care of the priest who has to encourage and watch over it, so the natural human life of society finds its support in our mothers. Nay, the supernatural life of the Church to a large extent depends on the mothers. Motherhood and priesthood are in many ways alike.

MOTHERS THE CORE OF SOCIETY

All wives and mothers are the pillars of families, the well-springs of social life, the core of society. Take the mother away from the family and the family ceases to exist! If the wives and mothers were removed from the social life, all life would gradually cease, for soon there would be more coffins than cradles. If the mothers were torn from society, it would be the death-blow to society whose heart would thus be torn from its breast, as it were, we should find ourselves in an icy atmosphere because the warm sun of maternal love would have vanished for ever. The Church and the State may be said to have their foundations in our wives and mothers. Nay, every society that would continue to exist places its hopes in our wives and mothers.

Even Heaven itself looks down full of expectation, upon our mothers. Up there in the House of our heavenly Father, there are many mansions standing empty, many places unoccupied. It is the mothers who are destined to co-operate in filling these dwellings, in having these places occupied. Thus, mothers are not only the hope of humanity; they are, above all, the hope of Heaven.

So high, so sublime is her dignity that she reaches out far beyond this life on earth and has her efficacy and meaning even in Eternity. The Lord God first lights the undying spark of the human soul in the womb of the mother. Henceforth it shall shine throughout eternity. The human soul which through the creative breath of God, first imparted life to the embryo beneath the mother's heart, will never die. No power of any creature can be extended so far as to bring destruction upon this soul, not even though by some horrible act, the embryonic life should never know the light of the sun. But the omnipotence of God which could destroy that which it created, has bound itself and will never permit to die that which it has called into existence. The life of the soul is eternal, without limit or end, even as Eternity is without end. The human being enters into this Eternity only through the mother; only because that mother allowed the life to awaken in her *womb*, does the human being enter Eternity.

But this is true not only of the soul; it is also entirely true with regard to the body. Of course the body must pass through the stage of decay, but on the last day it will rise up radiantly transfigured—to live unchanged for all eternity. Hence the body also enters Eternity through the mother.

Thus, if in a certain sense, Heaven itself is dependent on our mothers, surely the dignity of our mothers also ascends to Heaven. And so, Christian mother, when you think of the coming generations who had their beginning in your womb, and who will therefore one day thank you for their eternal happiness, then you also can say with right: "From now all generations shall call me blessed."

Such is the noble dignity of the Christian mother as it appears in the transfigured light of Faith. Women who were conscious of this dignity have always been the pride of the Church. It was such women as these who in the early Christian days caused the pagans to exclaim: "What noble women those Christian have!" It was this sublime dignity in our mothers also which made each one of us see the greatest natural sanctity in our own mother.

MODERN EFFORTS TO DESTROY MATERNAL DIGNITY

But today many forces are at work to destroy this sanctity, to recast in the pagan mould the maternal dignity which has been transfigured by Christianity. They do not see, or do not want to see, how they are degrading our women by tearing from their heads this radiant garland of motherhood. Those modern revolutionaries with liberal or socialist tendencies who set out to improve the world, pull down the rampart which protects this noble dignity of our mothers—I mean the

Christian, sacramental marriage— setting up in its place the probation marriage, or marriage *which* can be dissolved at any time, “free love.” In so doing they trample upon the true dignity of the mother. The mother to whom we all look up with true esteem thus becomes at best a prostitute of the husband, with no more security than that provided by a registry office, a mere sexual creature to be cast aside when she has served her purpose and can no longer appeal to the passions. Motherhood becomes a mere physical function robbed of all higher spiritual sanctity. To what an abyss of human misery the mother must sink according to the ideas of these apostles of progress.

Dear Mothers, the determination to cherish your true dignity must be engraved deeply in your hearts. You must not allow that garland to be torn from your head, for **it** was woven by our holy religion and placed with the garland of myrtle invisible in your hearts before the altar on your wedding-day. The destructive tendencies of the times must find in you an impassable wall, they must not penetrate your hearts, nor find any entrance into your families.

