



KEEPING
YOUR
MARRIAGE
CATHOLIC

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Six keys TO keeping your marriage Catholic

BY JOHN BOSIO

**FINDING THE
BLUEPRINT
FOR A LOVING
MARRIAGE MAY
BE AS SIMPLE
AS GOING TO
SUNDAY MASS**

Recently, as our 36th wedding anniversary approached, my wife, Teri, pulled out a box of old letters. They were the letters that we wrote to each other when we were engaged. "Let's read



them together!” she said. I agreed. We were curious about what we wrote; it was the first time we would be reading the letters since they were written.

Before we were married, there was a period of three months when Teri and I were carrying out a long-distance relationship. We wrote to each other daily about what was going on in our lives and families, current events in our respective countries, and the

frustrations of being an ocean apart. Now, 36 years later, we read the letters again and laughed at the stories we told, recalled events long forgotten, and were reminded of how we felt about each other and about marriage at that time. I was struck in particular by how our hopes and dreams for a life together as a married couple were shaped by our Catholic faith and the values and traditions we grew up with in our families.

Life as a married couple has not always been easy for us, and our relationship has had its ups and downs, especially in the early years when the children were young and our budget was tight. We struggled to make time for each other while trying to keep up with the demands of home, work, school, and even church activities. Time for each other seemed to often lose, and because of it our relationship would become strained. Over the years there have also been serious illnesses, losses of jobs, and moves to new cities, each of which brought their share of adjustments and stresses.

Thankfully, Teri and I found a source of strength and guidance for our relationship in our Catholic faith. Prayer and Sun-

What Catholics believe about marriage

- Marriage is a sacrament; one of the seven sacraments through which Christ makes us holy.
- It is a lifestyle of total dedication and self-giving to each other that reflects God's love for humanity and Christ's love for the Church.
- Because God's love is always faithful and his covenant unbreakable, the marital bond that represents it is also indissoluble.
- Marriage is a vocation, a call by God to be collaborators with Him in bringing new life into the world and creating a family that is the first school of faith and love.
- As collaborators with God, husband and wife are guided by the Church to responsible parenthood through natural means of birth regulation that conform to God's design for human sexuality.
- Through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in the relationship and gives spouses the graces to endure the challenges of their vocation. ■ JOHN BOSIO



day Mass attendance have been central to our life as a couple. Throughout our 36 years together we always felt a desire not only to attend Mass but to do so with each other.

Prayer and Mass attendance are an important part of the spiritual practice of Catholic couples. Unfortunately, it is easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of family activities and let Sunday's Mass attendance become a lesser priority. What couples do not realize is how they shortchange themselves and their children by choosing to let other activities replace Sunday Mass. A recent survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Aposto-

late (CARA) for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops found that Mass attendance and being active in the parish community are activities that affect a couple's beliefs about marriage, their attitude toward each other, and their marital satisfaction. Christian spouses learn the true meaning of love when they gather around the altar at Mass. As Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, "The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage" (No. 57).

When spouses attend the Sunday liturgy, they bring their marriage to Mass. Even when they attend alone, their whole marriage is there because spouses

The Catholic Church **cares** about your marriage

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have launched an initiative in support of marriages. This effort, known as the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage, is a multi-year project to communicate the meaning and value of married life. The bishops want to make the Church a community of hope and help for marriages. The bishops' initiative offers guidance and resources to married couples and to those preparing for marriage. One of the resources is the Web site: foryourmarriage.org, which offers help for couples at all stages of their marriage. To assist the bishops, the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers is hosting a "Becoming a Marriage-Building Church" conference in June. Information can be found at nacflm.org.

are a part of each other's lives, and because whatever one does affects the other for good or for bad. During the celebration of the Eucharist, God, the third partner in the marital relationship, feeds the couple. God speaks to spouses

sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. There are many poignant moments during the liturgy that challenge every married couple. How can spouses remain distant and angry when acknowledging their personal sinfulness: "I confess that I

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through the Scripture readings and reminds them of the self-giving love He wants them to nurture in their relationship.

Recently, while attending Sunday Mass, I was listening to the lector proclaim the words of St. Paul: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Suddenly the movements of a young couple in the pew in front of me caught my eye. As the lector read: "Love is kind, love is not rude," the wife gently elbowed her husband and looked at him with a grin that said, *Are you listening?* The husband turned to her with a contrite smile and whispered, "I heard it! He is speaking to me."

