

The

# Passionate

**mixing sexuality and spirituality**

# Couple

Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S.J.



a Living in Love  
companion book



A Living in Love Companion Booklet

**THE PASSIONATE COUPLE**

**BY**

**FR. CHUCK GALLAGHER, S.J.**

Mixing Spirituality and Sexuality

PASTORAL AND MATRIMONIAL RENEWAL CENTER



## DEDICATION

To Kathy and Ron who are a model to me about what sexual spirituality and sacramentality are all about.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a great time of renewal in the Catholic Church. It is so wonderful to live in this special age of the Holy Spirit. One of the most important inspirations He is communicating to us is the tremendous significance of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Clearly, the age of the laity has arrived. In no way can that truly come to full flower, without facing into our couples' sacramental love. This is their vocation, the divine call of the vast majority of adult Catholics. We cannot expect lay people to assume their rightful role in the Church Community unless we increase our appreciation for and understanding of this magnificent Sacrament. It is not as lay people that they will be true instruments of the Lord but as married lay persons. We have truly not revered their special love sufficiently. Such reverence is not only important for our couples. It is essential for the well being for the whole Community of the Faithful. We cannot be our full selves without their sacramental love being a driving force in the Church. Their love is part of our very identity. We have, up until this moment of Church history, not realized how vital Matrimony is to the full development of our spirituality and evangelization. We have been like a family who has a map to a buried treasure but have been using it as an ordinary road map. Matrimony is rich beyond our wildest dreams, a treasure long buried which is now being dug up. Their love in the Lord reveals to us, the Faithful, how constantly, closely and mercifully Jesus loves His Body.

Couples, who truly love one another, make a big difference in the Church. The Faithful, through them, see love on its highest human level, the level which most closely resembles the love of Jesus for themselves. The more the couple make no distinction, one from the other, the more believable the love of Jesus for his own Body becomes to the members of the Church, as they model their love on Jesus' love for his own Body. The sacramental couple, in a way, unique to them, reveal Jesus' special love for the Church community. Our couple's love for each another helps us to have greater ambitions to fulfill our call to love one another in the Church. All Sacraments have the power to bring about what they signify. The Sacrament of Matrimony is a sign of how we are to love one another - as Jesus has loved us. The couple not only

testify to that but actually create the atmosphere and environment which makes this possible. The more the “Little Church” becomes a shrine of love, the greater becomes the possibility of love in the whole Community. Our couples set the tone for us all. The more devoted our couples are to one another, and to us, the more believable the presence of Jesus, in our midst, becomes. The Church, enriched in its intimacy by the presence of married couples in our midst, becomes more aware of our call to be a loving family. They are the prime witnesses to his love and to our own, in the Community of the Faithful.

Our couples are Sacraments. Therefore, their love is not private. In their total commitment to one another, they enter into the very mission of Jesus himself. They are the evangelizers whom The Lord sends forth, two by two. Consequently, each of us, whatever our vocation, has a real stake in the development of their love for one another. This is not merely for the sake of the husband and wife but for all our sake. We must take seriously the need to create, in depth and fullness, a true matrimonial spirituality. Our couples need it. The Church will never be itself without it.

Scripture tells us how Jesus wants those who are called to belong to him in the Church are to respond. Paul describes this in terms of Christ's being the tender and caring head of his own Body. Jesus defines himself as the bridegroom dedicated to his beloved. The love which we, the members of the Church, are vocationed through our Sacrament of Baptism to have to one another is most effectively and powerfully witnessed and proclaimed by the Matrimonial love of our couples. Both loves consist of: fidelity, tenderness, intimacy, self sacrifice, healing and forgiveness. These qualities belong, not only to the love between Christ, the bridegroom, and his bride, the Church, but to the relationship of every sacramental couple. Through the power of their marital love, they call us to love one another in the Church as Jesus, the bridegroom has loved us.

