

THE THIRD CROSS – VOCATION TO THE ORDER OF SPOUSES

This article is about the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage. Perhaps the title threw you off. In the configuration of the Catholic Church there is not only an order of priests, and deacons – among others, there is also an *order of spouses*. And within this order of spouses there are *rights and duties* that are part and parcel of belonging to an order, a sacred order at that. The man and woman who are baptized and give themselves to each other for life in a ceremony known as a *wedding* – also contract a *sacrament of the Church* – raised to such a dignity of Jesus himself at the wedding feast of Cana.

It is an astonishing fact that a great majority of married couples do not have an accurate and true understanding of what marriage is all about. The results of the divorce rate speak of this – but so too does the presence of still-married couples who are extremely miserable and searching for a way out! For a Catholic couple to have such feelings and experiences is a very sad commentary, but especially for them, an easily avoidable experience if only they were presented with some authentic and true teaching from the Church.

This brief article is meant to provide a brief outline of such vital information regarding marriage and family life.

The very first thing that a couple who wish to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage need to know is that the object of marriage is NOT THEM! This I hope is a startling fact! Marriage is not all about the woman, and it is not all about the man – and it not even about the two of them joined as one! The main object of marriage, as is any state and vocation in life is GOD THE FATHER! JESUS HIS SON! and THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE, LOVE AND POWER! Marriage is all about giving glory and praise to THEM – and not in any way, shape or form, giving glory and praise to the woman, the man or the couple!

I hope that this is already beginning to shift your entire perspective on marriage!

So, then what is marriage really about? Where did it come from? What is its goal and aim? What makes it work? Tell me more about these rights and duties! What is the “order of spouses?” Is marriage here to stay? What can we do to preserve the real dignity of marriage and family life? [First some short answers, then the more detailed:]

- ❖ **marriage is about providing a *sign on earth*** of God’s eternal exchange of love that he is in himself in heaven...participating in that sign gives glory and praise to the Father – and that is what is most important
- ❖ **it came from the way in which God created man and woman** who reflect in their bodies the eternal exchange of love mentioned above
- ❖ **its goal and aim is to prepare the couple for eternal life**, as well as provide new members of God’s family by co-creating and raising children to be members of that family
- ❖ what makes the sacrament of marriage work is **Christ’s real presence in it and the operation of the Holy Spirit** to help spouses carry their crosses and live an authentic and genuine married life of self-sacrificial love
- ❖ **married spouses have a right to the help and blessings of God the Father, Jesus and his Church, and the amazing gifts of the Holy Spirit**; they have a duty to live as true Catholic spouses within the Church of God of which they are a special part, they have a duty to co-create with God the Father, and raise in a true Catholic environment any children that God wishes to present them with, they have a right to continued and constant spiritual care after a spouse dies
- ❖ **the order of spouses is the canonical term for husband and wife after the sacramental marriage ceremony is completed –**

this true order makes the individuals/couple a dear and venerable asset to the life of the Church – together with the order of priests and deacons – they are a sign of God's love, his providential care and concern for all people he creates and assigns tasks to within the community of the Church – it is a privilege and an honor to be numbered in the order of spouses!

- ❖ **marriage is here to stay** – it is as old as Adam and Eve – and something way back there went terribly wrong – which all but meant the death-knell for it – but, as it was created by God – it is essentially good, and essentially here to stay until the end of the world – what is making this day in age so prone to the dissolution of marriage all together is the fact that the remedy for the ills of marriage – all of them have been provided – by God – but very, very few persons on the face of the earth know about them or care to know about them
- ❖ **what you can do to help is to read this article and let everyone you know understand that MARRIAGE IS FIXABLE** – it can be a true JOY, it can be a true BEACON OF LIGHT in the world today – with the proper understanding of JOY and LIGHT!
- ❖ read on:

CHAPTER ONE – A REMARKABLE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

Much about what I will have to say in the rest of this article is based among other important works, on Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." It must be understood that this "theology" is a monumental contribution to the explanation of revelation as it comes to us from God. Just there is a theology of St. Paul, and a theology of St. John, there are also theologies of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and now, as of late (not yet, but close St.) John Paul II.

A theology is a total theological world view presentation of the story of God and how he deals with creation. *Theology of the Body* qualifies in every sense of the term. What makes this theology so attractive is that it is very practical and down to earth – in fact it is the study of the embodiment of God's loves in all of creation but in particular his most prized creation: man and woman, in his own image and likeness. When we look at our bodies what we ought to be seeing is the vast design of God for the whole universe – and our participation in God's love – his eternal activity of exchanging love.

