

08/23/15 21 B

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.

-- The last few weeks we've had gospels from the 6th chapter of John. We've heard his teaching on the Eucharist, that it is his true body and blood. This teaching was repulsive to some of his followers.

-- Today we hear that some actually left because he wouldn't back down from his teaching. But I suspect the 2nd reading is more repulsive to many of Jesus' followers in the 21st century. And it is challenging...but not for the reasons many people would suspect.

-- When many women hear the words *wives should be subordinate to their husbands*, they cringe. Perhaps it's not quite as revolting as the earlier translation of *submissive* (which some Christians still use), but it still offends the ears of people used to treating men and women equally.

-- But in the first century world, Paul's words wouldn't have raised an eyebrow. In fact, he was probably borrowing parts of a household code that was used in the Roman world.

-- If you read on in Ephesians, he will also tell about children to obey their parents and slaves to be subject to their masters. These were all things taken for granted in the world of that time.

-- But he also makes crucial changes to that secular code. While he assumes a certain order in the family, the relationships of family members are to be "in the Lord." In other words, love is the operative principle, not domination. Husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the Church.

-- That is a big order. In Paul's mind, our unity in Christ transforms all relationships, even the relationship of a slave and master. His short letter to his disciple Philemon (a slave owner) demonstrates that.

-- Some Christians today attempt to maintain a more literal reading of this passage as if it's mandating a family order for all time. That is like taking his words from Corinthians which command women to keep their

heads covered as something to be observed for all time. That clearly was cultural, since all respectable women in Corinth wore head coverings.

-- Yes, we look at the relationship of men and women differently now than they did, and that's good, for the most part. But there's a deeper truth in this passage that does challenge our culture.

-- The first line of the 2nd reading says it all: *Be subordinate to one another*. In some translations, it's *defer* to one another. That's deeply challenging to a culture like ours in which the individual and his desires tend to be #1. We don't like to defer to anyone.

-- What does that mean for marriage? It means **both** husband and wife must think of the other's needs first, not their own. It means a willingness to sacrifice—not a popular notion today.

-- In the family, it means that parents must think of their children's well being before their own desires. Children are not a means for them to receive unconditional love. Rather, they are to give unconditional love to their children.

-- It means children must remember that they are not #1, as if parents are there to serve their every desire. Adult children must respect their parents and be patient with them in their old age.

-- All this is a part of being subordinate to one another in Christ. It applies to marriage, to family life, and to all of life. None of us is exempt from its challenges.

-- Christ himself showed us the way. He deferred to his Father's will. He sacrificed his own desires, not just on the cross, but throughout his life.

-- May we resolve to follow in his way, deferring to one another in Christ.