

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

The first Sacrament I will look at in my series on the Sacraments will be **Matrimony**. Usually, we look at Baptism or Eucharist first; rarely is Matrimony the first Sacrament on the list. I choose this Sacrament with which to begin because it is the *form* for all the other Sacraments, in fact the whole Christian life. What do I mean by this?

In the beginning (as Genesis tells us) God created man and woman in His image and likeness. This means that we can tell something about God by looking at who we are – we reflect God’s life. It also means that in our study of God, we can come to know more about who we are. At the very heart and center of God is the greatest Mystery of our Faith – the Blessed Trinity. God, at the heart and core of who He is, is *relationship*. The eternal Father is eternally pouring out His love to the eternal Son, and the Son is eternally returning His love back to the Father. And that eternal love is so real that it is a *person*, the Holy Spirit. God created us to be in relationship – in a relationship of love. And the gift of marriage reflects the very heart of who God is – that the husband and wife join is such an intimate union of love that that love is so *real*, that nine months later you may have to give it a name. Pope Francis (in his new document *Joy of Love*) says:

**The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon... capable of revealing God the Creator and Saviour. ... Seen this way, the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.** (11, emphasis added)

Matrimony, then, is the form of all the Sacraments for all Sacraments are a way into the Heart of God – the gift of the Grace of His relationship poured upon us – and so we see most clearly how God as the *lover of our souls* comes to us, desiring to unite Himself to us... God wants to marry us.

Now, if marriage is an analogy of God’s love for us (not that God’s love is like marriage, but marriage is like God’s love for us) we need to look at *how God loves* so we can see what marriage is supposed to be. When we look at God’s love, we see four qualities – God loves **totally, freely, faithfully and fruitfully**. This is seen in the very life of the Trinity, but also seen in how He loves us as He pours out His life for us on the Cross. He holds nothing back – it is **total**. He chooses to go to the Cross and stay on the Cross – He is **free**. In His love for us, He thinks about us to the end – He is **faithful**. His sacrifice gives us eternal life – His love bears **fruit**.

These four qualities of God’s love must then be present in marriage: specifically in the **marriage vows** and the **physical renewal of the marriage vows** (did you know that the conjugal act is the renewal of the vows of your marriage?). This love speaks of **gift and reception** – *I give myself to you; I receive the gift of you to me*. So, marital love must be **total**. If you come to your vows saying, “I give part of me” or “I give everything, except...” or “I want all of you, except your fertility,” then the vows or the renewal of vows are a lie; they do not reflect the *total* love of God – it does not become the **“image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself”** (*Joy of Love* 11). Marital love must be **free**. Coercion, pressure and manipulation have *no place* in the marriage vows or in their renewal; rather, there must be a free gift of self, a free reception of the other. Marital love must be **faithful**. Fidelity means more than actions (though what we *do* is vital), but also means our thoughts – Jesus says if we even *look lustfully* at others, we have committed adultery with them in our hearts (Matthew 5:28). Our imaginations must be given over to *gift and reception*. Marital love must be **fruitful**. Our marriages, if they are to reflect the love of the Trinity, are to build each other up and give each other *life*. Each renewal of our vows is also to be fruitful, and always *open* to the gift of life, in order that we not *lie* with our bodies. While we may not be at the point yet of reflecting God’s love in our marriages and renewal of vows, God’s grace is always present. Call upon the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony for strength to live out the difficult call of dying to ourselves to live for God. God will answer!

In the first article, I mentioned that for validity of the Sacraments, there needs to be proper **matter, form** and **intention**. The matter are the *female and male bodies* of the bride and groom. The form are the *vows* given to each other (totally, freely, faithfully and fruitfully), and the intention is to enter into the marriage freely, without reservation, as long as you both shall live, and to be open to life.