



ONLINE, DO-IT-YOURSELF
CATHOLIC RETREATS

THREE HEARTS

A RETREAT GUIDE ON THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

written & presented by Fr. John Bartunek, LC, S.Th.D.
RCSpirituality.org

produced by Coronation
coronationmedia.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Please select a section below or continue on to the next page

1 INTRODUCTION

3 FIRST MEDITATION

God's Vision of Marriage

- Introduction
- The Original Sacrament
- A Surprising Ministry
- Conclusion: Marriage and Salvation History

7 SECOND MEDITATION

The Mission of Marriage

- Introduction
- Mutual Support on the Journey to Heaven
- The Gift of New Life
- Witnesses to the World
- Conclusion: A Mighty Gift of God

13

CONFERENCE

Constructive Communication

- Introduction
- The First Challenge: The Mystery of Gender
- The Second Challenge: Time and Space
- The Third Challenge: Original Sin
- What's the Solution?
- More Than a Date Night
- L.U.V. Talk
- Conclusion: The Journey Towards Perfection



INTRODUCTION

Retreat Overview

A few years ago a British millionaire in her forties married a dolphin. Sharon Tendler fell in love with Cindy the Dolphin during a series of vacations in the Israeli resort town of Eliat, where they would swim together.

She asked Cindy's trainer if she could marry the dolphin, and the ceremony took place on the end of the dock, in front of hundreds of astounded spectators. In her white bride's dress, Sharon knelt before her groom, who was waiting in the water. The wedding finished with a hug, and then Sharon's friends threw her into the water to swim with her new spouse.

At that point, according to reports, one of the kids in the crowd asked, "But what kind of children will they have?" That's only one of dozens of good questions that come to mind in response to this amazing, but true, news story from 2005. ^A

In a globalized culture that has given up on God in general, not to mention the Judeo-Christian concept of God, one of the first casualties is marriage. And that's our culture.

We would be naïve to think that our culture's distorted ideas about marriage have no affect on us — they certainly do, even if only subconsciously. To defend God's beautiful vision for marriage, both in our own lives and in our societies, we need to keep reminding ourselves and deepening our understanding of that vision.

This Retreat Guide, *Three Hearts*, will help you do that.

- In the meditations, we will dig into the meaning of the prayers used during the sacramental celebration of marriage.
- And in the conference, we will examine one key ingredient for every successful marriage: communication.

As we begin, let's take some time to turn our attention to God's presence. He is thinking of us right now, eager to spend this time with us; let's thank him for that. And let's ask him for all the graces we need, and especially for the grace to see and respect the wonderful reality of marriage just as he does.

A: cf., <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3191923,00.html>



FIRST MEDITATION

God's Vision of Marriage

Jesus only gave the Church seven sacraments, seven signs by which he guarantees to pour his saving and transforming grace into the world and into our lives.

Each sacrament is like a window between heaven and earth, through which God reaches from eternity into time and space in order to act directly in human affairs and human souls. And there are only seven of them. All the other rituals and ceremonies that enrich our Catholic faith are secondary — the seven sacraments are the pillars of God's saving action in the world.



The Catechism explains this by showing how these sacraments are an extension of Christ's own Incarnation and mission:



In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls “the sacramental economy”; this is the communication (or “dispensation”) of the fruits of Christ’s Paschal mystery in the celebration of the Church’s “sacramental” liturgy

– CCC 1070

In other words, the sacraments are the primary channels of God's grace, the arteries through which God's divine life flows to redeem the world and draw us into communion with him. And marriage is one of them; that's how important it is, from God's perspective.

FIRST MEDITATION

The Original Sacrament

But even among the seven sacraments, marriage has some unique characteristics. One of them is mentioned in the special nuptial blessing that accompanies the celebration of the sacrament.

At one point during the blessing, the priest or deacon addresses God with the following words:



... O God, by whom woman is joined to man and the companionship they had in the beginning is endowed with the one blessing not forfeited by original sin nor washed away by the flood...

The words of that prayer recall that marriage, unlike baptism and the Eucharist, for example, was actually part of God's design for the human family from the very beginning, even before original sin.

By creating the human family in his own image, God created us with a vocation to love, to give ourselves totally to another person and to receive totally the gift of another person.

In this mutual and total self-giving between man and woman, the human person images the very essence of the Trinity, which is the self-giving love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

And even the devastating effects of original sin couldn't blot out this sacred meaning of marriage.

The prayer of the nuptial blessing calls all this to mind by pointing out that the sacred and natural institution of marriage has endured, even after the Fall and the Flood.

That's the first unique characteristic of this sacrament.



FIRST MEDITATION

A Surprising Ministry

But there's something else unique about it too. In every sacrament, Christ himself is present and working, applying to our lives here and now the grace he won for us through his Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection. And in each sacrament he works through a minister, usually an ordained minister — a bishop, priest, or deacon.

In the sacrament of marriage, however, the priest isn't actually the minister of the sacrament; he is only the official witness of the Church.

In marriage, the ministers of the sacrament are the spouses themselves. Through their consent in the name of Christ to a life of total, mutual self-giving, they become the channels through which Christ sends his grace into each other's lives.

And this doesn't just happen during the wedding ceremony itself. The flow of grace continues for the rest of their lives — the sacrament doesn't stop until one of the spouses dies. Christ doesn't stop ministering to each spouse through the other. The spouses' sins can place obstacles to the flow of the grace; but the sacrament itself continues to act in their lives, and through them in the life of the Church and of the world.

