
PRESENTATION ONE

Estimated Reading Time: approx. 45-90 minutes

Following Christ in the Vocation of Marriage

PRESENTATION GOALS

- ✧ To understand God's intention in establishing the marriage covenant between a man and a woman and that the human family is a reflection of God's rich, Trinitarian life.
- ✧ To explore the meaning of marital communion and relationship in relation to the Trinitarian communion of love.
- ✧ To give an overview of creation, the Fall and redemption and to show the effects of Original Sin in our lives, especially in marriage, and how God's grace is the remedy to a happy, healthy, holy, and lasting marriage.
- ✧ To explain that the vocation of marriage is directed toward a person's own salvation and that of others, primarily the spouse and children. Moreover, in marriage, couples are being called to seek the goodness, integrity, holiness, and salvation of their spouses. Couples will perfectly do this if they follow the example of Jesus Christ.
- ✧ To show that marriage is built upon mutual love and understanding, generosity, forgiveness, humility, reverential service, and, most importantly, self-sacrificial love that mirrors Christ's unconditional love for his Bride, the Church.

ur First Parents; “The First Wedding”

In the beginning God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”¹⁰

MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.’”¹¹

The “our” and “us” is the first reference to the Blessed Trinity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a perfect communion of love; a relationship of Persons. God, who needs nothing, desires to create us in order to give us a share in his divine life. Here on earth, we strive to know, love, and serve him so as to obtain eternal happiness with him in Heaven for all eternity.

Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the other hand, the question of the right relationship between the man and the woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found.

In other words, it cannot be separated from the ancient but ever new human question: Who am I? What is a human being? And this question, in turn, cannot be separated from the question about God: Does God exist? Who is God? What is his face truly like?

The Bible gives one consequential answer to these two queries: the human being is created in the image of God, and God himself is love. It is therefore the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God: man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.¹²

The day when you exchange your wedding vows, the Lord Jesus will transform and elevate something ordinary and natural (your human love) and make it extraordinary and divine. God will do this because you have responded wholeheartedly to his divine love and his call to love. Through your love for each other and God’s grace, you will make manifest to your family, friends, the Church, and society the truth about God, ourselves, and marriage, in that, when we love as God loves, we show forth more perfectly the image and likeness of God in which we are all created. We witness to the beauty of God’s unconditional love and the divine truth that God is love when we respond to his call to love. As a result, we are transformed into the likeness of his being.

A child was once asked, “Why do we go to Mass?” The child responded, “To give worship to God.” “And what happens to us when we do this?” asked the teacher. The child said that “it makes us more united to God and to one another; it gives us grace to love God and others more and more each day; and it enables us to live in communion with God, which is like living in a family here on earth.”

Essentially, what this child had articulated was the nature of the Blessed Trinity and how the family mirrors our relationship to God in three Persons. The communion of love, the relationship that exists within the Blessed Trinity, consists of the Father who begets the Son (from his very essence), and in the begetting falls “madly in love” with the Son (because he is the perfect image of the Father), and, from the ecstatic overflowing love that flows from each, manifests the love of the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. (The Lover, the Beloved, and the Love that proceeds from both).

God's revelation of himself is not only true and good, but also *beautiful*. The beauty of God's love is the mystery of reality; it is the true meaning of life, of existence, of being. Just as we are overwhelmed by a beautiful work of art, so God's love overwhelms us, transforms us, brings us to ourselves, and awakens us to respond to God with love.¹³

“Before the beautiful—no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only ‘finds’ the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.”¹⁴

Before creating man, the Creator withdraws as it were into himself, in order to seek the pattern and inspiration in the mystery of his Being, which is already here disclosed as the divine “We”. From this mystery the human being comes forth by an act of creation: “*God created man in his own image*, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27).¹⁵

It was from within this overflowing communion of love that each of us received our existence; a love that could not contain itself; a love that freely gives and overflows to another or in marriage to beget another human being. At the moment of conception, God's image and likeness is made manifest in the human person and the very presence of the new child witnesses to the world that the imprint of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the source of all life and that divine and human love bring us into this world so as to share in the communion of love in Heaven with the Lover, Beloved, and Love.