Yes, Mass is the place where God graces husband and wife with his wisdom and strength — not only through the readings and the homily, but also through the

have sinned..." and then praying: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?" Later they turn to each other and say, "The peace of Christ be with you" and shake hands or kiss. Finally, they go to the altar to receive the Body of Christ as the nourishment for their faith and for their relationship. These in themselves are moments that should make us want to go to Mass. Through them we renew our commitment to love, and we grow in communion with God and one another.

In the celebration of the Mass, married couples find the Catholic blueprint for building a loving relationship. John Paul II wrote that husbands and wives discover in Christ the point of reference for their spousal love. In the Eucharistic celebration we discover the attributes of the love with which Christ loves his bride,

the Church. Such love requires accepting the beloved; committing to always being present; being willing to sacrifice; forgiving; comforting and healing; and serving God and one another.

THE CATHOLIC BLUEPRINT FOR A LOVING MARRIAGE

1) **Accepting the beloved:** Spouses who want to love like Christ loves learn to accept each other without conditions. Such acceptance is manifested in patience and tolerance for each other's imperfections and idiosyncrasies. It is expressed in overlooking annoying habits or preferences that we do not care for. Without tolerance, spouses cannot

ity, being honest, and not giving up on the relationship even in the face of betrayals big and small.

3) **Being willing to sacrifice:** The Mass is a renewal and a celebration of Christ's self-sacrifice on the Cross. Growth in marital intimacy comes about through self-sacrifice. For Catholic couples, this means letting go of our self-centered tendencies in order to make room for our spouse in our life. It means making time to listen and to understand how our spouse feels or what our spouse thinks and wants. It means giving up wishes to accommodate our spouse's needs. It also means going out of our way to do some-

GROWTH IN MARITAL INTIMACY COMES ABOUT THROUGH SELF-SACRIFICE.

build a loving relationship, nor can they keep the conflicts that are inherent in any marriage from tearing them apart.

2) **Committing to always being present:** The message we hear at Mass in the Liturgy of the Word is that God will never walk away or turn his back on us. Husband and wife have to be willing to do the same. This means paying attention to each other's needs, making each other the number-one prior-

thing nice for our spouse just because we care.

4) **Forgiving:** In the Mass, Christ forgives us and invites us to forgive one another. Forgiving is difficult because it is more than "not getting even." It means letting go of the anger, the fear, and the hurt we feel. If we cannot purge ourselves of these negative emotions, they will destroy the relationship.

5) **Comforting and healing:** To

love like Christ loves the Church means being compassionate toward our spouse. It means reaching out to help each other heal spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Spouses are the best healers of each other, as has been proven many times by research on couples. Helping our spouse heal is done with attentive presence, physical touch, kind words of support and encouragement, and taking action on behalf of the spouse in need.

6) Serving God and one another: Christ tells us that He came to serve, not to be served. This message applies to Christian spouses. Their life together is not intended for them alone, but it is a response to God's call to serve Him, and to serve one another and their community. Marriage is a call to give life to the next

Catholic practices to strengthen your marriage

Attend Mass regularly

Make use of the sacrament of Reconciliation

Develop personal prayer habits that fit your lifestyle

Carry on a conversation with God during your day

Say a prayer before your meals

Pray before bedtime and upon waking up

Pray the Rosary as a family

Pray for the peaceful repose of family members who have died

Pray to the saints for their intercession in moments of difficulty or need

Follow the teaching of the Church about responsible parenthood

Celebrate the feast day of each family member

Celebrate the Church seasons in your home (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc.)

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generation, not only by conception but also in the role of mother and father, educators, spiritual guides, and models of faith. It is carrying out the chores of daily life — like preparing meals, doing the laundry, changing diapers, going to work to provide for the family, etc. — in a spirit of service to each other.

Mastering these qualities of Christian love brings joy to spous-

es, the joy that Christ promised his followers: “Love one another as I have loved you... I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11-12).

After 36 years, Teri and I look back on our marriage with gratitude. The dreams and hopes for marriage we expressed in our letters were our way of searching for a blueprint for our relationship. We found the blueprint in our Catholic faith. In the Mass, we found the nourishment and strength needed to grow as a couple and to raise



WHERE TO GET THE BOOK

Happy Together: The Catholic Blueprint for a Loving Marriage is available from Twenty-Third Publications (twentythirdpublications.com; 800-321-0411

(Twenty-Third Publications). He and his wife, Teri, have been married 36 years.

a family. Today, as grandparents, we pray for the same gifts for our children and their children. May they draw from their Catholic tradition the guidance and strength to follow God’s call to serve Him. **CD**

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MORE THAN JUST DUST BUNNIES...