Another important dimension to matrimonial spirituality - also flowing from the special role sacramental couples have in the Church - is that it includes the fundamentals of any sound spirituality within the Body of Christ. For a spirituality to be truly of the Church, it must embrace the experience of prayer, celebration of the Sacra-

ments, listening and responding to the word of God, evangelization and the development and accountability of conscience - all this in the context of the spousal relationship between husband and wife. That is key. All those other qualities, by themselves, are applicable to any member of the Church. What makes them specifically marital is the atmosphere of coupleness in which they are wrapped. The couple must be continuously aware of the barriers to intimacy in relationship and be committed to practical measures of discipline and self sacrifice on the part of husband and wife for the sake of growth in deep spousal love.

The Matrimonial relationship differs most from other good personal relationships in the degree of sexual intimacy of married couples. Do married couples see their sexual relationship as a means to growth in holiness? Does the Church support them in this? How do marital spirituality and celibacy compliment and strengthen one another? How does the sexual intimacy of the married couple reflect the intimacy and unity of the Trinity? In what ways is the sexual relationship of the couple "life giving" to each other and others? How important to the marital relationship is the link between the unitive and procreative functions of sex? What helps or hinders couples in appreciating the significance of that link? All these questions go to the heart of a marital spirituality.

We have to develop, within the Church, a real spirituality of coupleness, not merely a spirituality taken from single life and somehow squeezed to fit into married life. The core of any true couple's spirituality is what John Paul II calls the "perennial attraction" of the man to the feminine and the woman to the masculine. It is a much deeper and more profound reality that just hormones or romantic externals. Our sexuality attracts us out of our selfish selves into relationship with the opposite sex. When we are attracted, we are other-centered rather than self-centered. That is why falling in love is such a conversion experience. When we are attracted, not just for mating and dating but even in celibate relationships, we bring out our virtue, what we like best about ourselves, and we are open to the other's influence. A couple's sexual attraction toward one another, makes them tender, responsive, generous, and open. When they communicate through the "language of the body" their desire to be one and to give themselves to each other, they experience an "exodus from self" that Pope Benedict XVI has defined

as authentic sexual ecstasy. It is a profoundly holy, other-centered disposition of soul in which spouses become a total gift of self to each other to mirror Christ's passionate gift of Himself to us on the cross and in the Eucharist. Sexual responsiveness to one another, sexual communication with each other, and the whole aura of sexuality that this attraction creates is the difference between loving and being in love. It is what makes the work of marriage so much easier. Nothing is difficult when we are in love. Spending time together, sharing our feelings, making love are all pure joy. Moreover it is the single defining characteristic that makes conjugal love special and unique and most clearly reveals the passionate, intimate, forgiving, and life-giving love of Christ for His bride the church. It is not a coincidence that husbands and wives give their bodies to each other in the same way that Jesus gives His Body to us in the Eucharist.

One of the key Gospel principles to be annunciated and made possible through their sexual attraction is surrender - the giving up of control. Whenever a couple are overwhelmingly sexually attracted to one another, each one has no difficulty giving up control. The problem, in marriage, comes when the sexual desire lessens and they are able to take back control. Then it becomes a power struggle or an accommodation. As long as one or both parties feel free to say "no" then the marital commitment is broken. They may never say "no" but as long as that is an option there is no surrender. (We are talking about good marriages here, relationships between healthy and loving spouses. If one party is a drug or alcohol addict, a physical or psychological abuser, or not living up to their marital vows, the "no" is not only permitted but demanded. The key scriptural passage which enunciates this principle of "surrender" is that of Paul. He says: "Husbands, your bodies are not your own. They are your wives'. Wives your bodies are not your own. They are your husbands'." He uses the word "body" in the sense of personhood, rather than merely the physical. For the normal mature person the individuation we are all trained into and find so tremendously attractive finds its normal antidote in sexual urgency and commitment toward a beloved. It calls us to be oriented toward the other rather than to self.

One of the Church's problems in respect to Matrimony is its over-emphasis on commitment and underemphasis on other-centered

passion. Actually, the marital commitment should be a desire to be one in mind heart and affection rather than solely to fidelity or living up to the duties of our state in life. In reality, if we are sexually urgent toward one another, there will be no problem in fulfilling the rest of the responsibilities of marriage. Scripture tells us that the “two shall become one flesh,” not that the two should just get along. Certainly, fidelity and permanence, which are the cornerstones of the Church’s teaching on marriage, will be a natural outgrowth of that urgency to give myself away in love. Death to self for the couple, the Gospel proclaims, is the constant struggle to stop taking myself back to myself and constantly be turning myself over to my beloved. This is symbolized and effectuated by the sexual experience.

