



THE VOCATION TO MARRIED LOVE AND CHILDREN

A CALL TO MARRIED LOVE

Married couples who commit to living out the truth about life and love are engaging in a truly wonderful work. This most personal form of human engagement is a sacrament instituted by Christ that enables spouses and their families to directly participate in the growth of God's kingdom. Marriage is the most intimate of all human unions. It is a call to faithfulness and complete commitment and to an openness to the procreative power of God's love. It is through the lived experience of marriage that husbands and wives give themselves one to the other in an ongoing way.

This love between two persons enables them to cooperate with God in the procreation of other persons to whom each spouse is intimately connected. A vocation to marriage and family is a particular way in which we can live out that Christian vocation which is the calling of every Christian person. It is a dramatic and powerful jolt to a culture which has become somewhat jaded. Marriage and family presents a radical opportunity to do something extraordinary – to freely give oneself over in a total, committed, lifelong and exclusive relationship which is hopefully blessed with children.

MARRIED LOVE IS LINKED TO CHRIST

The Scriptures are full of symbolic language about marriage. It is used to reveal the infinite love which God feels toward mankind and his total and faithful commitment. The prophet Hosea presents God as the spouse who will eventually win over the unfaithful people of God. Indeed, it is via the great sacrificial act of the Cross that Jesus is revealed as the 'perfect spouse'. Through the Scriptures we can readily see that the reason why marriage matters so much is that it is based on Christ: "No one can lay any foundation except the one that has been laid namely, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:10). Christ is the 'second' and 'final Adam' who reaffirms the significance of the Genesis covenant that "man should not separate what God has joined" (Mt 19:6). He shows us that God is always faithful and He invites us to live out a faithful, lasting love within our own marriages and families. In a very special way, it is through such a communion of persons that man as an 'image of God' is more fully apparent. It reveals how our bodies have a meaning and a significance for us both as individuals and as persons in relationship. We are called to recognise this reality and accept that our marriages and our family lives can never be isolated from the mystery of Christ. His life of abundant and loving self sacrifice serves as a living example for every husband and wife.



WILLING THE GOOD OF THE OTHER

The understanding of marriage as self-sacrifice has a particular resonance for each one of us. We have all seen glimpses of it in the spousal relationships of our parents and grandparents. It is a calling to abandon oneself for the sake of our spouse and children and to always desire their good. Through this understanding of total self-giving we can see marriage as an icon of that perfect relationship which exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here each of the divine persons works together in complete harmony in all activities but engages and contributes in a way which is appropriate for each. This challenges us to reflect on how each member of a human family has specific and appropriate roles which they are called to exercise within their own community of love and life. Any authentic vision of the human person finds its natural expression within Christian notions of marriage and family. The roles of father and mother, husband and wife complement one another. They are not simply functionally interchangeable. Even within families where spouses have separated, the need for fathers and mothers to develop character in their children and to nurture

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their spiritual growth remains undiminished. In a similar way, every child has a specific 'calling' to contribute to the growth in virtue of their siblings and to deepen their parents understanding of who they are called to be. Every son, daughter, brother or sister has a special individual vocation within their own family community of love and life.

A PERFECT SPOUSE

A most perfect response to the vocation to marriage and family can be found in the figure of Mary, the Mother of Christ. Mary has a vital and ongoing presence within the drama of the incarnation and redemption. The theologian Hans von Balthasar described how Mary's 'yes' at the annunciation and her renewed 'yes' on Calvary models how true freedom is linked to following the will of God. Mary maintained this disposition in the face of the many difficulties and challenges found within the circumstances of her life: the confusion following visits from an angel; her pregnancy prior to marriage; the forced journey to Bethlehem; the fear of being unable to properly care for her unborn child; feelings of uncertainty and fleeing across borders; the disappearance of the Christ child when he was twelve years old and finally the witnessing of the suffering and death of her only son.

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The story of Mary is one of a spouse and parent determined to live out their vocation with a total trust in God. In this she sought to always promote the good of both her spouse and her child. In the same way, every husband or wife has the freedom to choose 'to live for the good of the other' and to support their spouse on their journey to becoming the person that God has meant them to be. It is a call to reject the limitations of human freedom so that we can embrace that true freedom which comes with living our lives according to the will of Christ. As von Balthasar says, Mary is the perfect example of what God can fashion "from human material which puts up no resistance to him". Mary deeply understood the importance of her vocation and of submitting to the will of God. She is a perfect example of the value of obedience for each of us if we wish to live out God's will within our own families. We need to look to that guiding light which directs us towards what He desires of us within our own ordinary family life. This light radiates out from the words of Sacred Scripture and through the living Tradition of a teaching Church.

A GLIMPSE OF THE KINGDOM

Spouses are called to be responsive to the needs of both each other and of their offspring. Children are called to do likewise: “Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:20). By responding to this message we are able to conform our marriages and our family lives to Christ. We are able to be available for each other so as to assist one another in our Christian journeys. As St Paul says: “Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her” (Ephesians 5). When we reflect on the richness of spousal imagery, we can discern why Christ compared the coming of the kingdom to a ‘wedding banquet’ (Mt 22:1-14) and why he affirmed the importance of spiritual readiness through his Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Mt 25: 1-13). It was to show people that the truth, goodness and beauty that is lived out on a daily basis within loving marriages and families gives us a sense of what is available to each one of us in the next life. The difficulties that confront us in this life enable us to properly prepare ourselves for the next. We need not pretend that all marriages are filled with daily bliss or that good marriages don’t have their challenges. But something of the love and commitment that shines through at different times in every marriage gives us an authentic glimpse of that intimacy and fidelity which exists in God’s kingdom. Every marriage and every family manifests such glimpses and each is a treasure of its own. They give us an insight into that ultimate reality which is the relationship between God and humanity, between Christ and His Church. Marriage and family is a wonderful vocation and a lived experience which we share with the very person of Jesus Christ. We are profoundly blessed to be able to do so.

