

# THE HUSBAND AND WIFE

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## I. HUSBAND

The closest association of life is that of husband and wife. The period of courtship is a wise provision which affords time and means for young people to make sure that they are keeping company with the one who will make a suitable companion for life. One reason why there are unhappy marriages is that courtship is looked upon by many as a time of amusement only.

Oftentimes a man marries a girl without knowing her real self at all. Of course I understand that the best and most careful and wisest of men are occasionally mistaken in women. Even with due time and observation, the most prudent man may choose the wrong woman for his wife. But some men rush into matrimony without any regard for its life-long and intimate nature. Then they wonder that marriage is not what they expected it to be.

I am talking now to the husband, the man already married. I can only hope to advise him on a few matters which may enable him to be a happier husband if he is already happy, and a contented husband if he is not so now. The shortest and best advice I can give is that he regard his wife with the very same care and consideration that he has for himself. If he does that, I promise him he will have a happy married life.

The main reason why a marriage turns out badly is that the man proceeds to live for himself, instead of for his wife and himself. The selfishness of the man is the most common cause of marriage blight. Selfishness never pays, least of all in marriage. It is because the Church of God knows human nature so well, its selfishness and fickleness, that it throws around matrimony so many safeguards.

A young man after marriage sees his sweetheart every day. She may not have the same opportunity of adorning herself that she had before. He sees her as she is ordinarily, and she sees him in the same way. It is a maxim that the commonplace does not affect us. Husband and wife tend to become commonplace to each other.

Unless a man has married a girl for herself, "for her character and disposition, as well as for her looks, he will find marriage quite different from what he anticipated. As he gets to know his wife more and more intimately, he may find in her, as she may find in him, not a few undesirable traits. Also, he may find that she has many good qualities which he never suspected.

The first year of marriage is therefore the critical period. It is the time of adjustment. If the husband conducts himself wisely and patiently during early married life, he is laying the foundation of years of happiness. Just as a wife must overlook many things in her husband, so must he make allowance for much in her. This mutual consideration is the basis of contentment in married life.

A man cannot utterly change his nature—neither can a woman. Instead of quarrelling over the impossible, they should endeavour to amalgamate. If the husband makes it his main purpose in life to live for his wife and to please her, the chances are that she will make it her sole aim to live for his peace and welfare.

Time and again when I have been asked by newly married people for a word of advice, I have called the man aside and told him to live no longer for himself, but for his wife. And in the same way I have told her to live no longer for herself, but for him. In that way both are really living for themselves.

There is no partnership so important as marriage. How careful business people are to consult the interests of the firm! If one partner finds that something gives him pleasure but hurts the business, he refrains from the pleasure. There is more at stake in the marriage association than in any business partnership. If husband or wife starts out to consider self only, it should occasion no surprise if that marriage turns out a failure.

The husband is no longer a separate unit. Everything he does has an effect on his life's partner. Before doing anything or planning anything of importance he should consider how it is going to affect not merely himself, but his wife also. If in doubt, let him consult her. Even if she always concurs with him it is well to advise with her, as she will appreciate the compliment he is paying her by thus conferring with her.

The early period of marriage is critical for another reason. Until a marriage is blessed with a child, the wife's position is very difficult. The new home is lonely all day. She feels the loss of her old home associations during the

long hours when her husband is away. He has his business occupations and cares. She has little as yet in her new home to fill the time she spends waiting for his return.

No matter how tired he may be after his day's work, a wise husband will never be too fatigued to greet his wife warmly on returning home, and to do everything to make the evening a recompense for her long day of waiting. If she wants to go out, he will not offer an excuse for staying in. While courting her he did not put off calling on her for any slight reason. A husband can do at least as much for his wife as he did for the girl he was engaged to.

Some men make the dreadful mistake of thinking that a woman changes her nature when she becomes a wife. She wants attention and love then just as much, and more perhaps, than she did before. Wise is the man who realizes this and acts on it.