With the unshakeable courage of Faith you must ward off from your children all modern destructive tendencies. Therefore you should impress deeply on your daughters the necessity of preserving their virginity inviolate and holy also in those years of their youth when the passions are stirred, because they should see themselves as the future mothers. Anything which might in the eyes of the daughters tarnish the ideal image of the mother— that is, *your* image, if your daughters could have seen it in your youth—must be opposed by them also with an iron will and firm resolution. Further, let this esteem for the dignity of the mother sink deep into the hearts of your sons above all, especially when they are growing up and nearing the years of storm and stress. They should learn to see in every young girl a future mother. Nay, they should be able to look upon every girl as they would look upon their own mothers, and to show every young girl of their acquaintance the same esteem they would wish others to have shown to their own mothers.

But your chief endeavour must be to let your sons and daughters really see in you the ideal Mother. The high dignity with which our holy religion has clothed you bears with it a strict duty to live in accordance with this dignity. The consciousness of your holy dignity should be reflected in all your actions. Would that your children could bear the same praiseworthy testimony of you which the well-known journeyman, Kolping, gave of his mother: “It is true my mother was poor, but she was a mother of whom I have never seen nor heard anything I could not respect. Whenever the tempter came near me, I had but to think of my mother and— the tempter fled.” The memory of a truly good mother will in later years be the guardian angel of the child.

Do not forget, then, mothers, that you have a glorious ancestry. Many mothers have been numbered among the saints of our Church. These are the best among your predecessors; these knew that motherhood is a gift from the All Holy; they valued the honour conferred on them of helping in the Divine creation. The significance of their motherhood, reaching out beyond time and this world, was continually before their minds. If your noble dignity is also expressed in your Christian life, then you too will one day be among those saints and the dignity of your motherhood also in Divine transfiguration will be radiant for all eternity.

MOTHER OF THE POPE

In a little country village there lived a good, God-fearing family. The good God had sent the humble pair ten children, the eldest of whom died a few days after birth. Their means were extremely modest and it was only through constant endeavour that the parents managed to procure the needs of their little ones. When the second eldest attained to an age at which his parents began to look to him as a helper in providing for the family, he came to them to tell them he wished to become a priest. A sympathetic friend offered to help the clever boy with his studies free of cost. Scarcely had the boy grown up when his father died, and now the care of the numerous family rested on the frail shoulders of the mother. Relatives and other friends advised her to take her son from school to earn and help to lighten her heavy cares for the other children. But the pious mother always made the same answer to their advice: “If it be God’s will that my son should become a priest, I must not stand in his way, however hard I may find the struggle to make a living.”

The son became a priest. Twenty years later he was consecrated bishop. His mother continued to live in the simple, quiet cottage in the country. A day came when the bishop went to visit his mother and, showing her his ring, said with

childlike simplicity; “Look, Mother! Look at the fine ring you have won for me!” But the mother said with homely simplicity, pointing to her marriage ring: “My son, you would not have that ring on your finger if I had not this one. This ring, blessed by the hand of the priest before the altar of God, was placed on my finger by your father. It has ever been a reminder of my duties, but above all when I felt discouraged and would have lost heart.”

The son became Cardinal; the son became Pope to whom the Catholic world is indebted for numerous manifold blessings to all mankind. Meanwhile the little mother had gone to her eternal rest. Ever since her departure a cheap watch might be seen lying on the desk of her son, the Pope; and when a wealthy nobleman offered to replace the humble little timepiece by a gold watch, the Pope replied: “This watch is worth more than its weight in gold or jewels; it is the watch my mother gave me on the day of my first Holy Communion.” So deeply was the memory of his good, pious mother rooted in the heart of the Pope.

This Pope—Pope Pius X—who came from the working class and rose to the highest ecclesiastical dignity, will soon, we hope, be ranked among the canonised saints of the Church. And when this Pope entered into eternal happiness through the gates of Paradise, we may be sure he was met there by his little mother, now among the transfigured in Heaven, and that she would again point to the ring on her finger and say: “My child, you would not have become Pope, nor saint, had I not worn this ring on my finger, if this ring had not constantly reminded me of my duties towards you.”

