

MARRIAGE WEEK

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7-14 February





Marriage is God’s gift to men and women. It is an expression of the depth of human loving, of its enduring reality and of its likeness to the love of God.

Marriage is also the fruit of a human desire for wholeness. That wholeness is not discovered simply in an individual but in the mutual exchange of love between a husband and wife. A marriage develops from initial attraction, falling in love, the exploration of personalities, a decision to embark upon and sustain a lifelong relationship.

A Christian marriage is rooted in faith. Firstly, that means faith in God, as the giver of life and the one who promises eternal life to those who believe in him. Faith also means God’s faith in his sons and daughters. In Jesus, he has shown people what human love can achieve through love of God and love that encompasses all the people in our lives. For married people, love of neighbour begins with love of each other and of all the children that may be granted to them as parents.

Marriage is a sacrament of reconciliation. It is the sacrament that endures even though it may bring its difficulties. It is a testimony to God’s forgiveness that unites what has been divided and brings unexpected discoveries of what men and women are capable of when they trust each other and stay steadfast to the vows they made to each other on their wedding day.

National Marriage Week is an opportunity to ponder on this display of God’s love for the world he created. It is a chance for married couples to reflect, perhaps with their families, on how they might develop the good things that exist between and within them. It is a time to demonstrate the value of marriage, based on sincerely lived vows, to men and women and to society as a whole. This is a week of prayer for the whole Church, in gratitude to God who has given us life and taught us to love so that we can be as he made us – a visible icon of himself.



Bishop David Evans

Lead Bishop for Marriage and Family Life

Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham

God our Father,

**We pray in thanksgiving for the vocation to marriage
And for each couple that you join together in order to make a
family.**

**We ask that every marriage brings each couple closer to you and
closer to holiness.**

**We pray for those who are struggling in their marriage at present,
That they can make it through this tough time
And support each other in their differences.**

We make this prayer through Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen.





Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment (AL 72).

The Church teaches that marriage is a vocation, a call from God and a response from two people, by God's sustaining divine grace, who promise to build a lifelong, intimate and sacramental partnership of love and life. The call to marriage is a way of living out our universal call to holiness which is freely given to each person when they are baptised. Couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path to holiness by faithful love, throughout the entire length of their lives.

Marriage is a natural vocation as it is created by God: "God is himself the author of marriage' The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator." (CCC 1603). "God has created us with a natural longing for love as we are all called to love which is 'the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being'" (CCC 1604).

We are called to live out our vocation in different ways, perhaps as a priest or religious and some of us will remain single. Whichever state of life God calls us each of us to, we are all united by our call to holiness, just like the saints in heaven. Let us give thanks for our husbands and wives, parents, grandparents, those who inspire us, and those we look up to in marriage. We also pray for all engaged couples, that through a period of discernment together, in prayer, and guided support that they use this is an opportunity of growth together.

We pray that the witness in this leaflet will inspire married couples, young people and children, in the celebration of marriage during Marriage Week.



Pope St John Paul II said of marriage: “The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.” (*Familiaris Consortio* §3)

Marriage from the beginning has a very special place in God’s creation. Each human person is created in God’s image (originally also likeness) but a man and woman who come together in marriage, were to image God in a special and unique way. God exists as a Divine Communion of Three Persons; God is also Love and Creator. In marriage a man and woman reflect these attributes of God through becoming a loving union and communion of human persons open to life. The gift of fertility enables the couple to procreate – together with God, they bring a new human person into existence. Marriage was also intended to point us to the relationship of love God desires to have with each of us: “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.” (*Isaiah 62, 3-5*)

God is Pure Spirit, so marriage, particularly the love of the couple, makes love visible and helps us comprehend the love of God. Marriage from the beginning is the primordial sacrament , which means that it efficaciously makes present an invisible mystery. In the beginning the marriage of Adam and Eve fulfilled this truth in all its wonder. At the fall, they and we lost our likeness to God, lost sharing his divine life, lost being able to love as he loves. Marriage as an institution suffered and needs the work of grace if it is to be as God originally intended it to be.

Jesus came to restore all that was lost. We share once more in God’s divine life and love through baptism. Christ raised marriage to a sacrament which bestows graces on the couple. Grace heals, and perfects nature, helping it to be completely itself. At the same time, it elevates it, which means it raises it beyond itself so that it is simultaneously transformed, into something new.



