

Listening to the sermon can be hazardous to your health ... no ... really?

“NUDGE SUNDAY

“He did what, Angie?”

“... gave me a gentle nudge and told me to pay attention.”

“You’re serious ... Richard did that ... at Mass?”

“Yea, Viv ... but he was just being playful.”

“Pay attention to what?” the gentleman in Angie’s chair asks.

“Oh, the reading at Mass yesterday.”

“Which one?”

“You know ... wives be subordinate to your husbands.”

“Ah, and what did you do?”

“After the reading was over, I gave him a little poke in the ribs.”

“Let me guess ... as if to say, don’t take this too seriously?”

“Something like that, Father,” Angie laughs.

Smiling, Fr. John chuckles.

“Ah... another ‘nudge’ Sunday .. come and gone.”

Hi Tony here. Monday morning finds us in the Kurle Up n’ Dye Salon. Seems Father John stopped in for a haircut. Enrolled in the OCIA class at St. Kate’s, Angie’s what’s called a revert. Baptized as an infant, over time, she drifted away from the faith. Now, a single mom raising a six-year-old little girl, she wants to return to the Church;

for herself and to give her daughter a better grounding than she had.

At mass yesterday, the portion of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus as to the responsibilities of husbands and wives was read. Normally, a lector would read the passage, but he fell ill so the celebrant had to fill in.

Given Angie's tendency to take things literally, an interesting discussion is likely at hand ... especially considering yesterday's celebrant is seated in her chair this morning.

*Let's listen in ...*

"Yea, when that passage is read, we call that day, 'nudge' Sunday," the priest says, chuckling softly. More than a couple husbands get a playful nudge in the ribs. All in fun ... I hope."

"So, Father, how are we to understand those words today?" Bobby Jo asks, overhearing the conversation.

"When I was younger, I remember the word was submissive. Subordinate may sound 'softer,' but I don't imagine that makes the idea any more palatable, especially today."

Chuckling, Angie spins the chair to face the mirror.

"Really, Father, isn't that idea a relic of the past?" she asks.

"Well, I admit, in our culture and the value it puts on gender equality, it's problematic. Not so, however, when it was written ... times and expectations were quite different."

Silence ensues as Father sips his coffee.

**“But, actually, one of the big problems with that passage today is the weariness of those listening.”**

**“Weariness?” Angie asks.**

**“Well, people listen half-heartedly, if at all, because they’ve heard it before. And doing so, miss the most important part.”**

**“Which is?”**

**“The first verse. Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.”**

**“So, are you saying there’s some sort of equality implicit in Paul’s words?”**

**“Exactly. After setting forth his foundational principle; ‘for the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church’ Paul goes on to say, and I’m paraphrasing ‘... so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.’”**

**Listening intently, Angie trims the hair on the priest’s neck as he continues**

**“To fully understand Paul’s words, you have to consider the culture of his time,” the priest says. “Marriages were arranged, and friction, disillusionment, and even rebellion often arose. And remember, in Paul’s time, a woman’s expected role was to be submissive, or subordinate ... expected by the women themselves ...**

**“... And that brings us to the “crux”, or difficult saying of the text.**

**And that is? ... Vivien asks.**

**“Husbands love your wives ... as Christ loved the church.’  
In the ancient world that would have been the stickier  
point.:**

**“And that’s what you mean when you say Scripture must  
be read in context?” Bobby Jo asks.**

**“Exactly. To truly understand Scripture, you can’t isolate  
the words from the times in which they were spoken.”**

**“Or written ... interesting,” Angie says as she brushes hair  
off Father’s neck.**

**“Another problem is we think of submission in the terms  
of “superior and inferior,” Father says. But to Paul, its  
meaning is more in the sense of a sacred order. Not  
domination but an interrelation as ordained in the order  
of creation. Man, Adam was created in the image of God,  
an image of strength; to provide, protect, and support  
Eve. To lead. Mary’s husband, Joseph, is the perfect  
example of that. In the mind of the Creator, woman, Eve,  
was made to be a helpmate to Adam. Made from Adam’s  
rib, not his head and not his feet. Neither greater nor  
lesser.”**

