



# A Heart for Service

One of a series • Archdiocese of Baltimore

It's pretty amazing, if you stop and think about it, that anyone gets married these days. That in a culture with a miniscule attention span, people would promise all that they have to one person, forever. That they would be willing to assume the life-altering role of parent and to become, essentially, servant to spouse and children.

That kind of life becomes fulfilling, if we think about what marriage is. It's not just about our own ideas and plans, but instead is about our answer to God's call about how we live our life – as our vocation. Though we often associate the term with religious people – priests and nuns and such – the truth is, *each* of us is called by God to a vocation. For many, it is the lifelong covenant that is marriage. We might not think of our decision to marry as a response to God's call, but when we do, it will make life far more meaningful. At moments of great satisfaction, we realize that accomplishment depends as much on God as on us. On the other hand, moments of great doubt are tempered, when we know that – this being more God's brainchild than ours – He will give us what we need to get through.

The joys of a life of service are immense, and the occasional bad day is to be expected. You need to be very strong in yourself and your sense of purpose in order to give your life away. You could easily fall victim – for awhile, anyhow – to overwork or unrealistic expectations

**Kid Talk**

- ◆ Have you ever thought about what you wanted to be when you grow up?
- ◆ Whatever vocation you choose will require serving others. How do you serve others now?

or even resentment. But when you fall short of this ideal of selfless love, through prayer and reflection, your vocation can call you back to strength. And when you know what you're about, as Jesus did, giving can be natural, pure joy – a life happily lived.

The Church supports you. Interestingly, the individual parts of the Mass give married people a road map for their relationships: There's the great-

ing – a wonderful way for couples to start the day. There's the Penitential Rite, a reminder that – though all people hurt one another – when we give and receive forgiveness, we heal. There's the Gloria, a hint that all of us like a bit of praise from those we love. And there are the readings, where God lets us get to know Him better, something we need to do for each other as well. There is the simple offering of gifts, of course. And there is the transformative and life-giving power of the consecration, a beacon of all that is possible when married couples give of themselves fully.

**For More Reading...**  
*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, Chapters 20 (Holy Orders) and 21 (Marriage)

**You and your priest – more alike than you realize.** Holy Orders – along with Matrimony – is known in the Church as a “sacrament of service.” Its aim is identical: to help the spouse become the person God intended him to be. Married couples serve primarily through their devotion to each other and their families. In the priest's case, the whole Church becomes the spouse who is served, usually through parish work. And as married spouses are designed perfectly to go together – physically, psychologically and emotionally – so priests are configured to the Church.

While married spouses remain faithful so as to carry out their call to serve the other, the priest remains celibate in order to be completely free to serve the Church. And while the husband and wife provide the best environment for the raising of children, the Church's rich treasure of grace brings personal faith to maturity.

**But what do celibate men know about what it's like to be married?** How can they give advice? Surely you've heard this cliché many times. Maybe you've even used it. In fact, though society sometimes discounts (and even scorns) the wisdom of our religion, priests probably know family life better than the rest of us do. A wise priest would be well worth tapping from time to time on your marriage journey. Think about it for a moment:

– Priests don't appear out of nowhere. They themselves have grown up in families, in marriages.

– Every day, they play pivotal roles in the families of





There's no room for growing apart. This is like any other Christian call to service, but obviously, so challenging it's hard to imagine it possible without the Lord's help.

### Which brings us to the sacrament of marriage.

Our human relationships have moments of absolute and utter joy, don't they? And even though these moments may be rare, the memory of them sustains us through many a bad day. So, too, with the sacraments, when the Lord comes particularly close to us, bringing us massive quantities of love and grace.

With that grace, He infuses us with everything we need to live out our call with essential peace and joy. He bolsters us to live sometimes difficult lives of service to one another and our children. He fortifies us to resist the temptations to break apart. What's more He enables us, through prayer, to tap this grace throughout our lives, in times of great challenge and great joy.

OK, I get that, but why does it matter where I get married? When we make that commitment to marry, we become a single entity in the eyes of society, not just in the eyes of God. As the nuptial blessing reads, "Father...You gave man the constant help of woman so that man and woman should no longer be two, but one flesh, and you teach us that what you have united may never be divided."

We step into roles that have significance in the larger social and civic worlds. We become open to parenthood and leaders of a family. This is a public event, thus the need for witnesses. And in the Catholic Church, the witnesses – by their very presence – assume a unique

*For Catholics, marriage is the exclusive union of a man and a woman, for life, for the good of each other and their children. It's loving, faithful, freely-chosen, exclusive and open to children, and it's a path that makes spouses holy as we work with God in His ongoing act of creation. So much does God join us on this journey that marriage itself is worthy of a sacrament – a sign that God is right there, in the midst of their lives, filling it with His love. This is why family life is often called a domestic church, Christ present in their midst.*

responsibility to bless this new family, and signal their willingness to help the couple live out their marriage vows. The priest or deacon represents the Church witnessing and blessing your marriage. Together these witnesses become a source of grace to the marriage. In fact, community is so important that the Marriage Rite begins, "You have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence

of the Church's minister and this community."

Why the church? Because the parish church is a special place that has been set aside and dedicated as a place of prayer to nourish our spiritual lives together as a community. It is where we go to Mass and celebrate baptisms and special events throughout our lives. It only makes sense to celebrate

one of the most important sacraments in our lives – our vocational sacrament to marriage, this covenant to each other before God – in this sacred space.

Couples aren't necessarily articulating all of this when they start out to marry at a Catholic wedding. But they know, intuitively, that having God in their marriage will somehow make it better. And in our experience, when couples pray regularly and go to weekly Mass (together, when they can) the rate of divorce plummets.

No wonder so many want to be married in the church. You can always have the reception in the backyard.

### For More Reading...

- ◆ United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 21
- ◆ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1640 and 1644