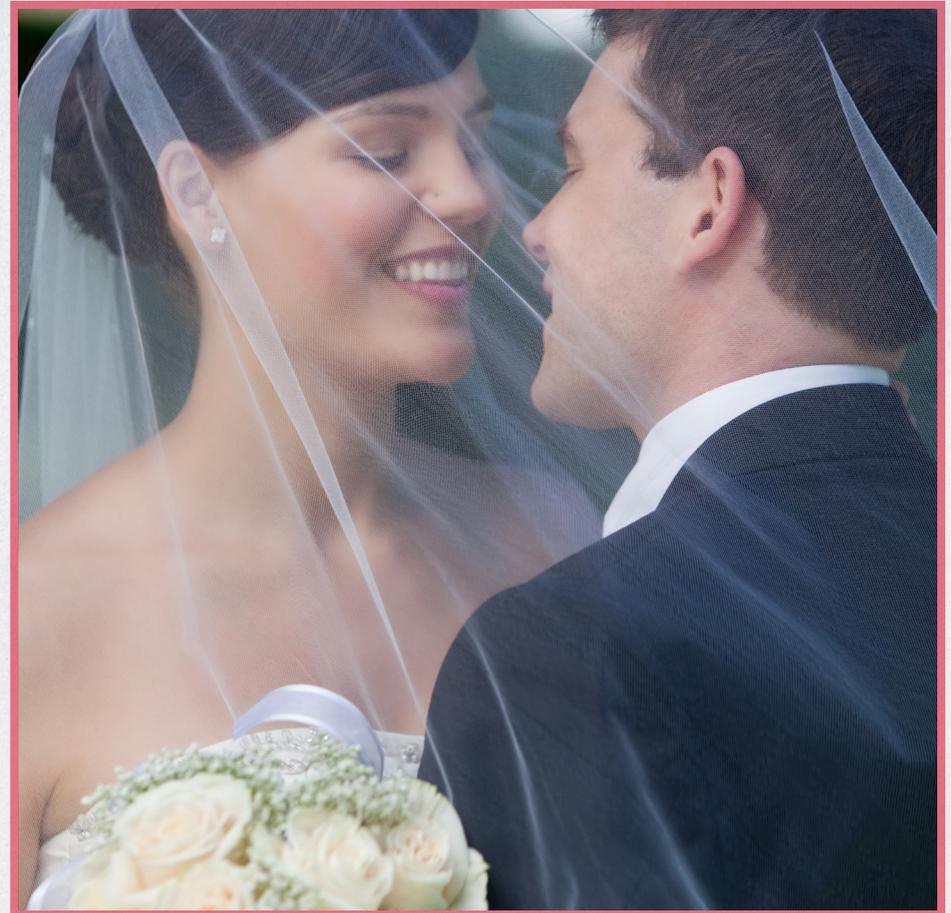
This too comes across in the words spoken over the couple during the nuptial blessing. The priest or deacon makes the following petition to God, asking him to make his own divine strength flow into their spousal love, so as to make their marriage a living icon of Christ's own love for his Church:



Look now with favor on these your servants, joined together in Marriage, who ask to be strengthened by your blessing. Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit and pour your love into their hearts, that they may remain faithful in the Marriage covenant.

That is the point at which the nuptial blessing shows that in the sacrament of marriage two hearts become one, because they are joined to a third.

God's deepest identity is love — “God is love,” the Scriptures tell us (1 John 4:8). And the bond of love in the heart of the Trinity is so full and vibrant, that it is in fact the third Person of the Trinity — the Holy Spirit.



So, by asking God to “send down the grace of the Holy Spirit” and to “pour your love into their hearts,” the Church here unveils what really happens inside the mystery of this sacrament.

The hearts of husband and wife, given to each other out of love, are united not only to one another, but to God's own heart, so that their mutual love, a natural love, is somehow infused with God's own love, and is supernaturalized.

As long as they keep nourishing and activating their spousal love, it becomes, in a sense, a living fountain that makes God's own eternal and redeeming love flow and spread into this fallen world, furthering Christ's redemption.

FIRST MEDITATION

Conclusion: Marriage and Salvation History

That's amazing enough in itself, but the nuptial blessing continues as the priest prays:

