

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LOVE AND LIFE

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

This time of prayer together takes place within this marvelous Year of the Family. Our topic for today is the sanctity of human love and life. We begin by pointing out that our Christian vision of married love is extraordinarily noble. It makes us capable of being the greatest romantics on the face of the Earth. At the very heart of Christian marriage we find the gift of self. Genuine love seeks the good of the other. How important it is to have this clear from the start. Let us have especially in mind during this time of prayer those young people preparing for marriage or perhaps just starting out in their married life. The rock-solid foundation of a lasting marriage is none other than that of giving oneself to the other, just as Jesus gave himself to the point of death for each one of us.

Consider these words of the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz. These are words that he said in a get-together in Vancouver over two years ago: "Love is not simply feeling good about being together, it's desiring the good of the other. There are people who enter into marriage without loving each other completely, truly. Ultimately, what they call a falling in love is simply pleasure, feeling good about being together. However, this "feeling good together" can be selfish if it does not go beyond that, if it lacks the other fundamental part which is a real desire for the good of the other person. This is what makes one capable of sacrificing himself or herself for their spouse, understanding the other person's defects. That, along with God's grace, is what makes marriage stable and strong."

Those simple words to desire the good of the other are actually quite profound and quite demanding. You will no doubt say to yourself, "This is really hard!" Indeed, selflessness requires daily struggle in order to overcome our self-centeredness, which is so deeply ingrained in us.

St. Josemaria addresses this challenge in his homily, *Marriage, A Christian Vocation*. He says, "People who are constantly concerned with themselves, who act above all for their own satisfaction, endanger their eternal salvation and cannot avoid being unhappy even in this life. Only if a person forgets himself and gives himself to God and to others, only then can he be happy on this Earth, with a happiness that is a preparation for and a foretaste of the joy of Heaven."

At another moment in that same homily, St. Josemaria urges us to be realistic: "As long as we walk on this Earth, suffering will always be the touchstone of love. In any marriage, there are two sides of the coin. On the one hand, there's the joy of knowing that one is loved, the desire and enthusiasm involved in starting a family and taking care of it, the love of husband and wife, the happiness of seeing the children grow up. On the other hand, there are also sorrows and difficulties – the passing of time that consumes the body and threatens the character with the temptation to bitterness, the seemingly monotonous succession of days that are apparently always the same."

He continues, "We would have a poor idea of marriage and of human affection if we were to think that love and joy come to an end when- when difficulties arise. It is precisely then that our true sentiments come to the surface. Then the tenderness of a person's gift of self takes root and shows itself in a true and profound affection that is stronger than death."

Obviously, our consideration of marriage must necessarily include children. None of you needs to be convinced that a couple's relationship changes if and when the Lord gives them the gift of offspring. This reality is eloquently expressed by a member of Abraham Lincoln's cabinet, Edwin Stanton, in a letter to his wife, Mary: "We years ago were lovers, we are now parents; a new relation has taken place. The love of our offspring has opened up fresh fountains of love for each other. We look forward now to life, not for ourselves only, but for our children. I loved you for your beauty and grace and loveliness of your person. I love you now for the richness and surpassing excellence of your mind. One love has not taken the place of the other, but both stand side-by-side. I love you now with a fervor and truth of affection that speech cannot express."

You may recall that early on in his pontificate, St. John Paul II directed his Wednesday audiences to the theme of human sexuality. From 1979 to 1984, he developed a most compelling vision of the Theology of the Body. Marital relations, by their very nature, speak a language, which can be true or false: that language of the body is essentially exclusive, total and permanent. This is an excellent moment to refresh our understanding of the Holy Father's insights. We can turn to a most helpful summary of the *Theology of the Body* written by Jay Michael Miller several decades ago, while he was a university administrator in Houston, Texas. He is currently the Archbishop of Vancouver. The article is entitled, *Telling Lies With Our Bodies: What the Pope Thinks About Sex*. Here is a brief synthesis, which will hopefully entice you to download the article from the internet:

"God gave us our body, which expresses itself through actions that are themselves a language. Just as our verbal speech reveals who we are, so also does our body language. The Lord intends that we speak this 'sexual language' truthfully. Our sexual 'words' – that is, the actions we use to embody our love – those words can say something either true or false. Conjugal relations speak fully and truthfully only within the permanent and exclusive commitment between husband and wife. The giving of one's body is 'a real symbol of the giving of the whole person.' No act between man and woman is more intimate. The gift of the body symbolizes the total gift of self. Yet this gift cannot be given when a couple is unmarried. They are saying

one thing with their bodies– that is, 'I love you totally and definitively'– but another with their minds– 'I love you now but we'll commit to nothing permanent.'"

We can break away from this article just for a second to dwell on this last point because it is so important. The fact is that the language of the body is something real, regardless of the intention. The marital act speaks volumes about permanence, about exclusivity, regardless of the intention. Only in the context of a permanent, exclusive bond can that language be truthful.

Back to the article... "God has inscribed in men and women a sexual language that is to express total love. And that includes the fruitfulness proper to conjugal relations. In truthful intercourse, a couple either wills to share their generative power or, as in natural family planning, they accept they're periodic unfruitfulness. The nuptial gift of the body, which involves surrender of one's entire self, including one's fertility, is not total when contraception is used. What appears to be a 'full' marital act is, in fact, stunted."

Well, this brief synthesis is a lot to absorb in a single meditation. Thus, the usefulness of obtaining a copy of the article so that you can study it at your own pace. You may be thinking that these ideas are challenging and that you know very few people who follow this approach to marriage. Perhaps it is up to us to introduce our friends to this magnificent vision of God's plan for marriage and the family. Let us never forget that we are God's creatures. To the extent that we live our lives according to his divine plan, we will enjoy his peace on this Earth and eternal glory with him in Heaven.

A long time ago, St. John Paul II addressed recently married couples and he read their minds. The essence of his message was that the Christian ideal of marriage is indeed lofty, but then again the goal of our life is sky high: Heaven itself. Furthermore, God has given married couples the means to reach that goal: the sacraments and the grace of marriage. We finish our prayer as always, by turning to Our Lady, the Queen of Families. Mary, never let us lose sight of the fact that our path to holiness and happiness lies in our daily effort to make of ourselves a sincere gift.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I asked your helping putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless each one of you and God bless your family.



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