The actual text of this theology was delivered by the Pope in brief passages on 129 consecutive Wednesdays from 1979 to 1984 – in his General Audience from his balcony at the Vatican. Greatly misunderstood as it came out in unapologetically concise and theological terms – in time – the true essence of what he was trying to convey was released, no doubt by the Holy Spirit – and Church history began to be made in a very concrete and laudable way!

The "Theology of the Body" has everything to do with marriage. It has everything to do with celibacy. It has everything to do with life on planet earth as we prepare for the Eternal Wedding Feast of Heaven which will commence on the Last Day! How very exciting it all is!

The most important thing any two people who are thinking about contracting a marriage must get into their heads is that "marriage is all about GOD" and about them only secondarily! Any and all life, but especially human life is about GOD. None of creation had to come into

existence. It is here because God, who is LOVE, decided to share his love with, primarily, other persons – who resemble him a great deal! And so he prepared an environment for his highest form of creation and then he created our first parents – Adam and Eve – in his image and likeness; that is, as persons, who were meant to share his life of glory.

The point to emphasis in this creation is that they were created to give glory and praise to God, while participating in that glory themselves. In other words, the more conscious they were of this dynamic – the more they would “get” out of life by “giving” themselves completely to each other, so to enhance their own happiness and God’s glory.

It is deeply disturbing to see how this dynamic is ignored, twisted and violated throughout the history of mankind and especially in our own day. Our entire culture thrives on the exact opposite: “glory to man in the lowest” places of the substrata of civilization. Grabbing and getting for one’s self is the pearl of great price. This is not only twisted, it is sinful and anti-Christ to the enth degree. Do we really understand that this is happening? Do we really care? We should. We WILL be accountable one day for the decisions we make in this regard! No one will be exempt!

Not all marriages lack the depth perception of God’s original plan; many couples have heeded the message of *salvation* and *freedom* that comes from clinging to Jesus, the Way and the Life and the Truth about everything, including marriage. And they testify by a fruitful and productive love and marriage that it can work as it was meant to “in the beginning” – if it is tied securely and permanently to the Cross of Christ: more about that later.

Marriage is then meant to be a grand and glorious sign of who God is in himself – so that we can have some tangible and visible assurance that the supernatural is what counts most, and that the transformation of the natural into the supernatural is a process that has strict rules and guidelines in order to be successful. It all has everything to do with Christ Jesus as we will see later in this article.

CHAPTER TWO – LOOK NO FURTHER THAN YOUR BODY

So, in what way did God provide an eminent sign of his reality on earth from the beginning of creation? The sign resides in the total reality of the man and woman that he created. He chose these two to signify his own self-giving essence. The sign begins with the physical bodies of the man and the woman themselves, but it also incorporates all else that comprises the personalities of each, which derive from their physical composition. The man and the woman were created to complement one another fully and entirely – so much so, that, they can only be truly complete if they give themselves entirely to one another in a great act of self-donation which has as its chief sign the joining of the two into one flesh; or the same act of total self-donation to God directly by incorporation into a separate order of celibates which reflects the joining of the Church as Bride with Christ the Bridegroom.

This stamp of God upon our very bodies – the stamp of an innate desire to give of oneself to another – cannot and should not be diminished or forgotten – ever.

The way it reflects the essence of God himself is this: God the Father is eternally giving himself, giving love to his Son, who returns the love, the gift, completely; the Holy Spirit is the love, and the gift. In marriage, the husband gives himself, gives love in a self-sacrificial way to the wife, and she gives herself in the very same way to him. The love that they share is also fruitful: it produces something tangible: a child, a visible manifestation of their act of self-less self-giving. And so, marriage and family life are intimately bound up with the very essence of God as he exists; and for us who live on earth, a tangible sign of God's existence and essence in which we can participate freely and joyfully.

“In the beginning” Adam and Eve, thus created in God's image and likeness were unclothed and felt no shame as they gazed at each other, and they felt no inner compulsion to initiate or dominate the relationship in any way. They were perfectly happy, walking with God in the solitude of his peace, joy and happiness in the wonderful Garden that he provided for their

pleasure. But then came the sin – and with the sin – a total unraveling of God’s original plan for man’s happiness. And with the unraveling came a twisted, distorted and hostile world in which to live – which touched every part of their lives including how they viewed each other, and how they related to each other. Lust and domination and fear entered in and the world has never been the same since – until... but that is later in the story.

