

Supplemental Information for
The Celebration of the Christian Mystery—Sacraments
By Deacon Al Laabs
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Session 12: “Matrimony, a Sacrament at the Service of Communion”

Suggested Environment

Here’s a real chance to get creative with your environmental display, since the folks from Renew International always seem to suggest the same thing. If you’re a married couple hosting the group, why not put your wedding picture (if you’re not embarrassed at hair styles) as part of the display or even your old wedding album. If your album is like Joanna’s and mine, it hasn’t seen the light of day for many years. You might even put some symbols or even a wedding invitation if you have a recent one you’ve received; or perhaps a candle from your 25th anniversary if you’re one of the older couples. At any rate, even such things as a family picture certainly fit into the area of discussion, and some of the pictures might just provoke additional discussion.

Let me insert a note here about the prayer suggested from the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). It may not provoke any conversation but the imagery there has some deep theological symbolism around the sacrament we are discussing. Many Christian commentators interpret the Song of Songs as a picture of the Church as the Bride of Christ. God loves His only Son and has called out, and prepared for him, a beautiful, virgin bride, "without spot or blemish," (Ephesians 5:23-32). Early commentators saw the “he” as an image of Christ and interpreted such lines “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag...” in the following manner: The swiftness of the gazelle or the young stag leaping upon the mountains pictures not only the vitality of youth and adventure, but is a perfect symbol of the abundant life Jesus offers all who follow Him. In the Jewish tradition this male/female imagery was compared to the love between God and Israel. This Song of Songs or Canticle of Canticles as it is also known was preserved in the Jewish canon of revealed literature because of their belief in the basic goodness of human love--physical, emotional, and spiritual. Christians typically interpret the Song of Songs in an allegorical or typological sense. [For more information on the allegorical/typological sense, follow this link.](#)

Sharing Our Good News

It would be good to note that we often pray for vocations in our Prayers of the Faithful, both weekends and at daily Mass. You might check out if anyone did something in a direction to encourage vocations, especially those in your group, if that is the case, having younger children.

Exploring the Catechism

This section begins with the beautiful vision of man and woman being created in the image and likeness of God. I would encourage your group to underline in the second paragraph parts of the fifth line and seventh line to read: “God created us out of love....shared mutual love becomes an image of God’s love for all of us.” I’ve always found it interesting that [Stephen W. Hawking](#), the great cosmologist from Cambridge University, in his two popular works, would admit that scientists can tell us the “how” of creation but not the why. He, of course, was referring to the big bang theory. Central to our appreciation for the role of God in our lives is an appreciation for the primacy of his love which is the only explanation for creation, and since we are made in his image, love should be at our center also. In fact, our Gospel for this past fourth Sunday of Lent highlighted his love in John 3:16...”For God so loved the world, etc.” You may want to encourage your group to reflect even before you get to the Scripture on the ways we all have experienced love from others, and the critical role it plays in developing our children.

The third paragraph has an interesting statement that you may want to bring out to see if there is agreement. In effect, it says we need God’s grace to live in harmony and cannot do this solely by our own efforts. Ask your group if they think this is true and why so? You would find in St. Paul the idea that without God’s grace we have no hope of avoiding sin.

In the middle paragraph of page 70 you’ll find the words “covenant relationship of unconditional love and fidelity.” The word “covenant” implies something much deeper than a mere contractual relationship because in our Judeo-Christian tradition, God is always a partner in a covenant relationship. The words below are borrowed from a site intended for non-Catholic congregations who want to get back to our traditional view of marriage as a permanent sacramental commitment. The site is called “[Covenant Marriage Movement](#).”

“A covenant marriage is intended by God to be a lifelong relationship exemplifying unconditional love, reconciliation, sexual purity, and growth. A covenant is an eternal commitment with God. People can negotiate out of contracts, but not out of a covenant. The heart of covenant marriage is “the steadfast love of the Lord,” which comes from the very heart of God and “never ceases” (Lam. 3:22, RSV).

God intends for marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between a man and a woman. When a couple shares their wedding vows, they are vowing to God, each other, their families, and their community to remain steadfast in unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity, while purposefully growing in their covenant marriage relationship. Through it God desires to bring wholeness to families through covenant marriage relationships.”

It is heartwarming to see other religious faiths realize the damage done to our society by a casual view of what the marriage commitment entails.

In the last paragraph on page 70, note the statement that the two individuals entering marriage are the actual ministers of the sacrament with the priest or deacon there only as an ecclesial witness. This idea of who are the ministers plays a key role when a divorced Catholic approaches the Marriage Tribunal for an annulment. Should discussion involve a lot of questions about “Catholic divorce,” and there seems to be a need for follow-up, please feel free

to refer individuals to me in confidence. If questions regarding this occur during this section of Exploring, you might remind individuals that the next section will have a lot more to say about the issues of separation or annulment.

If, as we saw in the very beginning of this section, that shared mutual love, becomes an image of God's love for us, then faithfulness between husband and wife, as the last paragraph presents, clearly is an image of God's faithful and unconditional love for all of us. It is for this reason that Catholic moralists have always highlighted the extreme seriousness of adultery. Even in the Old Testament, the people of Israel who worshiped idols or foreign Gods were said to be in an adulterous relationship by the prophets.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

1 John 4:7-21

4 You belong to God, children, and you have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They belong to the world; accordingly, their teaching belongs to the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We belong to God, and anyone who knows God listens to us, while anyone who does not belong to God refuses to hear us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit. 7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.

8 Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. 10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.

13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit.