Should not the ring on *your* finger also be a strict, yet loving remainder of your duties as a wife and mother? Should it not tell you that with this holy ring a blessing has been imparted to you personally, a blessing to which you must correspond by a holy life? Is not the little ring a symbol full of meaning and a reminder that you have been joined, body and soul, your life long, to your husband? And surely you would wish also, in later years to show your little ring to your children and say: “My children, you would not have become what you are today, if I had not worn this little ring on my finger.” The ring on your finger should indeed be a reminder of your high dignity but it should also exhort you to be true to your holy charge.

A well-known proverb says that the greater the honour we receive, the greater is the obligation we are under. Whoever accepts the honour must also bear the responsibility. You, Christian mother, have the richest and most beautiful natural calling, but you also have the most difficult and responsible task.

You should build your heavenly kingdom in your calling, in your family, in your house. If you do not find happiness there you will never find it. Your duties as wife and mother are your first and holiest duties. It is altogether impossible to be a bad wife and mother and at the same time consider yourself a good Christian. In carrying out your duties as wife and mother, you must live a Christian life; and the constant reminder and admonisher of your Christian duties and tasks as a mother is the ring on your hand.

The fact that this little gold ring was blessed at the altar of God and placed on your finger in that holy place should always remind you that great and difficult religious tasks lie before you. If you want to be a true mother, if you want to be a Christian mother having a just regard for her holy responsibility, then your whole nature must be permeated by religion. If you eliminate the religious motif from motherliness, then motherhood will be no more than a sheer natural event as it is in the case of other living creatures and the most glorious crown will fall from your head, and you will then think nothing of neglecting your duties as wife and mother. You will see in your calling, in your duties as wife and mother, not a holy responsibility, but an oppressive burden which you will endeavour to shake off at every opportunity. It is because religion has died in the hearts of so many mothers that we must feel the deepest pity for their neglect of their duties.

As a mother you must constantly strive to cultivate a deep religious spirit in your heart. In your whole exterior there should be the holy pride of a child of God who in face of the enemies a religion is fully conscious of her inner worth. Your person, speech and conduct, your prayer and work must be the true reflection of your great soul. In this way you will furthermore build up within you a wall of defence against certain failings likely to appear in the character of a proud woman arising from her superficial nature and excessive desire to please.

Oh! Christian mother, let, your work and leisure be used to cultivate your soul. Use all the forces of our holy religion continually, that they may ennoble and sanctify you more and more. Thus daily prayer must become second nature to you,

the reception of the sacraments a heartfelt necessity. As a holy Christian, person of true nobility, you must take your place—in the centre of your family, esteemed by your husband, loved and honoured by your children.

This is the first thing the little ring on your hand tells you. It was blessed and laid on your finger that you may sanctify your own person more and more for the noble tasks given you through your calling as wife and mother. When you have become firm in your religion and continue to uproot the faults of your character then you can confidently undertake your obligations as wife and mother; for you can then feel sure that you will be able to bear, to the satisfaction of your God, the holy burden which you took up when you chose your calling,

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL OF THE HUSBAND

Look once again at the ring on your hand and hear what it has to say to you further: it is the sign that you are bound your whole life long to one who is dear to you, to the husband of your choice.

You have been placed by his side, united and bound to him who is the head of the family. Do not look upon yourself as being there to play the tyrant and order him about, to vent your humours on him and treat him as your servant to be ever at your beck and call; but as his companion showing understanding for his work and cares, for his hopes and plans for the future. It was for this that the Creator of Nature placed such strong love in the female disposition, so that the husband in his turn may find in his wife a noble, loving support, a guardian angel, loyal and thoughtful.

You shall walk with your husband as a loving companion, a protecting guardian angel along the thorny way to Heaven. Later on you may not knock at the gate of Heaven without your husband; for your husband must not, through your fault or carelessness, miss the road to his eternal home. To keep him on the right road during all the time of your life together is your noblest task as guardian angel of your husband. Therefore, see that you carry out conscientiously your duties in regard to the soul of your husband. For you have solemnly pledged yourself before the altar of God to do this. Michelangelo in his famous painting in the Sistine Chapel in Rome shows a frail little wife guiding a strong, heavy man along on the way to Heaven. A profound truth is here expressed. A mysterious power over the soul of her husband lies in the soul of the wife so that he is entirely under her influence and willingly permits that he should be guided by her for good—but also for evil. Then see to it that you use your power for the best in your husband.