Suffice it to say for now that, after the Fall, participation in the eternal exchange of love which was God himself, was the farthest thing from Adam and Eve’s mind. Groveling their way through life, estranged from one another – they had all they could do just to survive – and just barely surviving they did – until... but that is later in the story.

CHAPTER THREE – TOWARDS THE CREATION OF THE ONE GREAT FAMILY OF GOD

God the Father has done two astounding things for each of us: he loved us so very much as to not to be able to picture eternity without each and every one of us; and he also provided a means for us all to successfully navigate through the oft times dangerous waters of earthly life to the shores of eternal life. And that life – because of the death and resurrection of Jesus - is now eternal – rest assured of that. The choice that we get to make, however, is just exactly where we are going to spend that eternity: with God and our brothers and sisters in heaven; or with the devil and his fallen angels in a fiery hell.

It seems like a “no-brainer” – but apparently many, a great many, opt for the second choice – as is manifested in the way they are participating in human life right now and making or failing to make critical decisions that have everything to do with their eternal placement.

Jesus, the very Word of God: Truth, came to spell out the instructions on how to achieve the amazing and blessed experience that is now available to all – but, how many are taking to time to “check it out” – to “tune in” to his

“wavelength” and afford themselves the opportunity to end up in the right place when the time of righteousness comes!

The Church – which is the true Body of Christ – still proclaims the instructions loudly and clearly, and offers the sacramental helps given by Jesus himself to put them into practice. On the Last Day Jesus will be able to say: I did everything I could to get your attention – and to help you decide where it is you want me now to assign you for all eternity: heaven or hell! And then, basically, we will tell him where we have decided to go: and he will tell us then to go there and stay there - forever!

Now what does this have to do with marriage? Marriage is meant to be a trying on of the golden slipper! A truly Christ-centered marriage lived out in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit is in a sense a full dress-rehearsal for the Marriage Feast of Heaven to which we are all invited – and which will actually occur, beginning on that Last Day. The more the husband and wife come to know about, learn and practice true self-sacrificial love in the ordinary daily activities of married life – the more ready they will be for the Nuptial Feast of Heaven. They will “get” what is going on when they arrive there!

The fact that their physical mutual self-giving is productive of new life in cooperation with God / Creator of all – is again representative of the reality of God himself – as the love between himself and his Son produces the Holy Spirit.

Living fully the family life of marriage is not only the most excellent form of “practice” for life in heaven: it is also a true and sacramental sign of it! When other family members and friends, and society at large looks at married couples they should say: **THIS IS WHAT GOD AND LIFE IN HEAVEN ARE ALL ABOUT!** If this cannot be said of your marriage: maybe you simply didn’t know that it could; maybe now you can get more information about it and try it out! God’s love, God’s grace, God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness, God’s Spirit will be there to help you at each and every moment! This is what the sacrament of marriage is really all about!

CHAPTER FOUR – THE THIRD CROSS AND THE ORDER OF SPOUSES

The proverbial “happily-ever-after” of a “fairy-tale wedding” remains just that – a proverbial, wishful-thinking kind of fantasy borne of unrealistic expectations. Not that there is not going to be a “happy-ending” – but the ending is the ending, the journey to the ending is far from consistently and unnaturally blissful!

A couple who, when approaching marriage, list as their main goal “to be happy come what may! – are in for a big let-down when reality sets in. When the honeymoon is over, the honeymoon is over – and it needs to remain over! What opens up with the end of the honeymoon is a whole new life full of amazing and seemingly incomprehensible contradictions – which in actuality are two-sides of the one coin of real married life.

A real marriage must be filled with joy *and sorrow*; pleasure *and pain*; health *and sickness*; good times and *bad times*; communication *and lack of communication*; smoothness *and roughness*. Unless and until these elements are experienced by the couple – then their marriage remains in an infant stage.

Why does this have to be so? why, especially, for those who contract a marriage that is also a sacrament – imbued with the presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The sacramental presence of God provides the key to the understanding of this seeming dilemma.

Jesus tells anyone and everyone who wants to be a disciple, to be not only a member of the Church on earth, but of the family of God, one day, in heaven – that the only way to get there is **to imitate him entirely** – and that includes picking up the cross that we are assigned and carrying it lovingly, generously and bravely throughout our entire lives – with the help of the Blessed Trinity in the sacraments. With that kind of help how could we go wrong?