Think about what a child experiences when he or she is born into this world, the moment when the father and mother gaze into the child's eyes. The child experiences for the first time what it means to belong to a communion of love, to be in relationship, to be a part of a family. It is from this experience that we all desire to become a part of the larger community of humanity and to seek beyond ourselves to the eternal communion of love for which we have all been created.

The birth of a child makes us realize that love grows through love and as Pope Benedict XVI said in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Love is ‘divine’ because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and worldly understandings of love and makes us one.”

God is rich in relationships, communication, and love for all people. The Blessed Trinity models to us what the dynamic Trinitarian life is all about—communication, relationship, and affection. The quality of our Christian life is based on imitation of the interior life of the Trinity. Why is it important to believe that God is One in Three Persons: a communion of love? If God is defined merely by function of what God does rather than what God is: a loving relationship of Persons, then our understanding of the family loses its meaning as a relationship of persons who exist to love and to be loved. The family, like the Blessed Trinity, is not merely defined by what it does, but rather by what it is: a relationship of persons called to communion with God and one another.

There is a temptation to embrace the modern idea of the human person strictly as an individual, in contrast to seeing our identity in terms of relationship. The late Francis Cardinal George commented that:

If we are individuals for whom relationships are just added on, rather than persons who are born related, then we start with rights and not duties and obligations to others. Since rights have to be protected, we get into a legal framework that is almost adversarial. Society becomes brittle and violent. Natural community, such as marriage, is much weakened. People's mobility and pursuit of one's own dreams, even in conflict with others, have become something of a priority in our culture.

This doesn't foster the kind of relationship that is necessary to live humanely . . . while there is conflict to a certain level, the highest level is one of harmony and peace, mutual love and love of God.¹⁶

To be created in the image and likeness of God means, therefore, that human beings reflect not the life of a solitary deity, but the communal life of the Trinity. Human beings were created not to live solitary lives, but to live in communion with God and with one another, a communion that is both life-giving and loving.¹⁷

Have we not all, perhaps, felt most alone when we embrace the world's ideology of individualism and fail to foster our relationship? In our relationships with our fiancé, family members, friends, and co-workers, are we not most alone when, in our selfishness, we seek to divide rather than unite? Manipulate and dominate rather than surrender to charity, generosity, and kindness? Control rather than embrace humility?

When we choose to fashion God in our own image and likeness, we distance ourselves from others—especially our spouse—and compete with others so as to assert our self-will, our own desires, ambitions, appetites; we compete to realize our own desires over and against our spouse's.

Today human beings not only create their own gods they seem to claim themselves as gods and want to transform the world, excluding, putting aside or simply rejecting the Creator of the universe. Man no longer wants to be the image of God but the image of himself; he declares himself autonomous and free. Obviously, that reveals *an inauthentic relationship with God*, the consequence of a false image that has been constructed of him, like the prodigal son in the Gospel parable who thought that *he could find himself by distancing himself from the house of his father*.¹⁸

Thomas Merton once said, "People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centered on themselves, can only conceive one way of becoming real: cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast and distinction between themselves and other men. They do not know that reality is to be sought not in division but in unity, for we are members one of another."¹⁹

By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, which is perfectly manifested at the Baptism of Jesus, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and he has destined us to share in that exchange. The Trinitarian God, who is utterly transcendent yet radically immanent, reveals to us that just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do nothing apart from each other, we are called to interact with others as though we are interacting with God himself and participating in the divine exchange of love.

What is so unique about this communion of love that we share in, in relation to marriage, is that it does not remain turned in on itself, but it gives generously, infinitely without boundaries or limits. Discouraging words and actions that tear at the very heart of this communion and unity are not only debilitating to the spiritual life and to marriage but in the end leave us alone and isolated from God and others.

This is a time of preparation for Heaven. By seeing and loving in others what Christ sees and loves in us, we not only imitate the dynamic Trinitarian life—communication, relationship, and affection, but we communicate to the world that "love grows through love and through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and worldly understandings of love and makes us one."²⁰

If our faith is based in this Trinitarian mystery that is fundamentally a mystery of communion then all of our earthly efforts and activities must work toward building up the human community (family) that is a reflection of God's rich, Trinitarian life.