The similarity between sexual intercourse and the Eucharist is very strong. The Eucharist is the sign of unity which exists in the Body of Christ and between the members of that Body and its Head, Jesus Christ. The Eucharist also accomplishes that reality. So too, the sexual experience of the sacramental couple signifies the unity of the couple and actually creates it as nothing else does. Clearly, the core of the sexual experience is making love. It includes, however, the whole sexual ambience. The couple cannot be their full selves without the love making. Unfortunately, the sexual activity can take place without that ambience. Whenever the sexual atmosphere is missing, the couple is diminished. We do not mean that this sexual desire is present on the occasions they make love. That would go without saying. We mean that sexual attraction for one another should be the normal atmosphere they breathe.

Today, a basic problem exists because of our belief that verbal communication is the core of the marital relationship. Couples appreciate sex, see its value and, even, its essential nature, but, to them, verbal intimacy is more significant. The sexual becomes an outgrowth of the verbal. That is a pre marital attitude. That is the way we should prepare for marriage and choose our partner. After marriage the verbal should be the result of the sexual. What makes a marriage, truly a marriage, is the sexual relationship. We are not implying that a powerful sexual experience with no or little verbal communication is our goal. That would be sexual activity, not a complete sexual environment. But the overemphasis on ver-

bal communication is to be recognized and addressed. The verbal intimacy, which is so vital to the couple's well being, must be an outgrowth of the sexual desire. In many marriages, it is the other way around. The sexual comes into play, only after the demand for verbal intimacy has been satisfied.

The spirituality of coupleness we suggest here is not possible without a deep relationship with God and God's people. It calls for not only prayer, but prayerfulness. It demands a deep intimacy with other couples as well as other members of the Church committed to an ecclesial way of life. Above all, it takes the Eucharist. Death to self and surrender is a Sacramental experience. The empowerment through the Eucharist is in the context of the Community of the Faithful. It is not merely going to Communion as an isolated individual but being part and parcel of this living, breathing organism, the Body of Christ. Therefore, accountability is part of marital sanctity. We need the support, love, mutual sharing and empowerment of the best Sacramental couples we know.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is deeply personal but not private. It is like the Sacrament of Orders. Suppose we ordained a person, who immediately went off to a mountain top and lived out life, celebrating Mass, praying the Office, read deeply into theology but never saw anyone, never spent that beautiful Sacrament on anyone other than self. Sooner or later, a delegation of Church people would go and say to that individual: "You're missing the point. We didn't ordain you for you and for your pleasure in the Sacrament but for us and what we get out of the ordination, which we have shared with you. We should equally go to our couples, tap them on the shoulder and say: "The Sacrament of Matrimony is not merely for the two of you (that would be marriage) it is for what we in the Church receive, through you." The way to evaluate the Sacrament of Matrimony is different than the way you would evaluate a marriage. You have to be in our midst, consciously and completely one of us and be responsible to us. See your relationship through our eyes rather than merely through your own, open yourself to our marital values and live them out from our perspective. Your communal way of life with one another is to assist us in living the way of life the Lord wishes us to live as the Community of the Faithful. If a couple wish to be truly Sacramental, they can't solely focus on their relationship with one another

and how it satisfies them. They have to look at how well they are living out their relationship with us. That means living a communal lifestyle with us, living our values, talking with us, communicating with us. They are to accept the customs, traditions, practices, heritage and facts which make us Catholic. Above all, they must seek out the best Catholics they know seeking their advice and direction on how to be a better matrimonied couple. They are not to take secular norms or, even, their own personal ones but ours as the goal of their Sacramental life.

Death to self can only occur in the Gospel context, only in the environment of the Church community, living out the life of Christ on this earth. It cannot be a bitter, resigned death to self. It must be a joyous giving, following Jesus' statement - greater love than this no man/woman has, than to lay down his/her life for a friend. Certainly a spouse is a friend.