Above all be a saving angel to your husband when perhaps he is influenced by the spirit of the times, or anxious for the advancement of his family, he would even desecrate the garden of your marriage. Christian wife and mother, ward off this plague of our time from the holy precincts of your married life. Use all the force of your womanly heart to maintain discipline and chastity.

In this be a true angel on guard, nay, an angel with flaming sword keeping watch over the paradise of your marriage chamber, so that this evil influence of the time may find no entrance. If your marriage remains holy, then genuine love will prevail; but if the marriage be desecrated, then love will die; and when love has fled, true happiness will have fled also. This is the curse of the desecration of marriage.

Endeavour therefore to transfigure your surrendering, conjugal love, your physical-spiritual union with your husband by the light of your holy faith. . . . Remember that it is God's decree that you should surrender yourself, that the decrees of God are holy, and hence should be kept holy by you, and that the Divine laws of life cannot be violated with impunity. Above all remember that through the sacrament of marriage (which like all the other sacraments has its noblest source of holiness and efficacy of grace in the infinitely bitter passion and death of the Saviour), the Blood of Christ also washes the conjugal act in which according to Our Saviour's own words, you become one flesh with your husband. And surely it is a frightful sacrilege to trample upon the Blood of Christ through the desecration of marriage. But what esteem a husband with religious disposition will have for you when you make known to him your idea of conjugal life! Should you not be able to win him over to this view also? Then when your souls are united in love; surely your husband cannot ask anything of you which your conscience will not permit!

Christian wife and mother, that day on which the Lord God will demand from you an account of the soul of your husband, you may not take the refuge sought by Cain and reply: "Am I my husband's keeper?" You *are* your husband's

keeper, and if his soul should be lost, a severe judgment will await you.

You will notice further that without religion you cannot fulfil this duty, without religion your courage will fail and, making all kinds of weakly complaints about the inconvenience and suffering caused by another child, you become the temptress of your husband and bring down grievous guilt upon your soul. Without religion you cannot be the loyal, submissive and loving guide of your husband.

CHILDREN THE BLESSING OF MARRIAGE

The little ring blessed by the Church is further the sign that you are consecrated not only as a Christian and wife, but also, and above all, as a mother. The holiest burden of our mother's is the child. Until recent days people always called children the blessing of marriage. Unfortunately this idea of the child being a blessing has disappeared, it is being regarded more and more as a boring disturber of the comfort and peace of life, a burden to be avoided if possible. Contrary to the law and commandment of God, they snatch at the pleasure of the parental act of creation while not wanting its natural fruit—the child, even deliberately eliminating him. They go yet further, for in the street, at meetings, in the pages of the newspapers and periodicals of the most varied kinds, the idea is proclaimed loudly that the expectant mother is entirely master of her own body and hence may dispose of her child when and how she wishes! And those wives who adopt a child so that he may obtain a little place in the sun and thus generously take upon themselves the troubles and cares of a larger family—these are despised as stupid and behind the times.

Today, no less than formerly, the great commandment holds good in regard to the mother: "Thou shalt not kill!" The child within the mother's womb possesses a human life which may not be wilfully destroyed. It is just the little one in its first cradle beneath the mother's heart who should in a very special way be a sacred burden of the mother's love which in the light of Faith she should bear with joy and courageous sacrifice.

The most difficult and far-reaching tasks of the mother are connected with her child. According to the decree of the Creator the care and education of the child is placed first in the hands of the mother. The tiny infant requires careful attention and needs nourishment from the mother's breast which the mother is in duty bound to offer to the child unless she is dispensed for important reasons. The young soul develops in the warm atmosphere of maternal love. In the formation of the child's soul the mistakes of the mother can never be fully rectified by the father or the school, and what has been neglected by the mother can never be made good by the teacher.