Take a five minute break and think of two things you learned from this presentation so far. These notes will help when you have to answer the online questions and when you have discussions with your fiancé at the seminar.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

In the beginning, man and woman were in the state of original holiness, without sin, suffering, sickness, or death. After God had created Adam and Eve and brought them together in the communion of love, God gave Adam a divine command: "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die."²¹ "The 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom."²²

According to Origen of Alexandria, "the violence at the heart of the human condition began with the question by the cunning serpent, 'Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?'"²³ In this particular passage, God reveals the instigator of all evil: Satan, God's nemesis, an angel consumed by pride and cast out of Heaven. We read in Revelation how Satan, who was defeated by St. Michael, went to wage warfare against those who keep God's commandments.²⁴

In Genesis, "we see the original vision of God for union between men and women that was so intimate, with a love so pure that there was the deepest trust and intimacy. We find no shame here in the full revelation of their hearts and bodies offered as gift to one another. But Satan filled with pride, jealousy, and envy sought to attack the root of this intimacy between men and women, and between man and their Creator."²⁵

Satan incessantly tempts us to desire to reach beyond the limits of our present existence, not merely to ascend to God, to become like God, but indeed to become equal to God. By answering the question of the serpent, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any trees in the garden?"²⁶ Eve fell prey to the inordinate desire of pride, the overreaching desire for that which is not of God; the unrestrained desire for power over her Creator.

She essentially desired to "become like God," because the serpent assured her that "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad."²⁷

By choosing to turn toward the serpent, toward her own selfish desire and away from God, Eve, along with her husband Adam, denied the very otherness of God, their radical unlikeness, which inevitably led to a denial or refusal of God's love.

Eve desired all the more what God had prohibited because she felt it was God's own envious desire; "I want it because you have it" or "I want it all the more because you told me I couldn't have it." (We see this is our own life, especially with children.)

Consequently, she freely acted on her inordinate desire to become like God, and thus shared that sinful desire with her husband, Adam. The activity of envy inevitably becomes the attitude of concupiscence;²⁸ the corruption or domination in the relationship between the sexes. As a result, concupiscence becomes an infatuation with death, instead of an orientation of self-giving and self-sacrificial love. Consequently, man has an ever-increasing desire toward a selfish love.

This is why St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is so misunderstood today in relation to marriage. Instead of embracing a self-giving, self-sacrificial love, (the ways to healthy and holy relationships,) which St. Paul exhorts couples to embrace, there is this inordinate desire among spouses, an effect of Original Sin, to dominate or subjugate the other for personal gain or satisfaction.

This not only happens in marriage, but also in all of our relationships. Pride seeks to demean, humiliate, and control others in order to fortify ourselves. In order to have a happy, healthy, holy, and lasting marriage, spouses need to be aware of the effects of Original Sin, specifically concupiscence and the effect it can have on marriage.

If we read a bit further in Genesis, we begin to see the descending steps of pride and its devastating consequences.

When the plea for repentance had been ignored, the man blamed the woman by saying, "The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it," and Eve in turn said, "The snake tricked me, so I ate it."²⁹ This is best described as "scapegoating": the denial of or disavowing responsibility. How often do we continue to experience this in our own lives? How often do we see this as one of the primary causes of many broken marriages?

Therefore, because they disobeyed the divine command and refused the offer of repentance, the human person came under the power of the Evil One. Prior to the Fall or the act of disobedience, Adam and Eve were naked without shame. After the Fall, they were naked with shame, and they hid themselves because they were filled with guilt and disgrace. For this reason they were expelled from paradise, subjected to death and condemned to servile work on earth.

While marriage has remained the good gift that God created it to be, and so has not been a blessing forfeited because of the Fall, Original Sin has had grave consequences for married life. Because men and women became wounded by sin, marriage has become distorted. Original Sin introduced evil and disorder into the world. As a consequence of the break with God, this first sin ruptured the original communion between man and woman. Nonetheless, the original blessing of marriage was never revoked.³⁰

It wasn't supposed to be this way. God's plan was perfect, we just messed it up by wanting more than what was offered. As a result, evil, suffering, and death entered into the world.