When we discuss marital sexuality, we recognize, in the usual circumstances, that sexual awareness, presence and aura, tend to fade, in even the most passionate of marriages. It is not sufficient to say: "We have a good sex life.". Couples can have a great sex life without being sexual toward one another the rest of the day. We have to work on the sexual environment, as we do on verbal communication. It doesn't happen automatically. We should be using the normal human means: flowers, candles, perfume and after shave, the way we dress, touch and look at one another. We should involve the children. Many couples wonder where the romance went, what happened to their constant sexual appreciation of one another. It went because they became distracted, didn't make it a priority. It gradually ebbed away without their notice. Remember your dating days. You strongly practiced your sexuality. It wasn't something in the air. You created it between you. That is the strong lesson we teach. Sex is a discipline, a decision. Sometimes the word decision in connection with something as deep seated and personal as sexuality causes us to recoil. It seems to take the magic away. Rather we should rejoice in the awareness that it is always in our power. It doesn't depend on the vagaries of feelings. We are in control of our sexuality, at all times. How hopeful that is.



## SEXUALITY

We have no difficulty in persuading people of the importance of masculinity and femininity, the significance of the interaction of men and women. We tend, however, to make less of its value than we should. We perceive sex as a valuable dimension of our lives. The average person couldn't conceive of life without sex and would not want to do so. The fullness of their sexuality, though, is another story. We can easily take that for granted. It is a given that I am a woman/man man. That is taken as a fact and not really reflected upon or tapped into unless there is some conscious interaction with the other sex, actually occurring, anticipated or remembered. Most of our day, our sexuality, usually, is not in the forefront of our consciousness. We have it but consider it to be basically irrelevant to the normal circumstances of our lives. We neutralize our sexuality. Our self definition is locked into the talents and abilities of an undifferentiated person. We don't deny our sexuality but don't think deeply about it, much less exercise it, unless we are in what we deem a "sexual situation". Since the functions of the average day: grooming, working, getting kids out to school, fed and homeworked, off to bed, shopping, housework, driving, relaxing, etc. are not what we would normally look upon as sexual, we put that aspect of ourselves mostly into hibernation. We only become sexual, when sex is on the horizon. That is so limiting to the completeness of our personality. We are not our full selves, unless we are sexual. Our masculinity/femininity should permeate our day, all our activities, most especially, our personal interactions. Otherwise, we have reduced ourselves immeasurably.

What if I decided not to use my hands all day? We see how crippling that is and wouldn't do it. A more likely practice, unfortunately, is to live through our day, mindless. That can happen to even the best and brightest. We put ourselves on automatic pilot, proceeding through our day without thinking very much, if at all. We get ourselves into a rut and routinely do things, without any thought. For most, this occurs only occasionally. For some, though, it becomes the pattern of their lives. In the examples offered, such people miss so much fulfillment and happiness in life. Yet, in the case of our sexuality, we discover no real sense of loss in its suppression. We would never want to lose it completely.



We want the capability to turn it on, whenever we consider it to be appropriate. But we can, actually, look on it as a distraction from more important matters. We have made our sexuality recreational. It becomes the part of us we refer to after hours, when business and duties are done. It is not too strong to say we become sexual zombies in our work a day worlds, that is, lifeless, asexual. This is so diminishing for all but, most especially so, for the Matrimonied. Their vocation is sexual. That vocation should pervade their day, not something restricted to the time they are together, after all the chores. The Matrimonied are called to be the most sexual people in our society, obviously fully conscious of the femininity/masculinity because of whom they are to one another. For a husband or wife to be asexual, even in the most mundane activities, is a contradiction in terms. We don't marry to be persons with one another. We marry to be sexual persons with each other. Our sexuality should be enhanced by our state of life and become ever more real and dominant in our thinking about ourselves.