And so, sacramentally, married couples need to heed Jesus’ words very carefully – and JOYFULLY carry the individual and joint crosses that God

the Father, so carefully and lovingly dispatches to them in their new state in life. They are absolutely perfect for each and every situation.

The one condition for successful transporting of the crosses is complete obedience to what they entail and complete trust that everything will turn out just fine in the end. They come from God the Father – they cannot not be best! The inherent and absolutely essential positive creative and loving tension between the two partners in a marriage often-times is of the very heart and essence of the crosses to bear, but also the joys to be experienced. Presence (being there) and fidelity and commitment and loyalty and self-sacrificial loving of one to the other is vital to the spiritual and material lives of the individuals and the marriage itself.

To walk away from a marriage because things become difficult is to deny that the difficulties that Jesus endured for us mean anything at all. Because of how he saw things through to the end – the death, darkness and hatred that was swallowed him up were transformed by the Holy Spirit of God into life, light and love.

By our Baptism and Confirmation we are plugged into that very death and resurrection. We can now tap into the power of the Holy Spirit to see us through any difficulty as well – and our marriages can radiate the dying/rising dynamic that is part and parcel of our own salvation! The sun will always, always, always come out for the married couple who stick it out – and who rely on the gifts and presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in their marriage – that is, if they understood at least the basic elements of this dynamic before they were married – during their marriage preparation instructions.

And so, I like to call the thankfully inescapable cross of the relationship that begins in earnestness on the wedding day as the **THIRD CROSS OF THE ORDER OF SPOUSES**. I have written a separate article on the “third cross of the order of priests.” Most, if not all, marriages can make it – if the participants – husband, wife, children all rely on their membership in the Church with all that it has to offer both interiorly and exteriorly!

CHAPTER FIVE – THE ORDER OF SPOUSES: RIGHTS & DUTIES

Since marriage as Pope John Paul II puts it in “Theology of the Body” is the *primordial sacrament* – a most excellent sign of God’s presence in the history of the world, which points to his own reality – God has endowed the married state with everything it needs to be successful – when entered into with full knowledge, freedom and good will.

This life-long joining of man and woman carries with it very specific rights and duties –

- the right to the help and blessings of God the Father; Jesus, his Son and the Holy Spirit who instituted the sacrament in the first place
 - the right of the help of the Church – created by the same Blessed Trinity – in preparing the couple fully to enter into marriage – and then to help them maintain a healthy and spiritually as well as temporally successful relationship
 - the right of the help of fellow Catholics, especially from others who are also enrolled in the Order of Spouses
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- the duty to live, with God’s help, as true Catholic spouses within the community of the Church – being accountable to the community
 - the duty to co-create and lovingly raise, with the help of God, any children that God wishes to present the spouses with
 - the duty to be a primordial sign of God’s eternal reality in himself – thus, to point the way to the Nuptial Banquet of Heaven in which everyone is called to participate

With such a secure and solid foundation – knowingly and willingly entered into by intellectually, emotionally and spiritual mature individuals – these kind of marriages are destined to be magnificent signs of God’s love to all involved – and they will definitely last “until death do they part!”

CHAPTER SIX – THE FORGOTTEN TITLE

The above mentioned “order of spouses” is the canonical (church law) term for husband and wife after the sacramental marriage ceremony is completed. This is all but a forgotten and rarely-mentioned term. But it is most assuredly an essential and important one. It gives a spiritual depth and integrity to what takes place on the wedding day. It give pause for adequate reflection, meditation, prayer, discussion and soul-searching both as individuals and as a potential “couple” for those seeking to join this order.

Inclusion in this order makes the individuals/couple a dear and venerable asset to the life of the Church. Together with the order of priests and deacons – they are a sign of God’s love, his providential care and concern for all people he creates and assigns tasks to within the community of the Church.

It is a privilege and an honor, as well as a source of inspiration and motivation to be a member in good standing of the order of spouses!

CHAPTER SEVEN– MARRIAGE BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN IS HERE TO STAY

Marriage is here to stay. Couples have been called by God to enter into this special relationship beginning with Adam and Eve. It was not the marriage that went wrong when the sin occurred – it was rather the sinful decisions of the individuals within the marriage. But as a result the marriage relationship itself became severely distorted and strained. John Paul II describes the original solitude, the original nakedness, the original integrity that the couple enjoyed – and the amazingly wonderful relationship they had with God their Father and Creator. They participated fully in the glory of God – participation in the complete unselfish self-donation that is of its essence.

But with the sin came estrangement, shame, lust, domination and all but complete selfish self-centeredness.