A man of great distinction once made the following remark: "Whenever I meet a person of outstanding merit I always ask who was his mother. It happens almost always that great sons or daughters have an excellent mother, and I have seldom been mistaken in forming an opinion of the children when I see their mother." And again and again life has proved to be true the words of the great Bishop von Ketteler: "The greatest and most natural gift of God is the gift of a good mother."

In a penitentiary for women, a convict decided after long inner struggles to make a confession of her sins once more. She begins with the words: "Your Reverence, do not be severe with me for I have had no mother." That is to say, she had had a mother, but one whom she would no longer call by that name for she had not been a good mother and through neglecting her duty towards her child, she had driven her on to the road to crime. Nor can one be hard on such a poor creature who had been deprived of the greatest natural good.

EARLY RELIGIOUS TRAINING

The high place which the mother holds among Christians is due to the religious wisdom which she is able in such an exemplary manner to instil into the child's soul according to his ability. A good religious training will ever be the most precious jewel a mother can give her child setting out on the road of life. But it must be implanted in the child in his earliest youth. Together with the loving words "Father" and "Mother," the most holy names of Jesus and Mary must be the first to cross the lips of the child. From his earliest years the child must be taught to pray; he must also be taught to fight against the faults of childhood like quarrelsomeness, greed, and a hatred of all that could lead to impurity must be

implanted in him. If the Christian mother lend an ear to some of the new views regarding these matters, and give free scope to the nature of her child, she would be consciously working for his temporal and eternal destruction.

Do not believe that your task ends with their childhood. You will have a twofold responsibility when your sons and daughters are growing up. Then above all you must be their guardian, taking under protection their innocence and virtue. In bygone days our wives and mothers were the faithful guardians of pure, chaste customs. They were also able to ward off those dangers which might threaten their families outside the home. But today it almost seems as if they had forgotten this duty. Immorality could never spread so effectually through the pages of newspapers and periodicals, through pamphlet and poster, if our wives and mothers had always been at their post in the interest of their children. It is the duty of wives to preserve the public life from such filth in order that the young may not suffer.

GUARDIAN AND COUNSELLOR

When the time comes in which your son is approaching manhood, or your daughter is blossoming into womanhood, then above all you should be a faithful guardian, able to read in the eyes of your child the question he fears to ask. If you have up to now won the confidence of your children, so that they can speak openly to you in all their doubts and fears and receive from you a definite, unequivocal reply, believe me, you are the true guardian of the souls of your children; your counsel and your every word will be to them the light which will guide them safely in the days of darkness and storm.

But long after your children have gone out into the world and perhaps started a home of their own, you must continue to be their counsellor. There should of course be no question of acting as their guardian in all matters, nor to interfere in their personal affairs but they should always feel that they can come to their mother in all that concerns them.

You are bound to your children as long as God leaves you here on earth. You are reminded of this tie by the little ring on your finger. The gold circlet indicates the threefold bond which joins you indissolubly to your God, to your husband and to your children while on earth. Do not endeavour to loose this bond; rather strive to bind to yourself more closely, more securely, this threefold sacred duty together with the threefold bond.

Pope Pius IX once said: "Give me truly Christian mothers and I shall save the sinking world." Words profound and true. Great mothers leave the imprint of their souls on their country and on their time. Whether a nation lives or perishes depends on its women.

The sad moral decadence of recent times would never have crept in if our Christian wives and mothers had stayed at their post. Many have failed to recognise their noble task. They have not been mindful of the sacred burden which God laid upon their shoulders.

Therefore, mother, give thought once more to the noble, sacred office which has been given you. I have briefly indicated wherein your task lies. Come, set about your noble duty. It is God's will. The healthy state of our modern humanity must proceed from the family. Above all it must be effected by our Christian mothers who must themselves first be penetrated by a true religious spirit which will then be reflected in their relations with their husbands and children. The more the life led by the mother is Christian, pious and resigned to God's will, the more lasting will be its effect upon the religious and moral life of the family.

Then, Christian mother, when your task has ended, in your last hour you can stretch out the little ring on your finger and joyously say to the Lord God: "My Lord, I have lived a truly Christian wife, a loving, loyal spouse and a dutiful mother of my children, because with this ring Thou hast blessed me and my life's task."