The downright neglect which some men show their wives after marriage is appalling. Nothing contributes so much to turning marriage into a mockery. Love, like everything else, needs nourishment. You can starve the strongest love to death by indifference and neglect. A wife's love is the greatest fortune a man can possess. It is worth every effort made for it. What shall we say of the man who risks the loss of that treasure by overlooking any, even the slightest of the things which help to preserve and increase it.

I know only too well that some husbands have a hard time of it. The more they do for their wives the more they want them to do, and in spite of all they are never satisfied. Some wives never seem to appreciate what is done for them, nor what burdens may weigh down a man's soul in his battle with the world of business. To avoid marriage with such a wife the best precaution lies in considering during courtship not merely the girl's looks, but herself. But if a man has made a mistake he must abide by it. Remember the marriage vow: for better or for worse. Even so, the best way for a man to make the worse better is to study his wife and her disposition, and endeavour to do all in his power to be agreeable to her. Sometimes, even then, a man finds it impossible to live congenially with his wife, which goes to show how careful he should be before marriage.

However, a Catholic man always has a remedy where other men have none. His religion comes to his aid. Of course I mean his religion, if it is practical. If it is only nominal, it can serve no purpose. Let the practical Catholic make certain that he is marrying a practical Catholic and religion will furnish a thousand aids altogether unknown to those outside its influence.

Occasionally married couples, both Catholics, have their difficulties and estrangements, but in such cases it is frequently found that one or both are nominal or sentimental Catholics. Practical Catholics know that they must be patient and forgiving and considerate and they try sincerely to be such. When both man and wife are patient and forgiving and considerate there will be no estrangement of consequence. Temperamental differences and difficulties may arise but temperament will bow to religion of the true kind.

The man is the stronger by nature, and must be ready to support the weakness of his wife. Women are by nature more sensitive than men. They are so delicately and exquisitely constituted that the least thing may, at times, upset them beyond all measure. Manly patience is the virtue to be practised on such occasions. A man should try not to lose his temper when his wife becomes excited. If he remains calm, she too will become calm sooner or later; sometimes, alas, later. But the husband's duty is patience. What hers is, I shall say in my talk with her. Just now I am advising the husband, and I say that in proportion as his wife seems unreasonable, he must be calm and tactful. In the end he will be glad. Very often a wife flares up just because she has her husband's welfare so much at heart. She is so concerned for his good that she cannot restrain herself. He should not overlook that.

Again a wife's home cares place her under high tension. Under that strain the least thing may cause her to break out. Her husband must be as oil on the troubled waters. In business a man will put up with a good deal for the sake of patronage. It pays. It more than pays to be very considerate with one's wife. If at any time there is a difference of opinion on any point, such, for example, as the expenditure of money, a quiet talk will disclose the wife's side of the matter and perhaps adjust matters. A husband worthy of the name will not start to condemn and abuse before he has considered the question from all sides. Often a little review of the situation will not only alter his opinion, but have useless and detrimental wrangling.

Wherever possible, dissension should be avoided. Instead of disputing, it is well to confer. Talking a thing over as if seeking information will banish many dissensions. A husband should not expect his wife to make all the

concessions. Let him meet her at least half way. Often, when he has given in to her, she will reverse the decision and yield entirely to him. At all events, dissension should be avoided as a serpent, for like a serpent, it will work its deadly way into marriage and poison family happiness. Dissension costs too much to indulge in it. It produces most frequently the disruption of the bond of affection between man and wife, and when that is broken there is little left of marriage.

Dissension usually has its beginning in some indication of disregard shown by the husband for his wife. It may have been the omission of some little token of love, the forgetting of some sign of affection towards her. A wife is keen to feel any diminution of her husband's love, and even the slightest sign of its lessening will pain and embitter her.

Of course she cannot expect matrimony to be a perpetual honeymoon. She understands that during the honeymoon the ardent passion of love reaches its climax, and that a climax is not perpetual. But the subsiding of love's climax does not mean the passing of love.

Most married people find love growing stronger and stronger with years — not its passion which characterized their first "love making," but a calm, peaceful, satisfying and comforting love which makes their hearts beat in unison and makes each live for the other. This love is far more valuable than the violent emotion, and its possession and maintenance depend in great measure on the husband.

