

“Theology of the Body” for Couples
Talk 7: Marriage—The Dimension of Sign

“I passed near you again and looked on you...I swore a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became *mine*...” (Ez. 16:8)

In Summary

This talk continued the 2nd half of “Theology of the Body”, which John Paul II calls “The Sacrament”. This particular section that we looked at is entitled “The Dimension of Sign”. Here, “sign” is understood as something which *points toward* an even greater destination. The sacraments partake of the world of signs, and so does a couple’s marital embrace: The marital embrace is a sign of *true love*, a love that is *from* God, and which is Heaven-bound.

We learned in this section that love has a truth all its own. Love is both an action (“self-gift” and “wanting the good of the other”) and a passion (“the spiritual presence of the beloved *in* the lover”). Love cannot be manipulated. If it is, it is no longer love. It is in this light that John Paul II speaks of the “Language of the Body” and the “Prophecy of the Body”. In the marital embrace, the body itself “speaks” the language of marital love and marital truth. It says, “I belong to you and *only* you” (unity); “I want to be with you *forever* (indissolubility); and “I want to have children with you (procreativity). A prophet is one who speaks the truth. The body’s language is prophetic: It declares the *truth of love*, and the *truth of marriage*.

The “language of the liturgy” is also prophetic. It speaks the truth of marital love through the vows that are exchanged: Freely (“Have you come here freely and without reservation...?”); Fully (“...to give yourself to each other in marriage?”); Faithfully (“Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?”); and Fruitfully (“Will you accept children lovingly from God?”). These “four F’s” are also perfectly exemplified in the life of Christ in relationship to the Church, His Bride, showing us yet again the powerful sign value of authentic married love and how it shows forth for the world the life of faith, *and* is built up *by* the life of faith. In a word, the Church builds up marriage, and marriage builds up the Church.

Lastly, we looked at the two great Biblical “love stories” of the Song of Songs and the book of Tobit. Both of these stories show the sacred nature of human love. In the Song of Songs, we see the woman being embraced as *sister* before she is fully received as bride. And in the book of Tobit, we see how shared prayer in the life of a couple can be not only life-giving, but literally life-*saving*. It is when God is invited *into* marital life and the marital embrace that true intimacy is born, and couples are able to serve one another through the greatest of gifts: being one another’s help mates toward Heaven.

“Theology of the Body” for Couples
Talk 7: Marriage – The Dimension of Sign

TOB/JPII & Related Quotes

“Man is the cause of his actions, and the *author of their meanings*” (TOB 105:6)

“Truth and love need each other...Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth! One without the other becomes a destructive lie”.
(St. John Paul II, canonization homily of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

“Love is a power...; the power given to the human person to *participate* in the love with which God Himself loves”
(TOB 127:1).

“Love unleashes a special experience of the beautiful”.
(TOB 108:5)

“The content of the Song of Songs is at the same time sexual and sacred...human love, created and blessed by God, can be the theme of an inspired biblical book” (TOB 108, n. 97).

“The sacraments infuse holiness into the terrain of...humanity: they penetrate the soul and body, the femininity and masculinity of the person...with the power of holiness”
(TOB 117b:2).

“In the texts of the prophets, *the body tells the truth* through faithfulness and conjugal love, and, when it commits ‘adultery’ it tells a lie, *it commits falsehood*.” (TOB 104:8)

“Before being spoken by the lips of the spouses... ‘the language of the body’ was spoken by the word of the living God...” (TOB 105:4).

“Everything, in fact, happens during the couple’s wedding night...the choices and acts...[of the spouses] take on the whole weight of human existence” (TOB 114:8 & 115:3) ...
Conjugal life in some sense becomes liturgy” (TOB 117b:6).

“Reciprocal self gift...*impresses the seal on their whole life*”
(TOB 111:5).

TOB Terms

Sign: Like a sacrament, a sign is **“the visibility of the invisible”** (TOB 95b:7). A sign points *beyond* itself toward a hoped-for destination.

Grace: God’s help to us so that we can live His divine life.

Liturgy: Our thanksgiving to God through right worship and adoration, centered on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; The public prayer of the Church.

Love: As a passion, love is the spiritual presence of the beloved in the lover. It is something that happens *to* me. As an action, love is a gift of self, and wanting the good of the other. It is something that I *do*.

Language of the body: “[The] singular language of... [our] **personal existence and vocation**” (TOB 104:7). The marital embrace is a sacramental sign in which the bodies of man and woman speak “prophetically” in the name of God with His authority. This language is meant to proclaim the truth of God’s love for us, poured out in Christ’s body, *given up* for us.

Prophetism of the Body: **“Conjugal consent...offers the spouses a particular share in the prophetic mission of the Church”** (TOB 106:4). Our bodies are created for a gift of self that is unitive and life-giving, because *God* is a life-giving communion of love. Made in His image, we show forth His life *prophetically* through our actions and our choices when they are good, or, we *obscure* His life when our actions and choices are sinful.

Prophet: **“one who expresses with human words the truth that comes from God”** (TOB 105:2).