“...to live this vocation, we need a new heart; instead of a heart of stone – as Ezekiel said – we need a heart of flesh... And the Lord ‘implants’ this new heart in us at Baptism, through faith... Thus, by living in communion with Christ, with his Church, the new heart truly becomes ‘our own heart’ and makes marriage possible... For nothing is impossible for God even if the atmosphere of our world makes it difficult to the point that it appears impossible.”
(Pope Benedict XVI, Encounter with the Youth, April 2006)

Other sacraments have purely supernatural ends. In baptism we do not pour water on the child because he or she needs a bath, we do so to cleanse of original sin. We do not go to the Eucharist because we are hungry but to become one with Christ who completely transforms the bread and wine into his body and blood- a nature not their own. The grace of the sacrament of marriage, however, does enable it to fulfil its natural purpose which is to create a lifelong union of love between the couple, and for the procreation and education of their children . It heals and restores it to its beginning and at the same time elevates it to become an icon of the mystery of the love of Christ for the Church – a new kind of love – total self-giving and self-sacrificing love, unto death, for the good of the other.

We are given faith, hope and charity in baptism. Faith to believe the Gospel, hope that the work of grace will be fulfilled in us and charity to enable us to choose to love. Let us contemplate this week and ask the Lord to “help us to see” (*Luke 18:41-43*). The gift of faith grows through constant prayer, meditating on the Scriptures and participation in the sacraments. Let us deepen our prayer life, especially together as married couples, and read the Word of God together. Let us frequent the sacraments and if possible, spend some time together on Retreat. Let us reflect on the vows we made on the altar and on the fact that ‘I do’ is a daily commitment and choice; a choice to love which is the mission of marriage. Let us meditate on the nuptial blessing that would have been said or sung over us as a couple on our wedding day. A blessing which prayed for all of the above to be fulfilled in us, so we could fulfil the vocation of marriage in the mission of the Church.

Jane Deegan
Diocese of Shrewsbury



I remember the first time I heard the idea that part of the role of a married person is to help their spouse get to heaven – my mind was blown!

I had already been married a few years at this point and suddenly hearing about this noble calling got me really excited and gave me an entirely new perspective on my vocation. I had a role in helping my husband get to heaven? What an incredible gift and honour – I couldn't wait to get started.

What I discovered is that we had already been living this in the 'every day' of married life... It wasn't a new project to think through, and there wasn't a special way to approach it. No. It was in the everyday loving, challenging, and journeying that we were meeting Jesus, making Him more present to those around us and participating in the great work that God invited us into; in the everyday simplicity of our marriage, we were helping to make each other more holy.

Our favourite Hollywood or Disney film can lead us to believe in easy 'Happily Ever Afters' – but they don't tell the whole story. Marriage, like anything of worth in our lives, requires work, dedication, and attention to keep it healthy and flourishing. If we don't put in the work, we can't expect results. But when we said our vows, we were saying 'yes' to a vocation filled with beauty, intensity, and joy.

And we have great cheerleaders encouraging us in this amazing adventure – the Church, in her wisdom, celebrates great married saints that can pray for us as we discern the gift of marriage. Saints like St Louis and Zélie Martin and St Joachim and St Anne are in our corner, interceding for us and our vocations.

Let's turn to these powerhouses and ask for their prayers for happy and holy marriages.

Beccy Roseman
Kenelm Youth Trust

Developing and nurturing positive relationships with those we love is so important. Here are three positive steps to think and pray about.

Remembering to say “thank you”

In our busy lives, it is easy sometimes to fall into the trap of taking things for granted; or worse still, taking God and the other people we love for granted. We need to remind ourselves frequently that everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God. We need to nurture grateful hearts. When you say your prayers with your family every evening, try including a time to say thank you to God and to each other for all your blessings.

Remembering to say “sorry”

Whenever we realise that we have offended God or hurt someone else, we need to be brave enough to say sorry. It is equally important to forgive each other, just as God forgives us when we confess our sins. Try to include in your family prayers a time of silence to reflect on the day and call to mind anything for which we need to say sorry to God. It might be something we have said or thought or done, or something we failed to think or say or do. Why not learn an act of contrition you can pray together as a family, or create your own?

Remembering to be “kind”

It costs so little to show kindness to others, but it can make a huge difference to the atmosphere in our homes. Even small acts of kindness demonstrate our love for each other. It might be no more than an encouraging word, or an offer to help, or a smile. Why not set yourself a challenge to do at least seven selfless acts of kindness every day? Ask the Holy Spirit and your guardian angel to help you.

Written by a married parishioner

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