

# Duties of a Wife and Mother



THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS promised St. Margaret Mary that He would give those consecrated to Him *all the graces necessary in their state of life*. At Lourdes and Fatima, we have been commanded to do *Penance! Penance! Penance!* To clarify this repeated threefold request, His Majesty later came to Sr. Lucia, saying: *"the sacrifice required for every person is the fulfillment of his duties in life and the observance of My law. This is the penance that I now seek and require."* Many fail to complete this penance because they do not know their duties beyond those basic ones owed to God and His Church as indicated in the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. Here, then, is a summary of the social duties of a wife and mother according to reliable moral handbooks and catechisms, but principally from the writings of St. Peter Julian Eymard (cf. *Eucharistic Handbook*).

Before beginning, however, please note that since marriage is a sacred union to form a family and share a life together, it naturally follows that many duties of husbands and wives overlap. Thus, it helps if men and women are familiar with the duties of each so as not to 'lord it over each other' but as a means to a deeper appreciation of the other, increased selfless service, and a strengthening of their mutual charity. With this in mind, the articles in this series are likewise meant to complement each other. For brevity's sake, therefore, many duties that are shared by the father are not repeated here.

*"Who shall find a valiant woman? far, and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her. The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no need of spoils"* (Prov. 31:10-11).

**Duties towards her family.** – God has made of the family the center of Christian obligations, the sanctuary of His graces, and the fruitful field of every virtue. A married woman, therefore, seeks her perfection first and foremost in her family by honoring her vocation and accomplishing her duties as wife and mother.

*She must esteem her state of life.* In practice that means loving her vocation, her family, and her home. She ought to love her vocation as being that which God, in His loving Providence, has selected for her in preference to all others. Every flower is beautiful when it is perfect; God pays more attention to one's charity than to the sublimity of one's state. We never fail to please Him as long as we serve Him with loving faithfulness. On the human and natural level, she should therefore be convinced that serving her family is far more *important*, far more *challenging*, and far more *rewarding* than anything a job or professional career could offer. A mother is more likely to change the world for the good through the raising of saintly children than anything she might accomplish outside of the family. Her spiritual reading and meditations ought to be aimed at making this truth real to herself.

*She ought to love her husband.* – A faithful Christian wife will love her husband above all others as the representative, the minister of God's authority. She will surround him with

respect and assist him with affectionate confidence, remaining loyal to him in every way that virtue demands.

The God-fearing wife does not use the marriage act for purposes of lust or sensuality (cf. Tobias 6:16-17 *vulgate*), but rather keeps within those limits which are reasonable and serious without ever purposely impeding procreation. A reasonable and serious request for the marriage duty is made with a definite, sober will, not too frequent and without the presence of any obstacles of bodily health. Such a request obliges the other party, in justice, to render the debt, as St. Paul says: *"Let every man give his wife what is her due, and every woman do the same by her husband"* (1 Cor. 7:3).

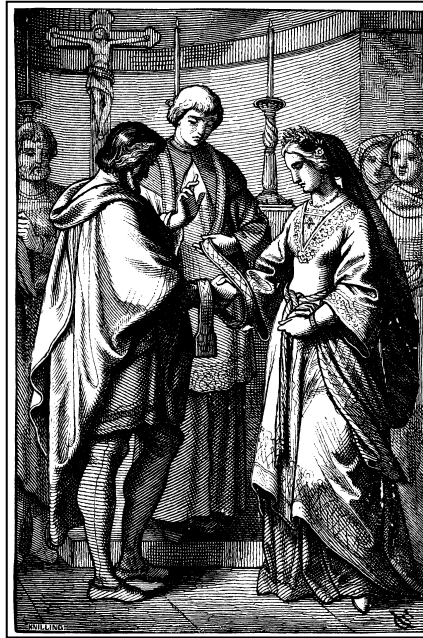
As every blessing is to be obtained from God by holy prayer, the faithful couple ought sometimes abstain from the marriage debt, in order to devote themselves to prayer. This religious continence is particularly recommended during the solemn fast of Lent and as a way to prepare for Holy Communion.

