

Matrimony
Session #3 year 2
May 5, 2009

Before exploring the Sacrament of marriage,
we would do well to lay some groundwork,
i.e. to see what preceded the institution of the Sacrament *per se*.
I hope you realize that we are opening a hug can of worms!

We can, of course, consider marriage from a purely human perspective.
In terms of understanding, prior to any reference to God, marriage,
i.e. *long-term coupling*, so to speak,
is a natural reality a natural phenomenon.
Aristotle says, in his treatise on the political community, that
“Man is a naturally political and gregarious animal.”
In other words, people bond!
It is important to situate and understand marriage
from a “philosophical” perspective.
Why?

1. Because it stands on its own as such and merits such understanding,
as does all of human life and experience.
2. Because such understanding allows us to see
 - a. exactly what the Sacrament does
 - b. what exactly is the work of grace
 - c. that which is properly and directly about Christ

In addition to a philosophical perspective,
there is a theological perspective that precedes Christ.
There is marriage in the *Old Covenant*.
In the Old Testament, we believe that God reveals
how He sees the reality of marriage in relation to Him
—prior to Christ taking hold of it and taking it to another level.

The beginning of Revelation for us, the book of Genesis,
gives us a vision of the relationship between man and woman.
It is probably better to speak of *vision* or *perspective*,
than it is of plan or project.
The latter suggest a work of art that God is fashioning
or a detailed road-map, both of which would eliminate human freedom,

a key ingredient in the mix.

The story of Creation grants us to see how God sees man and woman.

It is important to underscore that there are *two* stories of Creation.

How interesting.

How initially confusing.

We sometimes forget this.

Or, because it is challenging, we sometimes either

- blend the two
- allow one of the two to overshadow the other

When you think “story of Creation”,

many of you probably think, “Oh yeah: the rib”.

The first story of Creation is in Genesis 1 (24-28a).

In it, we read that God created man and woman, together,
in unity, in equality.

Equality does not mean sameness in everything.

Equality does mean that, as regards what makes us properly human
—mind and will—we are the same.

Men and women are both human

—despite the fact that men are from Mars, women are from Venus!

It may be hard to decipher humanity in some men and some women (!),
but that is another question.

Man and woman are both rational animals with free will.

The second Creation account is found in Genesis, chapter 2.

It presupposes the first,

i.e. what is revealed regarding unity and equality between man and woman.

We go from *unity* to *diversity*.

In other words, if I may digress, diversity always presupposes unity.

And this applies across the board—for gender and race and age, whatever.

Diversity always presupposes a more fundamental unity.

Hence my personal discomfort—if I may further digress

—with our national preoccupation with so-called diversity,

diversity which, moreover, is usually that of appearance, not thinking.

We need to focus first on unity and equality.

Focusing first on diversity will not and cannot promote diversity.

Focusing first on unity,

i.e. that which we share/have in common, promotes unity.

For example, why must we check “race” on every form and document?

Most of the time it is entirely irrelevant.
Do not get me started! I digress...

We read in Genesis 2 (4b-8, 15-25) a Creation account that is *very* different. In fact, historically, the two accounts contradict one another. Fortunately, this is not an historical document, i.e. a description of how everything took place. This is divine symbolism, i.e. symbolic language revealing deeper truths. truths deeper than description, truths that are then true today and every day, truths for every generation.

Man is created alone—without the rest of Creation even complete, unlike the first Creation account in which man is created as the crowning piece of everything after everything is complete. What does this reveal?

This reveals that

- man is distinct from woman
- man—without falling into stereotypes or caricatures (hard to do), implies certain general differences from woman.

The first Creation account is orderly, with everything building to the creation of man and woman, together, on the 7th day. The first Creation account reveals that Creation is a work of *wisdom*. Order, orderliness characterizes wisdom.

Here, when the earth is still a mass of water, God cannot wait, “Hurry, let’s create man!”

Then, after the creation of man, God realizes (here we see how symbolic this is: there are no afterthoughts for God) that man, as such, cannot survive 24/7, and so plants a garden where He plants man.

The plants and even the animals prove to be insufficient companions. God casts man into a deep sleep, and draws a rib, around which he fashions woman.

Hmm: man from dirt, woman from human flesh.

Woman comes from something more developed and physically refined. This symbolically suggests greater sensitivity.

Woman is shown to be complementary, different, with her own nuances.

As we see in this account, when it comes to the creation of man and woman, God is in a hurry.

Creation is also a work of *love*.

Haste characterizes love.

The original state of our first parents in humanity—whom we call Adam and Eve, given who they are—is symbolized by Eden.

