

FEBRUARY – THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

The foundation of the domestic church is the sacrament of marriage. It is therefore important to reflect often on the mystery and calling of this sacrament. Also, our children may be called to become spouses and parents, so it is important to help them understand the type of love that is necessary in marriage and family life.

Breaking Open the Theme

The sacrament of marriage is a wondrous divine mystery. As Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen liked to remind couples, it takes “three” to get married: husband, wife and God.⁴⁶ By virtue of the sacrament of baptism, Christians no longer belong to themselves, but to Jesus Christ. As a result, when a baptized man marries a baptized woman, Christ himself is the one who gives the spouses to each other on their wedding day.

It is Christ who also receives their vows as the Church witnesses their exchange of love and blesses it in Christ’s name. This is why it is important to celebrate the sacrament of marriage in a church where the Blessed Sacrament is present and also why the Church recommends that Christian marriages take place within a Mass.⁴⁷ Christ, who is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, is made present in the love of the spouses. He becomes the source and unshakable guarantor of their unity as a couple.⁴⁸ He transforms their love: “Spouses love each other with a love that is greater than themselves, in fact, with the very love that brought them into existence in the first place!”⁴⁹

By virtue of the great sacrament of holy matrimony, human love participates in Christ’s own sacrificial love wherein he gave up his body for sinners on the cross. To receive the graces of this sacrament fully, married couples must enter into the total self-gift of Christ on a daily basis, holding nothing back in their love of each other through prayer and sacrifice for the good of the beloved.

Meditations

From a homily by St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life

How is marriage a mystery? The two have become one. This is not an empty symbol. They have not become the image of anything on earth, but of God Himself. ... They come to be made into one body. See the mystery of love! If the two do not become one, they cannot increase; they can increase only by decreasing! How great is the strength of unity!⁵⁰

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From Pope John Paul II's Familiaris Consortio

The Spirit which the Lord pours forth [in the sacrament of marriage] gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross. ... Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers.⁵¹

1. Do we think of marriage differently when we remember that Christ is present in the sacrament of marriage? How does this change or challenge our personal views of love?
2. What do we think of St. John Chrysostom's principle of Christian married love — that spouses and family “increase” by “decreasing”? How does this principle relate to the words that we hear from John the Baptist: “He must increase; I must decrease” (Jn 3:30)?
3. Have we loved each family member by sacrificing for them as Christ has done for each of us? In what ways do each of us do this? In what ways could we be better at this?

Scripture Reading — Psalm 128

A prayer of the happy home that follows the Lord

Blessed are all who fear the LORD,
and who walk in his ways.
What your hands provide you will enjoy;
you will be blessed and prosper:
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your home,
Your children like young olive plants
around your table.
Just so will the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

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May the LORD bless you from Zion;
may you see Jerusalem's prosperity
all the days of your life,
and live to see your children's children.
Peace upon Israel!

Family Project

Read the below nuptial prayer from the Order of Celebrating Matrimony. Share memories about your wedding day with your family over a nice family meal. At this meal, have each child share one thing they appreciate about their parents' marriage. Then, each spouse should share one reason why they are grateful for their marriage and how each one sees Christ as present in their marriage.

Nuptial Blessing

Holy Father, who formed man in your image, male and female you created them, so that as husband and wife, united in body and heart, they might fulfill their calling in the world; O God, who, to reveal the great design you formed in your love, willed that the love of spouses for each other should foreshadow the covenant you graciously made with your people, so that, by fulfillment of the sacramental sign, the mystical marriage of Christ with his Church might become manifest in the union of husband and wife among your faithful. ... 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. ... Through Christ our Lord. Amen.⁵²