Pope Pius XI teaches: *"This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbor, on which indeed 'dependeth the whole Law and the Prophets.'*

*"Domestic society being confirmed, therefore, by this bond of love, there should flourish in it that 'order of love,' as St. Augustine calls it. This order includes both*

the primacy of the husband with regard to the wife and children, the ready subjection of the wife and her willing obedience, which the Apostle commends in these words: *'Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ is the head of the Church.'* This subjection, however, does not deny or take away the liberty which fully belongs to the woman both in view of her dignity as a human person, and in view of her most noble office as wife and mother and companion; nor does it bid her obey her husband's every request if not in harmony with right reason or with the dignity due to wife; nor, in fine, does it imply that the wife should be put on a level with those persons who in law are called minors, to whom it is not customary to allow free exercise of their rights on account of their lack of mature judgment, or of their ignorance of human affairs. But it forbids that exaggerated liberty which cares not for the good of the family; it forbids that in this body which is the family, the heart be separated from the head to the great detriment of the whole body and the proximate danger of ruin. For if the man is the head, the woman is the heart, and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love.

*"Again, this subjection of wife to husband in its degree and manner may vary according to the different conditions of persons, place and time. In fact, if the husband neglects his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the*



family [e.g., spiritual formation and education]. But the structure of the family and its fundamental law, established and confirmed by God, must always and everywhere be maintained intact.

"With great wisdom Our predecessor Leo XIII ... teaches: "The man is the ruler of the family, and the head of the woman; but because she is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, let her be subject and obedient to the man, not as a servant but as a companion, so that nothing be lacking of honor or of dignity in the obedience which she pays. Let divine charity be the constant guide of their mutual relations, both in him who rules and in her who obeys, since each bears the image, the one of Christ, the other of the Church" (cf. *Casti Cannubii*, 23-29).

St. John Chrysostom adds: "Observe again that Paul has exhorted husbands and wives to reciprocity...To love therefore, is the husband's part, to yield pertains to the other side. If, then, each one contributes his own part, all stand firm. From being loved, the wife too becomes loving; and from her being submissive, the husband learns to yield."

*She ought to love her home.* – In order to be happy in her home, a mother must look upon it as another Nazareth; she must delight in it, and love the solitude and seclusion which it affords, keeping the world's scandals at a distance and sheltering her from its dangers; she ought to transform it into a cenacle of prayer and grace. For the safety of all, without any presumption, internet connections ought to be protected and used with limitation and prudence.

One of her first concerns will be to establish a well-regulated home, to assign to each one his duties, to insist on cleanliness and order and on the Christian manners of her children among themselves, making herself the soul and center of everything. Her home will then be like the House of God; she will enjoy therein the delights of peace and happiness of virtue.

To complete these duties unto perfection, to avoid the errors of our time, the faithful wife and mother should pray daily to love her husband, children and even her home, for love is patient, kind and enduring of all things, and it is only by prayer that this love will be attained.

Of our times, Pope Pius XI teaches: "Communism is particularly characterized by the rejection of any link that binds woman to the family and the home, and her emancipation is proclaimed as a basic principle. She is withdrawn from the family and the care of her children, to be thrust instead into public life and collective production under the same conditions as man. The care of home and children then devolves upon the collectivity" (*Divini Redemptoris*, no. 11).

*She must serve her family.* – Once penetrated with deep esteem and love for her state, a mother must feel a strong impulse to serve her family. The service a woman renders her loved ones will become for her the *form of her life*, the *substance and center of her virtues*, the rule of piety set by God for her sanctification.

The service of her family becomes the *form of her life* when she surrenders herself to its tasks. The life of the mother is one entirely of dependence. In taking up her state of life, she sacrifices to God her liberty and will. Her life becomes a continuous act of self-denial; and blessed is she when she

knows how to make this self-denial meritorious after the example of His Majesty, Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother, and the saints, who practiced obedience unto perfection, without glory, without condition, without end.

A mother both nurtures and nourishes her children. She is the immediate provider of their daily bread, the first physician of their wounds, and a sweet solace who brings empathic compassion to soothe their sadness and difficulties such that they come to her without hesitation in all their difficulties and trials.

