

Undesired Celibacy

January 16, 2010

Last Sunday's Feast of the Holy Family may be a suitable moment to quote a reader's question arising from the pronouncement of "Eleison Comments" three weeks ago that, normally speaking, an unmarried man is a "zero" while an unmarried woman is "less than a zero": what about a man or woman who might have liked to get married, but for whatever reason either could not or did not do so? Not everybody that does not marry has a religious vocation, the reader added.

I began by replying that unnatural loneliness is all too normal today. Modern life, especially big city life, causes not only marriages not to happen which should happen, but also many marriages which have happened to come apart. That is one punishment amongst many others of liberalism, which by glorifying individualism engenders an inaptitude to live in the married state. Liberalism also glorifies freedom from all ties, and the marriage bond is nothing if not a tie. "Hence the collapsing birth-rates of the Western nations and the suicide of once Catholic Europe. It is all immensely sad and immensely serious."

I continued: "Obviously to call all men "zeros" is a colorful way of saying that, firstly, we are all before God minute creatures, and secondly, men are not nearly as great as they think they are. (Two Russian proverbs say that a man without a woman is like a garden without a hedge (to surround it), or like a man out in January (in Russia) without a fur cap!) To go on to call women "less than zeros" is a likewise provocative way of saying that firstly, contrary to the dreadful disparaging of their complementarity by the enemies of God everywhere today, women are not the same as men, and secondly, they are more profoundly dependent on men than men are on women – see Eve's punishment in Genesis III, 16: "Thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion

over thee.” But the “zero” and “less than zero” are not primarily to provoke but to be put together in an eight, to demonstrate graphically the natural power of the union of marriage.”

Alas, today many a priest comes across young women who would love to marry but can hardly find a young man that strikes them as fit to be a husband. The young men seem all too often virtual dishrags, washed out by a liberalism which dissolves their minds by which God meant them to lead. Liberalism does not so easily undo the instincts and emotions which God makes natural to woman, although when it does, the results can be even more terrible.

In conclusion, I referred to the Eighth Station of the Way of the Cross, where Our Lord consoled the weeping women of Jerusalem (Lk. XXIII, 27–31): such a punishment, he warned, would soon come down on deicide Jerusalem as would make them envy the women who had never had husband or family. In our own day that is not a reason not to marry, but it may be a consolation for anyone to whom Providence has not given to marry but who might have liked to do so, because coming down upon us in what cannot be the too far distant future is . . . tremendous reason to start putting now more trust than ever in God’s unfailing Providence . . .

Kyrie eleison.