



Beauty

DISCOVER THE TRUTH, GOODNESS & BEAUTY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

'Beauty is the lustre of truth' and an inseparable companion of goodness. It is something that we are drawn to through our senses. Beauty is found in proportion and harmony. It is something which can bring us great delight and also evoke a sense of awe within us. Often we encounter the beauty of something before we come to understand its inherent truth or goodness. Sometimes we can be challenged by truth and strive to reject it. Or we may feel that our inadequate efforts to embrace goodness are simply the best we can do. But beauty can overwhelm us and continue to beckon us towards that which is true and good.

The Sacrament of Marriage is a work of great beauty. It is concerned with the joining together of two complementary persons as 'one flesh'; the combining of two bodies and souls in committed and faithful love. Spouses are drawn to the reality of the goodness and truth of marriage through the beauty of their union. They experience the growth of this beauty through the love they have for each other and through the gift of children. Such an understanding of beauty involves an appreciation not only of external appearance, but a full and deep sense of the beauty of a person.

As well as experience, beauty is also an act of contemplation. Husbands and wives are called to ponder the beauty of their marriage covenant and the gift of themselves to the other. The beauty of this reciprocal giving and receiving is reflected in how the love between two persons facilitates the creation of another person to whom each spouse is intimately connected. This act of interpersonal creativity is the most beautiful of all works of art.

There are however, forms of 'beauty' within relationships that are deceptive and false. They are essentially self-serving and lock us more deeply within ourselves. They do not encourage the flowering of true beauty through the nobility of sacrifice and the abandonment of self. Rather, they allow uncontrolled desire to pursue power and to possess another. Such distortions are a twisting of the true beauty of marriage and family.

Human experience has often used the language of metaphor and poetry to express the beauty of married love. The Scriptures describe in the *Song of Songs* the beauty associated with the giving of oneself to another in life-long love: 'My lover belongs to me and I to him' (Sg 2:16). Each is entrusting themselves to the other. In the same way, all spouses are called by God to trust in each other and to unconditionally affirm their willingness to embrace the truth, goodness and beauty that is the gift of marriage and family.

*Lord, grant us
the ability
To love one
another deeply
and unselfishly,
To live the
Truth about our
covenant with
each other,
To embrace the
Goodness of
what we can be
for each other
and for our
children, and
To always see
the Beauty of
your great gift
of marriage
and family,
Amen.*



Reflection: *What are the works of Beauty that continue to draw me towards the truth and goodness of marriage and family?*

What is it about marriage and family that makes it timeless? What is it that causes a man and a woman to take the risk of trusting in their love and making promises of lifelong devotion? As a young man and a young woman are drawn towards each other they sense an opportunity for real joy, for completion. Following their public vows, celebration and the consummation of their love, the two become one flesh. Each marriage creates a new home and through the gift of new life, a family. As both an ideal vision and a universal experience, this fundamental human reality gives us an authentic and beautiful glimpse of what life is like with God. This is why John Paul II reminded us that *"it is necessary to rediscover the truth, goodness and beauty of the marriage institution"*.



TRUTH

The source of all Truth is God. All that we really know about marriage and family only makes sense when it directs us towards that which is authentic; when it shows us the way 'we are meant to be'. Truth can seem rather abstract. However, through the person of Jesus Christ we can come to know and love the Truth. Church teachings about the truth of marriage and family are drawn from both scripture and from two thousand years of living tradition. These teachings are important because they guide us in how we are meant to be in our spousal and family relationships.

The Truth about marriage and family is revealed in the reality of God's plan from the beginning. This reality means that two complementary persons choose to become 'one flesh', to love one another faithfully and to cooperate with God in welcoming new life. This is the civilization of life and love in miniature.

Marriage is one of God's most precious gifts. It is also a concrete reality in our daily lives and a sign of God's promise to humanity. Through marriage we can glimpse the truth about God's faithful and enduring covenant with us. Just as Christ's sacrifice on the cross has united us to him, he unites himself to every married couple and gives them the strength and grace to live marriage in truth and love. Just as God's covenant with us is indissoluble, so too is the matrimonial union of a man and a woman: "So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mt 19:6).

We are images of God endowed by him with the wonderful gift of rationality. Through the use of our intellect we can consider whether something appears to be in harmony with revealed Truth. However, we need to also remind ourselves that we are not perfect and that there may be times when we may struggle to fully understand the Truth. That is why a teaching Church is so important for us in our efforts to discern what is authentic. Our faithful efforts to conform our lives to the Truth about marriage and family still bear fruit even if our efforts sometimes fall short. This is because we are simply acknowledging that despite our imperfections, we are willing to continue to try to witness to the reality of the way things are meant to be.

Each of us has seen glimpses of the Truth about marriage and family. We may remember the life long commitment that flourished despite difficulties; the self-sacrificing parent with the suffering child; or the generosity of a married couple open to the abundant gift of new life. Such resonances make profound impressions because they are authentic ones.

Reflection: *What are the glimpses of Truth about marriage that have been given to me?*

The first cause of all goodness is God. This is what Jesus meant when He said "None is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19). If we desire true goodness within marriage then we need to know and love what is good. Marriage is about the happiness of spouses, their openness to new life and their giving of glory to God. Goodness is reflected through spousal love, the love of children and a love of God.

Faithful and exclusive sexual intimacy between spouses reflects the goodness of marriage. That wonderful and rich psychological, emotional and physical reality which is evident in the marital union is the way in which God wants us to channel the powerful desires associated with human sexuality into their proper context. The Church has always valued the goodness of the intimate and chaste union of spouses and regarded such unions as 'noble and worthy'. This love differs from other kinds of human love. It engages us completely with another person - with their sexuality, their procreativity and their complementarity.

The procreation and nurture of children has always been an essential part of God's plan for marriage. It is the way in which two complementary persons 'become one' and through their love for each other, make room for a third (and hopefully a fourth and fifth etc). We need to have that openness towards new life which is essential for spouses if we are to welcome children lovingly. This is why the last great Council of the Church reaffirmed that parents were called to 'regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted'. Every child deserves to know that they are the welcome fruit of the loving union of their parents. Hence, the Church has always encouraged spouses to respect the goodness of children and to avoid engaging in practices that are designed to reject the gift of life. From the time of their conception, every child is a gift of immeasurable worth and should be welcomed unconditionally.

Loving fidelity between spouses is also a reflection of that enduring and faithful bond that God has with us. We have a duty to love and honour our spouse and in a similar but much more significant way, we also have a duty to God. The inherent goodness of the marriage bond reminds us of the infinite love that Christ has for His Church and for each one of us. In fact, Christ loves us far more deeply than we could ever love one another. As God is the author of marriage, it is through marriage that spouses are given the grace to be sources of goodness and holiness for each other.

Reflection: *How can I live a life that more truly reflects the Goodness of marriage?*