Before birth the parents, especially the mother, must avoid anything that is injurious to the child *in utero*. After birth the mother should nurse her own child if she is able. Without a legitimate reason, a mother may sin seriously if she neglects this obligation. On October 26, 1941, Pope Pius XII took time out from his busy wartime duties to meet with Women of Italian Catholic Action. His primary concern in this talk was character development, and he explained that it began at the mother's breast. "This is the reason why," he explained, "except where it is quite impossible, it is more

desirable that the mother should feed her child at her own breast. Who shall say what mysterious influences are exerted upon the growth of that little creature by the mother upon whom it depends entirely for its development?" Many recent studies have reinforced the wisdom of our forefathers that a mother's milk is the most nutritious food for her child. In particular, it fortifies a child's immune system, helps excel brain development, and strengthens the bond between mother and child.

Furthermore, the faithful mother will love her children in a Christian manner, that is, in Jesus Christ, Who has said: "Let the children come to me, do not keep them back; the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." His Majesty became a little child Himself in order to make childhood still more lovable and worthy of the motherly care. To be perfect, such a mother's love is supernatural, tender and generous.

The service of her family becomes *the substance of her virtues* when she recognizes that God has provided the grace and all that is required for the highest perfection in every state of life. When good works or pious desires interfere with the duties of one's state, they are not in order, but rather distractions. A mother must then guard herself well against this temptation and never lose sight of the divine end, which the will of God has marked out for her.

The Blessed Virgin Mary never overstepped the bounds of the simple and hidden vocation God had meant for her. She attended exclusively to her humble duties of spouse and mother, to the obscure labors of her poor condition, the simple and little virtues of everyday life. In this she pleased God. Blessed is the mother who knows how to find in her state occasions for the practice of every virtue and the exercise of divine love; she has discovered the kingdom of God on earth.

The service of her family becomes *the center of her virtues* when she practices the love of God by loving one's neighbor. In serving her family, she is loving God and neighbor and growing in that love. The virtues of the mother are easily summed up in the practice of kindness and charity.

In seeking kindness in her actions and in her relations with others, she becomes a visible and sensible expression for all, as it were, of the goodness of God, and the sweetness of



His fatherly providence; always calm, like the love of God, the divine motive which animates her; always good and condescending, like the divine goodness which sustains her; giving always and looking for no return, since she is satisfied with God; incessantly denying herself; always calm and gentle in imitation of the Most Blessed Sacrament that is the substance and center of the Christian life.

The service of her family becomes the rule of her piety. Since the perfection of holiness consists in the perfect sanctification of the vocation, a mother must direct all her spiritual duties to that end, just as the soldier uses all his science, his weapons, and his strength for the combat. She will, therefore, look upon piety as the supernatural means of sanctifying her state, and she will subordinate the exterior practices of it to her duties. That is why she will make it a point to regulate and coordinate her pious exercises and in such a way as to support her principal duties rather than interfere with them. If she knows how to economize her time and be orderly, she will always find means to foster her piety and attend properly to everything.

In case of necessity, of a pressing demand of charity, she will make it her duty to leave the pious exercise for her neighbors, to set aside the sweetness of prayer and rest for the sacrifice of work, having only one watchword, "*God wills it!*"

A woman ought to sanctify her family. Not content with only serving her family, a mother must devote herself to its sanctification. That is the portion of the field entrusted by God to her assiduous care that she may in all patience, cultivate and make it yield fruit a hundredfold through the generous zeal of an ardent charity.

The divine mission of the mother is one of *faith, virtue, prayer, and suffering.*

*A mission of faith.* – She must be the first to speak of God, of the goodness of Jesus Christ to her children; to foster the growth of the seed of faith deposited in them by the grace of baptism; to watch with a great care over their innocence and to make piety a part of their early training.

It is the mother that must preserve and keep up the faith of the family by being very strict and guarding it from everything that may scandalize one of its members. Faith is the Christian's most precious treasure, the pearl of great price. Through spiritual readings and pious conversations, she will help the faith of her children bear fruit.

Furthermore, parents are the first educators of their children. Pope Leo XIII once wrote: "Catholic parents should not confide the education of their children to schools that are not safe..." (letter to the Italian people, Dec 8, 1892). The Catechism says, this right and duty of parents is "primordial and inalienable" such that, "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute."

*A mission of virtue.* – A mother must instill virtue in each one of her children in such a manner as to make it agreeable to them. Virtue that does not spring forth from within will quickly be lost by a child through bad companions or upon leaving home. A mother will first of all apply herself to making her own virtue *simple and easy* so that her children may become, as it were, naturally virtuous through her example; *mee and gentle* – as was that of Jesus and Mary – so that she may win the hearts of all; *strong, determined, and yet disinterested*, so that she may always remain undisturbed in her trials and faithful to God in her sacrifices.

