

Tomato Stakes – II

November 12, 2011

When “Eleison Comments” quoted (Sept. 10, 217) the Russian proverb likening woman and man to a tomato-plant and the stake around which that plant clings and climbs to bear fruit, it used the comparison to expound on the nature and role of woman. A woman reader then asked how it applies to men. Alas, our crazy age is trying to wipe out all these basics of human nature.

On God’s design for man and woman, profoundly different but sublimely complementary, there is of course much more to be said than a mere comparison from the garden can say. At every Catholic wedding Mass, the Epistle compares the relations between husband and wife to those between Christ and his Church. Worthy of note in this passage (Ephesians V, 22–33) is how St Paul lays out at length the consequent duties of the husband, briefly those of the wife. Already we may suspect that today’s men are greatly responsible for the loss of sanity between contemporary man and woman, but let us leave the supernatural mystery for another occasion and return to the garden, because it is above all the natural basics that are being attacked today by the enemies of God and man.

For a tomato-stake to serve a tomato-plant it needs two things: it must stand tall and it must stand firm. If it does not stand tall, the plant cannot climb, and if it does not stand firm the plant cannot cling, or wrap itself around the stake. The firmness, one might say, depends on a man’s wrapping himself around his work, while the tallness depends upon his reaching for God, no less.

As for the firmness, in all times and places where human nature has not been twisted out of all recognition, the man’s life revolves around his work while the woman’s life revolves around her family, starting with her man. If the man makes the

woman the centre of his life, it is as though two tomato plants were clinging together – both will finish in the mud, unless the woman takes on the part of the man, which she was never meant to do, and which she should at least never wish to do. A wise woman chooses for husband precisely a man who has found his work and loves it, so that while he is firmly wrapped around it, she can wrap herself around him.

As for the tallness, just as the stake must point to the sky, so a man must reach for Heaven. Leaders need a vision with which to inspire and lead. Archbishop Lefebvre had a vision of the restoration of the true Church. Similarly when the faith of Cardinal Pie (1815–1880) saw unmanliness in the men of the 19th century all around him, he attributed it to their lack of faith. Where there is no faith, he said, there are no convictions. No convictions, no firmness of character. No firmness of character, no men. St Paul was thinking along the same lines when he said, “The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (I Cor.XI, 3). Therefore to recover his manliness, let a man turn to God, put himself in order beneath him, and it will be that much easier for a wife to put herself in order beneath her man, and the children beneath both of them.

But “beneath” is not to be understood as any kind of tyranny, either of husband over wife, or of parents over children. The stake is there for the tomato. It was a wise Jesuit who said that the best thing a man can do for his children is to love their mother. Men do not run on love as women do, so they can easily fail to understand how women need to love and to be loved. In fact, a teaspoonful of affection, and she is good for another hundred miles. The Holy Ghost says it rather more elegantly: “Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter towards them” (Col.III, 19).

Kyrie eleison.