14 Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world.

15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God.

16 We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.

17 In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God⁵ whom he has not seen. 21 This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Footnotes:

[7-12] Love as we share in it testifies to the nature of God and to his presence in our lives. One who loves shows that one is a child of God and knows God, for God's very being is love; one without love is without God. The revelation of the nature of God's love is found in the free gift of his Son to us, so that we may share life with God and be delivered from our sins. The love we have for one another must be of the same sort: authentic, merciful; this unique Christian love is our proof that we know God and can "see" the invisible God.

⁴ [13-21] The testimony of the Spirit and that of faith join the testimony of love to confirm our knowledge of God. Our love is grounded in the confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the example of God's love for us. Christian life is founded on the knowledge of God as love and on his continuing presence that relieves us from fear of judgment ([1 John 4:16-18](#)). What Christ is gives us confidence, even as we live and love in this world. Yet Christian love is not abstract but lived in the concrete manner of love for one another.

These lines from 1 John merely continue the idea of the primacy of God's love for us and the consequent challenge we have in the words of St. Paul, (paraphrased) "I no longer live for myself but I allow Christ's love to live in me."

Sharing Question

The key in this sharing question is the word "experience." This always calls for concrete examples of acts of love and kindness. If you think of it, you may want to remind individuals that what we discussed as the "fruits of the Spirit" should show in our daily lives. In fact, through Confirmation, to quote the previous chapter, "we are empowered to practice our faith in the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of our lives." That certainly includes married life. This is from Galatians 5: 22-23: "22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."-- Just another example of how the Sacraments tie together our entire lives as Catholic Christians.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

This section begins with a recognition that not all intended marriages work out. While a complete explanation of what constitutes an annulment is beyond the scope of this effort, let me just say that annulment recognizes one very direct condition or rather its absence. In comparison to a contract's being voided or cancelled, an annulment means that the sacrament never existed between the parties (remembering that the couple are the true ministers of the sacrament). This can be for a variety of reasons. A good reference is the red *US Catholic Catechism for Adults*, pages 288-289. You may also find [this article](#) from US Catholic of interest.

Remaining paragraphs are solid descriptions of the Church's position on conjugal love, conception, and sexuality. I would encourage you to ask your participants to underline the sentence beginning the second last paragraph on page 72: "The Church teaches that sexuality is all about faithfulness, commitment, and the expression of love." See if you can get statements that begin to describe today's culture such as "Sexuality seems today to be all about self-gratification....about selling products....about using others or exploiting others...etc." For in truth, the Church takes a counter-culture stance to society's view of marriage and sexuality.

I want to point out one idea near the very end of this section, last paragraph on page 73. That idea centers on what Vatican II called the “Domestic Church,” the family, where children first learn about the Christian life. For if Matrimony is, as the title of the chapter suggests, a sacrament at the service of communion, then the bond of unity centered on love between husband and wife has to carry over into a live example of communion that becomes the first living example of life to be lived to the children, the fruits of their love. So the sacrament of Matrimony should be seen as a foundation stone for the unity and communion that must be carried over into the larger society. I’ve attached a section of *Lumen Gentium (LG)* from Vatican II that highlights the entire interactive aspect of all the sacraments we’ve studied in these last six chapters which ties into the family and each of our individual goals as a Christian to a life of perfection as followers of Christ. I think it’s a very nice summary to end this session of Why Catholic. You may want to make copies of this for your group. It is copied from the Vatican’s web page, Chapter Two, section 11 of LG. If you want to cut and paste section 11, here’s a [link to the entire LG](#). Just scroll down to section 11 and cut and paste it to a new page...it should fit and then print the number of copies you may need without having to run to a copy place or you may be able to life if from this posting.

Sharing Our Faith

All of the questions in this section are worth discussing but I have a feeling that this sacrament will provide much discussion and prove difficult to keep within the usual time frame.

Living the Good News

I would suggest that some conversation take place about the next segment of Why Catholic which will begin in the fall. Certainly find out if everyone is interested to be together again. I would add to the worthwhile suggestions on page 74 perhaps the idea of getting together for a Sunday Mass and then do brunch or breakfast together. I know that can be difficult to work out since all of us seem committed to habitual attendance say at 8:00 Mass and others maybe at the 9:30. But I think since you’ve grown together as a group, sitting together, praying together, wishing peace sincerely to one another, and then sharing in the union that the Eucharistic give us, will have a more profound meaning for you since you’ve gone through these weeks together—just a thought.

Lifting our Hearts

Nice to encourage spontaneous prayer before the ending family prayer and offer to begin by praying for your children, if you have a family yourself, or perhaps just for all those families in our parish who may be struggling with faith, the economy, or other problems.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs@comcast.net

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH, *LUMEN GENTIUM*, SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI, ON NOVEMBER 21, 1964

Chapter Two “On the People of God”

11. It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation. Incorporated in the Church through **baptism**, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as sons of God they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church (4*). They are more perfectly bound to the Church by the sacrament of **Confirmation**, and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ (5*). Taking part in the **Eucharistic sacrifice**, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.(6*) Thus both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself. Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament.

Those who approach the sacrament of **Penance** obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion. By the sacred **anointing of the sick** and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them;(106) she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ.(107) Those of the faithful who are consecrated by **Holy Orders** are appointed to feed the Church in Christ's name with the word and the grace of God. Finally, Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of **Matrimony**, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church,(108) help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God.(109) (7*) From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. *The family is, so to speak, the domestic church.* In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.

[Courtesy of Vatican Web Site](#)