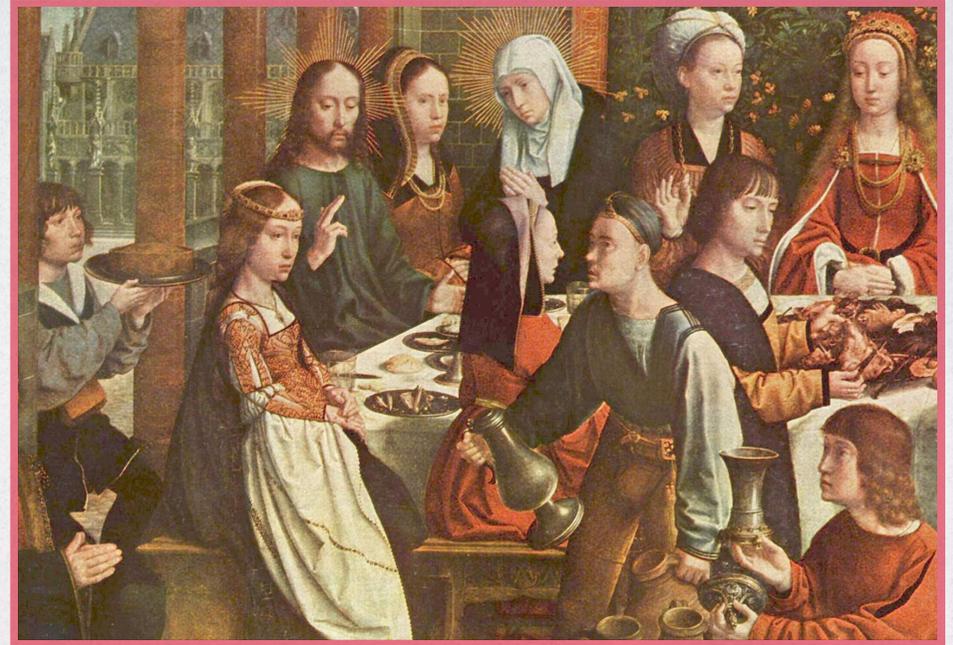
May the grace of love and peace abide in your daughter, and let her always follow the example of those holy women whose praises are sung in the Scriptures. May her husband entrust his heart to her, so that, acknowledging her as his equal and his joint heir to the life of grace, he may show her due honor and cherish her always with the love that Christ has for his Church.

The words of this blessing show that in the sacrament of marriage, the history of salvation as played out through the drama of the Old Testament and the grace of the New Testament, continues to unfold.

Husband and wife become a living, efficacious image of God's saving, self-giving love for mankind, and of Christ's self-sacrificing, life-giving love for the Church. By making marriage into a sacrament, then, Jesus actually takes something that has had a sacred meaning from the very beginning of human history, and then he elevates it to an unimaginably higher level.

This is God's vision of marriage. This, if you are married, is the astonishing dignity of your sacrament — it's so, so much more than hugging a dolphin on the end of a dock.

Let's take some time now, in the silence of our hearts, to let the magnificence of God's vision for marriage fill us with humble awe and joyful reverence. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- 1 Compare the vision of marriage depicted in popular culture with God's vision of marriage. What are the similarities and the differences? Where do the differences come from?
- 2 Jesus' first miracle took place at and contributed to a wedding, in Cana (see John 2). God's providence could have arranged for his first miracle to take place anywhere. What might the significance be of having it happen at a wedding?
- 3 The words most often used to describe how spouses reflect God's love in their own relationship with each other are love, honor, and respect. What do those verbs mean in the context of marriage? How do they differ from each other? What does it look like, in my mind, to "love, honor, and respect" one's spouse?

Biblical Passages to Help Your Meditation



If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

– 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, NABRE



Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. 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 with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

– Ephesians 5:21-33, NABRE



Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body. Let marriage be honored among all and the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the immoral and adulterers. Let your life be free from love of money but be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never forsake you or abandon you.” Thus we may say with confidence: “The Lord is my helper,[and] I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”

– James 4:7-10, NABRE

SECOND MEDITATION

The Mission of Marriage

Two hearts united in the sacrament of marriage become three hearts — the heart of God himself beats within them and with them, pumping his divine life into the world through their spousal love. And in turn, that spousal love changes the world.

This is why the Catechism calls marriage one of the sacraments “at the service of communion and the mission of the faithful” (CCC 1211).

Marriage is a grace that the spouses receive from God, a grace that unites them to him more intimately and powerfully, but it is also a mission.

As followers of Jesus, we are all called to build up the Church, to spread Christ’s Kingdom, to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” as Jesus himself put it (Matthew 28:19). And the sacrament of marriage is explicitly directed to helping the spouses fulfill that mission, in three primary dimensions.

