

The Church Cares About Your Marriage

By John Bosio

Recently, Teri and I had the opportunity of meeting with the RCIA class at St. Henry's parish in Nashville, Tennessee. We were impressed by the size of the class, and were even more impressed by the questions and the interest on the topic of the evening: The Sacrament of Matrimony.

In spite of all the current controversies about marriage, or perhaps because of the controversies, Catholic couples are interested in learning what we Catholics believe about such topics as marriage, cohabitation, divorce and annulments, contraception, etc.

This past November the Bishops of the United States gave us a wonderful gift. They published a document, a pastoral letter that intends to answer today's questions and helps Catholic couples to appreciate their Christian vocation. They write that marriage is an authentic vocation, a divine call, a path to holiness.

The pastoral letter is called, **Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan**. You can find this document on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' web site: <http://www.usccb.org/laity/LoveandLife/>.

In this document the bishops remind us that marriage was created by God. The gift of marriage, they state, is something we receive from God and “not something we construct or change to fit our purposes.” The Bishops summarize the wisdom and teachings of the Catholic Tradition on marriage by reminding us that marriage is a life long partnership between a man and a woman. Such mutual partnership is ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation of offspring.

Marriage is not a private institution that husband and wife create for their own benefit and purpose. Marriage is a divine call with a purpose designed by God. Husband and wife are called to serve God as spouses and as parents. Marriage is the foundation for the family. Children are the “supreme gift of marriage” write the Bishops.

Through this document the United States Bishops encourage every couple to acknowledge their call from God, and to let God’s grace help them fulfill it by growing in virtue, especially the virtue of love. Love is the heart of the vocation of marriage. Christ is the model to spouses of such love, and through their love for each other spouses make Christ’s love visible to others. That is what we mean when we call marriage a sacrament.

The Bishops exhort spouses to “Become what you are.” In other words: become the sacrament that you are. They use the word “become” because learning to love is a life-long journey. Such journey requires us to overcome our shortcomings and imperfections. To succeed we need the help of God’s grace.

The document closes with a reminder that the Eucharist, the participation in the Mass, is the source of graces for spouses. The Bishops write: “In the Eucharist, spouses encounter the love that animates and sustains their marriage, the love of Christ for his Church.” To strengthen your marriage attend Mass regularly.

The Catholic Church cares, and wants you to find happiness in your marriage. To help you the United States Catholic Bishops have created a website for couples. You will find many resources at: <http://foryourmarriage.org/>.

Question for Reflection: What can I do today for my spouse that is likely to give him/her a taste of God’s goodness and love?