Christian philosophy has, like the Hebrew, attributed moral and physical evil to the action of created free will. Human suffering is a consequence of man's defiant actions. Man has himself

brought about the evil from which he suffers by transgressing. As darkness is nothing but the absence of light, and is not produced by creation, so evil is merely the defect of goodness. (St. Aug., In Gen. as lit.)

Evil, in a large sense, may be described as the sum of the opposition, which experience shows to exist in the universe, to the desires and needs of individuals; whence arises, among humans beings at least, the sufferings in which life abounds. Thus evil, from the point of view of human welfare, is what ought not to exist. Nevertheless, there is no department of human life in which its presence is not felt; and the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be has always called for explanation in the account which mankind has sought to give of itself and its surroundings. With regard to the nature of evil, it should be observed that evil is of three kinds—physical, moral, and metaphysical.³¹

If suffering is a consequence of evil, then as Christians, what do we do with suffering, how do we make sense of it? What is its purpose?

Victor Frankel wrote a short yet compelling book called, *Man's Search for Meaning*. He spent many years in a Nazi concentration camp. Having had the opportunity to escape, he went back to help his sick friends. He was asked how they survived, how they found meaning in the chaos. He said, "If you found meaning in suffering, you survived. To live is to suffer, therefore if life has meaning, suffering has meaning too. If suffering does not have meaning, then life does not have meaning. Suffering ceases to be when one finds meaning in it."

Pope Benedict XVI posed a question in his inauguration homily that we ask all too often:

How often we wish that God would show himself stronger, that he would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.³²

Suffering is a mystery just as much as life is a mystery and it takes a lot of patience to see God's divine providence unfold. We would all like to see evil destroyed and suffering cease, yet God has a plan in everything and is patient with us because he desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. Yet as Pope Benedict XVI said, because of our impatience we fail to see his loving plan. We do not try to explain a mystery away or rid ourselves from it, we simply stand before it with respect for who it points to and who designed it. Pope Benedict states:

The possibility of conversion entails that we learn to read the events of life in the light of faith. . . . In the presence of suffering and grief, true wisdom is to let oneself be called from the precariousness of existence and to read human history with God's eyes, who, always and only wanting the good of his children, by an inscrutable plan of his love, sometimes allows them to be tried through suffering to lead them to a greater good.

In one of his lectures, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, Peter Kreeft says that instead of asking, "Life what is your meaning? We eventually come to realize that life is questioning us by name. . . . What is your meaning? As Christians, we find our true identity and meaning only when we include God in the equation. Only when God is part of the equation can we make sense of suffering." Christianity is the

quintessential religion that can make sense of suffering. Why? Because we have a God who endured it and placed redemptive value on it.

Suffering is often devalued by our modern world. Many people seem to adhere to a utopian ideal of living without pain and suffering. Peter Kreeft asserts that, “When the world is teaching ways to get out of suffering, Christ Jesus is offering and inviting us a way into suffering, as the way to salvation.” It is hard to see God’s plan in suffering when we are going through it. It is sometimes easier when we have made our way through it. Finding meaning in suffering can be redemptive and even a source for personal and spiritual growth. With the combination of grace and human effort, we can begin to cope with and embrace suffering in a positive spirit.

What God is trying to reveal to us in Scripture, is that the meaning of human suffering (the Cross) and the meaning of life (the Resurrection) are of the same reality. Suffering and happiness are of the same reality, just like the Cross and the Resurrection; we cannot have one without the other. Without suffering, without crises and problems, many of us will never discover the true meaning of our lives.

What counts in suffering is not so much the suffering but our attitude toward it. Suffering often cannot be eliminated or changed, but our attitude toward it can be. That is why when we are confronted with the questions like “Why?” and “Why me and not someone else?” we must ask ourselves the question, “What can I do with it.” “What can I make from the situation in which I find myself?” Our Faith tells us that when we experience suffering and darkness, God is with us. God’s presence does not eliminate the suffering, but his grace helps us cultivate the right attitude toward the things we cannot change.

