

The Vocation of Marriage

by Matt and Sharon Farinholt

June 22nd, 1985, my husband, Matt, and I were joined together in Holy Matrimony for life. Now, many years later, we love each other more than we did that day in 1985. Those vows we made to one another really didn't mean as much then as they do now. Only now can we truly appreciate those promises that we made to one another.

Perhaps if someone had explained the meaning of those vows to us when we were younger, we would have taken them a bit more seriously on our wedding day. Maybe we would have really understood the promises that we were making before God. It is our hope that we can give young people a bit of insight on what it really means to love one another.

Most of the young people today will choose the vocation of marriage. However, statistics show that the success rates of marriages are not so good. About 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Catholics don't fare any better. About half of all Catholic marriages also end in divorce.

With such a high rate of failure, why do most young people choose to get married? The number one reason would probably be for love. Another reason is so that they are not alone. And yet another is to start a family.

But what is *love*? Most young people think of love as an emotion. But love is *not* an emotion. It is an action. Here is the best definition of love that I have heard: *Love – the total, unconditional giving of one's self for the good of another without expecting anything in return.*

Let's break this definition down a bit more to better understand it. **Total**- complete; everything; nothing left out or held back. **Unconditional** – no strings attached. It would be wrong to say that one would love their spouse only under certain conditions. **Giving of one's self for the good of another** – all that we do for and with our spouse must be for their good. **Not expecting anything in return** – what we do out of love is not done with the expectation of receiving something in return. If we do things for our spouse with expectations of something in return it becomes an act of selfishness. This may be the hardest part because most of us are selfish by nature.

If both people go into a marriage with this understanding of what love is, what a blessing their marriage will be! If this definition of love is lived in a marriage we will see many more young people growing old together in marriage.

Marriage is a vocation. It is a lifelong commitment. It is what we will be doing for the rest of our lives. This person is who you will be with as long as you are walking on this earth!

Let's take a look at the traditional wedding vows:

The Priest asks: *"Do you take ___ as your lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish until death do you part?"*

Think about these words! This Covenant between these two people is also a promise to God! Think about this promise you are making to one another. Can two young people in love really live up to this promise? It is not an easy one.

Let's look at it again... *"Do you take ___ as your lawful husband?"* That's an easy one. Sure, it's legal. Let's move on... *"to have and to hold from this day forward"* ...a little trickier. You are saying that you will be together from this day forward. Not from this day until he makes me really mad, or from this day until I find someone else.

Now it gets even more difficult to promise--- *"for better or worse."* It is important for young people to know that there are many "worse" moments in a marriage. A true commitment gets through those worse times as well as enjoys the better times.

Back to the marriage vows; “*for richer and poorer.*” This is a difficult one to swallow.

Financial stress can be very difficult for a marriage. But having money is not what makes a marriage a success. It is good to remember that God does not give us more than we can handle. For those of us with the vocation of marriage; God gives us a spouse to help carry the load. It is always important to remember that our possessions will not get us to Heaven.

The next part of the marriage vow is, “*in sickness and in health.*” It can be very difficult to be a caregiver to someone you love. It is easy to believe when you are young, that illness can’t happen to you. Helping one through an illness is a huge sacrifice. And it is important to remember that prayer and the Sacraments will help make any marriage a success, no matter how tough times may get.

The final part of the wedding vow: “*to love and to cherish until death do you part.*” Notice that love is a verb in this sentence. It is an action...to love. If young people can really learn how to love then they will have a beautiful marriage together filled with many blessings.

In the late Pope John Paul II’s Familiaris Consortio he states, “*The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family are capable of being fulfilled*” (13). Without living the Gospel and putting our Faith in the Lord, what we have is nothing more than a friendship between two people. One cannot have a marriage without Christ being the center of the marriage.

How can a Director of Youth Ministry help the youth of today know the importance of the Sacrament of Marriage? To begin, if you are married you should be a living example. If you are not married but believe it is your vocation, why not pray for your future spouse with your youth group? They can also pray for their future spouse with you.

The youth of today have so many negative images of marriage. Not only are movies and TV shows filled with examples of unhealthy marriages but adult role models in teens’ lives such as teachers and parents of friends, have real-life, unhealthy marriages. Unhealthy marriages have become too commonplace and even seem expected to today’s youth.

Have a night dedicated to the vocation of marriage. Have the teens discuss in small groups where they have seen unhealthy marriages as well as healthy marriages. Be sensitive to young people who are living in separated or divorced families. Try to share with them a newer and brighter perspective of marriage and how they can have a holy marriage despite their parents’ choices.

It is also a good idea to have a happily married couple come and give a talk to the youth about marriage and the sacrifice involved. Our parish has also had a renewal of marriage vows ceremony where any married adults are invited to come and renew their vows. This would be a wonderful thing for the youth of the parish to sponsor and invite their parents to attend, as well as the parish community.

Matt and Sharon Farinholt have served as Directors of Youth Ministry at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Winchester, VA. Embracing the vocation of marriage and family life, Matt and Sharon were married in June 1985 and are the parents of seven wonderful children.