If a man does not cherish his wife, if his first thoughts are not for her welfare, if he does not manifest those little signs of consideration and regard which will show her that his heart is hers, he does not deserve this abiding and consoling love. Love must not only be planted, it must be cultivated. Of all flowers it is the most beautiful and most delicate. It will last forever if it be carefully guarded and nourished. But if a man does not value and cultivate his wife's love, it will gradually change into mere toleration or perhaps into positive dislike.

The husband took a good deal of pains to win his wife's love. Why should he not take as much or more to retain it? Some men think that a wife is like an object which, once obtained, may be used or laid aside as it suits them. Such men come to grief.

Every wife has a natural hunger for the spontaneous affection of her husband and if he fails to give her the love she craves, he is starving not only her but himself as well. It is useless to tell her of his love. He must show it. While courting, he knew the art of love. He cannot say that marriage has made him ignorant of it.

I insist so much on this, my dear men, because I am concerned for your life's happiness. I know of many families wrecked because the husband assumed that, once married, he could let affection take care of itself. A husband should bear in mind that his wife has left father and mother and home associations for him. He is her all.

If a man says that his love has grown cold, and that he cannot show what he does not feel, it is because he mistakes love for passion, or else because he has neglected to foster the love which he once cherished. Love itself does not die easily, and when he married, he felt that his wife was the most lovable girl in the world. Love made him willing to go through fire and water for her. She is the same girl now. She has not changed, and if his love for her is not what it should be, ordinarily it is because he himself has changed. Of course close and continued association has taken the bloom off in some respects, but the love that made him leave all and give himself forever to his betrothed was too deep and strong to pass away, unless little by little he has caused it to depart.

A man may say that his wife is not the woman he took her to be. And I may ask him if he is altogether the man she took him to be? He may say that, while he courted her, she was quite another person. But is not the object of courtship to enable a man to know the girl's real self, her 'disposition and her character?

If a man employed his courtship only to amuse himself, now he must take the consequences. Let him take them like a man, and not complete the ruin of two lives by his selfishness. Even though his wife is not all that he had hoped to find her, let him take her for what she is. He should play the game fair. If he buys a house and it is not everything he expected it to be, he sets to work to make it right. Let him make his marriage right if it is not so. It can be done in most cases, and it will be the best expenditure of effort that any man can make.

Moreover, a Catholic husband must realize that his wife is his wife forever. Religion will enable him to do what he might otherwise find impossible. The Sacrament of Matrimony gives, to the man who lives true to his Faith, the grace to surmount all the obstacles and trials of married life. If he frequents the Sacraments, I promise him that he will

receive the grace to live holily and happily in the marriage bond.

This does not mean that at times he will not have differences and difficulties to meet. In one's own family, where father and mother and brothers and sisters are united in the strongest love and affection, there are occasionally troubles and disagreements. But they pass with the day. It is on these occasions that manhood and religion must guide the husband to do what is proper. An insignificant breach may widen and widen until it is a gulf too wide to bridge over — and all because husband or wife lacks a little consideration for the other.

A husband is a man, and a man can afford to give in to his wife. But if she gets stiff and he gets stout and neither of them will budge, something is bound to happen. If a stone drops from a roof to a stone sidewalk, sparks will fly. But if the stone strikes a grass-plot, it sinks in almost without a sound or sign. A real man can afford to be the grass-plot.

A Catholic husband understands that he can never break the bond of a duly performed marriage. It is to his advantage from the very start so to regulate his attitude towards his wife that, if anything should mar his marriage happiness, it will not be his doing. The home should be his dearest place on earth. His wife's welfare should take precedence of everything.

Neither club nor cafe nor friends should come between a man and his wife. Too often a breach is made because the husband finds his main pleasure away from the home. If a wife sees that her husband prefers outside interests to her, she will suspect his love. No outside issue can compare with home peace and welfare. Too late, often, a husband finds that in overlooking the home and his wife, he has lost life's best treasure.