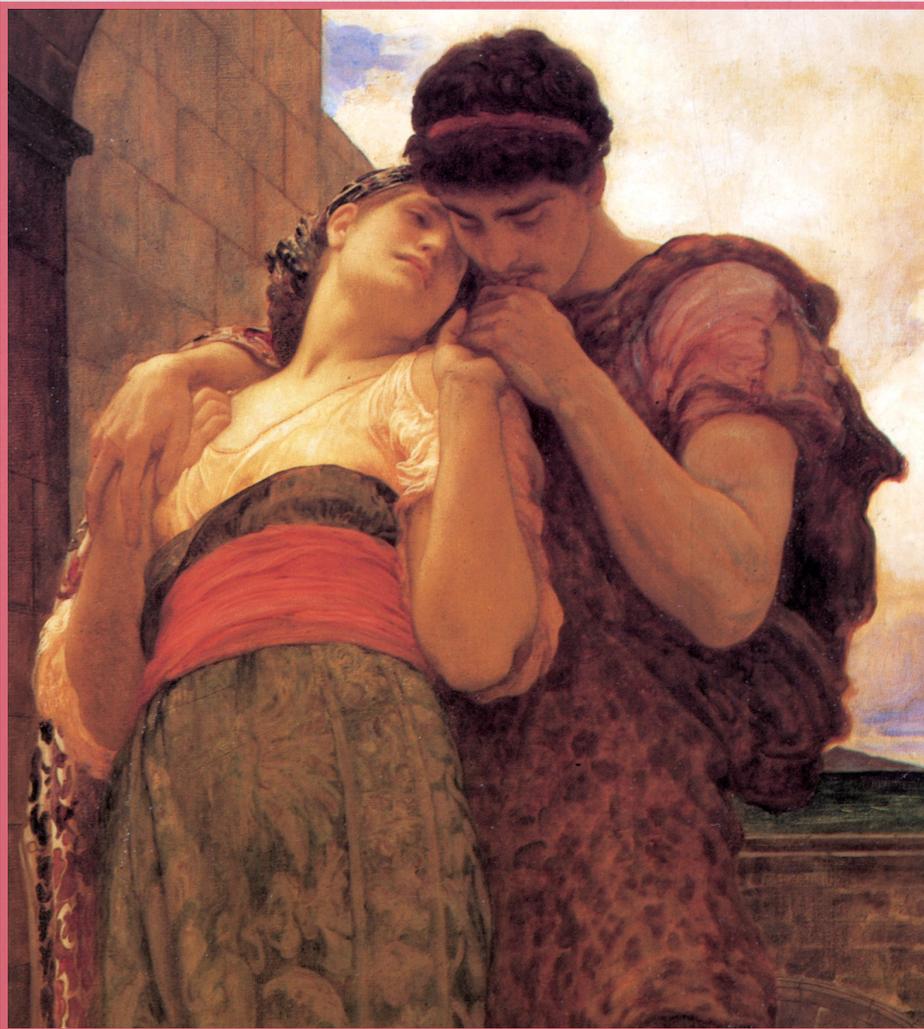


SECOND MEDITATION

Mutual Support on the Journey to Heaven

In the first place, the grace of this sacrament enables the spouses to support each other in their pursuit of happiness, holiness, and heaven.

Spouses accompany each other through all the ups and downs of life, leaning on each other in times of weakness, encouraging each other, and holding each other accountable amid the trials and temptations that pop up along the way.



This is expressed beautifully in the nuptial blessing prayed during the wedding Mass, when the priest or deacon says to God:

And now, Lord, we implore you: may these your servants hold fast to the faith and keep your commandments; made one in the flesh, may they be blameless in all they do... And grant that, reaching at last together the fullness of years for which they hope, they may come to the life of the blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is the first dimension of the mission of marriage: each spouse finds in the sacrament the grace necessary to help the other grow in virtue, in holiness, in the happiness that comes from living according to God's wisdom and love.

This grace of mutual support and accompaniment also comes across in the words that express the spouses' consent to their marriage, the core of the sacramental celebration.

In its simplest formula, the words of consent are as follows:

I, (Name), take you, (Name), to be my wife [husband]. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

This promise can truly be fulfilled, through the grace of the sacrament, so that marriage becomes a powerful life-long impetus for spiritual growth.

This first dimension of the mission of marriage is captured beautifully in a drama written by Pope John Paul II before he became pope. In one scene, a woman is describing to a jeweler how her fiancée proposed to her. She tells how they were walking along together and he simply asked her, "Would you be my life's companion?"

That's it exactly — together, the spouses accompany and support each other through all the Good Fridays and Easter Sundays that God sends to each one, making them all fruitful for holiness and happiness through the grace of the sacrament.

SECOND MEDITATION

The Gift of New Life

The second dimension of the mission of marriage is found in the gift of new life that God gives to many married couples. When spouses become parents, they become an even more eloquent image of God than they were simply as spouses. This is because the love of God is always fruitful.

Even in the Trinity itself, the mutual love of the Father and the Son brings forth, from all eternity, a third person, the Holy Spirit, who “proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

In another nuptial blessing, this dimension is emphasized and contemplated as the priest addresses God the Father, saying:

May they also sustain, O Lord, by their deeds the home they are forming and prepare their children to become members of your heavenly household by raising them in the way of the Gospel.

Pope John Paul II adopted an ancient phrase to describe this dimension of the mission of marriage. In the early years of the Church, Christians met to pray and celebrate the sacraments not in public churches, but in private homes. The word in Latin for a private home is “domus.”

The homes that were used for these gatherings came to be known as “domestic churches.” John Paul II, following the example of the Fathers of the Church, used that phrase to encourage every Christian family to really become a mini-Church, an incarnation, so to speak, of the universal Church, a place where God dwells and acts in the world:

The family itself is the great mystery of God. As the “domestic church”, it is the bride of Christ. The universal Church... is most immediately revealed as the bride of Christ in the “domestic church” and in its experience of love: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, the love of a community of persons and of generations

– Pope John Paul II
Letter to Families, 19

In this mission of domestic church building, the parents are Christ’s apostles, sent to announce to their children, in word and deed, the Good News of God’s love to their children, and to educate them in that love, just as St. Paul did for the church communities he started.

His description of his own mission applies beautifully to this second dimension of the marriage mission: “My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19).



SECOND MEDITATION

Witnesses to the World

But there is still another, a third, dimension to the mission of marriage. The grace-infused love of husband and wife supports each other on their path to spiritual maturity, it gives rise to a domestic church, but it also radiates out into the world at large.

The nuptial blessing puts it like this, when it petitions God for the newly married couple:



... and with the strength that comes from the Gospel, may they bear true witness to Christ before all...

The solemn blessing at the end of the wedding Mass gets even more specific about what “bearing true witness” really means. The priest invokes God’s blessing with the words:



May you be witnesses in the world to God’s charity, so that the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness may one day receive you thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God.