MOTHERHOOD IS NOT THE CURSE OF THE WOMAN

Not seldom it happens that we meet wives and mothers who are angry because their Creator has not sent them into the world as men instead of mere women, as they express it. In the man they see the great strength and with it the power to rule the world and with mighty fist to master life, while the woman, as they believe, is only called to serve, or at most to be able to share in the progress made by the man. They would like to leave the hidden life of the home, to enter public life and have a hand in the fate of their country. Nay, we even hear of many women cursing motherhood, saying:

“Motherhood makes the woman incapable of competing with man, and therefore motherhood is a curse on the woman.”

Women should certainly share in public life, especially in regard to matters concerning their own sex and children—in these matters they are in every way more competent than men,—but on this account to become a stranger in the home would be to reverse the natural order. In nature we also hear the voice of God speaking to us in the power and capability He has placed in it. But all the gifts and advantages the female sex possesses point to the domestic circle. Hence it is not a matter of choice—giving the wife the home as the circle of her special activities; God has destined her for this. When every good woman’s aim and longing are for motherhood, the Voice of God is speaking in this urge. But God has done all things well; therefore motherhood cannot be a curse on the woman. Rather, motherhood, willed by God, must be her greatest blessing.

Hence those wives are to be pitied who have become so depraved as to want all wives to desert the domestic hearth. They are indeed short-sighted in supposing they can make a ruler of one who serves. Dazzled by the brilliance and esteem attaching to certain masculine callings, they do not see the glorious crown that rests on the head of every wife and mother who, conscious of her high dignity, seeing her sacred task in the light of Faith, follows with heart and head the calling which God has willed for her. That which at the first glance seems to be nothing more than servile work by which the wife and mother sacrifices herself to the little family circle, makes for her the royal crown she wears in the little kingdom of her house, it secures to her the crown of honour in the delight and enthusiasm of her husband and the loving gratitude of her children even after she has passed away from this life. And one day it will merit for her the crown of victory in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is a great mistake to believe that great or sublime actions are proclaimed by loud acclamation. Nor is all that appears amid outward splendour for this reason of lasting worth. Not all those who play their part on the great stage of public life, who make marvellous speeches before huge audiences in parliament or assembly halls, not all such men have any effect on the fate of man. And if they should, for some time, influence the nation and the multitude to a great extent, only too often their fame and consequent importance are no more than the flash of a comet, a meteor appearing for a brief moment, holding the attention of the people, eagerly discussed everywhere, but soon disappearing as quickly as it came and sinking into oblivion. The one who believes that only events and facts which draw the attention of people and are discussed everywhere are the true and only forces which affect the fate of man and humanity, that only these leave their stamp on time and the nation—such a man only shows that he is unable to penetrate deeply into human life and its developments.

Great and sublime things are often achieved in quiet, not in the streets or thronged market places and assembly halls. Even the great event of the Incarnation was accomplished amid the silence of midnight, and the Son of God lived in the home of a poor family for thirty years. And when He had to go forth into public life, He did not travel round the world, making obeisance to emperors and kings, which He could easily have done. Rather He confined His activities to a country that was scarcely noticed by the great world. Yet it was here that the renewal of the world had its beginning. This humble little country became the Holy Land from which the blessings of Christianity were to flow to all other lands.

It may be said of the mother that she too lives in a little, unknown, but “holy land.” She too lives in a home which is little noticed by the great world, which is almost lost in the great whole. But the seed which she sows shall also bear fruit in the time that will come. Only God Himself knows how high this tree will send its branches heavenwards and how many generations in the course of time shall dwell beneath its shade.

Now this little country, your family, is *your* kingdom, *your* world. But the husband bears the sceptre. As incontestable as is the truth that Christ is the Head of the Church and governs the Church, is also the Divine decree that the husband is the head of the house and therefore he shall bear the sceptre. However true it is that many wives dislike to hear of the subjection of the woman and hence believe that there should be complete equality with the husband, yet it is true and must always be true that the decisive authority in the family rests with the husband in accordance with the commandments of God.