If the husband God has given her is more of the sinner than a Christian, to his edification and her sanctification, she will devote herself to his conversion with patience and confidence. Such a wife may find recourse and inspiration

from St. Monica, St. Rita, Bd. Anna Maria Taigi as well as Bd. Elizabeth Canori-Mora.

*In mission of prayer.* – A Christian mother will best sanctify her family by prayer. Her prayer puts the finishing touch on what her words and examples have begun. God refuses nothing to the persevering prayer of a mother, as St. Monica proves. He has placed her power and victory in prayer. Prayer should then be the habitual food of her soul.

A mother will teach her children their prayers early. Inasmuch as she can, she will take it upon herself to have them fulfill this pious duty every day. She will especially get them into the habit of frequent visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament by leading them to church from their tenderest years.

*A mission of suffering.* – The title of mother is the fruit of suffering; God has willed it so. The title of spiritual mother can be acquired only on Calvary at the side of the Virgin Mother of Sorrows.

To obtain the grace of salvation for her children, a mother must then accept suffering and often suffer alone with Jesus and Mary: blessed sufferings indeed, since they beget children of God and citizens of heaven to the life of grace. The greater is her suffering and the more devoid she is of all natural consolation, the more a mother should rejoice in divine charity; for that is the sign that the hour of victory is at hand.

Happy the mother who possesses the wisdom of the Cross, the virtue of Jesus Crucified; all the sweetness and power of it will be hers. Let her then practice this crucified love without ceasing; let her earnestly pray for it as for the surest and sublimest grace of perfection.

*Duties towards her neighbor.* – The duties of the faithful wife and mother towards her neighbor fall into three classes: duties towards her relatives, duties towards her friends, and duties towards her social acquaintances.

*Duties towards her relatives.* – These duties are part of her Christian obligations. They are not always easy. Jealousy, self-interest, and the spirit of discord often make it difficult to keep the union of peace and charity. Thus, the faithful and duty-conscience woman should in all charity and prudence spend herself in furthering the bonds of love among her relatives, in reconciling minds at variance, in smoothing over hurt feelings without compromising the truth. She will always be successful in her mediation if she seeks only the glory of God and the spiritual good of her neighbors by setting aside her own interests and self-love. She will always be a bond of union if she is ever charitable in her words towards all, full of consideration and deference for their rights, and seeks rather to serve than to be served, to be ignored than to shine. This duty is often particularly challenging with in-laws, yet she may view this as a means afforded to her by Divine Providence for greater merit and growth in sanctity.

*Duties towards her friends.* – From a motive of divine charity, the wife and mother should not, as a rule, seek to have friends outside her relatives since her principle sphere of activity has already been defined by the family. If however, in that respect, she happens to be isolated, and God has given her friends with the same spiritual ambitions, let her love those friends as a sisters and count on them for strength and help. But she should not forget that detachment is the salt of friendship. This reserve or detachment makes the Christian woman always pure in her affections, always prudent in her confidences, always noble in her sentiments, always modest in her manner of living. She should, therefore, be discreet concerning her sorrows and difficulties at home. One

imprudent word is enough to destroy union in the family, to irritate wounds only half closed and ignite the flames of discord. She should be reserved in revealing the defects of her own; honor and charity make this a duty, and prudence makes it a rule of conduct. A friend may not always be discreet.

If she is a mother, she should be judicious in the choice of her children's friends. Friendship is the source of both good and evil among young people.

Lastly she should be reserved in the pouring out of her heart, especially in moments of sorrow and sadness. It is difficult to find a friend who, in such circumstances, can truly console and strengthen in God a distressed soul. Happy the soul that is satisfied with God and finds everything in God.

*Duties towards social acquaintances.* – Due to the obligations of her state of life, the wife and mother is often required to have dealings with the world. These duties fall into three classes: those arising from *politeness* or good manners, from *business*, and from *social proprieties*.

*Politeness.* – These duties consist especially in receiving visits and in returning them. She should lend herself readily to them when duty or charity requires it. On such occasions, she should be known for her respect of the truth and love of charity, her motivation being the edification of her neighbors. But in the interests of her religious duties and of those of her state, she should avoid as much as possible useless and idle visits, which dissipate the soul, weaken piety, and not seldom offend charity.

