

*"Marriage in Christ: The Sacrament of Faithful, Lifelong Love"*

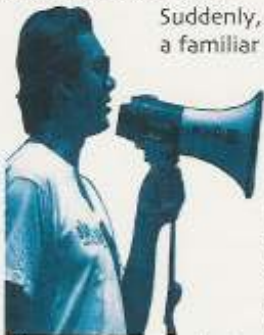
**Part One:**

# Marriage as a Calling

+ By Julie McCarty +

## VOICE RECOGNITION

In the rush of people flooding out of the stadium after the game, Joe lost sight of his girlfriend, Heidi. After ten minutes of searching, he began to feel a bit queasy. How would he ever spot her in all this noise and chaos?



Suddenly, Joe heard a familiar voice behind him say, "Hey, Joe, over here!" Relief flooded his face as he wove

through the crowd. They held hands a little tighter as they walked to the pizza place.

## CALLING: RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd, the one who loves his sheep so much that he is willing to lay down his life for their sake. The sheep follow the Good Shepherd because they recognize his voice calling to them.

As Christians approach adulthood, they listen for Christ's voice to guide them in the choice of vocation. *Vocation* is a calling to a specific way of living out the Christian faith. It is a little like being given a mission. Some Christians will follow Christ as

priests, professed sisters or brothers. Others may feel called to remain single in order to give themselves completely to a particular cause.

God invites many Christians to the vocation of marriage. For Catholics, marriage is much more than signing a "piece of paper" (marriage license) or living in the same apartment. Christian marriage is a sacrament, a way of expressing God's love in the world. Marriage is a calling from God to love one's spouse with the deep, eternal love that Christ has for all people.

## CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: A UNIQUE TYPE OF LOVE

In our society, the word "love" has come to mean many things, including as little as a nice feeling we get from something trivial, like a cup of espresso coffee. How can Joe and Heidi know if their love is the "marrying kind"?

Genuine marital love is a special form of love between husband



*"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

- words of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in the Gospel of John (10:27)

and wife that mirrors the deep, faithful love that Christ, the Good Shepherd, has for his sheep. This love involves giving all of one's self, just as Christ gave completely of himself for the sake of others when he died on the cross.

We can learn a few things about authentic marital love by looking at the words of the Catholic wedding ceremony, when the priest asks the couple about their intentions. Christian marital love is given freely, lasts a lifetime, and brings life to the world.

## MARITAL LOVE IS FREELY GIVEN

On Heidi and Joe's wedding day, the priest will ask them, "Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?"

"Freely and without reservation" is a formal way of saying, "Are you doing this because you

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# Marriage a

truly want to be married to this person?" Couples should not marry *merely* to please their parents, gain citizenship, grapple with an unplanned pregnancy, or because they are already living together. They may have to deal with these situations, but these should not be the main motivators for entering into marriage. Christian marriage must be based upon genuine love that is freely chosen.

The phrase "to give yourselves to each other in marriage" reminds us that marital love is deeper than infatuation. Crushes often feel terrific because of an emotional high that comes from receiving attention through being "liked." If Joe and Heidi have genuine marital love, they will each think more about giving to the other than about how much they can "get" from the spouse.

In marriage, there are shared times of joy, such as vacations, the birth of a child, or a new home, but there will also be times of sickness, financial strain, and parenting challenges on the marital journey. Feelings come and go, but Christian spouses need the kind of love that endures through thick and thin.

## MARITAL LOVE LASTS A LIFETIME

The second question the priest will ask Heidi and Joe is, "Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your



lives?"

Although it is currently popular to "live together" before marriage, Catholics do not believe that cohabitation is a complete giving of yourself. Cohabitation contains the hidden message that I am only going to love you as long as it is convenient or feels good.

Marriage involves loving each other "for the rest of your lives."

It is also interesting to notice that both husband and wife are called to a kind of love that *honors* each other. Catholic marriage is a spiritual partnership that includes mutual respect and admiration.

## MARITAL LOVE IS LIFE-GIVING

The priest will also ask Joe and Heidi, "Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"

Catholics treasure children as gifts from God. Because God is the Creator, parents can be called "co-creators." That is, although God is the Author of life, husband and wife cooperate in producing new life.

The life-giving quality of mari-

tal love is not limited to physically giving birth. Heidi and Joe will bring spiritual life to each other as their marital love deepens. They will provide a good life for their children through seeing to their spiritual, educational, social, emotional, and physical needs as they are growing.

To be life-giving in marriage also means that the family brings life to others outside the home through voluntary acts of kindness and compassion. For example, a married couple may volunteer at a soup kitchen or serve as foster parents.

It is important to note that some marriages exist without having children due to infertility or old age. Couples may find this a difficult cross to bear. However, marriage is still considered a sacrament when a couple is unable to have children.



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## Summary

*Marriage is a special calling from God to love husband or wife with love that is freely chosen, lifelong, and life-giving.*



## Your Turn

After the bridal couple answers "yes" to the three questions, the next part of the wedding ceremony is the "consent" (agreement to the marriage) or what is commonly called the "vows." These promises declare to God and the church community that they intend to be husband and wife in a sacramental way.

Below is one version of the consent or vows of the Catholic wedding ceremony. Study it carefully, reading it several times. Which ideas already discussed are also contained in the vows? What else do the vows tell us about the meaning of Christian marriage?

I, (Name), take you, (Name), to be my husband/wife.  
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.  
I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

*Some couples memorize their vows before the wedding.  
Why might this be a good idea?*

*During the wedding ceremony, the priest blesses wedding rings to be worn by husband and wife. What do you think the symbol of the ring signifies? See back page for possible answers.*





# Marriage as a Calling

## *Possible answers to the wedding ring symbolism:*

- Rings are circles. Circles have no beginning or end (you could just go around and around the circle) and marriage is a commitment for your entire life.
- In our culture, wedding rings, worn on the ring finger of the left hand, are a signal to other people that you are not "available" because you are already married.
- This custom of wearing the ring on the ring finger of the left hand began in Egypt, where it was believed that a vein in this region connected directly to the heart, the seat of love (see *St. Cloud Marriage Preparation Newsletter*).



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## Notes



*Quotes from the marriage rite were taken from The Rites of the Catholic Church, Volume 1, Study Edition (New York, Pueblo Publishing: 1990, pages 726-727).*

*Questions, comments and contact information about this study guide available at  
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