But this subjection of the wife to the husband should not deprive her in the least degree of her inner freedom or her personality. Hence, in no sense should the wife become a servant or a slave.

Nay, the wife and mother who is truly Christian knows that there is a government of the home which is different from the legitimate government which bears the official stamp. This is the magic power of a noble, loving, generous heart which, by submission and kindness, disarms all resistance without seeming to, and by a loving word can lead far any husband of noble character. The wife and mother who possesses a selfless love and “has a way with her,” will govern the whole family with irresistible power. Truly Christian wives always rule in the home but in their own way. Without any feeling of envy they yield the sceptre to the husband while they wear the crown—queens in the little kingdom of the family.

The sceptre is a staff, the symbol of leadership and protection; it is symbolic of the strict, authoritative government which has its support in command. “The crown is a garland, an adornment, the symbol of the dignity and the consecration which subjects men by winning their hearts.” (Wibbelt). By winning the hearts of all her family the wife rules. He who has conquered the heart of man possesses the whole man. Hence, Christian wife and mother, if you have won the hearts of your family, you reign as queen in your domestic circle.

Therefore, the wife and mother, by her gentle womanly rule helps the Lord God to rule the world. She helps Him who has entrusted to her as His vicar the care of the little bit of the world which is her family. In her little kingdom let her wear the crown in accordance with God’s will. While the husband embodies the power and authority of God, the mother represents the goodness and love of God in the sphere of the family. Therefore let her leave the sceptre to her husband while she herself wears the crown in womanly silence and gentleness. “Before the sceptre we bow down in fear, before the crown we incline reverently.”—Wibbelt.

But the office you hold as queen of the family circle is not only a question of great honour. It brings with it very great responsibilities. It demands above all a willing, joyous heart—a heart which can really make of the family its world. All your thought, cares and troubles must be for your home. In the domestic circle you should feel happy and consider yourself fortunate in being allowed to care for others with pleasure and love—not like a serving maid who would consider, “what have I to get out of this work, or that? When can I have a day off again and get away from this work for my family, a change from all this?” A change often enough of the most doubtful kind. The faithful housewife becomes a gad-about. Those wives and mothers who for ever complain that they get nothing out of life because they are busy with their numerous family cares, and therefore look for “a bit of life” outside the home, belong to the superficial, volatile women who take no heed of the royal crown which every wife and mother wears; and when therefore they are unhappy and envy others their carefree life, it means they have not yet understood the real nature of a wife and mother. A simple, pious woman once wrote the following words underneath a picture she was giving to her daughter who was about to be married: “To be a mother means to be happy even amid cares.” To be a mother means wearing a royal crown and by her fidelity to her duties and by motherly love to govern the little kingdom of the family.”

Therefore wear your royal crown proudly, aware of your responsibility in the little kingdom of your home, and you will find that all will readily submit to the gentle rule of your motherly heart.

When, proudly conscious of being a royal child, a child of God, you have worn the crown in your home, been a loving wife and a truly solicitous mother, then a laurel wreath, ever green, will be wound about your heart, the garland of a peaceful conscience, knowing you have faithfully fulfilled your duties, the garland of contentment in your heart.

Yet another crown is being woven for you, a crown more beautiful, more glorious than anything the world can offer a mother, one *for* which many a worldly queen would like to exchange her crown of gold. This is the crown of the high esteem and love of a husband who has found his true happiness in the sunshine of your love. It is furthermore the crown of the gratitude and respect of your children. This crown will be secure upon your head when age has begun to spin its silver threads in your hair. The older your children become the better they will be able to appreciate what they have in their mother, the warmer will be their gratitude and attachment to a good mother. Their mother will simply be their dearest and most precious possession in the world. They will remember with joy every word with which their God-fearing mother has put wisdom in their hearts. And when, after years during which perhaps life has gone hard with them, they gaze with grateful hearts at their mother’s picture, their remembrance of her who gave them life will make them continue

to feel her gentle sway over their dispositions. The mother's rule over her children only ends at their death.