Jesus taught us that the afflictions we may experience in the flesh are always transformed when we apply the fruits of the spirit to them; such as patience, perseverance, fortitude, and love. God knows it is hard sometimes, but if you keep Christ at the heart of your marriage, pray constantly together and for one another, share your faith together in the sacramental life of the Church, (especially the Eucharist), you will always be strengthened, consoled, and healed in difficult times and given fresh opportunities for proving and strengthening your love for one another.

If we allow the wounds of Christ to shed light and meaning upon our wounds, we will come to recognize that through suffering (the Cross) the human heart is strengthened and the soul begins to embrace the love and compassion of God, in Christ Jesus, who is our hope and salvation.

Conflict, quarrels, and misunderstandings can be found in all marriages. They reflect the impact of Original Sin, which disrupted the original communion of man and woman. They also reflect modern stresses upon marriage: the conflict between work and home, economic hardships, and social expectations.

Nevertheless, God’s plan for marriage persists, and he continues to offer mercy and healing grace. We bishops urge couples in crisis to turn to the Lord for help. We also encourage them to make use of the many resources, including programs and ministries offered by the Church, that can help to save marriages, even those in serious difficulty.³³

The Scottish writer, George MacDonald, asked why God allows suffering, why he sometimes seems so distant. He said: “As cold as everything looks in winter, the sun has not forsaken us. He has only drawn away for a little, for good reasons, one of which is that we may learn that we cannot do without him.”

Sometimes the storm arises around us or within us. And it may seem at times that our frail craft (souls) cannot take any more. At times we have the impression that God is heedless of our fate. The waves of temptation and despair may be breaking over us daily, personal weaknesses, illness,

professional or financial difficulties can overwhelm us. When we are confronted with such pain and sorrow, we have to realize that Jesus is carrying us and calling all of us in the midst of our trials and tribulations to carry one another; to share with them the words of Jesus, “Be still, Do not be afraid.” . . . If difficulties arise, then the grace of God will come more abundantly as well. If there are many difficulties, there will be many graces from God. Divine help is always proportionate to the obstacles . . . it is good that there are difficulties, because then we will obtain more help from God.”³⁴

Take a five minute break and make note of two things you learned from this section.

GOD’S ORIGINAL PLAN IS RESTORED IN CHRIST JESUS

“After the Fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. God said, ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.’³⁵ This passage in Genesis is called the *Protoevangelium*: (‘first gospel’): the announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman and of the final victory of a descendant of hers.”³⁶

This passage foreshadows the new Eve (Mary) and the new Adam (Jesus Christ). “As a new Eve Mary believed, not the serpent of old, but the messenger of God, with a faith wholly free of doubt. She gave birth to the Son, appointed by God to be *the firstborn among many brothers*, that is, among those who believe; with a mother’s love she cooperates in their birth and development.”³⁷

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss priest and considered by many to be one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century, the *First Adam*, who freely chose the path into the violent state of Original Sin, a state that disfigured the perfect order of God’s universe and distorted the “likeness” of God that each individual person possessed in the beginning, now experiences alienation, isolation, suffering, evil, and ultimately death.

Unable to reverse the violence at the heart of the human condition, man must seek redemption through the perfect obedience and love of the *Second Adam*, Jesus Christ, who alone is able to reconcile the human person to God and restore what was lost due to man’s disobedience.³⁸

“The first attempt at a response: there must have been a fall, a decline, and the road to salvation can only be the return of the sensible finite into the intelligible infinite.”³⁹

“The human race—every one of us—is the sheep lost in the desert which no longer knows the way. The Son of God will not let this happen; he cannot abandon humanity in so wretched a condition. He leaps to his feet and abandons the glory of heaven, in order to go in search of the sheep and pursue it, all the way to the Cross. He takes it upon his shoulders and carries our humanity; he carries us all—he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. . . . Let us pray for one another, that the Lord will carry us and that we will learn to carry one another.”⁴⁰

“The first thing that must strike a non-Christian about a Christian’s faith is that it is all too daring. It is too beautiful to be true: The mystery of being, unveiled as absolute love, coming down to wash the feet and the souls of its creatures; a love that assumes the whole burden of our guilt and hate, that accepts the accusations that shower down, the disbelief that veils God again when he has revealed himself, all the scorn and contempt that nails down his incomprehensible movement of self-abasement—all this, absolute love accepts in order to excuse his creature before himself and before the world.”⁴¹

Just as every person comes into this world wounded and fallen because of Original Sin, you, as a couple, will enter into marriage wounded and fallen, with your defects and shortcomings, sins and failures.

