

Marriage Talk
Saint Mary Men's Ministry
February 15, 2014

Some wag once commented that if love is one long sweet dream then marriage is the alarm clock. Since the topic of my remarks this morning is about marriage I guess I'm the designated alarm clock. I'd like to begin my comments on marriage by recalling a story that occurred several years ago and still resonates in my mind from time to time. Kathie and I were invited to a reception honoring a couple who were celebrating their wedding anniversary. I don't recall specifically which anniversary it was but it was one of the expensive ones – you know precious gems or gold. The wife of the couple being honored was reflecting on a time when they were dating. She was telling the story because her husband was suffering with a form of dementia and unable to do so. She told of a discussion they were having about getting married and a question her future husband had asked her. "What do you want to get out of marriage?" he asked. She responded, "I want to get to heaven." Wow. "I

want to get to heaven,” think about that response for a moment. Now I don’t know about you, but I can assure you that if Kathie had asked me what I wanted to get out of marriage, I doubt if getting to heaven would have been on my mind or something out of my mouth. The long walks under the stars, candlelight dinners, soft music and all those tender moments tend to keep ones thoughts on the near future and obscure any picture of a more distant time. To be sure we all discussed with our future wives ideas about our lives together. Career ambitions, plans for children, places to live, leisure activities, and even religious practices were certainly among some of those discussions. But marriage as the vehicle for one to achieve heaven is a topic that I doubt was part of many pre-marital discussions. I’m tempted to ask for a show of hands on the subject but I think I’ll pass.

This morning I’d like to take a quick look at the sacrament of marriage and see how it fits the bill as an avenue to heaven.

One of the first things we know about marriage is that it was designed by God. In the second chapter of Genesis God

has created the world and all that is in it yet the man He created was still without a partner so God took a rib from the man Adam and created a woman Eve. When the man saw her he said, “This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,” and the immediately following verse says, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gen 2:23 & 2:24) Adam and Eve were literally made for each other. They were made to come together in the union of marriage in order to obey God and, “Be fertile and multiply...” One merely has to look at how God designed man and woman to understand that they were made to fulfill His command to multiply. Man and woman in the unitive bond of marriage were to be the vehicles by which God continue His loving act of creation by bringing new life into His world.

Next, marriage is a covenantal bond. From Abraham, to Moses, to Joshua, and to David God’s agreement with his people have been one of covenant. We tend to think of a covenant as a bilateral agreement between two parties, but when God is one of the parties it is much, much more.

Unlike an earthly legal covenant a covenant with God is not voided if we should break the agreement. When God promises he cannot go back on His word no matter how the other party of the covenant strays from the agreement. God is always faithful to His word and that is why we see God frequently relenting whenever the Israelites break their covenant. Throughout scripture we see marriage as the best image we have been given by God to understand His unbreakable and complete love and fidelity to us, His covenant. God uses marriage as the relationship to reveal Himself to us. Marriage is a covenant intended to image God's relationship to us with all the love, forgiveness, nurturing, sacrificing, protecting, and faithfulness that are contained in the marital promise. The sacrament of marriage is a sacred exchange of persons, where each pledges to give himself or herself entirely to the other. It is more than a contract it is a holy indissoluble covenant.

Thirdly marriage is intimate. Marriage involves the complete opening up of one's entire being to the spouse, holding nothing back, physically, spiritually, or psychologically. It is the complete surrender to each other

so total that the two spouses mirror the mystery of the Trinity, even if obliquely. A husband and wife’s intimacy respects each other, does not exhaust or consume each other, and leaves room for the third (the gift of a child) Their total faithful and fruitful love, even when not blessed with a child, reflects the self-giving love that is in the Trinity. This Trinitarian type intimacy fulfills the two fold purpose of marriage – the good of the spouses and the transmission of life. The meaning of transmission of life is obvious; the term, “the good of the spouses” may need a brief explanation. The “good of the spouses” refers to the mutual satisfaction and fulfillment of a husband and wife as they help each other live and grow in holiness to become saints. Marriage also fulfills each spouse’s desire to love someone and be loved by someone. They do this by demonstrating to each other unconditional, permanent, and total love that images the love that God has for us.

Designed by God, covenantal bond, and intimacy are only three of the characteristics that constitute a sacramental marriage. Some other characteristics include faithfulness, indissoluble, freely entered into, between a man

and a woman and between baptized persons. When you consider all the factors that constitute a sacramental marriage I think you'd agreed that marriage as a relationship designed to serve spouses as pathways to heaven.

I don't mean to imply that getting married magically confers perfection and opens heavens gates. Rather, the love shared by spouses in a marital relationship is powerful enough to transform their whole life's journey so that it becomes a journey toward perfection. In this journey, the spouses are ever more conformed into the likeness of Christ so that they can ever more perfectly love one another as Christ loves his Church."

In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II it is stated as follows, "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church, with the result that the spouses are effectively led to God... spouses are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope and charity; thus they increasingly further their

own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render Glory to God.” Those who are called to the vocation of marriage and have entered into a sacramental marriage help each other to holiness and Heaven.

After reviewing my talk she who must be obeyed suggested that I include some tips on what makes a marriage successful. Fifty years of married life have taught me the wisdom of taking suggestions from she who must be obeyed seriously. I think a short story will make the point. It seems a young man about to be married was talking with his grandfather “So Grandpa” he asked “your marriage to Grandma is legendary everyone talks about how you two get along so well and never fight, what’s the secret to your marital success?”

“Well” said Grandpa Joe after taking a deep puff on his cigar “it all started on the way home from our wedding, we hadn’t gone but a mile when the horse started giving us trouble I gave the horse a little whip and that’s when I heard your Grandma say in a low voice “that’s strike one.” A bit later the horse stopped again “that’s strike two” she said. The third time the horse stopped she took a pistol out of her

purse and shot it in the head. I was in shock! “What in the world was that all about?” I had protested at the time. “That’s strike one!” she said back to me. ”And that is what I owe our marital success to.”

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and you kind attention.

Since I have the microphone and no one has given me the hook yet I’d like to make one final point that is a bit off topic yet I think important; it has to do with conscience rights. We are well aware that many of our Catholic beliefs are under attack today from an ever increasing relativistic society – marriage being one of them. The primrose path that our legislators are proposing is that we can allow our governments to impose certain morally objectionable acts, abortion, same sex marriage, co-habitation, etc, on society if those opposed are given the option of conscientious objection. The question that has to be asked and satisfactorily answered is what happens when my conscientious objection runs afoul of the established law. We are already seeing discrimination suits popping up when

a baker refuses to accept an order from a same sex couple, or when a church attempts to dismiss someone who acts contrary to Church teaching. We must not be lulled into thinking that conscientious objection is an acceptable compromise in the struggle against the advances of immorality being perpetrated on our society today. Thank you for allowing me to rant.