If God blesses the home with a child, its father should consider it as a gift from heaven, given into his keeping to cement the bond of love between him and his wife. He should regard his child as a jewel which he must polish for God's kingdom.

Parenthood is one of the most sacred of human functions. By it, man and wife cooperate with the Creator for the maintenance of the human race. If they expect God's blessing on their married life, they should never violate the sacred laws of marriage. Any attempt to prevent the natural consequences of marriage relations will bring down God's curse on them.

Some parents seek to regulate the number of their children at will. God often punishes them by depriving them of the children He has given them. Others decide to have no children in their early married life because it would tie them down too much to domestic cares. These are often cursed by God, and later when they would give all they possess for a child, God will not give it to them.

There is no greater sin in married life than that of preventing legitimate life. God punished it terribly in His dealings with the chosen people. He punishes it just as terribly now. If a man does not wish to have a family, he should not enter upon that contract designed by God for the perpetuation of the human family. A man is free to marry or not. But if he marries, he is not free to break the laws of nature and of God. How many homes have been made desolate by man's changing of love into lust!

If God does not see fit to send a child, He blesses a faithful marriage in other ways. But if parents deliberately spurn the child He designs to send them, He exacts an awful penalty. He punishes here and now in ways they little think of, and He will punish them hereafter as He does those who are guilty of taking human life. In God's sight, race suicide is a perversion of one of His most sacred institutions for mankind.

The number of wrecked marriages due directly or indirectly to this sin is appalling. But I need hardly touch on this matter in speaking to Catholics, since it is a sin hardly known among them, thank God!

In conclusion, let me say once more to the husband, that marriage will be in large measure what he makes it. There are exceptional cases, where the man's best efforts are in vain. Such is a sad and hard condition of life, and for that man, his one sure means of making the best of the situation, is his Religion.

Recourse to retaliation or dissipation is useless — that merely puts a man lower down in the pit. Patience is the virtue he must practise. Virtue means strength in doing and bearing. Let him show strength in carrying his burden and he will be amazed to see how light it becomes when It Is carried in the spirit of faith.

Sometimes an unfortunate situation must be met in a strong way. It may be necessary for a husband to put his foot down firmly. His wife may try his very soul. She may cross him at every turn. In such cases, it may be necessary for him to read the "Taming of the Shrew," but he must not forget that he is a Catholic husband, and if he must take strong

measures he should do so in a just way.

Unless a marriage has been altogether unfortunate, a man will find that the observance of the many little kindly things which he found so easy to do while courting, will help make his married life a happy one. If he makes his wife his first and chief consideration, he will not have to worry about the rest, ordinarily.

Sometimes for reasons of His own, but always for our eternal welfare, God allows us to be afflicted. With some, the affliction may be poverty or illness or the loss of dear ones. With others, it may be an unsuitable wife. Patience solves many difficulties. And patience is the virtue a husband must practise if, after doing his part fully, his wife fails to correspond.

By patience a husband will not only lessen the evils of an unsatisfactory marriage, but also work out his eternal salvation in a most meritorious way. There is much good deep down in the heart of the most cantankerous woman. By patience, a husband may bring out the good that is in his wife, and thus, even in this life, receive the reward of virtue.

I trust that the husbands whom I am addressing are blessed with good wives and that they value the blessing so highly that they are doing everything in their power to perpetuate it. By frequenting the Sacraments, husband and wife together, they draw God's blessing on them. Fidelity to the Faith, more than anything else, will make man and wife faithful to each other here, and secure for them eternal blessedness hereafter.

## II. WIFE

Most plays and stories end with marriage. Some women fancy that when they get married they have achieved their great purpose in life. But marriage is only the beginning of a new and more important chapter in the book of life.

Some women fail to realize that it is easier to win a man's love than to retain it. They believe that love is something which, once possessed, is theirs for good — a great mistake, as they sometimes find out too late. A woman of great worldly experience once told me that she found it much harder to hold her husband's love after marriage than it had been to win it before. And this was a woman of such great charm that her hand had been sought by several desirable men.