It can, too often does, happen, once a couple marries, that they become less obviously sexual to themselves and others. This should be the reverse. Being called to a fully sexual way of life, which is the Sacrament of Matrimony, should call forth the fullness of the person's sexuality, in all dimensions of their life. Their masculinity and femininity should be the most obvious thing about them, to all they meet and the most evident aspect of themselves to themselves. Their sexuality should exude from every pore. Good couples know sex is good. By that, though, they often mean it is enjoyable. They use the expression much as they would say the food was good. On a deeper level, they might mean it was a plus in their lives together and had a positive impact on their relationship. Or, even, it is good as an aspect of God's creation, as are: the mountains, the sea, our intelligence. It is even better than we think. Sex is Godly. That is the full sense of the way we should use the word "good" in conjunction with sex. Through sex, we are normally led to lead the life God wants us to live. He uses our sexuality as one of His prime ways to communicate to us and encourage us to be His sort of woman/man.

To truly interact with God is a conversion. We are taken out of ourselves and given a new perspective. We discover new interests, values and purposes. We become more confident in our-

selves and become aware of facets of our personality which had previously been hidden and talents we hadn't seen. Above all, we become other centered rather than self centered. Our goals become oriented toward the happiness of others rather than success or self fulfillment. We no longer search for meaning in life or scratch desperately to find our identity. Our Father provides each of us many occasions for touching him and experiencing such a conversion. He is most interested in our happiness and pursues us throughout our life to lift us beyond our limitations and self doubts.

For most people, the first such experience is falling in love. That can appear odd, at first reading. What has falling in love got to do with God? It seems so exclusively human. That is the point. When we are fully human, we are most alive. When we are most alive, we are most Godly. After all, we are made in His image and likeness. The Bible reveals that we are most His image as male and female, not as undifferentiated persons. When in love, we are most obviously and completely man/woman and delight in being such. There is no holding back, no underplaying our sexuality. We are never happier, which is our Father's ambition for us. He is such a good Father and wants all His children to be fully happy in the life He has given them. Moreover, to see how Godly falling in love is, look at the results. Jesus said: "By their fruits you shall know them.". The person in love is never better at life.

The first occasion of falling in love usually happens during adolescence or young adulthood. Those are periods of deep doubt and self searching. Often, such confusion and tentativeness leads us to be unaware of the needs of others, if not to downright selfishness. When we fall in love, we are converted. Now, the other, the beloved, is more important than I. I find joy more in his/hers than in my own. I am not concerned anymore about who I am and what life is all about. It is all quite clear. I don't feel I have to prove myself. I am loved. My beloved has chosen me, above all others. I have my place in the sun. There is no envy or jealousy in me; the urge to accomplish is now for my loved one's sake and not my own. I become more sensitive to my lover's needs than my own. Ego and power trips become a thing of the past. Without question, falling in love is part of God's plan to make us more like Him and closer to Him.

It is truly a religious conversion, whether we recognize it at that time or not; whether we are “religious people at that time or not. We have definitely become more in His image and likeness. We are more Godly. This experience is being in love, not just loving. To love does not necessarily include sexual absorption. Being in love does. I can love without the sexual context but the sexual awareness and responsiveness is precisely what being in love is all about. That is why we say being in love is a conversion experience, whose power our Father uses to change our lives. We are not addressing, here, the special rapture of making love. That is very special and unique. We are talking about something equally enwrapping, a condition of being, apart from intercourse. This pervades my whole life, a prism which alters my perception of everything and everyone.

Sexuality is powerful and Our Father uses that power to draw out the Godliness within us. We are at our best. We are most pleased with ourselves, not only because we have someone who thinks we are the moon and the stars, who puts their whole concentration into pleasing us, but because we are able to please them. The world, which was so small, when I was the main inhabitant, now has become a galaxy. Before there were dark and frightening corners, now, all is full light with exciting possibilities. Now, I have no doubts at all about what the world holds in store. My life will be full and meaningful. I don't have to be cautious and anxious about whether I am prepared for my future or what that future contains. I have experienced my future and it is marvelous. I have a magnificent purpose in life, which no one else can accomplish. - to make this beloved person the happiest person on the face of this earth. My total awareness of self and others has been completely converted. It truly is a taste of paradise.

