
WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE (5)



May this fifth excerpt from my Pentecost 2004 pastoral letter help us discover anew the beauty and greatness of Christian marriage.

FRUITFULNESS OF MARRIAGE

Vatican Council teaches that by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love are ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring. Furthermore, children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: "it is not good that man should be alone" (Gn. 2:18), and from the beginning he made them male and female, wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work. God blessed man and woman with the words: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gn. 1:28). Hence, true married love and the whole structure of the family life which results from it are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Saviour, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day. Married couples should see it as their mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating in the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. This involves fulfilling their role responsibly as human beings and Christians, judging matters correctly in a spirit of obedient respect for God, and reflecting and working together; it also involves taking into consideration their own well-being and that of their children already born and yet to come. It is not always easy to assimilate the Church's complete teaching on marriage. This requires time and an availability to take these precious elements to heart. It would be important, in marriage preparation, in meeting with couples, or in family and couples meetings, to review these different elements together. In doing so we shall discover their wisdom, the fruit of long centuries of reflection and experience. If questions and doubts arise, it would be pertinent to deal with them individually in the light of human and Christian experience.

GUIDED TO A COMMUNITY OF LOVE

Graced with mutual love and enclosed in God's love, spouses aim at responding as adequately as possible to the call to give life and spread love. They are aware that faced with life's difficulties they owe it to themselves to continually reinforce their love. Alone, a couple can easily feel as vulnerable as David before the giant Goliath. That is why it is so important to have a solid plan for preserving and strengthening their love. I offer here seven possible paths which, however, are not exclusive. Each couple is invited to determine the means it employs, in promoting the growth of their love.

COMMUNICATION

Among those elements conducive to making love grow, communication holds an important place. We have access to all possible means of communication, including the internet and the cell phone. If everything can become communication, do lovers sufficiently understand that their whole being, too, is a "message," if they are truly open to one another? Way beyond communication techniques, there is a quality of being which must be guaranteed: truth and credibility in one's words and actions. If sulking is the chosen path, it can have disastrous consequences. Transparency, on the other hand, can be the royal way, if it is directed by tactfulness. It is not necessary for issues to be aired publicly, it is not necessary that everything be known to the whole family. Some events and secrets are best kept between the two lovers. Even between a couple it is not necessary to relate in minutest detail all the comings and goings of each one. If such were the case, an unhealthy atmosphere could develop which would take on the features of disagreeable investigations. Mutual growth in understanding promotes gradual and quality communication.

AFFECTION

The saying goes, "Say it with flowers." If the rose has more or less become the symbol of affection, it only repeats the human lessons given by the Little Prince: "We see well only with the heart. The eyes cannot see what is essential. What makes the rose so important is the time you have spent for it..." Affection isn't just a vague feeling, it is the expression of deep love communicated in word and gesture. In a world so marked by violence of all kinds, lovers have the exalted mission of living and communicating affection, for affection cannot be an object of communication if it is not first found deep in the couple relationship. This feeling gesture which is difficult to describe in all its aspects is a response of the heart in the presence of a loved and lovable one. The *Song of Song* counsels: "were he to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked" (Song 8:7b). The same applies to affection: love and friendship are not best expressed by mountains of gifts! Simplicity has much better taste: the simple attention of a loving gaze speaks much more than countless passing gifts.

TESTIMONY: WITH LOVE AND CONVICTION

When we began going out together we were attracted and called to the vocation of marriage. We met and courted one another, we got to know each other and our love grew quietly. There was a period of reflection and prayer on both our parts, after we got engaged, to discern whether our love was strong enough to take us through 40, 50 or 60 years together as a couple. This means that our commitment had already ripened during our courtship. We got married, but it has always been a "ménage à trois:" the husband, the wife, and God. God has always been with us through trials, difficulties, and joys as a couple. There were times when trials were harder, and this Third Force which is God, was much needed. We know that without Him we could not have pulled through. It is easy to communicate with God. He knows everything, He sees everything, so we don't need to do any explaining. Speaking to Him in prayer, we already feel our burden getting lighter, less heavy. We are still praying, we are practising Christians, totally committed to serving the Church. God has done and continues to do so much for us that what we do for Him in return is very normal. What we do is done with love and conviction. There are times, as in illness, fatigue, and the pressures of everyday life, when, as baptised and confirmed Christians, we need the fruits of the Holy Spirit to keep us from hurting one another: for example, patience, understanding, respect. Some days, it is more difficult. As a couple, it is each day that we must live our union. We could say that one of the hardest things to do, and to do each day, is to forgive, to acknowledge our faults, our weaknesses, and to forgive them as God does to us. There is a special power in the sacrament of matrimony we received, a power which helps us and which strengthens our love of one another. Careful, though: it does not solve our problems in the blink of an eye! No, the special power is given to us in the form of graces to help us have understanding of the other and discernment in difficult daily situations. Without God's presence at the heart of our couple, I don't know whether we would have been able to go through forty years of life together, with everything that went with it. We must always work to make our love grow, and not take anything for granted. Love and kindness are at the heart of our couple.

– *Pierre and Fernande*

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (553) (10 August 2004)