



# A School of Love

One of a series • Archdiocese of Baltimore

A tropical island...sometimes. If only the pop culture version of marriage were real...sipping wine on holiday at a Tuscan villa... sunning the day away on a Caribbean honeymoon...weekending in an English castle. Married life may bring us one or two of those movie moments, but generally the joys are simpler: a Saturday morning soccer game, a day at the zoo... And we're just as likely to be hanging out with a sick child, a difficult relative, or a refrigerator that breaks down just as we've saved up for a weekend away.

No matter. Hanging in there during the tough times may not be Hollywood's version of marriage, but it is God's version. He promises when we marry that He will meet us wherever life takes us. Usually where it takes us is beautifully ordinary. But God also will use the difficult times to make us more holy. Of course, difficulties take different forms for different families, and we may go through our troubles fighting and screaming, but these are also the times that teach. They teach us to forgive, to be patient, to be more kind, more compassionate, more trusting in God and

**Kid Talk**

- ◆ In what ways do you feel loved in your family?
- ◆ What are ways you show love to your parents, siblings and friends?
- ◆ When you've gotten mad at your friends, what are some ways you show them you're sorry?

others. In short, these times teach us to sacrifice, and they introduce us to the great paradox of our faith – that we gain our life when we give it away.

And as individuals grow through adversity and sacrifice, so do marriages. It's like those couples – we've all

met them – who've overcome severe difficulty together and wound up stronger as a unit, their lives infused with a deep peace. With God, this response is available to all of us.

The church itself offers all kinds of help to marriage. In marriage preparation, we caution against expectations that life will be ever-idyllic, and we provide strategies for dealing with it when it isn't. We always advise newlyweds to join their parish, and to become involved in whatever aspect of parish life

Whether you seek marriage enrichment, marriage "first aid" or tools for building family life and faith, the Archdiocese of Baltimore encourages you to reach out and explore the resources available to you. For more information, please visit: [www.MarriageMattersBalt.org](http://www.MarriageMattersBalt.org)

appeals to them, because there is support in the parish for our belief that marriage is a life of sacrifice in a world of indulgence, a life of fidelity in a world of transience. We share camaraderie and good humor, and when a household is upended for some reason, there's often a fellow parishioner stopping by with a casserole or an offer to babysit. And don't forget the greatest help from the Church: statistics show that divorce plummets for couples who go to weekly Mass and pray regularly – together if possible.

In our experience, when both husband and wife are committed to the marriage, God's grace will help overcome any obstacle in its path. Much of that grace is right there in the Church – in the pastoral experience of the priests, in the wealth of wisdom from married couples, in referrals to counseling that respect the marriage bond. Remember that through the sacrament of matrimony, God gives us everything we need to re-





main true to our vocation, however impossible it seems at the moment.

When yours is not ideal. As Catholics, we have high standards for marriage and family life. Sometimes we are tempted to stay away from church if we think our own lives don't measure up to the ideal. Maybe it's divorce or separation or living together outside of marriage. Maybe it's unwed motherhood, or a single-parent household, or home problems so seemingly intractable that we just can't get ourselves dressed and out the door. We might think we're unwelcome, or that we'll be judged, or that the church isn't interested in us, or even – in another common misconception – that we are excommunicated. But in truth, these are the times we need the Lord the most. After all, Jesus – the Divine Healer – came to care for those most in pain. Parish life and the sacraments help us move forward through painful times with hope and confidence.

– If the ways of the world have gotten the better of you, confession may be a good place to start. Hearing the words of forgiveness after your confession may be all you need to get your bearings.

– If you're facing specific concerns about the Church's marriage policies, you should consult your pastor or a sympathetic priest to avoid misconceptions and learn as many other couples have, what applies to your specific situation. If you have remarried

or plan to remarry, you may – as many other couples have – find the annulment process to be a time of great healing.

– Most marriages are imperfect, but that doesn't make them invalid. Where there is the threat of abuse, we may counsel separation, and where there is great conflict, children may need to be removed from the situation until things settle.

Where both spouses are willing to try, everything is possible. And even when one spouse is unwilling to save the marriage, we move forward in prayer, confident that God can and will work in every situation in life.

So if your life needs the love of Jesus, but the Church feels a little too perfect for you, you may not know the real Church. Whatever your situation, your pastor and parish are here specifically to help you become closer to God. So stay close to Jesus through the sacraments. Continue to come to Mass. We need each other.

### Prayer for Married Couples

Heavenly Father,  
You have created man and woman to be a reflection of Your love for the world,  
Bless our marriage and all married couples that we might truly become an image and likeness of You in the world.  
May our love for one another share in Your love and fill us with a generous heart that is open to life.  
When difficult times arise, surround us with Your presence, loving family, friends and parishioners to give us the strength and grace we need.  
Assure all married couples of Your abiding presence with us in good times and bad, in sickness and in health and for richer or for poorer – may our lives be a witness to the world of Your loving care, faithful commitment and persevering love for all people.  
Amen.

### For More Reading...

- ◆ *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message to Families*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994
- ◆ *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis
- ◆ *Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis
- ◆ *Men and Women are From Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body*, Mary Healy