

Honour All Men

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

St. Peter, in today's Epistle, outlines a manner of conduct for the believer which is a prescription for living as a Christian in whatever age or situation one finds oneself. It worked for his immediate audience, who were under open persecution. It has served the purposes of every generation since then, when the Church has lived a self-consciously different life in the midst of a secular culture. It has proven successful under every sort of hostile ruler and government, and will do so in times like ours, when adherence to God is increasingly criticized. It describes a pattern of behavior which is triumphant not through force or retaliation, but through the persuasive power of example, of well doing, as our text puts it.

The Epistle closes with four short, concise commands: *Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.* I want to focus on just one of these: *Honour all men.* The Greek word for *honour* is from a root meaning “costly, precious, valuable,” and so it means to affix a value on others. In order to get a sense of what this implies, think of a yard sale. Here you sit, in the days prior to the sale, trying to evaluate items in order to convince the buyers of their worth, but also to reflect what you feel is an honest assessment of their value. Some of your offerings may be time-worn, well-used, and even unattractive, but especially if you have a bit of the antique-dealer's instinct, you may recognize in certain of them that they are worth far more than their appearance. The result of your work is to raise the uniqueness, beauty, and virtue of something in the estimation of the one beholding it, to ennoble it. You have turned trash into

treasure, not through deception and misrepresentation, but by the recognition that there is far more than meets the eye to that which you have prepared for presentation.

We live in an age which is serving to devalue everyone in the eyes of everyone else. Men are stripped of their manhood, of their place as guardians and protectors of their families, and deprived of the self-respect that is key to the ability of men to function at all. Women must fend for themselves in a culture awash with lust, and because of the nature of the times, cannot satisfactorily fulfill their roles as nurturers and family-builders. Both are subject to the scorn of a culture which despises and makes fun of the particularity of sexual difference. The result is that men and women have little good to say of one another, and families dissolve, and no relationship can really be counted upon.

Financial pressure is another factor. Employment is far less than satisfactory. Wages are low, and there is little widespread promise of advancement, and of finding real vocational fulfillment. There is a polarization of available jobs that pushes the majority into low level positions that have little to recommend them, and others into high-end, well paid positions which often require expensive training and education with the real prospect of extended indebtedness. This unpromising situation has forced many people on to welfare and an ever expanding degree of dependence upon assistance. The result is loss of honor, and the pitting of one sector of society against another. Bitter words and contempt are the fruit: "Why should we support all of these? Why don't they just go out and work? They're just...worthless!"

Add to this the destruction of the American image. We are told that all of our founding institutions and the national narratives which have sustained our spirit and will really are the consequence of exercises of power and dominance. Any national pride we may lay claim is at the expense of some oppressed class, and shame and disgrace would far better befit us.

To these is added the promotion for public honor of that which deserves none at all, of lifestyle choices which bespeak the extremes of self-indulgence and defiance to which things have actually progressed.

It is into this situation to which you and I are called to honor all men. We alone have the power to restore honor where it has been lost. Our ability to do so stems from a deep inner respect for what people intrinsically are, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The way in which we accomplish this will be primarily through how we treat others, in direct personal interaction. Every meeting is an opportunity to restore to others that which the world is actively trying to remove from them. This begins first of all in our marriages, where our respect for the dignity and beauty of the sexes will be most clearly demonstrated. A grace-filled Christian marriage is a jaw-dropping wonder in a time where so many have given up on the idea. We can model the virtues which others have searched for in vain: gallantry, chivalry, deference to one another, operating within the context of matrimony. In so doing, we will have recovered both the bride's pure, white gown, and the groom's spotless suit, from the filthy dumpster of rejection where they've been thrown gleefully aside.

How will we approach the elderly? The loss of family ties has left many marooned to face the end of life alone, with nothing to show for their years, and no one to affirm them. This scenario is due to be increased many fold, in spite of all the nice-sounding jargon which is the stuff of political campaigns about recognizing the plight of the helpless and disadvantaged. Diminishing space, resources, and staffing will only make expediency always the highest priority. *Honour all men.* It takes very little from those willing to do so. But mostly it is simply a matter of telling the truth, and imparting to the aged the words of appreciation which are richly due them, even if we struggle at times with whether they are deserving.

And the young. We search in vain even to find the essence of their small hearts and souls in this world of frantic hyperactivity into which they've been dropped through the electronic media, which has sought to deprive them of any reference point in real life. To honor them is to help them find a way of being children again, to affirm innocence and simplicity. It is through appealing to whatever remains in them of that which is truly human, which children have universally understood and believed in: fairness, goodness, justice. We must beat their gadgets in the goal of remaking and refashioning them.

Honor all men. We are restoring the image of God in their lives by so doing. Every encounter is an opportunity to add value to others. Our mission is made that much simpler and clearer because people are subject so constantly to devaluing influences. They see no point for their lives. They have been told that there is nothing to believe in. They cannot see that anything they do really matters. So many relationships in which so many expectations have been invested prove to be complete disappointments.

Honoring others is simply upholding the value that God originally imparted to them by creating them, and the infinite worth He gave them by redeeming them. Regardless of whether they acknowledge God or not, we do His work by relating to them in terms of what we know to be true of them.

This does not mean honoring others in the manner they expect to be honored. The proud, self-sufficient, self-made person expects to get what's due him. The dominating, intolerant individual assumes he will get his way. Whatever class of people that is currently claiming oppression and victim status considers it a right to be recognized and championed, and society rushes to offer it. But we look to fortify something completely different. It is the inherent worth and nobility of every human being as a bearer of God's image. It includes an understanding of the universal

marring of that image wrought by sin. And it is an acknowledgment of the object of personal love that each one has become in the eyes of the Redeemer, who had them in mind when He died for them on the Cross.

Honour all men. This is the holy insight we as believers possess about every living person whom we meet, and should provide the lens through which we view them all, whether sinners or saints, rebels or allies, successes or failures, worthy or unworthy. We must get below them, to raise them up. It is a work of Christian humility. Most will not even understand nor necessarily even consciously realize what we have done by honoring them, but both God and the world will benefit. We will simply, in a small way, be restoring the order that the Enemy is endeavoring to undo.

In doing so, we will have *done well*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.