
The joy of marriage

By Fr. Vincent Pereira, JCD

In the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the Legislator introduces a new explicitness to an important concept in marriage law; namely, that the marriage aims at, or “is ordered for”, “the good of the spouses” [c. 1055]. The expression “the good of the spouses” is pregnant with a richness of meaning because it centres on the consenting persons themselves, who are creatures made in the image of God. The emphasis is laid on the persons who are getting married.

In the Roman Church, marriage is a sacrament and a calling from God for a man and a woman. Its value and effect cannot be overestimated. The core of the sacrament of marriage is the mutual consent of the spouses, which is a simple contract but filled with a range of terminologies; unfolded, as it is, in the Church's rite and ritual, and publicly expressed by the parties. The model is the mystical marriage of Jesus Christ and the Church. Appropriate grace is obtained in and through sacramental marriage, which stands out among all other sacraments, involving as it does, two persons from somewhat different backgrounds, who do not know all the details of the future and yet choose to accept each other wholly, in the presence of the Church's minister and the believing, worshipping community. The entire community is expected to pray with them and for them, wishing them well.

The joy of marriage comes from that grace of sacramental married love, and this joy is further nurtured by the spouses in their frequentation of the holy Eucharist. Of course, in their journey together, in their day-to-day manner of living, the spouses need to show and renew and confirm that simple consent that they made to each other – “I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.”

The conscious experience of an intimate partnership for the whole of life must mean for the married couple a lasting love founded on complementarities, equality, dignity and sacrifice. It does not mean that all the difficulties of life are eliminated. Human difficulties come in every form and in all walks of life, but life and love survive, for God gives grace when needed. Given the virtues of faith, hope and love, the measuring rod that measures the joy of married life is the degree of sacrifice that each spouse makes for the well-being and growth of the other.

This article is the first of a series on the value of Marriage Law and the Tribunal Ministry. In next issue, the article will be on marriage outside the Church.