

Voices From the Past

When considering voices from the past, one might object that we are living in modern times; what popes and saints of the past have said no longer applies to Catholics today. All those old puritan-like ways are not practical; we are living in a more enlightened time. We are no longer stuck in the dark and dismal past. *Thank God.*

The above, *sad to say*, is the sentiment of the vast majority of Catholics today, and is the direct result of a lack of quality catecheses in the Church. Uninformed Catholics tend to conjure up repulsive illusions of the past from what society tells them the past was like. Materialistic people are extremely good at vilifying the family lifestyle of the past, and when the Church is not vigilant, the world captures the mind and hearts of the people.

What is the fate of people to whom the world has charmed into the ways of modernism? How do rampant drug addiction, pornography, adultery, fornication, abortion, and suicide sound? There are also rampant out-of-wedlock pregnancies, mass killings at our schools, mothers killing their children, and spouses killing each other. Homes in which the only time God is mentioned is in profanity. These, along with a divorce rate of more than 50%, are the wonderful results of a world that has silenced the voices of the past. Well, let us resurrect a few of these voices from the past for those who are not impressed with the direction our enlightened modernistic world is going.

Pope Pius XI

“With great wisdom Our predecessor, Leo XIII, of happy memory, in the Encyclical on Christian marriage which We have already mentioned, speaking of this order to be maintained between man and wife, teaches: ‘The husband is the chief of the family, and the head of the wife. The woman, because she is flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, must be subject to her husband and obey him; not, indeed, as a servant, but as a companion, so that her obedience shall be wanting in neither honor nor dignity. Since the husband represents Christ, and since the wife represents the Church, let there always be, both in him who commands and in her who obeys, a heaven-born love guiding both in their respective duties.’”

The Emancipation of Woman

“The same false teachers who try to dim the luster of conjugal faith and purity do not scruple to do away with the honorable and trusting obedience which the woman owes to the man. Many of them even go further and assert that such a subjection of one party to the other is unworthy of human dignity, that the rights of husband and wife are equal; wherefore, they boldly proclaim, the emancipation of woman has been or ought to be effected.”

We have here a Pope quoting another Pope, saying that it is false teachers who say a woman does not owe obedience to the man, and that the obedience owed is an honorable and trusting obedience. I am sure that the reader is wise enough to realize that the false teachers won out over both Pope Pius XI and Pope Leo XIII. Yes, the false teachers have won, and families have lost. Today, there are many more voices in the Church that are echoing the cry of the false prophets, and the divorces among Catholics have more than doubled since these two voices rang out. We have become so smart and so enlightened that we no longer are able to do what the ignorant and unenlightened of the past had no problem doing — **that is, have a happy well-adjusted family that can honestly say, til death do we part.**

The Pope continues: “This emancipation states, the woman is to be freed at her own good pleasure from the burdensome duties properly belonging to a wife as companion and mother. (We have already said that this is not an emancipation but a crime); it is the debasing of the womanly character and the dignity of motherhood, and indeed of the whole family, as a result of which the husband suffers the loss of his wife, the children of their mother, and the home and the whole family of an ever watchful guardian. More than this, this false liberty and unnatural equality with the husband are to the detriment of the woman herself, for if the woman descends from her truly regal throne to which she has been raised within the walls of the home by means of the Gospel, she will soon be reduced to the old state of slavery (if not in appearance, certainly in reality) and become as among the pagans the mere instrument of man.”

Pope Pius XII also states, “From a very early age, children are entrusted to the hands of a stranger, brought up and guided more by others than by their mother, who in the exercise of her profession is kept far from them. Why wonder if in these circumstances the sense of hierarchy in the family fades and begins to disappear? What wonder if the supervision of the father and the care of the mother do not suffice to render the family circle happy and lovable?”

“Fortunate the child whose mother stands by its cradle like a guardian angel to inspire and lead it in the path of goodness!”

“Such sentiments in a woman and a mother give her the right to that reverence and dignity which belong to a man’s loyal helpmate; such a mother is like a pillar, for she is the central support of the home; she is like a beacon whose light gives an example to the parish and brings illumination to the pious associations of which she is a member.”

Folly Repeated

The Pope in his comparison of the problems of the early Church with twentieth century women states: “Women especially of high society, who fled disdainfully from the duties of motherhood, to give themselves rather to occupations, and to play a part till then reserved to men alone.” . . .

Third Century A.D. Problems

At the same time as divorces multiplied, the family began to disintegrate, and womanly affections and behavior deviated from the straight path of virtue to such an extent that it drew from Seneca the bitter lament: “Does there now remain any woman at all who is ashamed to break her marriage, when great and noble ladies measure their age not in terms of the consul, but of their husbands? When they divorce to remarry, and marry only to divorce? The woman has a great influence upon individual and social behavior, because she has a great influence upon her husband. Remember that Eve, deceived by the serpent, gave of the forbidden fruit to Adam, and he too ate of it.”

