

THE LITTLE KNOWN DUTY

(1945)

In a century of so much disorderly activity and vertiginous speeds, there is a duty that is very little known. And yet, Christ alludes to it twice in Luke 14: 28-31. It is the duty of sitting down.

I do not think I am making a rash judgement when I say that even the best Christian spouses, that is, those who never break the duty of kneeling down to pray together, often commit the transgression of not sitting down.

Before starting to build your married life as a couple, you expounded your opinions, weighed your material and spiritual resources, and drew up a set of plans. Now that you are living your married life, do you not neglect to sit down together to examine what has been accomplished, to rediscover the ideal that had been gleaned, and to consult the Master Architect?

I know all about the objections and difficulties, but I also know that the house one day will fall down because it has not been properly taken care of. For a couple who does not take the time to stop and reflect, material and moral disorder very often slips in and settles down insiduously. Routine begins to take over family prayer, meals, and all other family rites. Education is reduced to reflexes from parents who are more or less nervous. Conjugal unity is cracked. These deficiencies and many others can be seen, not only in homes with no formation and ignorant of the problems of education and family spirituality, but also in those homes which are considered competent in the art of family sciences and, in theory, are effectively so. However, they have not sufficiently observed their condition. The spouses no longer see what the visitor perceives as soon as he enters the door. It is a looseness which friends may speak of among themselves sometimes, but hesitate to speak to those concerned who most often will neither comprehend nor be open to suggestions.

Couples who have seen the danger have considered and adopted different methods to avoid this. One of these couples spoke to me recently. Their experience showed how profitable it was for a couple to leave their children each year (they have eight) and go off together for a week or two for a rest or holiday. But perhaps in reading this, you may think that not everyone has the people, friends, or family with whom to leave the children. There are other solutions. Three families from the same area banded together in order to have a holiday and each couple would be gone a week while leaving their children to the other two couples.

To avoid the danger of getting into a rut, there is another means which I would like to speak of. Take your calendar and in the same way as you would note a dinner, a film, an appointment, mark down a definite date for yourselves of two or three hours. Let nothing interfere with this appointed time. It is sacred time. It is more Christian not to allow any reason whatsoever to prevent you from being together, than to let either friends, guests, jobs, or other commitments interfere. How then will you use these hours? First, you must decide, for once, that you are in no hurry! Leave the banks of the shore and go out upon the high seas.

No matter what, change the scenery and forget all preoccupations. Read together a well chosen chapter from a book kept for this special time, the Bible, Saint Exupery's 'The War Pilot', Daniel Rop's 'Holy History', etc...

Then, or better yet, first of all pray for a long time. Each, if possible, praying aloud spontaneously. This form of prayer, without impinging on others, draws hearts miraculously together. In this way, having entered into the peace of the Lord, you now tell each other what is in your heart, your thoughts, your anger, your confidences, apprehensions, desires. These are not easy and often are not wished for during active and noisy days. And yet, it is dangerous to seal within one's heart these things because, as you may know, these are "silences that become enemies of love". Do not stop with yourselves nor the worries of the day, but make a pilgrimage to the source of your love. Reconsider the ideal that you saw when you embarked sprightly on the road together. Renew your fervor. "One must believe in what one does and do it enthusiastically." Then return to the present and confront both the ideal with the reality by making an examination of conscience as a couple - notice, I did not say a personal examination of conscience. Make some practical resolutions and insert opportunities for healing, renewing, openly airing things out. Be forthright and sincere in this examination. Go to the cause of the evil that has been diagnosed.

Why not spend a few moments also in meditating upon each of the children. Asking the Lord, according to His promise, to "put His eyes into your heart" so that you can see your children and love them as He does, and lead them according to His will. And finally and above all, ask yourselves if God is the first One served in your home. If there is time left, do what you wish, but I beg you not to gossip or use a radio. If you have nothing left to say, then be silent together. It probably will not be the least profitable moment. Remember the remark of Maeterlinck: "we do not know each other yet for we have not yet dared to be silent together."

It is very important to make an account of this meeting as to whatever was discovered, studied, decided. It can be done sometime thereafter by one of you and then reread at your next sit down.

What I have just said to you is only one way of keeping your love and your union young and alive. There are surely other ways. However, the sit down, already adopted by many couples that I know, has proven itself. You can try to improve the formula or try to find something better, and if successful, then please let me know of your discovery.

In order to overcome your final hesitations and confirm the importance of the DUTY TO SIT DOWN, I give you an example from afar. "Friends are often surprised at my tranquility. They ask me where my calmness and confidence come from. Here is my answer", says Marshall Tchiang Kai Shek as he shows his visitor a small and austere study which opens into the hall. "Each day, whatever be the tasks, reports, or meetings that await me, I spend an hour in here, in this study, reading the Bible and praying. My wife joins me and together we consider the day which is dawning, the people with whom we shall meet, and our country."