But, nonetheless, since marriage was created by God – it was essentially good and essentially permanent. It was created to be around until the end of the world. *Men must not put asunder what God has joined together!*

Is it really possible for marriage to survive at all – as sin-laden as the world and individuals in it seem to be? Everything that is destructive about society also seems to be present in marriage – what is the solution?

It may sound simplistic – but the answer lies in **the real definitions of truth and love** – *as defined by God* – and not by any of us. We are not smart enough to define either – with unaided intellect. The light of grace is necessary to have any understanding at all!

God has given us the very answer to these questions – but very few people know about it or care about it – and therefore society continues on a downward spiral, and marriages end in the trash-bin each and every day!

So what is the solution?....

Read on:

CHAPTER EIGHT– THE ONE SOLUTION IS “CHRIST OUR HOPE!”

The one solution to the delinquency of the global society and the dissolution of marriage is Jesus Christ! Not that there are not a host of auxiliary and satellite solutions that in one way another participate in what he has done for us – but – cutting to the quick – **the TRUTH and the LOVE involved in the solution are all about Jesus**. If Jesus did not do what he did – by coming to this world, and redeeming it by his precious act of self-sacrificial love –(death on a cross followed by a glorious resurrection and entrance into a newness of life) – then there would be no hope for anyone concerning resolution to any conflict ever. Sin would have won! However...

Jesus *did come* – and he *did do* these things, and so everything that has anything to do with reconciliation, regeneration, rebirth, renewal, newness

of life originates in him. **No one else in the history of the world was qualified to do what he did and make it efficacious as it truly is.**

And so, **MARRIAGE IS FIXABLE!** It can be a true JOY! It can be a BEACON OF LIGHT in the world today – with the proper understanding of joy and light. As was mentioned above – the contradictions that are a part of marriage (joy/sorrow; health/sickness; pleasure/pain etc) are essential to a balanced and successful marriage. Any life has sorrow, sickness and pain in it – but because of the merits of Jesus redemptive act – these can all most assuredly be transformed into their opposites: joy, health, pleasure. The dark parts of life are transformed into light; the dead parts into life; the hateful parts in love.

But the secret is to embrace *both* the “cross” and the “resurrection” that is involved in each case! To want only the “resurrection” is to be illogical, selfish and unbalanced.

Jesus said: “I carried my cross; now you carry yours! But don’t forget there will always be a resurrection for every crucifixion!”

This is the primary solution! This solution is found in a complete, comprehensive and very readable fashion in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Avail yourself of a peek into the solutions to perplexing problems – get yourself a copy of “The Catechism of the Catholic Church” – either the complete version, or the “Compendium” version.

CHAPTER NINE– MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

Briefly: marriage and celibacy are the same call to eternal life.

- marriage is a “sign” of what is coming – eternal life of self-giving!
- celibacy is the “actual presence” of what is coming – though incomplete and precursory!

CHAPTER TEN – THE WEDDING FEAST OF THE LAMB

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb is where it is all leading. It is what marriage is pointing to; it is what celibacy is the real presence of (though in an incomplete and imperfect way)! The Marriage Feast of the Lamb refers to the joining of Christ the Bridegroom with his beloved Bride: The Church – on the last day – when he will *bring his bride to perfection* and *celebrate a nuptial banquet* with all participants that will last forever!

Jesus is the Lamb of God – who came to take away the sins of the world – and to draw his Bride (The Church) to himself in the Kingdom of God his Father and ours!

What a glorious day that will be for those wearing the wedding garment of faith in him; what a tragic day for those not wearing such a garment! He gives us our entire lives to reach a decision for him – or against him! He gives us every opportunity to be a participant in the banquet! For those married couples who – hopefully – early on in their marriages (but it can begin anytime) understand how their relationship has mirrored that of Christ and his Church – a great mystery – that will one day be revealed – everything will make perfect sense – especially the concept of *obedience*. Jesus was thoroughly committed to the will of God through OBEDIENCE. Married couples need to be completely committed to that obedience in the same fashion - as it plays itself out in their family relationships!

Thank you God for creating the primordial sacrament of marriage; and the Christian Sacrament of Marriage; and the presence in the world of Christian Celibates - to educate us in your ways and to prepare us for eternal life!

On that grand and glorious day: together with all creation we will sing with the entire communion of angels and saints:

***Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise –
forever and ev***



Behold, the Lamb of God – who takes away the sins of the world!

Father William Dinga, Jr.
May 11, 2008
Solemnity of Pentecost