But when the beloved mother lies on her death-bed, her death will be the last impressive sermon; her children will be filled with wonder, amid the bitter pain of parting, at all the love, patience, sacrifice, faith and trust in God shown by their mother now leaving them. The edifying death of a mother is in itself an exhortation to her children which they will not forget their whole life long. A life of sacrifice can only be followed by a beautiful resigned death.

All the time you were a mother an everlasting garland was woven which lay invisible on your head and will later adorn also that mound which will cover you, the mother of your children. The ever fresh green on the mother's grave is a sign that the remembrance of their dear mother will always live in the hearts of her children. The grave of the mother is a holy spot beside which many tears will be shed and much consolation found; here too many a prayer of gratitude will be offered; many a petition will go up for the peace of the soul of the one who rests here. This grateful remembrance is of all natural things the most beautiful reward, the most desirable crown, the best everlasting garland— one which will never fade with the years that pass, and which will always adorn you as long as your memory remains stamped on the hearts of your children. Here on earth it will never wither, and one day in eternity it will adorn your brow for ever.

YOUR CHILDREN ARE THE JEWELS IN YOUR HEAVENLY CROWN

The most beautiful crown of all awaits you in Eternity. You will be especially happy there as the mother of your children. Does not St. Paul tell us: "The mother will be blessed through her children." What a glorious crown will be prepared for you when you find in Heaven your reward for all your cares and trouble—your children, now among the host of saints, with you, their mother. "Your children will be the stars of your Heaven and the jewels in your crown." They will then be the reward of your work and prayer, your sacrifices and your struggles. In your children you will have fulfilled the task the Lord has given you. You, who went forth from God poor, will have returned to Him rich. As a reward for your willing, joyous and humble sacrifice through your maternal love, a glorious crown of victory has been prepared for you in the transfigured garland of your children which will be your bright adornment for all Eternity.

Furthermore, the Lord will fulfil in you what He has promised in the Old Testament: "I shall be your reward in full measure." The Saviour who Himself had a dear Mother, and whose life on earth was transfigured by the sunshine of the noblest maternal love, took into His Sacred Heart with His own Mother all human mothers. Even as He crowned His Mother Queen of Heaven and Earth, making her Mother of all who are saved, He will also crown you queen of all the generations who have sprung from you. Further, He will Himself be your most beautiful, most precious Crown, your Crown of victory, your Glory. Throughout Eternity this Crown will last, and the hymns of thanksgiving will be sent up before the throne of God by your descendants who will honour you unceasingly as their ancestress.

For some years Sweden has celebrated a Mothers' Feastday. One day in the year is devoted entirely to the mother of the family. On this day the mother is the centre of all attention, love and honour. Flags are flying on all the houses; in every family a holiday atmosphere reigns. The mother is not allowed to move a finger. She is waited on; She is recipient of gifts and endless testimonies of love. Her children vie with one another in demonstrations of affection. On this one day of the year she is publicly honoured as queen of the home. The Mothers' Day might be called a day of homage paid to the silent, self-sacrificing majesty of the mother.

This Mothers' Day is undoubtedly a beautiful and significant gesture on the part of this Nordic people, a gesture which has been repeated in our own country in the annual "Mothers' Sunday." On this day the Queen of the Home is as it were raised to her throne. The children, big and little, all help in weaving a green garland, a symbol of their gratitude, for their mother. When this demonstration of love by the children comes from sincerely grateful hearts, every mother must surely be filled with just pride and true happiness.

THE REAL "MOTHERS' DAY" AWAITS YOU IN ETERNITY

The time will come when you also will celebrate your "Mothers' Day," when for you also a feast will be prepared—on the Sunday which will be eternal, followed by no work day, because the time for work and worry will have ceased for ever.

See that when the Day comes you will have merited this homage. Wear your royal Crown in the circle of your family *now*, conscious of your great responsibility. With the profound dignity symbolised by this Crown, take up your holy burden courageously. Pray, strive, work, love and sacrifice yourself in patience, so that your husband and your children will have good reason to weave a garland of gratitude and love for you also. Then, on that true Mothers' Sunday, the King of all Eternity will raise you also to a throne and adorn you, like His own Mother, with the eternal Crown of Victory and Glory that will never end.

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