

devotions one with the other; but if there is any reason for it, public devotions may precede or follow liturgical services' (Fr Clifford Howell's translation).

As far as I can see then, the holding of October devotions during mass is from now on to be regarded as an abuse, and your friend would have the right, perhaps even the duty, of complaining about it to the proper authorities.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SOME REFLECTIONS ON MARRIAGE

The Editor,
THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.
DEAR EDITOR,

Several months ago (I have given the issue away, so don't have it to check the date) your magazine had an article—a very good one—on the similarities between divine love and human love. The last line, however, to the effect that the pleasures of divine intimacy were not usually the lot of those to whom God gave the pleasures of conjugal love, somewhat bothered me. And even though it finally occurred to me that, after all, it is not primarily pleasure that we seek in the service of God, still it seems that there was an aspect of the question left unexplored.

For the participation of human love in divine love is not limited to the reflection that human love bears to the divine in its own nature. To the extent that human love results from, and is ruled by the love of God, it participates this divine love as it is in itself, even as it is in God, in God the Father, and God the Son, spirating God the Holy Spirit. And to this very love whence, *ad intra*, proceeds the Holy Ghost and whence, *ad extra*, we ourselves proceed as creatures in the image of the Son by way of Love, parents are united when by an act of love—of God and of each other in God, overflowing to their children—they bring forth children in their own God-imprinted image. And when procreative love is thus united to the creative love of God, so that it bears not only a natural but also a supernatural similitude to the

trinitarian act of creation, the second of time in which conception takes place participates most intimately in that divine love which is from all eternity. And so, just as creation does not begin and end with that second in which creatures come into being in their own natures, but rather, as partaking of the Creator's own eternity, exists from all eternity in the mind of God, in the Word who expresses that mind and who is thus our exemplar, and includes, besides this pre-existence from eternity, also that providential care which accomplishes our return to our source and end; so does procreation also have some participation in this same divine, eternal solicitude. This is not only in the self-giving and care for the beloved which is the condition of that sexual love which is ordered to procreation, and in which children already somehow are, as the flower is in the seed, but also in the greater self-sacrifice which must characterize the months of waiting for birth; and then, with birth, this second of natural procreation, in which we shared God's natural creation, stretches into years of supernatural re-creation in which we become, daily, the cause of our children's sanctification in grace. For as he who is from all eternity the exemplar of our humanity became, in time, one of us, that so we might become him, even his own body, and so that, as the mystical body of Christ, vivified by that Spirit which breathes into us the very life of God himself, we might be even yet the sons of God, nor is it revealed what we shall become; so also in the family, we who are one in body are even more intimately one in the body of Christ, and we who have life by the same blood, are more closely bound together in the trinitarian life we share by the blood of Christ. For it is in the providential plan of God that we should be members of each other as we are members of Christ, and although God could have effected his purposes without the intermediary of secondary causes, he has nevertheless chosen to make use of these, that the dignity of causality may be imparted to creatures. And so the divine generosity which gave us a share in that divine creation whence creatures proceed from God, gives us also a share in that re-creation, and sanctification, whereby they return to him.

And if God has chosen some to be his brides in a most special way, nevertheless, we are all, as members of the Church, espoused to the eternal bridegroom, and our conjugal union in marriage is a participation of our union with Christ; we are wedded in Christ because we are first wedded to Christ. If this is true at all, married

love is somehow born of union with Christ, even if remotely, and it is ordered to the perfection of this union, and it is here alone that it finds its own proper perfection. And to that end it has the protection, the grace of a sacrament. And as this sacramental bond is the similitude of Christ's love for his bride, the Church, so also does it have some share in the perfection of this love, so that in the beloved it is Christ who is loved. And this conjugal love is even the very love of Christ himself, and the reason why it is tender is that the love of Christ is tender, and the reason why it is jealous is that the love of Christ is jealous, and the reason why it draws us close to each other is that it draws us close to Christ. It is Christ himself who whispers in one's dearly beloved husband, 'Come, my love, my dove, my beautiful one', and the reason why the bride is beautiful, why she has the purity of a dove, why she is worthy of love, is because she is first loved by Christ, and adorned with the beauty of his grace.

I have understood very often when I have overcome the reluctance of fatigue to respond readily to the demands of conjugal love, that it was the insistent demand of the love of Christ himself that I was answering. And once it happened that under very great pressure there was danger of infidelity, so that for that and other reasons it was very difficult to be responsive, until at last I knew that I could no longer continue to give of myself; and in that moment I understood very, very clearly that it was no longer I who was making the sacrifice of love, because I was not capable of it, but Christ who was making it in me, to avert the danger of evil. And after that, the continued sacrifice became infinitely sweet and infinitely precious, so that I was very, very reluctant to relinquish it when circumstances made it no longer necessary.

But if God has given this understanding in times of adversity, it has also been granted in times of more care-free pleasure, when I wondered if there must not be something not quite right about a love given so gladly, and so generously, to a man; and the eternal bridegroom himself gave me to understand that it was a love given to Christ, because it was given to one loved in Christ. And at such times he has given me graces of prayer as pure as any ever granted in solitary moments, kneeling before the tabernacle.

It is necessary, I think, to bear in mind the fact that the difficulties concerned with sexual love, and with the married state,

derive rather from the weakness of our fallen nature than from a *per se* imperfection in that love itself, which as a natural similitude of divine love has a certain natural disposition to be supernaturalized in grace. Even if the wound of original sin has made us weak, yet what is impossible to man is possible to God. The fact that the married state is not as perfect a state as that of virginity must not blind us to the fact that nevertheless it does have a perfection which is proper to it, and that by it God leads many souls to sanctity, and sanctity is union with himself. Nor is God prevented from manifesting his infinite mercy and condescension in the gifts he gives to those whom he has placed in a lowly state for that very purpose. Most particularly, it is necessary to understand that the perfection which is proper to the married state bears an intimate relation to the perfection of that procreative love whereby parents share even in the trinitarian love in God, whence from eternity proceeds that Love who is reflected in every other love. And the pleasures of human love should in no way detract from the joys of divine love, but should ever more perfectly participate the intimacy of divine love itself.

Sincerely in Christ,
A MARRIED WOMAN