

“Theology of the Body” for Couples
Talk 6: Marriage—The Dimension of Covenant and Grace

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her... The two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:21-22, 25, 31-32). *(The whole text is Eph. 5:21-33).*

In Summary

This talk delved into the 2nd half of “Theology of the Body”, which John Paul II calls “The Sacrament.” In this talk, we focused on marriage as the “primordial sacrament”—the form “from the beginning”—upon which all of the sacraments are modeled. This is because marriage is the first and most apt sign of God’s covenant and grace. How? Because from the beginning, the “one flesh union” of man and woman has been a sign of God’s promise of love, a sign that makes clear Jesus’ gift of self—*His* “one-flesh union” with *His* bride, the Church—on the Cross to *save* us. Christ’s gift of self (translation: Christ’s *love*) is not only redeeming, but also *spousal*, because it is a love that brings communion and new life through a sacrificial union that is total and eternal...just like marriage. These two signs of love—1) of Christ (the Bridegroom) & the Church (His bride), and 2) of husband and wife—are so closely united that John Paul II links them together as “one”, calling them *together* “The Sacrament.”

This rich imagery comes from St. Paul (see the scripture passage above) who speaks of the “Great Mystery”, which means that man-wife and Christ-Church express *one* mystery: the mystery of perfect loving communion: *God-as-Trinity*, Who exists as a selfless, dynamic exchange of love, and Who created us to exist in the same way. Marriage is the reality which God has given to us from the beginning to help us to understand the depth, the height, and the breadth of love He has for us: a love that is free, full, faithful, and fruitful; a love which lasts through life and beyond, never to be broken or tarnished, and which gives new life.

God has made it possible for us to participate in His own life through the offering of the Holy Mass—the “true presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross”—when Divine Love is made flesh for us in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Catholic Christian life. Whereas the other sacraments of the Church mediate Christ to us, the Eucharist *is* Christ: in the Eucharist, the Bridegroom becomes “one flesh” with His Bride, as His perfect self-offering of Calvary is made really and truly present for us. Through the Holy Mass, we understand in a new way that the language of self-gift “spoken” in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Marriage is the same: “This is my body, given for you”...A language of sacrifice, and of true love.

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TOB/JPII & Related Quotes

“Love excludes every kind of submission by which the wife might become a servant or slave of the husband...Love makes the husband simultaneously subject to [his] wife...” (TOB 89:4).

“Spouses are...the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the cross.” (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13).

“Love...allows [spouses] to interpenetrate each other, belonging spiritually to one another, to the point that... In union through love, the body ‘of the other’ becomes ‘one’s own’...” (TOB 92:7).

“...Marriage as the most ancient revelation...endow[s] [Christ’s] redemptive love with a spousal nature and meaning” (TOB 93:1)... **“...Redeeming love transforms itself...into spousal love”** (TOB 90:6).

“...The gift given by God to man in Christ is a ‘total’ or ‘radical’ gift, which is precisely what the analogy of spousal love indicates: it is in some sense ‘all’ that God ‘could’ give of himself...” (TOB 95b:4).

“...All the sacraments of the New Covenant find their prototype in some way in marriage as the primordial sacrament” (TOB 98:2).

“The Eucharist is the Sacrament...of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.” (St. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 26)

“The Church was made from the side of Christ, and He united Himself to Her in a spiritual intercourse.”
(St. John Chrysostom, (4th century) *Discourse to Married Couples*)

“Christ...unite[s] with [His bride] in an indissoluble love, just as spouses, husband and wife, unite in marriage” (TOB 97:4).

“Woman was not taken from man’s head, for she was never meant to rule, nor from his feet to be his slave, but from his side to walk beside him, from beneath his arm to be protected by him, from near his heart that he might love and cherish her”.
(Hugh of St. Victor- 11th century)

“Love binds the bridegroom to be concerned for the good of the bride; it commits him to desire her beauty and at the same time to sense this beauty and care for it” (TOB 92:4) **“Christ... assigns the dignity of every woman as a task to every man”** (TOB 100:6)

TOB Terms

Sacrament: with a capital “S”, a Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ that gives grace. There are seven of them, and each of them help us in a *specific* way to come closer to God and to live His life.

sacramental: With a small “s”, something sacramental is a visible sign of an invisible reality, a sign of the extraordinary *through* the ordinary, a spiritual reality made present through physical means. In this sense we can say that the created world is “sacramental”, because it shows us God’s grandeur. The body is “sacramental” because it reveals the *inner* person.

Primordial Sacrament: John Paul II’s description of marriage as the first form through which *all* of the sacraments are communicated and celebrated in the life of the Church. *Each* sacrament is a direct communication of spousal love: Christ “the Bridegroom’s” Blood is shed on Calvary for the benefit of His Bride, the Church, which is present in the soul of *each* of the baptized faithful.