
A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION FOR LOVERS



What would be your reaction in reading the following information in your church bulletin: "On the occasion of the Jubilee of the Year 2000, there will be a blessing of engaged couples who desire it, on the Sunday prior to St. Valentine's Day. This celebration will be held very simply."

ECONOMIC CAUSES

Several couples who are now living together without the benefit of marriage maintain that it is too costly to get married today, that this is one of the main reasons keeping them from having a church or even civil wedding. Often, also, we are told that church weddings are more expensive than civil ones. I hasten to point out that the diocesan stipend for celebrating marriages is one hundred dollars, and that such an amount should not stand in the way of having a Christian marriage; each parish should take into consideration the plight of needy persons. Nevertheless, I believe that couples are especially referring to the high cost of preparations, invitations, dresses and suits, pictures and wedding receptions. People even refer to the "marriage industry" along with the "baby industry" and the "death industry," as costs are so grossly prohibitive. A couple I recently met told me that they had already estimated \$16,000 for their wedding, while everything could be done for less than five hundred dollars.

DOING OTHERWISE!

If we aim at essentials, the situation could be improved a lot more cheaply! It is true that certain traditions are hard to break, especially if we want to continue what had been the norm in the early past. "Our children were all married with a certain fanfare; we have always been happy to invite relatives and friends, the uncles, aunts, and cousins; there has always been a wedding reception at the hotel, and we have always had good photographers. It is true that these are expensive nowadays, but then, one gets married only once!" Far from me to scorn family traditions which have distinguished and still distinguish our milieu. "We love to celebrate, and a wedding is a celebration: it must be celebrated!"

SOLIDARITY

The economic reason is not the only explanation to living together outside marriage; other motives, such as fear of long-term commitments and mutual incompatibility play a considerable role in decisions taken. The pendulum swings from one side to the other: "In days gone by, everybody married; nowadays, people seldom are!" It is in such a context that community engagements and even community weddings could be held. The Christian community to which the couple belong or will belong must rejoice at having in its midst young and older lovers; it must exhibit its joy and solidarity very simply, in respect of decisions taken by each couple.

FREEDOM

Marriage commitments must be entirely free. This is one of the conditions for the validity of a marriage. Marriage assumes that the future spouses commit themselves to one another without any pressure from others, that they promise life-long fidelity to one another and accept the responsibility of spouses and parents, the wedding liturgy asserts. If couples today decide by themselves the general outline and the details of their wedding without undue interference or unfortunate advice, we can trust that things will be well. The day could come when there would be communal wedding celebrations: Montreal once had a fifty-couple wedding celebration. But for this, quality preparation is a requisite.

A GREAT MYSTERY

Speaking of marriage, the Apostle Paul states *"This is a great mystery: I say this in thinking of Christ and his Church."* Beyond the details around the celebration of Christian marriage, it appears to me that a married couple's mission should always be highlighted. The Church recognises in the couple's love the very love of Christ Jesus who came and still comes to reveal the Father's love for all humankind. Besides acknowledging this love, the Church asks its couples to be "sowers of life and love" throughout their lives, to love one another as Jesus did, in giving his life for humankind. That is why Saint Paul also says: *"Live in love as Christ loved us and gave his life for us. You men, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her."*

EARNEST PRAYER

Whatever decision the couple reaches about getting married or not and about the type of marriage, we must on a daily basis pray for all lovers in our communities. Keeping in mind those who will shortly be getting married, I make mine the Church's blessing prayer: *"God the Father keep you in love with each other so that the peace of Christ may stay with you and be always in your home. May your children bless you, your friends console you, and all people live in peace with you. May you always bear witness to the love of God in this world so that the afflicted and the needy will find in you generous friends, and welcome you into the joys of heaven."*

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (315) (26 January 2000)