

On the Marriage Ceremony I

First, a little etymology is in order. “Marriage” has a Babylonian root, as “mar” means “lord” in that language. So the word means “the taking of a Lord” (a little something to warm the heart of any feminist). This word is a norm in English.

The Latin word for the legitimate union of husband and wife is “matrimonium,” which is from two Latin words, “matri” meaning “mother,” and “monium,” a suffix which indicates the state or condition (of being a mother).

“Husband” comes from the Old English, “hus” the root of “house” and “bond” indicating a dweller or master. So the husband is the master of the house.

“Wife” is an Old English word for “Woman.”

“Spouse” is from the Latin, and it comes from the word “spondere,” which means “to pledge.”

That the Church uses “matrimony” and “spouse” in her official texts regarding marriage, is a clear indication that she regards the center of the household and family to be the wife and mother, and the head of the household to be the husband and father.

We’re at the heart of Western Civilization here, though I’m not convinced that I should use the adjective “western” with this, since it is the only kind of civilization. Everything else is a culture. To understand how this is at the core of Civilization, look at the [Aeneid](#) of Virgil. As John Senior once put it, “Since the first public readings of it in the reign of Caesar Augustus and the time of Herod the King, Virgil has never been considered less than the second greatest poet, and over the larger period of the two thousand years from then until now has been thought the very first. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Virgil and the Bible have been the only common documents of Western education.”

Look then at the love of Dido for Aeneas. “Dido’s love for Aeneas begins with their common sense of sorrow, which is the origin of all romance – which means that love is tears and that it is good.” Aeneas has been washed ashore at Carthage, and Dido its queen has sympathy for refugees because she says, “Me too has a like fortune driven through many a woe...not ignorant of ill I learn to succour the afflicted.” Dido and Aeneas go on a hunt – and what a hunt it is! Just the description of her and horse and her tack and the way she keeps everyone waiting (there is something correct in ladies being late) is worth reading the book. During the hunt, a storm arises, and our couple goes into a cavern for some shelter. She loves Aeneas...but this is tragic. “For now Dido reeks not of eye or tongue, but sets her heart on love in secret: she calls it marriage, and with this word shrouds her blame.”

But this love must be destructive, because it is not marriage. She wants to call it marriage, but there is no pledge, no bond. Aeneas must leave (to found Rome), and she cries, “How leavest thou me to die? At least if before thy flight a child of thine had been clasped in my arms – if a tiny Aeneas were playing in my hall, whose face might yet image thine, I would not think myself ensnared and deserted utterly.”

Senior continues, “There you have the difference between sex and love, so frightfully con-

trasted by those who think that the worst thing that can happen is the birth of a child. Because she loves him, she wants his child because the child would be part of him. Dido does not love herself or some degraded pleasure; she loves Aeneas and she wants to be his wife and the mother of his children.”

Aeneas replies, “*Non sponte sequor* (note the root word for spouse).” “I do not follow of my own will.” Which is to say, “I am not my own man.” When he is at sea again, he looks back, and sees the flames from her funeral pyre, for she has committed suicide. The neo-classical age reduced this tragic conflict to a formula: love and duty. That is correct, but the formula provides no solution. It is an irreducible conflict.

Later, when Aeneas descends into hell guided by the Sybil, he sees the souls of those in Hades: “Here they whom pitiless love has wasted in cruel decay, shrouded in myrtle thickets, not death itself ends their distress...Among whom Dido the Phoenician fresh from her death-wound, wandered in the vast forest; by her the Trojan hero stood, and knew the dim form through the darkness, even as the moon at the month’s beginning to him who sees or thinks he sees her rising through the vapours...” “Unwillingly, O queen, I left thy shores...” he cries. And her silence is the most eloquent speech in the poem.

Virgil has no answer to the conflict between love and duty. Nothing could shake him from the conviction that both Dido and Aeneas are right. Virgil did not know of the Sacrament of Matrimony, where love and duty become one.

Though there is no getting over the heartbreak of love’s conflict with duty, I like how Sir Richard Lovelace put it in his poem, “To Lucasta, going to the Wars.”

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore;
I could not love thee dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.

The wedding ceremony is necessary to Civilization, that the husband may pledge and bind himself to the needed love of his wife. And no man can love his wife properly, unless he loves her honor, and keeps his word to Christ which he gave in Baptism, and *waits* to fulfill that honor in Holy Matrimony.