The witness that each Christian is called to give to the world is magnified and boosted by the grace of this sacrament, such that every married couple is enabled to spread the “sweet aroma of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15) more widely and effectively than either spouse would be able to do alone.



SECOND MEDITATION

Conclusion: A Mighty Gift of God

Jesus only left us seven sacraments, seven guaranteed fountains of divine grace. And marriage is one of them. It is glorious in itself, because it brings three hearts together into one, imaging the Trinity and becoming a fountain on earth of God's heavenly love.

But it also imbues the spouses with the supernatural strength they need to engage in their threefold mission of mutual support, domestic church building, and bearing witness to the world. The sacrament of marriage is an amazing, mighty gift from God.

Let's take some time now to prayerfully reflect on its riches, its wonders, and its joyous demands. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- 1 In my personal experience of family life, what has most helped me become aware of my mission to help build a "domestic church"? What could help me become even more aware of it?
- 2 Think of examples from my own experience of situations where the mutual support of spouses impressed me or made a lasting difference in my life. What aspects of today's society make this dimension of marriage harder to live out than it might have been in past societies?
- 3 Write up a "mission statement" that describes how I feel God is calling me to live out this three-dimensional marriage mission, or how I would like to live it out.

Quotations from the Rite of Marriage to Help Your Meditation

Note: Although these liturgical texts are not taken from the Sacred Scriptures, they reflect the mind of the Church as regards the sacrament of marriage, and are as useful for meditation as any other liturgical texts.



Holy Father, maker of the whole world, who created man and woman in your own image and willed that their union be crowned with your blessing, we humbly beseech you for these your servants, who are joined today in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

May your abundant blessing, Lord, come down upon this bride, and upon her companion for life, and may the power of your Holy Spirit set their hearts aflame from on high, so that, living out together the gift of Matrimony, they may adorn their family with children and enrich the Church.

In happiness may they praise you, O Lord, in sorrow may they seek you out; may they have the joy of your presence to assist them in their toil, and know that you are near to comfort them in their need; let them pray to you in the holy assembly and bear witness to you in the world, and after a happy old age, together with the circle of friends that surrounds them, may they come to the Kingdom of Heaven. Through Christ our Lord.

– Nuptial Blessing



... For you willed that the human race, created by the gift of your goodness, should be raised to such high dignity that in the union of husband and wife you might bestow a true image of your love.

For those you created out of charity you call to the law of charity without ceasing and grant them a share in your eternal charity.

And so, the Sacrament of holy Matrimony, as the abiding sign of your own love, consecrates the love of man and woman, through Christ our Lord.

– Preface: Matrimony as a Sign of Divine Love



May God the eternal Father keep you of one heart in love for one another, that the peace of Christ may dwell in you and abide always in your home...

May you be blessed in your children, have solace in your friends, and enjoy true peace with everyone...

May you be witnesses in the world to God's charity, so that the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness may one day receive you thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God...

– Solemn Blessing at the End of the Wedding Mass



CONFERENCE

Constructive Communication

All experts agree that the better spouses communicate with each other, the better their relationship will be, and the more fulfilling their family life will become — good communication is one way to keep the grace of this sacrament flowing freely. Those same experts also agree that effective spousal communication is one of the most widespread problematic areas among married couples.

During dating and courtship, future spouses seem to communicate great — they almost seem to read each other's minds sometimes. What happens after they get married? Why does healthy communication suffer in so many marriages, even among virtuous, well-meaning spouses?

In this conference, we will first look at three challenges to spousal communication. Then we will look at two pieces of practical advice about how to steadily improve spousal communication.



