

# From the desk of Fr. Jim

## A COMMENTARY ON MARRIAGE

### PART 1: WHY DID YOU GET MARRIED?

While it is the hardest thing in the world to admit, most of us live our life in default mode. It is like falling down the stairs. The best thing to do in order to survive is to just relax. Of all the attitudes and philosophies of modern living, however, this is the least rational or productive. More effort is involved, but the one and only way that a marriage will work is to work at it.

Among the principles for a “good marriage,” the first is to see it as a vocation. Couples come to priests with stars in their eyes. The compelling force of romantic love has done its business, like pushing a boulder over a cliff. It is so compelling and powerful that many couples imagine that this is the definition of love and marriage. Unfortunately it is the thinnest kind of love, like a mist it is gone.

There are, by the way, different kinds of love. We know this because we love ice cream, our dog, mom and our soul-mate, but we love them very differently. The love that first compels us to our mate is erotic love. Now, as I say, erotic love has its place but it is intended to be brief and shallow, even though it is admittedly something quite powerful. It is shallow in the sense that it is not the stuff upon which a person makes a decision.

So, the first thing that we need (in order to have a happy marriage) is to go back to the beginning and ask the question, “Why did we get married?” A lot of folks don’t have a clue or, when they gain the perspective of time, they admit that it was lust or some other type of temporary insanity that was the ground of their choice. Couples used to come up with the claim that marriages were made in heaven. Now they imagine that marriage is a product of Hollywood, and Hollywood only knows about one kind of love.

Let’s go back and look at the marriage-made-in-heaven idea. Surely, this idea is an expression of the “starry eyed” state in which a couple finds themselves. Perhaps they mean that their marriage is rare and intended by God. It may not be rare, but I don’t think there is any doubt that God is involved in our marriage. He calls us to be married. The vocation is very clear. It is part of the universal call given to all humanity.

*“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” (John 13:34)*

It is true that this is not necessarily a command or vocation that is given exclusively to marriage, but that marriage is a unique aspect of this call is clear from St. Paul:

*“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word ...” (Ephesians 5:25-26)*

The word that Jesus and St. Paul are using to describe the heart of marriage is, of course, love. But it is the other kind of love, the love that motivates a man to lay down his life for his country, his neighbor, his family. It is sacrificial love, the love that Jesus has for us, from the cross. I think it is correct to compare these two kinds of love, erotic love and sacrificial love.

If erotic love becomes a substitute for sacrificial love, it is truly fake, like a painted face. It is shallow and even spiritually cannibalistic. Here is an example. A man comes home to his family. He works all day and makes a lot of money. He comes home with the expectation that his family will provide applause and even pleasure. He is looking for a reward for his effort. But no one is interested. They expect him to deposit his check and to provide for them. They have no interest in him in any other way. Sound gross? It is a family of cannibals.

In kind or degree, we have all been there, and all the examples of it are gross. The devil, in his sinister and malicious way, quietly creeps into the pure heart of marriage and turns it into a sickening mess. He makes marriage into something all about rights and being treated fairly and being owed something. Love becomes doing something for me because I did something for you. The devil wants to get the cross out of your marriage. She gets a lawyer; he gets a tan and gold chain. They both are trying to find erotic love, using another person for one's own self-love. Erotic love is dead but the devil will paint a corpse to keep out of your marriage the kind of love to which Jesus calls us.

*“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:13-14)*

The next marriage encounter weekend is **August 10 - 12, 2007**. Here is a way to strengthen the vocation in your marriage. Signup information is found in pamphlets available in the Narthex, or by e-mailing [register@dfwme.org](mailto:register@dfwme.org)