Yet, there is hope! In order to have a healthy, happy, holy, and lasting marriage, you must recognize and accept the reality of your fallen state so that you may continually strive for sanctity by uniting yourselves ever more closely to Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

This can only happen if you remain *One in Christ*.

St. Paul, like all of the saints, knew his own sinfulness and yet he had hope in the risen Christ. He knew the problem of sin and yet he proclaimed, “Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more.”⁴² Jesus Christ comes to “unmask” the violence due to sin and to show us how to overcome pride through humility, envy through generosity, concupiscence through chastity, scapegoating through responsibility, forgiveness, and unconditional love.

In Jesus Christ, God comes to save us

- ✠ To heal our wounded nature, forgive our sins, and reconcile us to God.
- ✠ To accomplish this on the Cross through self-sacrificial love.
- ✠ Through his Cross and Resurrection, to lead us on the path of salvation.

This is best summarized in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: The Father’s plan of salvation, fulfillment through Christ, and inheritance through the Spirit. Thus, unity and reconciliation with God is restored. St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians also underscores the importance of marital union by emphasizing Christian marriage as taking on a new meaning symbolic of the intimate relationship of love between Christ and his Bride, the Church.

Our unity with Christ and one another should reflect the inner life of the Blessed Trinity here on earth; a perfect communion of love. In marriage, you are being called to manifest this perfect communion of love. Speaking about communion and love, Paul urges us “to live in a manner worthy of the vocation you have received.”⁴³

THE CALL TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHRIST

What is a vocation?

A vocation is a call from God to serve him in a particular state. Each Catholic passes through one of three vocational calls:

1. Priesthood/Religious/Consecrated Life
2. Marriage
3. The state of “single blessedness.”

Pope Benedict XVI takes basically the same starting point as St. John Paul II. God has a personal plan for each of us, and we must listen to him to learn what it is.

The Lord has his plan for each of us, he calls each one of us by name. Our task is to be listeners, capable of perceiving his call, to be courageous and faithful, so that we may follow him, and in the end, be found as trustworthy servants who have used well the gifts entrusted to us.

The origin and goal of this plan is God’s love. God loves us, so that we can love him in return. “He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and from God’s loving us ‘first,’ love can also arise as a response within us.” A vocation is always situated in the context of this love. “Before the creation of the world, before our coming into existence, the heavenly Father chose us personally, calling us to enter into a filial relationship with him, through Jesus, the Incarnate Word, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God’s voice inviting us to love him is heard in the people and events around us, but especially in prayer.

“God speaks with us in many different ways. He speaks by means of others, through friends, parents, pastors, priests. . . . He speaks by means of the events of our life, in which we can discern God’s gesture; he speaks also through nature, creation, and he speaks, naturally and above all, in his Word, in Sacred Scripture, read in the communion of the Church and read personally in conversation with God. It is important to read Sacred Scripture, on the one hand in a very personal way . . . as God’s Word which is ever timely and speaks to me . . . to enter into prayer and thus read Sacred Scripture as a conversation with God.”⁴⁴

You are here today because you have heard God’s call to love and have responded to his call to marriage. You have said “yes” to each other, to God, and to the vocation of marriage.

What are you called to do in marriage?

What is your call or vocation?

We know that each one of us has been created by God with a unique purpose and an eternal destiny (to know, love, and serve God so as to be happy with him in Heaven for all eternity). God has called you in Christ Jesus to fulfill a certain mission in life; a mission that began at your Baptism and continues to unfold in your lives individually and communally through the sacramental life of the Church.

It is a mission of holiness; a mission of deepening your relationship with God and neighbor; a mission which has as its goal: eternal life. This is called Christian Discipleship. And as Christians we are all called to holiness. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, there is essentially one vocation of a Catholic, and that is to love with the divine love, with the love of charity. The more one loves, the better he is fulfilling his vocation.