Of course true love is never-ending. Where love is based on true mutual affection and regard, it increases with time. But nowadays love is so frequently based on superficial qualities, that we frequently see man and wife after a short time, living as though they barely tolerated each other.

Moreover man's heart is fickle. He may mean every word of love that he vows to his betrothed, at the time. But under constant and close association he loses the idealism of his former devotion, and permits himself to look upon his wife as an ordinary mortal. This is the critical period of marriage.

If the wife at this juncture takes the same pains to please her husband that she did to please her fiancé, his affection for her will mature into a strong and constant love, which will last as long as life. I have seen middle-aged, and old married people every bit as devoted to each other as young lovers. Years of close association, marked by mutual regard and consideration, had augmented their first affection and bound them together with ties of deepest love and sympathy.

I have known other couples who had gone through fire and water in order to marry and who after a few years had nothing in common. Their love was apparently dead. More than once the reason was the selfishness of one or both. It may happen that a young wife thinks only of herself, which invariably leads to marriage failure.

Selfishness in matrimony is fatal. A wife should always remember that her husband's interests are hers and that her greatest interest is her husband.

During, the period of courtship a girl is very careful to appear at her best. Without being finical or negligent of the home, why should she not try to show herself at her best as a wife? I am not thinking of wealthy people whose houses are full of maids to do the work, but of ordinary wives who are their own maids and everything else. Such a wife has the house to look after, the meals to prepare, the marketing to do. But does that justify her in greeting her husband, on his return from a hard day's work, in soiled clothes and unkempt?

Some wives think that their husbands are indifferent to appearances after marriage. They think that it makes little or no difference whether they look neat or untidy. It makes all the difference in the world. Even a tired woman can afford the small cost in time and effort to appear attractive and bright on her husband's return from work. She has as

great a need to be attractive now as when her fiancé was courting her. The attractiveness of the home he comes to, and of his wife, its best ornament, will stimulate his love for home and wife.

Here I may say a word on the importance to a wife of being a good housekeeper. Again, I have in mind, of course, the wife in ordinary circumstances, who does her own work. Even for those wives who are wealthy, a firsthand knowledge of home duties is a great advantage, while for the wife in ordinary circumstances such knowledge is positively necessary. A woman who does not know how to manage the household and prepare a good table should not get married, ordinarily, until she has learned how to do these things. In some countries abroad a marriage license cannot be issued to a woman who does not present her certificate of housekeeping. Many young women rush from the counter or the typewriter to matrimony, knowing little or nothing about keeping house or cooking. The husband may be satisfied for a while with a makeshift dinner, but unless his wife soon learns how to prepare a proper meal, there will be dissatisfaction and eventually quarrels, and a miserable married life.

I want to impress upon wives, the importance of a tidy house and a good table. If a husband returns in the evening to a careless fireside and an untidy wife, why be surprised if gradually he seeks elsewhere the comfort his home fails to provide?

I once asked a greatly beloved wife how she managed to attach her husband so devotedly to his home.

She replied, "It is just a matter of continuing our courtship."

"How is that?" I asked.

"This way," she went on to say. "You see, my husband comes from his office tired and inclined to be on edge. I have the children nicely dressed to give him a welcome; the smaller ones have been put to bed, where they cannot annoy him, and I myself appear at my best. It all takes time and pains, but when I see his smile as he kisses the children, and his love as he embraces me, I feel more than repaid. Then, I do not talk to him too much, for I know he has had that all day. I let him read the paper, and when he has finished and is rested, he begins of his own accord to chat. At that I know he is in the humour for conversation, and we talk on and on."

"My goodness!" I ejaculated, "it is quite an art, isn't it?"

"A very pleasant and profitable art," she replied, as she went on to tell me that she always had her husband's meals ready on time, and to his liking. What was the result? The happiest family gathering I ever knew. That man rarely cared to go anywhere without his wife. He seldom sought his pleasure outside the home. His wife considered his welfare and comfort, made allowances for his condition of mind and body at the end of the day, and he in turn was always on the lookout for her happiness.