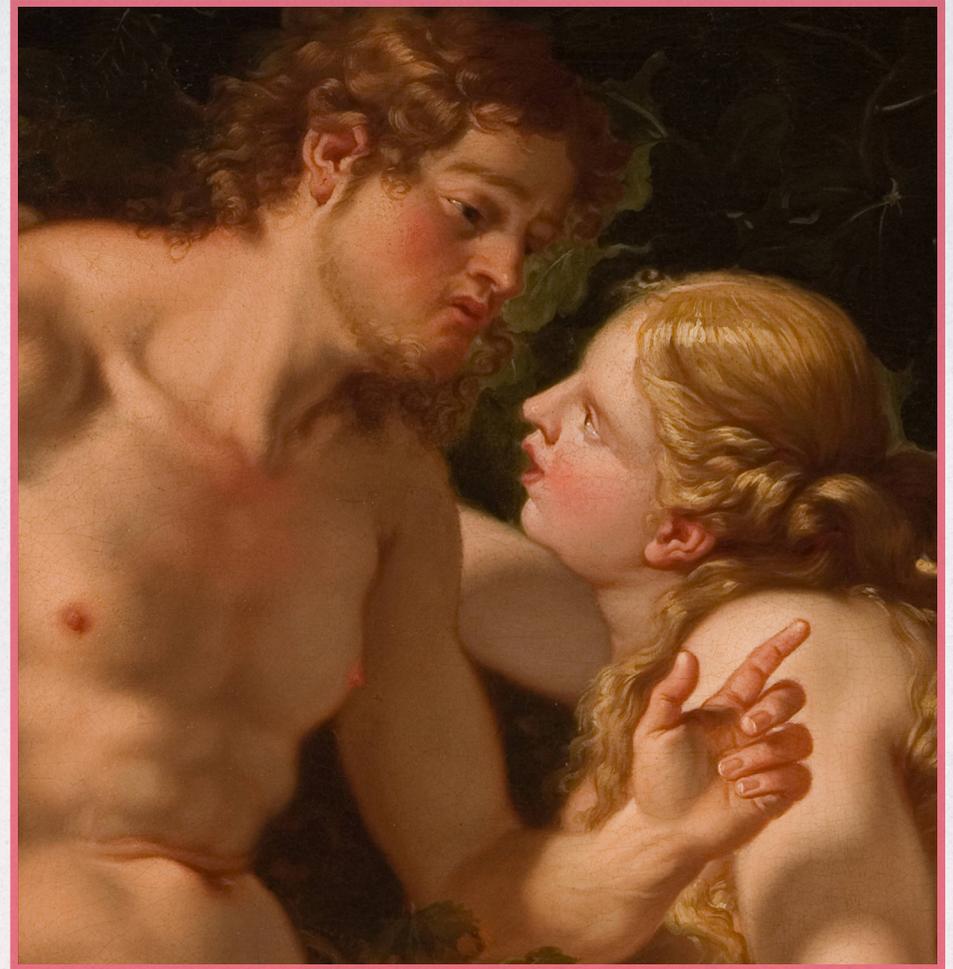
CONFERENCE

The First Challenge: The Mystery of Gender

The Bible tells us that when God created mankind, he created us in his own image and likeness, and then it says: “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Adam and Eve are equal in their human dignity; both are full human persons. And yet, they are profoundly different, and the complementarity of their differences is an essential part of how they image God.

Scientists have been researching the differences between men and women for decades. Study after study shows that the complementarity between the genders goes far beyond mere sexual fertility. The realms of emotion, cognition, intellection, affection, even the simple activities of hearing and seeing — in all of these areas and more, the genders differ complementarily.



Science is confirming theology: God really did create us male, and female — equal in human dignity, yet mysteriously and fascinatingly different. This difference is the first and most basic challenge to spousal communication: men and women perceive and interact with reality in fundamentally different ways.

Spouses can come to understand each other, but it takes intentional effort, and there will always be room for greater understanding — gender complementarity will continue to be a glorious, though sometimes frustrating, mystery.

CONFERENCE

The Second Challenge: Time and Space

The human soul is spiritual. Although our minds work through material instruments, like our five senses and our brain, our intellect itself is spiritual, not limited by time and space. But inter-spousal communication is limited by time and space.

For example, most experts agree that the average person thinks at the pace of about 700 words per minute. But the average person speaks at the pace of about 120 words per minute. So what happens when someone is talking to me?

In one minute of speaking, that person communicates 120 words; in that same minute, my mind — thinking while I listen — races ahead by about 600 words.

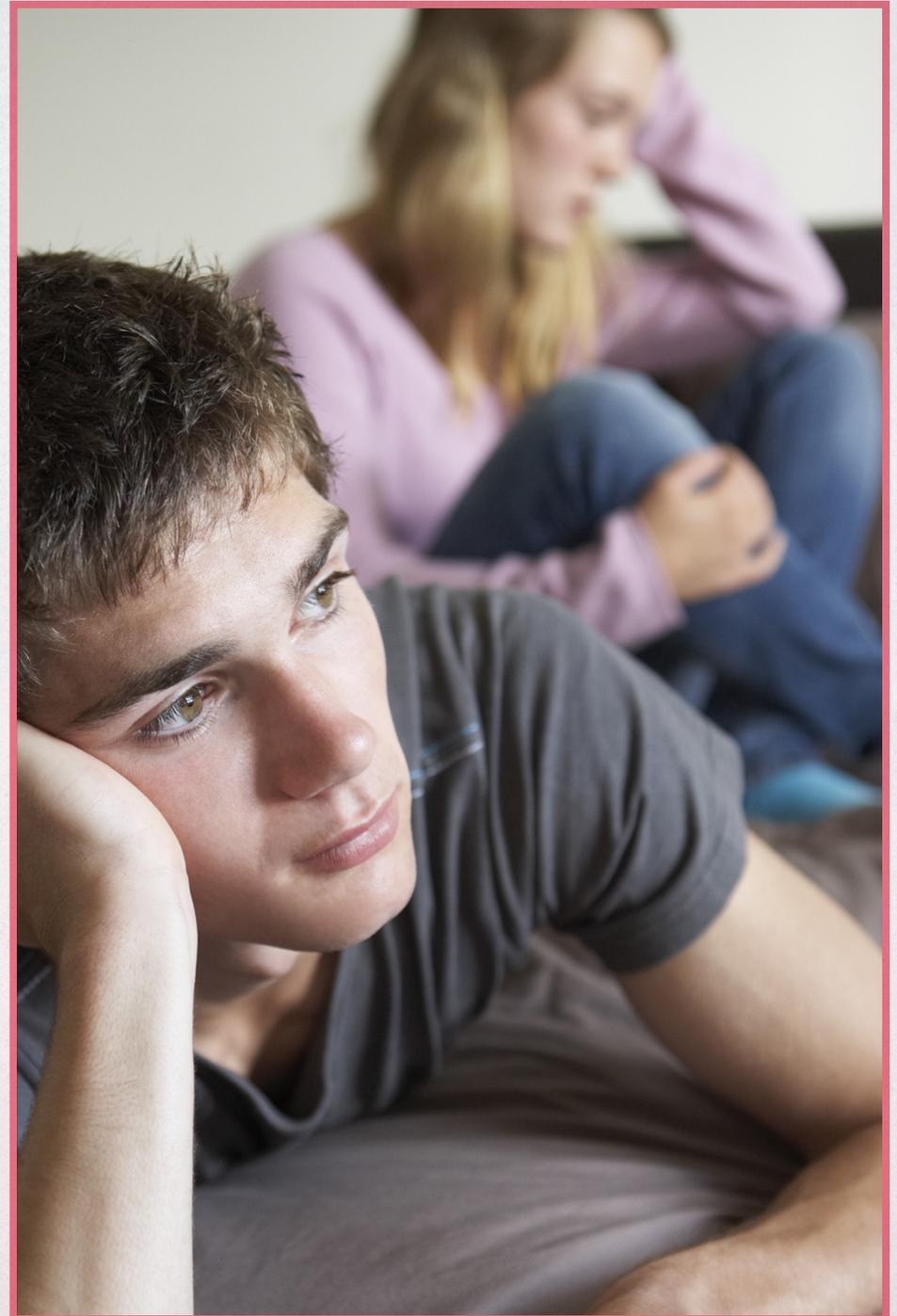
So, when I respond to that person, my thought-reaction to what they have been saying is already two pages — so to speak — beyond what they actually said.