But now, your personal mission/vocation takes on an added dimension, where your individual call or vocation to holiness now includes another, your spouse.

As Christian disciples, you will be embracing a special call, a vocation that has as its end, eternal life with God. But you will not accomplish this alone. Once you enter into marriage, you will have the awesome responsibility of helping your spouse get to Heaven.

Through the vocation of marriage, you are called to get yourself, your spouse, and your children to Heaven. How will you do this? The means to achieving this end consists of living out the vocation with the help of God's grace you will receive in the Sacrament of Matrimony (which will be covered in the next talk).

The two Sacraments of vocation in the life of the Church are Holy Orders and Matrimony. They are directed toward individual salvation and that of others. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.

A priest is a mediator between God and men, and a priest's vocation is to make manifest God's divine love and grace through the celebration of the Sacraments. A priest is called to serve God and his people unconditionally; to grow in personal holiness and to call others to holiness. How does a priest do this? By administering the Sacraments of the Church, teaching, preaching, evangelizing, visiting the sick, etc.

In marriage, you are being called to:

- ☞ Grow in personal holiness and seek the divine offer of salvation.
- ☞ Seek the goodness, integrity, holiness, and salvation of your future spouse.

You will do this perfectly if you follow the example of Jesus Christ.

THE VOCATION OF MARRIAGE

The Church reveals to us that marriage is a *natural* vocation, in that it aligns with how the human body was made. God designed man to have a natural longing to be loved by another and to raise a family—a desire deeply ingrained in the heart of every person. God himself desires to be loved exclusively, and thus Our Lord, the author of the universe, created marriage as a means to teach mankind of this love, and to draw man to himself. As St. John Paul II taught, marriage is an earthly foreshadowing of the mystical marriage between Christ and his Church. It is through this earthly foreshadowing [of marriage] that men and women can learn of heavenly realities.

Pope Benedict XVI sees love as an important, indeed *the* element in a vocation. It is at the origin of every vocation, and every vocation finds its fulfillment in love. Thus the pope describes marriage as a vocation insofar as it is to be formed by true love.

If you are engaged to be married, God has a project of love for your future as a couple and as a family. . . . The love of a man and woman is at the origin of the human family and the couple formed by a man and a woman has its foundation in God's original plan (cf. Gn 2: 18–25). . . .

In your prayer together, ask the Lord to watch over and increase your love and to purify it of all selfishness. Do not hesitate to respond generously to the Lord's call, for Christian matrimony is a true and proper vocation in the Church.⁴⁵

The three ingredients for a healthy, happy, holy, and lasting marriage:

1. *To serve and to be served.*

Jesus said, “[I] did not come to be served but to serve and to give [my] life as a ransom for many.”⁴⁶

2. *To love and to be loved.*

Jesus said: “Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.”⁴⁷

3. *To forgive and to be forgiven.*

Jesus said, “If you do not forgive your brother or sister from the heart nor will your heavenly Father forgive you.”⁴⁸ Peter approached the Lord and asked, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.”⁴⁹ What is demanded of the disciples is limitless forgiveness.

What then does it mean to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ so that your vocation will be formed by true and authentic love; a love that is self-sacrificial and unconditional?

Read: Ephesians 5:21–33.

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.

Read Christopher West's exegesis on Ephesians 5:21–33.

While we must admit that some men throughout history have pointed to this Scripture verse to justify their fallen desire to dominate women, St. Paul is in no way justifying such an attitude. He knows it to be the result of original sin, which is why in this passage he's actually restoring God's original plan before sin. He does so by pointing out what marriage was all about in the first place. It was meant to foreshadow the marriage of Christ and the Church. St. Paul simply draws out the implications of this analogy.

He starts by calling both husbands and wives to be subject to one another “out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21) — out of reverence for the “great mystery” that spouses participate in by imaging Christ’s union with the Church. In the analogy, the husband represents Christ, and the wife represents the Church. So, he says, as the Church is subject to Christ, so should wives also be subject to their husbands (v. 24).

