

Life Issues Forum

“Marriage—a Natural and Supernatural Gift”

By Theresa Notare

Our faith tells us that all is gift—human life, the created world, the call to participate in God’s love through Jesus our savior—all is gift. Among the fundamental gifts that God has given men and women is that of marriage. Today, this gift is frequently left “unopened” as it were. In fact, it is often neglected, damaged, mishandled, or even rejected.

Many modern trends assault marriage. The practice of multiple sexual partners before marriage damages a person’s ability to be faithful. The extreme emphasis on fulfilling one’s individual needs weakens the ability to be self-sacrificing. The use of contraception tears at the gift of life. The rise in cohabitation outright rejects God’s gift of marriage.

The bishops are concerned about these dangerous trends and how they affect the health of marriage. In their pastoral letter, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, they invite us to reflect on marriage as a natural and a supernatural gift from God to men and women. This is a gift that must be properly understood and prepared for carefully.

Sacred Scripture reveals that God designed marriage for the well-being of His people. Marriage is a blessing that affects everyone, whether married or not. Marriage nurtures spouses, creates family and builds up society. Given the nature of marriage, the Church proclaims it as a vocation, a call by God to share in His Trinitarian and creative love. These simple but profound points are at the heart of Catholic teaching on marriage.

Marriage, the Catholic Church proclaims, has God as its author. In the contemporary world, where the spotlight is often on the talents and abilities of men and women, it is easy to think that even marriage is a human invention. Our faith tells us otherwise: “Marriage . . . is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love” (*Humanae vitae*, #8).

Marriage is an “original blessing” that God gave men and women from the “beginning of the world” for the good of humanity. So critical is this blessing that it was not lost by sin, rather, it was redeemed by Christ. The Genesis stories speak about God creating man and woman “in His image” (Gn.1:27). Being made in God’s image has profound meaning. Only humanity holds both the material world and the spiritual world in its nature (see *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #355). Only men and women are “able to know and love” God. (*Gaudium et spes* #12). Only men and women are able to share in God’s love.

Every man and woman possesses the gifts to give and receive love that is selfless, faithful, total, permanent and fruitful. God inscribed these gifts in “the very nature of man and woman.” Taken together, they enable husband and wife to take sacred vows and live their mutual vocation of marriage. Husband and wife are ministers of love and life, and with the Lord God, are architects of the family.

Each of us needs to nurture carefully the image of God within. We need to reflect on His Word and participate in His sacraments. If we hope to strengthen marriage—either our own, or support the marriage of those we love—we need to do our part to study and meditate on God’s design for married love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good place to start. Also, the bishops’ marriage pastoral provides a useful summary of

our beliefs. Most importantly, we need to practice the virtues—especially chastity and charity. In these ways, we can do our part to accept God’s gift of marriage.

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