But it gets worse. When I respond, I speak for a minute — 120 words. As I am speaking, they are thinking, so by the time they respond to me, they are about 600 words beyond where I finished.

But since I started my initial response already 600 words beyond them, by the end of two minutes we are now separated by 1200 words — the equivalent of about four or five pages.

Now can you understand why so often we feel like we are talking and talking, but not really communicating!

As spiritual beings living in time and space, we face significant challenges to communication.



CONFERENCE

The Third Challenge: Original Sin

Besides the mystery of gender and the matrix of time and space, another factor that disrupts spousal communication is original sin. Because our human nature is fallen, we have deeply entrenched selfish tendencies that inhibit us from being good listeners — we tend to turn in on ourselves rather than be sincerely open to others.

But that's not the only effect of original sin. Because human nature is fallen, very few families are perfect. As a result, we all grow up in imperfect households. And so, during our formative years, we experience sorrow, loss, and trauma — some more, some less. This impacts our personality and the emotional patterns at work in how we interact with other people.



Most often, these patterns are not conscious, since they can be formed even during our pre-verbal developmental period. So when two people get married, they are bringing to the table two separate bundles of subconscious emotional patterns that are not automatically compatible. This is one of the reasons that communication seems to get worse after the honeymoon.

As the spousal relationship takes root and deepens, the spouses encounter sectors of each other's personality that simply never had a chance to emerge during dating and courtship.

This incompatibility can be shocking, painful, confusing... All of which throws up a challenge to continued spousal communication.

CONFERENCE

What's the Solution?

At this point it may seem that effective spousal communication is an impossibility. But that's not the case. We just need to recognize and accept the fact that there are very good reasons why inter-spousal communication is not always easy.

If we don't accept that, we will never make a firm decision to invest in improving our communication — we'll just think that it shouldn't be so hard, and we'll start blaming our spouse.

It's not your spouse's fault: it's human nature's fault. So what can we do about it?

If both spouses are committed firmly and explicitly to growing in this area, then any of the many techniques, exercises, and pieces of advice offered by marriage experts and counselors will be helpful and fruitful.

I want to share two pieces of advice offered by many of them, just to get you started.



CONFERENCE

More Than a Date Night

Most married couples have heard of the “date night” concept: taking one night every week, or every two weeks, where the husband and wife go out on a date, just like they used to.

The idea behind this practice is to intentionally create time and space for the intimate spousal relationship to reconnect, to synchronize.

Between work, and children, and in-laws, between traffic jams and social media and extra-curricular activities, there are so many demands on a married couple’s time these days that they often drift apart from each other without even realizing it. The date night is designed to counteract that tendency.



Unfortunately, date nights often don’t work very well — for one simple reason: they become a time to talk about all the practical things that have been piling up, unresolved.

Before the spouses were married, they didn’t share a home and a bank account and children; they didn’t have to talk about insurance and home improvements and vacation and in-law issues.

So when they went on a date, they could focus on each other, on simply enjoying each other’s presence, and exploring the mysterious attraction of the other person, of their ideas and feelings and dreams. A married couple needs to continue having conversations like that.

But those conversations won’t happen on a date night unless the slate is clean, unless other practical considerations are dealt with adequately in a different, proper forum.

So, to make a date night work, it’s important to also schedule time on a regular basis to deal with practical things. One marriage expert recommends spouses in today’s world to schedule three types of regular meetings:

- Family business meetings. This is where both spouses can talk about money issues, school issues, medical issues — all the practical stuff. If this meeting is scheduled on a regular basis, the pile of unresolved questions and issues will quickly be reduced, and stay reduced, relieving untold amounts of tension.
- Spiritual meetings. This is a time when the parents can get together and talk about their kids, about each child: the child’s needs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities. This is when the parents can get on the same page about how they are raising each child, and how to work together for the best of their children. Again, if this meeting is scheduled on a regular basis — early Saturday mornings over a cup of coffee, for example — the parents will stay up to speed on what’s going on in their children’s lives, relieving tension that can build up between spouses unintentionally.
- Date nights. With family business meetings and spiritual meetings happening on a regular basis, the slate will be clean, and a husband and wife can actually go on a date night that will feel like a real date, a real chance to enjoy, and be enjoyed by, the man or woman they married.