In Hebrew (supposedly: I do not speak it!),

- “Adam” means “dirt” or “soil” or “clay”
- “Eve” means “living”
- “Eden” means “garden of delight”

Eden sounds like Vegas, or the Bahamas, only better!

There was perfect harmony in Eden, between:

- Adam and Eve
- Adam and Eve and the rest of nature
- body and soul
- Adam and Eve and God

In other words, it was a *good* place!

Revelation tells us that Eden did not last for long.

The first generation lost it—literally!

Adam and Eve thought they could do better.

Adam and Eve, prompted by the Devil

—which, of course, poses many questions which we cannot answer here, break the harmony.

Adam and Eve break the harmony of all of Creation

as a consequence of breaking the deepest harmony in their lives:

that with God.

What happened?

They opted for knowledge over love.

They think that they can know themselves outside of their relationship with the all-knowing God.

Wrong! Very dumb!

Love is always primary.

Knowledge is awesome, but relative to love.

Love for God is supremely primary, and entails, given that God is first,

some sort of obedience.

Adam and Eve *disobeyed*.

They chose what they thought was a short-cut to knowledge, and, in so doing, fell into the worst form of self-centeredness: *pride*.

Pride is the mother of all sin, which is always a form of self-centeredness.

Adam and Eve, in a sense, repeated the sin of Lucifer, whose sin was that of pride.

Lucifer opted for knowledge over love.

He could not tolerate the creation of humans, i.e. less luminous beings, beings capable of participating in the fruitfulness of love in a new way.

Humans can love one another directly. Angels cannot.

Humans can reproduce. Angels cannot.

Lucifer opted for his perspective over that of God, i.e. knowledge over love.

He wanted to remain first, luminous being that he is.

So, Eden did not last for long
—and we are still living with the consequences.

Thank you Adam and Eve!

Before we explore the consequences,
have you heard the joke about the pastor
who pays home visits in his new parish?

**A new pastor moved into a small town,
and once he got more or less settled,
he figured he would do well to go from house to house
and visit his parishioners. All was going well until he came upon
this one house. It was obvious that someone was home,
but no one came to the door although he had knocked several times.
He realized that he ought not insist. So he took out his card, wrote on
the back "Revelation 3:20" and inserted it between the screen door.
Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any one
hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine
with him, and he with me."**

**That was a Friday. The next week, as he was counting the offering,
he found his card in the collection plate. "How odd", he thought.
Below his message was the notation "Genesis 3:10."**

**Genesis 3:10: "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid,
because I was naked: so I hid myself."**

What are the consequences of this break in harmony, of “the Fall”?
They are articulated in Revelation itself, in Genesis 3 (10-19a).
God underscores the break in harmony
in his conversation with Adam and Eve.
Unpleasant circumstances or tendencies emerge.

In order, they are:

- childbirth becomes laborious
- woman’s love for man becomes disproportionately emotional and controlling
- man’s love for woman becomes aggressive and controlling
- because the respectful understanding of nature has been altered, and because nature itself is less harmonious, work is laborious

This is the baggage that we carry.
It is important to be aware of the unloving, unhealthy tendencies in us,
that influence our behaviour, and even our decisions.
Of course, these tend to predominate in one gender but are not exclusive.
And when experienced by the other gender,
they are not a sign of a lack of masculinity or femininity.
Their experience suggests a lack of humanity!

God, of course, does not drop Adam and Eve in retribution.
In fact, it is very interesting to note that, when Eve bears her first child,
she says, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.” (4:1)
God is present.
God is faithful.
God is faithful to His covenants.
Oddly, God leaves Adam and Eve
with the consequences of their stupid choice.
God is faithful to His creative act,
and continues to sustain them in existence.
God is faithful to a fundamental “natural” covenant in procreation:
“Be fertile and multiply”.
If human fertility implies the creation of a soul by God,
then there is a covenant, and, whenever there is conception,
regardless of the circumstances, God is faithfully present.

Humanity goes along, limping, but nonetheless.
The relationship with God, however, is never quite the same
—to say the least!
But God is love, and thus pursues humanity,
and seeks to fix what has been broken—not because humanity deserves it,
but because He is love.
For lack of time, we will not look at the Old Covenant,
but directly at the New Covenant, the final covenant,
which ushers in the new age.
The Word made flesh, God incarnate, takes hold of humanity,
and thus takes hold of man and woman, surely with intentions for them,
a vision of them.
There is the reality of marriage in the New Covenant.
There is marriage taken hold of by Jesus.
What does it look like?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”
The coming of the God-man, much to the contrary of many expectations
—and the secret hopes of most of us(!)—did not put humanity back in Eden.
The baggage remains.
The consequences of the Fall still extend to and affect us.
And a couple to be married brings this baggage to the table.
Now you know why I am not married. I have enough of my own baggage.
Just kidding!