But how many young wives there are who spend the day frivolously, and permit their husbands to come home in the evening, to a disordered house, a badly planned and hastily cooked dinner, and an untidy wife! They are surprised that their husbands do not care for home, and that after a while their expressions of love grow less. Such wives have brought on themselves this sad condition of affairs.

A wife can make no better investment than in an inviting home. The inviting home means a house in order, the meals rightly prepared, and a wife attractively, albeit simply, dressed. I have gone into homes which were enough to drive a man to desperation — everything in disorder. Such a home will have little attraction for a husband's leisure hours. I have seen a man sit down, after his long day of toil, to a dinner of a few unsubstantial dishes, chosen because they required little or no preparation.

If a husband toils all day for his wife, shall his wife begrudge a few hours toil for him? For usually it is the woman who has spent the day novel-reading, or at the movies, or gossiping, who is too tired to greet her husband with a smile and invite him to a substantial dinner, and when she finds her marriage a disappointment, she fails to see that she has made it so. She blames marriage and her husband for her empty life, whereas she has only herself to blame. I know of course that some men are not responsive to the care and attention of their wives. Such men are the exception. I am not dealing with the exceptions, but with normal husbands.

Again, some wives pay no attention at all to their own person. Before marriage they took good care to be very presentable when appearing before their fiancés. As wives, they think that anything is good enough for their husbands. The dresses they have worked in during the day (if they have worked), no matter how soiled, are the ones they keep on for their husbands' homecoming. Some men may be indifferent to disorder in a room, but I have never met or known a

man who was indifferent to an untidy woman. If wives could realize how a neat and clean appearance counts, they would not begrudge the time or pains it takes to make themselves attractive for greeting their husbands. There are husbands so much in love with their wives that they can overlook even slovenliness in their appearance, but such husbands are the exception. As a rule, a man is repelled by slovenliness.

I urge wives to be as particular to appear pleasing to their husbands as they were to their betrothed. By that I do not mean that they should spend foolish time in fine dressing, but in their home, even when they are actually engaged in household work, they can be clean and neatly dressed. A wife knows the time of her husband's homecoming, and it does not take long to make herself presentable for his greeting.

I have insisted so much on this point of home attractiveness because I have found that the beginning of many a disruption in marriage originated in the neglect of a wife in regard to the home, the meals and herself.

There is, however, something more than material attractiveness. A wife is man's helpmeet. He looks to her for sympathy and for encouragement. In his battles with the world, he gives and takes like a man. But from his wife, he expects cheerful companionship. A wife has her cares, every wife has, but they are not the heavy material burdens which at times so oppress a man. A good wife remembers her husband's anxieties and tries not to add her own to his. If the details of business cares are his to solve, the petty items of the household should be hers. Some women start complaining as soon as their husbands open the door, and do not let up until they have gone out again, or, rather, until they have driven them out. Men hate a scold.

It is a wise wife who, if she must put her grievances before her husband, does so after the evening is well spent, after she has given him a good welcome, a good meal, and a good rest. Then he will listen to her and help her. If a husband is not in a mood for complaints, it is worse than useless to make them. To urge a matter under that condition is nagging. If there is anything that human nature cannot stand, it is that.

I do not mean that a husband is to be considered a man in a glass case who must never be approached. No, but there is a time and a way. Some women think that the time is always, and that the way is any way.

The wife who has observed the points I have touched on, will not have many grievances. Most husbands are more desirous of pleasing their wives than they are of being pleased. A husband knows that a good wife is the greatest boon a man can be blessed with. He will not allow anything on his part to weaken the bond of love which unites him to his wife. Too often the matters which wives complain of are the result of their own lack of regard for their wifely duties. They kill affection in their husbands, and then berate them for not loving them.

A man wants affection just as much as a woman does. He left father and mother and home for his wife, and now as a husband he desires to love and to be loved. When his betrothed married him, she considered him the most desirable man in the world. She left all for him. Is it not worth her while, therefore, to pay attention to even the little things which will help to keep that mutual love strong?

