



## Marriage

Although couples are required to attend marriage preparation classes before their wedding, much more is needed than a few hours of preparation for the big day. To enter the Sacrament of Matrimony, a rich understanding of marriage according to God's original plan and the development of certain skills are necessary for building a healthy and lasting relationship of love.

Pope St. John Paul II teaches us that marriage and family life constitute a "school of love." And love, like anything worth doing, requires sacrifice. Indeed, if playing sports, learning a musical instrument, getting a good job, or doing well in school require sacrifice, how much more will sacrifice be required for the highest good we can aspire to – learning to love? And marriage is the holy ground on which we are called to learn to sacrifice for love. Husband and wife must learn how to "die to self" for the good of the other. Certainly they experience many joys and rewards in marriage, but it is precisely in this offering – in sometimes having to die to one's own desires – that true love comes to life, and that is its own and highest reward!

### There is No Love Without Sacrifice

For this reason, Christians have always looked to the relationship between Christ and His Church as the model for married couples, because Jesus gave His life for us, the members of His Church. It is not easy to maintain a heroic spirit of love, but it is possible. In every relationship, a time of testing arises. Sometimes, it is early in the marriage, when the infatuation begins to fade. Love is placed in a crucible of stress or suffering, and its value is revealed. St. John Paul II tells us that, at this point, "If their love is a true gift of self, so that they belong to the other, it will not only survive but grow stronger, and sink deeper roots." But if the two people do not see the value of sacrificial love, and instead rely on superficial emotions, they may quickly run from the challenges.

With the high rate of divorce, it is easy for people to think marriage is nothing more than a legal contract, but this is not the case. Marriage was and is God's idea. He created it to be a covenant – a lifelong, faithful bond between husband and wife – that mirrors His unbreakable Covenant with his people. There are grave circumstances (abuse, etc.) in which separation is needed, but these are sad exceptions.

Successful marriages are not based on people finding the *perfect* partner, but on loving the *imperfect* person they have chosen to marry. It is essential that young people learn these principles so that they are not shocked when the honeymoon phase ends. If they have the courage and faith to persevere through the difficult times, living a life of virtue and prayer, a more beautiful form of love can blossom.

### Questions to engage with your son/daughter

1. Is there a couple you know that has a great marriage? What have you learned from them?
2. When do you think is the best time to get married? (Feel free to remind your teen that the part of the human brain that makes important decisions is not fully mature until the mid-twenties.)

Adapted from *YOU. Life, Love and the Theology of the Body. Parent's Guide*, Ascension Press, 2016.