Little Jonnie was coming home from church one Saturday morning with his mother. His mother noticed he had a very serious look on his face.

“What’s on your mind, Jonnie?” she asked.

“Is it true what Father said about us all coming from dust and all turning back to dust?”

“Yes, it is, Jonnie,” she said. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, then when we get home,” he answered, “you better look under my bed, because someone’s either comin’ or goin!”

■ FROM *THE BOOK OF CATHOLIC JOKES* BY TOM SHERIDON

Marriage AND THE Mass

BY JOHN BOSIO

**FOUR MOMENTS THAT CAN
STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

Every time spouses participate in the celebration of the Eucharist together, they have an opportunity to worship God and to strengthen their bond. Mass is, for husband and wife, a clear invitation to love each other as Christ loves the Church and thus be transformed. Here are four of the many moments at Mass that can help us strengthen our marriages:

THE INTRODUCTORY GREETING

Let this be the moment in which you make a special effort to remember your wedding promise to welcome and accept your spouse into your life. At your wedding you said, "I take you to be my spouse." Today, you are much



Prayer for couples

Oh Lord, our God,
We thank you for bringing
us together as
husband and wife.
We ask your Spirit to open our
hearts, and we ask your
Son to teach us to love.
To grow in communion with
you and with each other
is what we desire.
Grant us the will to welcome
and accept each other,
the perseverance to keep
our promise to always be
present to each other,
and the generosity to give
unselfishly day after day.
Grant us the humility to
ask forgiveness and the
courage to forgive,
the compassion to console
and the care to heal.
Grant us the eagerness to
serve without expecting
to be served.
With your help our unity
will grow to resemble
your communion,
and our hearts will be
filled with joy.
This we ask through Jesus,
your Son and our brother.
Amen

■ JOHN BOSIO

more aware than on your wedding day of what it means to welcome and accept this unique person. You know your spouse's strengths and weaknesses; you know what you like about this individual and what you do not like. Thank God for the happiness your spouse brings to you, and ask for God's help to accept your mate as he or she is even with the imperfections that cause you discomfort from time to time.

THE PENITENTIAL RITE

"I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters (husband/wife) that I have sinned..." When we pay attention and truly mean what we say, we can find ourselves moved by the grace of God. Our hearts can be softened and our intolerant and judgmental attitude toward our spouse melted away.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

As you join in giving praise and thanks to God, think about how you express your gratitude to your spouse. One of the main problems in marriage comes from the fact that spouses take each other for granted. We know how much our spouse gives to the relationship, but often we do not acknowledge our beloved's giving, and by taking it for granted, our mutual connec-

tion loses energy. We gradually drift apart. Resolve to say “thank you” to your spouse for everything he or she does for you. Appreciation is not expressed only in words. It can be said with a smile, a touch, a special glance, a note, a kiss, and in many other ways.

The Eucharistic prayer also reminds us that, to follow Christ’s example, we must be willing to give and to make sacrifices for the good of the relationship. Ask yourself: Am I giving my spouse

THE DISMISSAL

The grace received during the celebration of the Mass does not stay within the confines of the church building. Couples carry these blessings with them when they leave to go home.

A touch, a look, a gesture, a kind word, a silent pause, a smile — these are all behaviors that resonate God’s love celebrated at Mass. They convey messages to your spouse that say, “It’s OK. I don’t mind.” “You are important

REMEMBER THAT THE GIVING AND THE RECEIVING THAT GOES ON EACH DAY IN A MARRIAGE ARE THE ESSENCE OF YOUR LOVE.

the attention I promised? Am I being honest with my spouse as I said I would? Am I sharing with my spouse my thoughts, my wishes, my plans? Am I willing to listen without interrupting so that I can understand what my spouse wants and thinks? Am I willing to make compromises when my spouse and I have a conflict? Am I willing to take the first step in making peace when we have a disagreement? Remember that the giving and receiving that goes on each day in a marriage are the essence of your love. Improving the quality of this mutual self-giving is the secret to your marital happiness.

to me.” “I trust you.” “You are part of my life.” “You can count on me!” “Please forgive me.” “I care about you.” “How can I help you?” Your acts of love keep the communion that exists between you and your spouse growing, and that communion spreads to your family and to your neighborhood. Your interactions have a sacramental power. Each of your actions touches the other person in a way that gives your spouse a taste of the goodness of God’s love. **GD**

Excerpted and adapted from *Happy Together: The Catholic Blueprint for a Loving Marriage* (Twenty-Third Publications; happy-together.net)