Some wives hit back. If the husband overlooks something, they construe it into an intentional slight and become resentful. The husband is often preoccupied and unintentionally omits some of the customary tokens of affection. A wife should make allowances. If she feels that her husband has hurt her purposely, she will do more to make him regret it by patiently enduring it than trying to resent it.

Some homes are armed camps. Husband and wife are constantly on the point of hostilities, if not actually engaged in warring on each other. A wife should remember that she can do more with her husband by love than by all the wiles and arts and weapons at her command. Affection is a wife's Big Bertha. No man can resist the true love of his wife. At times he may appear to do so, but it is in appearance only.

To conquer a husband, love him. A wife may say she loves her husband while her deeds disprove her words. He looks for deeds. He wants to see her love shown by consideration for him. If he sometimes seems to be unmindful of her affection, opposition is not the means to win him back. I have known wives to make themselves and their husbands wretched and to wreck their homes, by stubborn and selfish opposition. If they feel that they are not being properly appreciated, they proceed to make matters worse by doing all in their power to make things miserable. After a while, they have not only lost their husband's regard, but have incurred his downright dislike and even hatred.

How many couples have I seen start out as doves, only to become, in a short while, like bears. And why? For one thing — the wife was selfish and stubborn. Such wives are like persons walking in a swamp. The harder they tread,

the deeper they sink. And suppose there are children. What a noble example the parents present!

Love cannot be forced. Mark that well. If you cannot win love, you cannot obtain it at all. You cannot drive a man, or a woman, to like you and to yield you the fruits of true love. The harder a wife makes it for her husband, the harder his heart will get toward her.

She may say that, at least she has the satisfaction of paying him back. Not so. She can never exact payment for the loss she inflicts on her womanhood and on her heart by unwifely antagonism. The best way to "pay him back" is to do the full duty of a good wife. That is certain. I am not talking theories.

But I forget that I am talking to Catholic wives. The motives I have set forth so far are those which common sense and experience suggest. The marriage of a Catholic wife is a Sacrament. She took a vow to God to be true to her husband. She took him for better or for worse, as he took her. She is under a sacred obligation to be a help and solace to her husband. She may have her trials and disappointments as a wife. Every career of life has them. Should she shirk her duty, be false to her marriage vow, because things do not suit her?

If you make a government contract, you have to carry it out, even if it does not suit you. If you give your word of honour to another, you will endure everything rather than violate it. In marriage, a woman gives her solemn word to God to be a devoted and faithful wife. Even though a husband is not all that his wife expected, God has her vow and she will have to answer to God Almighty for it. It will not excuse her to say that her husband has failed in his duty. She foresaw that possibility when she took him for better, for worse.

I do not mean to say that if conditions are intolerable there is no remedy. In such cases, consult a priest, and he will advise. But in many cases, the intolerable condition is of the wife's own making. A little generosity on her part, a little patience, a little consideration, would have saved her from it.

Many wives fail to realize that their husbands may have grievances as well as themselves. They expect all the consideration to be on their husbands' side. I have had wives come to me to tell me a tale of woe which would have softened granite. I have listened, and from their own statements have been able to point out to them how they were at fault themselves.

Sometimes I have had a woman come to complain of her husband, and her tale was so dreadful that I almost believed her when she said he was a devil. On sending for the husband and hearing his side, however, I concluded that she was the fiend. And yet the woman really felt that she was the aggrieved person.

When a wife gets into that state, it means torture for herself and for her husband. What is the best thing to do in such a case? Let her kneel down and say an earnest prayer to the Blessed Mother for patience. Let her offer up to Our Lord her injured feelings. That is a sacrifice which He will accept. His grace will flow into her soul, and she will find that peace reigns in her heart. When she becomes resigned and peaceful, it will react on her husband and make him peaceful and forbearing and lovable.

The grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony is sufficient to enable a wife to meet all the difficulties of the married state. But she must merit the grace by doing her part. Prayer, patience, the reception of the Holy Eucharist, will enable her to bear cheerfully the hardships of wedlock, and will, moreover, transform a dark prospect into a very cheerful outlook.