Another translation uses the word, “submission.” I like to explain this word as follows. “Sub” means “under,” and “mission” means “to be sent forth with the authority to perform a specific service.” Wives, then, are called to put themselves “under” the “mission” of their husbands. What’s the mission of the husband? “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her” (v. 25). How did Christ love the Church? He died for her. (How many men here would die for their bride?) Christ said He came “not to be served but to serve,” and to lay down His life for His Bride (Mt 20: 28).

What, then does it mean for a wife to “submit” to her husband? It means let your husband serve you. Put yourself under his mission to love you as Christ loved the Church. As [St.] John Paul II says: “The wife’s ‘submission’ to her husband, understood in the context of the entire passage of the letter to the Ephesians, signifies above all the ‘experiencing of love.’ This is true all the more so since this ‘submission’ is related to the image of the submission of the Church to Christ, which certainly consists in experiencing His love” (*Theology of the Body*, September 1, 1982).

What woman would not want to receive this kind of love from her husband? What woman would not want to be subject to her husband if he truly took his mission seriously to love her as Christ loved the Church?⁵⁰

“The basis of the supernatural grandeur and dignity of Christian marriage lies in the fact that it is an extension of the union between Christ and his Church. To exhort Christian married couples to live in accordance with their membership of the Church, the Apostle establishes an analogy whereby the husband represents Christ and the wife the Church.”⁵¹ When St. Paul exhorts wives to be “subject” to their husbands, he is not only taking into account the social position of women at the time, but also the fact that a Christian wife, by the way she relates to her husband, should reflect the Church itself, in its obedience to Christ. The husband, for his part, is asked to be similarly submissive to his wife, for he is a reflection of Jesus Christ, who gave himself up even to death out of love for the Church.

In 1930 Pope Pius XI taught:

The submission of the wife neither ignores nor suppresses the liberty to which her dignity as a human person and her noble functions as a wife, mother, and companion give her the full right. It does not oblige her to yield indiscriminately to all the desires of her husband, which may be unreasonable or incompatible with her wifely dignity. Nor does it mean that she is on a level of persons who in law are called minors, and who are ordinarily denied the unrestricted exercise of their rights on the ground of their immature judgment and inexperience. But it does forbid such abuse of freedom as would neglect the welfare of the family; it refuses, in this body which is the family, to allow the heart to be separated from the head, with great detriment to the body itself and even with risk of disaster. If the husband is the head of the domestic body, then the wife is its heart; and as the first holds the primacy of authority, so the second can and ought to claim the primacy of love.⁵²

“Above all it is important to underline the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men. This equality is realized in a unique manner in that reciprocal self-giving by each one to the other and by both to the children which is proper to marriage and the family.”⁵³ This can only become a reality in marriage if couples submit to one another out of reverence for Christ who never ceases to “abide with them in order that by their mutual self-giving, they will love each other with enduring fidelity, as Christ loved the Church and delivered Himself for it.”⁵⁴

The vocation of marriage is truly a path to holiness, which is built upon mutual love and understanding, generosity, forgiveness, humility, reverential service, and, most importantly, self-sacrificial love that mirrors Christ’s unconditional love for his Bride, the Church.

Tertullian on the Sacrament of Matrimony:

Where can I find words to describe adequately the happiness of that marriage which the Church fortifies, which the oblation confirms and the blessing seals? The angels proclaim it and the heavenly Father ratifies it. . . . What kind of yoke is that of two Christians, united in one hope, one desire, one discipline, and one service? Both are children of the same Father, servant of the same master; nothing separates them either in spirit or in the flesh; on the contrary, they are truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, so is the spirit. Together they pray, together they worship God, they teach each other, exhort each other, encourage each other. They are both equal in the Church of God, equal at the banquet of God, equal in trials, persecution and consolations.⁵⁵

Click on this link or use the QR to answer some quick questions about Presentation 1



Note: This takes you to an outside Microsoft Form; answer these individually (not as a couple)

Best Practice: Take note of your answers, so you can use them at the seminar for table discussions

Once you are done answering the questions, **move on** to reading PDF **Presentation 2** for Module ONE

~ Check-in with your fiancé to make sure they have started the Pework assignments~