The incredible thing actually is that, in the midst of the brokenness
and selfish tendencies, a New Covenant is established,
a covenant which can even make use of the brokenness.
This we see amazingly in marriage.

The Sacrament of Matrimony.

Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments.
In other words, it is one of the ways in which Jesus comes in a special way,
and through those to whom he comes, to the Community.
“When one member of the Body is blessed, the whole Body is blessed.”

Marriage is, with Holy Orders, one of two Sacraments of *service*.
In other words, it is a Sacrament
in which Jesus sends forth, in a particular way:

- the couple to one another
- the couple to the Community

In other words, we do not marry for ourselves.

We marry because of another person, to love the other person, and to bear fruit in the midst of and for the community; either in literally bringing forth new members or in the radiance of goodness of the relationship which nourishes the community.

When did Jesus institute the sacrament of matrimony?

It is not as though Jesus said

“I am establishing marriage as one of seven sacraments.

I will henceforth make use of this particular type of human love as a channel of grace.”

Two passages come to mind in trying to discern when Jesus established this sacrament.

One articulates what Jesus said.

The other articulates an understanding,

a deep understanding to which the church

—led by her Lord, the head of the church, came very quickly.

And, in the end, we must acknowledge that we lean on the church for the understanding that there are seven sacraments, and that marriage is one of them.

Matthew 19:1-12

He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'

and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss (her)?"

He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts

Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery."

[His] disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

He answered, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted.

Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Jesus restates what we read in Genesis 1.

Verses 5-6

A question is then posed.

Verse 7

In response, Jesus articulates an intention.

Verses 8-9

His disciples perceive the demands that Jesus makes and declare they are too much.

Verse 10

Jesus then articulates his intention not only to return to the original vision of God but to take marriage to a new level: marriage with a view to the kingdom of Heaven.

Verses 11-12

Sounds romantic huh?

Paul speaks along these lines,

showing how the church ripens in its heart what Jesus reveals.

In Ephesians 5 Paul says that Christian marriage is to be understood in the light of the relationship between Christ and the church.

He solemnly declares "It is a great mystery."

Something happens to a couple taken hold of by Jesus in this way, this sacramental way.

And so two persons fall in love, deepen their bond,
and decide to invite Christ to meet them in a new way,
to take hold of them together, to deepen their love in him.
They request the sacrament of matrimony.
And if there are no impediments
(lack of sufficient knowledge of the other person, lack of freedom
or free choice, bonds of kinship or consanguinity, existent bonds
i.e. already married, a religious or a priest),
they go for it—on a wing and a prayer.
The wing is that of the Holy Spirit!

What does the couple bring to the table?
They bring their love, their human love,
and they bring the willingness, wrought by that love,
to choose one another in an unconditional way.

Such a choice already makes sense humanly speaking.
Why?
Because when we love someone we love that person for him or her self.
Why do we love that person for him or her self?
Because they are the cause of the love we experience.
They are the transcendent cause.
In other words, to love rightly, *real-ly*,
means to love in reaching for the source, so to speak,
the source being the other person, the one I love.
One cannot stop at self.
And if the love is strong, and mutual,
it makes perfect sense, given that the other person is, in the end,
a mystery that I do not possess, to choose unconditionally.

Such a choice makes sense divinely speaking.
Why?
Because we know, in faith, that Jesus makes promise in the sacrament.
Jesus promises to be the primary actor in the relationship.
Jesus promises to make it possible as he invites, as he commands.
Marriage seeks to be a particular fulfillment of the new commandment:
“Love one another as I love you.”

This capacity and willingness to choose, which, in a sense,
crystallizes their love, is what is brought to the table,

is the matter of the sacrament.

The actual choice, the act of choosing is what will be key in the celebration of this Sacrament.

And it must be expressed in words.

There is a sensible sign for every sacrament.

As Thomas Aquinas says,

“There must be at least words by which the consent is made perceptible to the senses.”

There is an interesting analogy with Baptism.

Grace is conferred in the celebration, in the using of the matter, and the matter, in both cases, suggests what is happening invisibly.

In Baptism, water is used and there is thus an outer cleansing, which suggests an inner refreshment and cleansing.

In Matrimony, there is an expression of choice, a consent, vows, which, on the human level, make for joining, binding.

Of every marriage, Christian or not, we speak of “tying the knot”.

This visible act suggests what is happening invisibly: a new inner joining.

Christ binds the couple to Himself, and in Him, to one another.