CONFERENCE

L.U.V. Talk

A second practice of communication that can revolutionize spousal communication is what author and marriage counselor Michael Smalley has called L.U.V. talk.

This basic principle is especially useful when spouses need to resolve conflict, but it can be used effectively in any meaningful conversation. The three steps of L.U.V. talk are simple but powerful.

- “L” stands for “listen.” This simply means letting the other person speak, and paying attention to what they are saying. It means avoiding unnecessary interruptions, having eye contact, paying attention — treating your spouse with the respect they deserve.
- “U” stands for “understand.” A lot of times when we listen, we allow our own thoughts to color our reception of what the other person is saying. This second step reminds us to really climb into the other person’s mind and grasp what they really want to communicate.
- “V” stands for “validate” and “voice back.” For real communication to happen, each person in the conversation has to perceive that they are being listened to and understood. Otherwise, they will not feel completely free to listen to and understand the other person’s response.

After listening and trying to understand, the listener should voice back in their own words what they think the other person meant — this is the “voice back” stage. That validates the person who has spoken, and also provides an opportunity to clarify anything that may have been misunderstood.

Only after the listening spouse has done all three, L.U.V., should they then express their own thoughts in response.



CONFERENCE

Conclusion: The Journey Towards Perfection

The Three Meetings and L.U.V. talk are two practical pieces of advice that could give you a direction to take if you want to move towards better spousal communication. But no technique will bear fruit without a true desire and firm resolution to grow. And even with the desire and resolution, the challenges will all remain.

Here on earth, we are always journeying towards heaven, which means that we will never achieve perfection. But that's okay — after all, the sacrament of marriage is not the goal of life, but a magnificent gift to help us towards life's goal: an ever-deepening and everlasting communion with God.

Take some time now to reflect on the ten questions of the Personal Questionnaire, designed to help deepen your appreciation for God's great invention of marriage.



Personal Questionnaire

Note: If you are not yet married, reflect on these questions with an eye to the future, to prepare yourself to be the kind of spouse you really want to be. If you are following a celibate vocation in some form of consecrated life, you may want to reflect on these questions in relation to your consecrated community, or the Church institution that you minister to.

1 How would I describe my expectations for marriage? Are they more like a fairy tale romance, or a life-long journey deeper into the heart of God?

2 In what areas am I expecting my spouse to *complete* me instead of *complementing* and *accompanying* me?

3 What are my most common complaints about my spouse? How much are those complaints based on my love for them and what is best for them? How much are they based on my self-centeredness?

4 In my heart, what I am doing to continue honoring and respecting my spouse, even as I come to know better and better my spouse's flaws?

5 When I experience conflict in my spousal relationship, what is my most typical pattern of response, and where does that pattern come from: withdrawal, escalation, belittling, or discouragement?

6 What topics generally cause friction between me and my spouse, and why? What can I do to address them in a positive, constructive way?

7 In my other relationships (work, social clubs, friendships), what kind of things do I do to assure good communication? How can I apply those better to my spousal relationship?



8 Have my spouse and I found a good way to pray together on a regular basis? If not, where can I look for some good ideas to improve this area of our relationship?

9 When was the last time I read a good book about married life? If it has been a long time, why have I waited?

10 How firmly do I believe that in loving and serving my spouse, I am fulfilling my primary mission in this life and growing in holiness? What other activities or relationships tend to try and draw me away from living a proper level of respect and love towards my spouse in this, my sacrament?

FURTHER READING

For Reflection & Prayer

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

- *Letter to Families*
by Pope John Paul II
- *Three to Get Married*
by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
- *How We Love: Discover Your Love Style, Enhance Your Marriage*
by Milan and Kay Yerkovich
- *For Better Forever: A Catholic Guide to Lifelong Marriage*
by Gregory Popcak and Ronald David Lawler
- *Holy Sex! A Catholic Guide to Toe-Curling, Mind-Blowing Infallible Loving*
by Gregory Popcak
- *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*
by Gary Chapman
- *Heaven's Song: Sexual Love as It Was Meant to Be*
by Christopher West
- *Marriage: the Mystery of Faithful Love*
by Dietrich Von Hildebrand
- *Man, Woman, and the Meaning of Love: God's Plan for Love, Marriage, Intimacy and the Family*
by Dietrich Von Hildebrand
- *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs*
by Emerson Eggerichs

CONTACT US

How Are We Doing?

Please tell us how we can improve future Retreat Guides by giving us your feedback at www.RCSpirituality.org.

If you liked *Three Hearts: A Retreat Guide on the Sacrament of Marriage*, please help sponsor future Retreat Guides by making a donation at www.RCSpirituality.org.

Follow us on Facebook. www.facebook.com/retreatguide

Retreat Guides are a service of Regnum Christi and the Legionaries of Christ. www.regnumchristi.org & www.legionofchrist.org

Produced by Coronation. www.coronationmedia.com