The Pope is indeed illustrating that the desire of the woman to dominate is always there due to the effects of original sin, and what is happening today is not something new, but just a resurgence of an old sin, one that was there from the very beginning. There is an old saying: **“Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.”** It is extremely sad that our fashionable and supposedly brilliant women of today are falling prey to the same snare as their modernistic foremothers of the third century. Christ spoke of those who have eyes and cannot see, and ears and cannot hear. Sin tends to make us unable to understand the beauty of God’s plan for us. It builds up in the sinner an abhorrence to things that are good and holy. It so deforms the conscience of the sinner that she wants to eradicate any and all things that are good and holy.

Modesty

On the subject of modesty, the Pope had this to say: “ O Christian mothers, if you only knew what a future of worries and dangers, of ill subdued doubts, of hardly suppressed shame you lay upon your sons and your daughters by imprudently accustoming them to live barely attired, making them lose the natural sense of modesty, you yourselves would blush, and take fright at the shame you inflict upon yourselves, and the harm which you occasion to your children, entrusted to you by heaven to be brought up in a Christian manner. And what we say to mothers, we repeat to many women among the faithful, and pious women at that, who, by showing their approval of this or that fashion, by their example lay low the last barriers which hold back from that fashion a mass of their sisters, for whom it may be a source of spiritual ruin. As long as certain audacious modes of dress remain the sad privilege of women of dubious reputation, and almost a sign by which they may be known, no one else would dare to wear that same dress herself: but the moment that it appears upon persons beyond all reproach, she will hesitate no longer to follow the current, a current which will drag her perhaps to the worst falls.”

Pope Pius XII was and is exactly right. When women of the street wear immodest clothing there is no incentive on the part of decent women to wear such clothing. In many ways it could be a deterrent, for what Christian woman wants to look like a prostitute? However, when a woman who is “*supposed*” to be a good Catholic wears such clothing, she is paving the way for other women to follow in her footsteps. She then becomes the near occasion of sin to all she encounters. For women and girls, she becomes a temptation to the sin of impurity and immodesty. To men and young boys, she becomes a temptation to the sin of lust. In the event she would be sexually assaulted, she would likely respond as though she were a victim and completely innocent of blame in the horrible incident. Satan is extremely cunning, is he not?

Pope Benedict on Excesses

“We know that certain modes of dress which women are beginning to accept, are harmful to society, for they are a cause of evil. And on the other hand, we find to our amazement, that those who spread this poison seem to ignore its evil effects: those who set the house on fire, as it were, seem not to realize the destructive power of the flames. And yet only such an ignorance can explain the deplorable popularity of fashions so contrary to that sense of modesty which should be the most beautiful adornment of the Christian woman.”

Was this quote given in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI? No, it was given October 21, 1919, by Pope Benedict XV. The Pope calls immodest dress by women, poison and a cause of evil. Now this was back in 1919 when the dress of women was far more modest than today.

The turn of the twentieth century was the beginning of the move to a more sensual style of dress by women. Clothing was intentionally designed to reveal rather than to conceal the woman’s body. The Pope was aware of the danger and was warning of its consequence. He warned of the harm it will have on society. The Pope was well aware that a society’s morals will be no better than its women’s morals. As the woman loses her moral decency, the society will lose its moral decency.

That sense of modesty to which the Pope referred has not only been lost, it has come to be despised. This despising of modest feminine dress does not come just from our pagan society, it comes also from many of what you might call, good Catholic women.

The Pope was amazed that those who spread this poison seem to ignore its evil effect. What amazes me is that in our day, when the dress of women is far more poisonous, not only those wearing the immodest apparel ignore its evil effect, but many of our own Shepherds are ignoring this evil as well.

Conclusion

We human beings tend to believe that the way we think, act, and dress is the way it always was. We fail to understand that like all other things, morals are in a constant state of flux. There is a saying that goes something like this: Those who are ignorant of history shall repeat the same errors.

By pondering the statements of these Popes from the past, we are able to see first of all, they were right in their assessment of human nature. Second, that the gradual decline of morals, over a period of years, can and does desensitize the faithful as to its demoralizing consequence. We become like the man who lives next to a sewer plant who says, “**Stinks? What stinks?**” The stench of immorality and rebellion gradually becomes unintelligible to us. We become completely unaware of the rot in which we have allowed ourselves to become submerged, there- by becoming “*those who have eyes and cannot see, and ears and cannot hear.*”

We strongly encourage anyone, man or woman, who is interested in the restoration of modesty and dignity of women to read *Dressing with Dignity* by Colleen Hammond, TAN BOOKS copyright 2005. The author is a former cable network anchor, image consultant, actress, model and beauty queen, who abandoned it all to be a stay-at-home mother.