

A longtime Jesuit friend, Pat, shares a story about a wedding. It took place in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria where my friend used to serve as president of Loyola Jesuit College.

The bridegroom, Nicholas, is a friend of Pat; my Jesuit friend knows the bride, Amaka, less well.

Pat concelebrated the two-hour wedding Mass with another Jesuit who took the lead as celebrant. In his homily, the latter made a great deal of a passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians. "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord."

The celebrant then had the wife act it out. She gathered her wedding dress around her and knelt before her seated husband, placing her hands between his and promising due submission.

At this point my friend Pat was feeling uncomfortable, given the graphically subordinate role being taken by the woman. But, to Pat's surprise, the presiding priest soon reversed the situation.

He read the next verse: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water and the word." Then the priest seated Amaka and had Nicholas kneel before her and remove one of her shoes so he could wash her foot as Christ did at the Last Supper.

My friend Pat adds his commentary on the event: "Somehow it transformed my understanding of that scriptural passage. I thought particularly of a good friend in America who has recently lost his wife to cancer, and how he cared for her so tenderly to the end. Marriage, as the same Epistle says, is a great mystery."