**“But then, given how time have changed, why does the  
Church continue to include that idea in its teaching?”  
Angie asks.**

**“Well, first, because it’s in Scripture; something no one  
can add to or subtract from. In Genesis, God addresses  
Eve as he banished her, telling her, Adam, her husband,  
shall be her master. The King James version uses the  
term. ‘and He shall rule over thee.’”**

**“But doesn’t that contradict what you just said?”**

**“No, because Paul is presenting Christ’s teaching and His words and actions give to mankind a new and higher understanding.”**

**“Okay, but why not just deemphasize it in today’s culture?”**

**“Maybe because Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit? Maybe God hasn’t changed His vision: Maybe He wants it left in?”**

**Father John pauses. Then winking at Angie, says ...**

**“... And because that would be taking the easy way out.”**

**“Easy way out; why?” Angie asks.**

**“Well, personally, I’ve come to, let’s call it, a more evolved viewpoint.”**

**“And that would be.”**

**“Paul’s words need to be understood in light of something Jesus said.”**

**“... husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church?”**

**Bobby Jo asks.**

**“No, Bobby, those were Paul’s words. I’m thinking of something our Lord said.”**

**“And that would be?”**

**“... he who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”**

**Saying nothing, an inquisitive look ambles across the girl’s faces.**

**“‘I come not to be served, but to serve’... our Lord’s words,” Father John says, continuing. “By being submissive to the will of the Father, by serving, Jesus**

effected the greatest glory afforded mankind; its redemption. ...

“... I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to thy word.” Mary, though not fully understanding, submits to God’s request ...

“...Joseph, after wrestling with Mary being pregnant, and ostensibly having sinned to the point death would be her punishment according to the Law, submits his will and understanding to God, taking Mary into his care and his home ...

“... All humbly submitted their will to their Heavenly Father, and are now supremely exalted. That’s the dynamic Paul exhorts husbands and wives to emulate and embrace.”

Again, saying nothing, the three girls nod silently.

“In Paul’s words I hear an echo our Lord’s; ‘unless a grain of wheat falling into the ground, dies ... it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies it brings forth much fruit.’\* Submission, dying to oneself, ultimately brings forth

“much fruit”; in this case a strong, vibrant, and loving marriage ...

“... Paul’s words, in light of Jesus’ teaching, call for each partner to amplify and enhance the honor and dignity of the other ... again that dynamic ... a mutual submission that seeks not to rule, but to serve.”

Father John pauses, as Alyssa brings him a fresh cup of coffee. Sipping it, he continues.

“Our Lord’s word, exalt, clarifies and amplifies Paul’s as to a husband’s place in marriage; implying not

domination but a loving submission of his own so as to strengthen and perfect the bond between he and his wife

...

“...by his submission, a husband recognizes his wife is his sacred honor in living form; as Father Bob is fond of saying. And, in assuming his God-given role of provider, protector, leader, and guide, he becomes the “rock” she needs; encouraging and supporting her to be the best version of herself, as the contemporary phrase goes.

Sipping his coffee, Father John says softly ...

“... a version reflecting the honor and dignity instilled in her by her Heavenly Father.”

In isolating passages and failing to recognize the interplay of Jesus’ teachings and the writings of the various authors, our understanding of God’s word is rendered incomplete. Doing so leads to an imperfect understanding, or misinterpretation of the intent of the writer.

Scripture needs to be experienced as alive; in the living historical and cultural environment in which it was written. Only then can we fully understand the writer’s intention, and the complete truth of his words. Doing so allows us to properly apply his words to today’s world and today’s culture.

And, like the passage we hear on “nudge Sunday,” a loving and genuine submission, one to another; shown to us by Jesus Himself and echoed in Paul’s words ...

... is the rest of the story ...

**Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.**

**\*Jn 12: 24**

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