

Choosing a Spouse

What a pleasure and a joy it is to see a family where love and peace prevail between husband and wife, where the husband and wife share each other's joys and sorrows, thus mutually lightening all life's difficulties. By contrast, how sad it is for a husband and wife when dissension exists between them - when no tender feelings attract them to each other.

Unfortunately, there are today not a few marriages where, instead of mutual respect and peace between husband and wife, there are quarrels and complaints about each other.

From what does this result? There are certainly many reasons, but the principal one is having chosen the wrong person to marry. Holy Scripture teaches us a beautiful lesson on this subject in the case of our forefather Abraham (Gen. 24). And so, let us Christians recall the marriage of the patriarch Isaac, Abraham's son.

When Abraham was a hundred and forty years old and his son was forty, Abraham called his faithful servant Eliezer to him and said:

"I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son Isaac of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

The servant swore to him concerning the matter and left without delay for Mesopotamia, where Abraham's brother Nahor lived. After reaching the city of Harran, Eliezer stopped by a well of water and began to say a prayer in his mind:

"O Lord God of my master Abraham! ... Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass that to whom I shall say, 'Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink,' and she shall say, 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also': let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

Before he had done speaking, Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, came to the well. When Eliezer asked her for water to drink, she hastened to give him and the camels water. And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, Who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

When Rebekah's family learnt about Eliezer, why he had come to Mesopotamia, and how the Lord had showed him a wife in Rebekah for his master's son, they did not begin to contradict him, but gave their full consent to the proposal presented by Abraham's servant.

They said, "Behold, Rebekah is before thee. Take her and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." They called Rebekah, and said to her, "Wilt thou go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." When the servant returned home, he told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Saint Gregory the Theologian refers to Isaac's marriage with Rebekah as an example of Christian behavior before marriage and says, "When you mean to take a wife, don't go running to people, but to God. Tell God, 'Appoint for me the one whom You have prepared for me in Your Providence.' Entrust this matter to God, and He will reward you for granting such a great honor to Him."

And so, in wishing to enter into marriage, one should, above all else, pray diligently to the Lord, Who knows the human heart, that He Himself would arrange the marriage according to His will, pointing out the chosen person and blessing the marriage with His grace. If Abraham's servant, acting merely as a middleman, thanked God for finding a bride for the bridegroom, should not the hearts of the bridegroom and bride be filled with far greater thankfulness?

Not only do the bride and bridegroom have to thank the Lord, Who brought them together and decreed them to walk the path of earthly life as one, but also to pray to Him to send down His mercy for their future.

Let them recognize that they cannot build their happiness and a well-ordered marriage only by their own strength, without God's blessing. Let them together pray to God to bless their union and to send down His grace so that they may live in love, single-mindedness and chastity, fulfilling God's commandments.

Yet, how many people are there among us who left their marriage to God's will and, when wishing to enter into marriage, thought first and foremost of receiving God's blessing for it? Is it not true that all of us are busy primarily with earthly cares and thoughts?

How many men, before choosing a life-long partner, try to become familiar, not with a maiden's manner and behavior, but with how much property and various possessions she owns, how noble a family she is descended from, and so on.

Young men and women! Remember that a marriage made by mercenary calculations is rarely happy. A marriage that is not concluded for sincerity, mutual trust and the joining of hearts degrades those who enter into it, and consequently it often brings much evil, creating possibilities for family dissension, reproaches and mutual insults.

Saint John Chrysostom told those under his obedience, "I entreat you not to look for money and riches in a maiden, but for good characteristics: modesty, piety and godliness; these are better than countless treasures. "Let us say someone grew rich by his wife. Isn't such an example shameful? I hear many people say things such as, 'I would rather bear extreme poverty than receive riches by a wife.'"

And indeed, one who chooses a rich wife chooses for himself a master rather than a wife and helper. On the other hand, one who marries someone of equal or lower position acquires a faithful helper for himself.

Poverty disposes a wife to save her husband, to listen to him in everything, to obey him, and to care assiduously about household work. A sensible, good and temperate wife, even if poor, also deals with poverty better than a peevish and evil wife with riches. And so, riches and money are useless if we cannot find goodness in our wives.

Strong mutual love between a husband and wife serves as a further foundation of a happy marriage. The same love must serve as an incentive for the bridegroom and his bride to get married.

Moreover, one must look not at physical beauty, but at the beauty of [the] beloved's heart. "Time washes away physical beauty, and sickness eats it up," says Saint John Chrysostom, "but beauty of the heart is beyond all changes. The former arouses anger and produces jealousy, but the latter is not susceptible to similar passions and knows no vainglory."

Nothing beautifies a person, or gains his or her favor, more than a good heart. Therefore, the Holy Father teaches each of us to try to know the inner appearance when we see someone attractive; and if this is not beautiful, to ignore the attractive looks.

Fathers of families! Imitate the solicitude of the forefather Abraham, who tried to find a godly wife for his son; for he did not seek for riches by her, nor fame of her family, but only nobility of heart.

And you, mothers of families, beautify your daughters not with gold or expensive clothes, but with modesty and meekness. A meek and decorous woman will encourage her husband to be a child-loving father and to take part himself in household work.