*Business.* – Prudence and simplicity should regulate the managing of her business. She should be prudent in the choice of means, calling into play all that God has given her in the way of intelligence, ability, and an honest industriousness to succeed in her work; that is the legitimate investment of one's talents, spoken of in the Gospel. She should be simple in her business transactions, seeking only justice, acting only according to the truth, and trusting in God alone for success; a life that is based on faith need nothing further.

As the praises of Solomon for the valiant woman in Proverbs indicates (cf. 31:10f.) a woman's work in the home has immense economic value, although it is rarely remunerated monetarily or justly acknowledged. Nevertheless, none should ever belittle or degrade her work which is of vital importance for her family's sustenance and economic viability. The virtuous woman will not lend an ear to worldly values and human respect, trusting that God Himself will repay her loving efforts a hundred-fold. Note too that society at large is better served when its citizens are raised at home by the loving care of a mother. Unless there is grave necessity, a mother ought not work outside the home. A mother who places greater value on a professional career and earning income over the duties of her family and home places her own soul and that those of her family in grave danger.

*Social proprieties.* – The faithful wife and mother is occasionally obliged to take part in worldly festivities; her position, her family obligations, the demands of friendship make it a duty for her to do so. On such occasions, which are distasteful to her piety, the virtues of modesty, charity, and humility will be her rule of conduct and her safeguard.

*Modesty.* – Modesty should be her chief finery, her Christian protest against the vanities of the world, and her powerful defense against its dangers. The Catechism teaches: "Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden... Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity.

It is discreet... Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressure of prevailing ideologies."

Pope Pius XII once said: "There is nothing wrong in being fashionable. But, fashion can never be the supreme rule of conduct. There is a limit beyond which fashion can bring about the ruin of a soul." And in another place, he taught: "modesty foresees threatening danger, forbids us to expose ourselves to risks, demands the avoidance of those occasions which the imprudent do not shun. It does not like impure or loose talk, it shrinks from the slightest immodesty, it carefully avoids suspect familiarity with persons of the other sex, since it brings the soul to show due reverence to the body, as being a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost. He who possesses the treasure of Christian modesty abominates every sin of impurity and instantly flees whenever he is tempted by its seductions" (*Sacra Virginitas*, no. 58).

*Charity.* – Wanting what is best for another, the Christian woman should be gentle in order not to embarrass anyone, obliging in everything that conscience allows and truth is not violated, devoted to the very limits of duty.

*Humility.* – In the presence of human glory and ambition, the humility of the wife and mother should shine in all its simplicity. She should step into the background and forget self in order to busy herself only with others; she should accept in peaceful serenity the humiliations inflicted on her vanity and self-love, knowing how to find God in the midst of the joys and pleasures of the world as well as its sorrows.

When she is modest, charitable, and humble, she can take part in worldly festivities without fearing its dangers. She will have done her duty and left behind her the sweet odor of the Christ, in whom she lives and for whom she acts.

*Women, the Bulwark of Civilization.* – In the 1600's, Our Lady of Good Success foretold to Ven. Mother Marianna of Jesus that the 20th century would see a loss of faith, morals and good customs. Today we see her prophecies have come true. What remains of Christian Western Civilization is being attacked on every side and systematically destroyed. Christian mothers must remember, therefore, that in every society, it has always been the faithful women who uphold the standards for good manners, customs and morals. These are values which mothers, more than any other, hand-on to their children; these are values women are able to elicit from men and society—simply by conducting themselves in a respectful and modest manner which demands reciprocation. Thus, the recovery of Christian civilization, so desperately needed today, will begin and be sustained by the Christian woman and mother, the heart of every family and home and country.

**A**T FATIMA, the angel depicted in the vision part of Third Secret repeated the request of Our Lady of Lourdes: *Penance! Penance! Penance!* With this penance performed, the heavenly Queen is depicted in the same vision as putting out the flames of God's wrath coming upon the world! If we do our penance according to our duties of state, we will surely be aided by God's grace in all our endeavors and receive the protection of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts against all dangers as well as help Our Lady in fulfilling the Fatima promises... "In the end, My Immaculate Heart with triumph."

How happy such a good wife and mother will be when she goes before God's judgment seat and is able to say: "Those whom Thou hast given me I have guarded" (John 17:12).