You must not think that because I advert to the disagreeable features of marriage that I am disparaging it. Not at all. The good side of marriage is so evident that it needs no eulogy. A good marriage takes care of itself and most marriages are good. A wife who has ideal surroundings needs little advice. I am addressing wives who are not so fortunate.

To such, I say again that religion will prove their best friend when a situation becomes very hard or embarrassing. But if the advice I have given is followed, most of the pitfalls of marriage will be avoided.

If a wife lives mainly for her husband, he will live mainly for her. If she makes him her first concern, he will make her his, also. If she has regard for him in his tired moments when he is apt to be irritable, he will do the same for her. But if she gives tit for tat, she must not expect happiness as a wife.

Although the man is the head of the family, he will be a kindly and helpful head, his wife's protection and support and joy, if she but exerts her wonderful wifely influence properly. A woman has tremendous power over her husband if she shows herself the right kind of wife. The strongest man is a child under the influence of a loving wife.

If a wife wants to be the head of the family, let her begin by loving her husband and proving her love. Then, although he be the appointed head, she will be the real head and he will be glad to carry out her slightest wishes. But as a woman loves her peace and welfare, let her never try to boss her husband. Few men will take orders from their wives, but they will welcome suggestions and wishes lovingly expressed. A wife should not endeavour to dictate to her husband. Advise him, yes. Influence him, yes. And if she is very desirous of leading him, let her do so by true love. A husband will accept any leadership exercised over him in that way.

In early married life, man and wife will need to adapt themselves to each other. It is easier to accommodate oneself to the ways of another than to change another. I assure the wife that if she studies her husband's traits and has consideration for them, she is laying up for herself years of happiness. Moreover, she will make the home what it should be for her husband — the dearest place in the world.

But because a wife makes home attractive, she must not expect her husband to drop all his friends and associations. An occasional night at the club or an evening with So-and-so should not be objected to. A wife should try to go out with her husband, if he desires it, even though she must make an effort. The spirit of accommodation will go far to make both happy. Any wifely duty undertaken in the true spirit of faith, will, moreover, draw down God's blessing on their married life.

Your marriage is going to be almost wholly what you make it. Self-sacrifice, not selfishness, is the keystone of welfare in marriage. Wives who start out to make marriage serve their own personal ends usually come to grief. Let a wife forget herself in her desire to be helpful to her husband, and she will find that her own interests will be well served.

Furthermore, a wife has a special obligation to God. Through her cooperation and sacrifice the Ruler of the World perpetuates the human race. How dreadful for the woman whom He deigns to employ as an instrument in creating a new human being to pervert His measures for giving life, and make them a means of mere lustful indulgence! She shall stand judgment for the violation of one of His most serious commandments.

A Catholic wife, thank God, has too much reverence for God's law to violate it for the sake of pleasure or of avoiding inconvenience. Race suicide is such a detestable thing in God's sight that no truly Catholic-wife will be guilty of this dreadful sin.

In other ways, too, the Catholic wife has obligations to God. Her example as a practical Catholic will be a great help in encouraging her husband to live as a good Catholic man. And let me say that there is no surer way of having a husband all that he should be than to aid him to be a practical Catholic. I do not mean that she must preach at him — men hate that — but if he can see for himself the good effects of religion in her life, it will be more effective than many words.

Some wives who are frequent church-goers sometimes persist in running down their neighbours and in letting the home run itself. There is something the matter with their practice of religion if it does not make them better wives and better neighbours. Great harm can be done to religion by women who make a display of piety, and yet give scandal by their acts, to people who have little or no religion.

Let religious practice be sincere. A good test of its sincerity lies in how they act in the home. If a woman is not kind, forgiving, considerate and a good housewife, her religion, I am afraid, is only on the outside. God sees the heart. He wants the Catholic wife to be a solace to her husband, a help to him as he tries to live as a good Catholic, and consequently an aid to his eternal salvation.

Where Faith is practical, it helps to smooth out the roughness which at times marks every career of life. It will do more than anything else to make a marriage here a prelude to that blessed union which will be the portion of good wives and husbands for all eternity in the Kingdom of God.

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