This is not a private experience. It shows on my face, my cheeks glow, eyes sparkle, my smile encompasses the world. No matter what I looked like previously, I have a beauty and attractiveness about me that has never appeared before. My body language shows the effects of loving and being loved. I stand straighter and taller, with a bounce to my step, power and confidence in the way I walk. The manner in which I hold myself, whether still or in motion communicates energy. In a very real way, I am living out

what Jesus showed forth in his Transfiguration; his face shone as the sun. As with Jesus, this transfiguration of ours is a foretaste of our resurrection. Falling in love is a miracle. It says: "God is here. Pay attention." As St. John said in his Epistle: "God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him." We are never more Godly than when we are in love. We can do better things, be more heroic or dutiful, even, be more admirable in the service we perform for the sake of God's people but we can never be more Godly. This is God's way to call out the power to love, within us.

We sometimes miss that point. We are often under the mistaken impression that God is always solemn and serious, that He communicates to us in formal and Biblical type language. We look for His topics of interest to be specifically religious and spiritual. We know He wants the best for us but translate that to mean: difficult, unattractive or unworldly. In many ways, with God, we are like children who do not believe their parents want them to have any fun. Children know their parents care for them and look out for their best interest but that means: chores, homework, doing the right thing, preparing for the future - all good stuff - but terribly uninteresting and serious. We should accept that God made us the way we are and wants to communicate with us in our own language. That is why He sent His Son to become one of us so that God could get in touch with us on our terms, in ways we could most readily understand. Everything since Jesus is incarnational. Our Father wants to deal with us in flesh and blood terms. He wants us to be happy in our way and not merely by carrying out some dull theological ideal. He truly is a loving Father who delights in our delight. So, He communicates to us through the language of love. For married couples, that language is sexual.

Our God is a generous God. His gifts are ever abundant. He doesn't only give them once or occasionally. Being in love, in His plan, is to be a lifetime experience for His couples. He doesn't intend it to be solely a way to start you off on a good foot, with something wonderful to look back upon as life passes. He intends this to be the normal way you experience life and one another. Most couples have had an overwhelming experience, when they first discovered one another. Then, they have high spots, with greater or lesser frequency, throughout their marriage, through

which they have rediscovered the magic awareness which brought them together in the first place. But they don't expect this to be a permanent, all encompassing life style. The result, in the solid marriage, is that much of their interaction with one another is good, dutiful, satisfying, pleasing. But it is not transfiguring.

Such a condition is pleasing to our Father because He sees our sincerity and the strength of our efforts. But there is a sadness there too, because He doesn't want us to have to try so hard. He wants our loving to be easy, which it is, when we are in love. We never think of what we are missing or the sacrifices we are making, when absorbed in one another. That is enough for us, no matter how busy we may be or how difficult our circumstances. He is not a person who loans out His gifts only to take them back. He gives us the gift of sexual delight in one another, not briefly, to get us off the ground, but as a life time possession. His goal for a couple is not that they avoid divorce or do sufficiently well but that their love be a source of rapture. As the apostles said at the Transfiguration: "Lord, it is good for us to be here.". They said those words breathlessly, with wonder. So too, will a couple, fulfilling God's will for their sexual delight in one another, express those same sentiments of awe and gratitude to the Lord.

Such sexual delight on the part of couples is not only God's will for them but also His will for those with whom they are in contact. He knows we are not only at our best together when we are in love but also at our peak with everyone else. Much of the happiness of our children, certainly, depends on our being in love with one another. We conduct ourselves entirely differently towards them in: our attitudes, the goals and hopes we set, the way we interact, when we are sexually absorbed in each other. Our toleration level is higher, we are more compassionate and generous, able to forgive more readily, increasingly able to discover their good points and to establish a mood of acceptance and happiness. Each reader can look to their own experience to see the difference in the home when our sexual consciousness is high, compared with when it is low or absent.

This truth applies in wider circles than our own homes. It helps us in many of the same ways mentioned above, with our parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives. We treat our friends

differently. In all cases, we are not as needy, touchy, demanding. We are more capable of reaching out. We become a family favorite, delightful company. It also makes a difference on the job. Studies reveal that the quality of the home environment has a strong impact upon employee morale and effectiveness. In fact, poor marital relationships are an economic liability. We have been aware that alcohol and drug addiction cost hundreds of millions in lost time and poor performance. Only now are we learning the effects of poor marital relationships. The couple's devotion to one another also has a strong impact upon their relationship with us in the Church. When a husband and wife are truly wrapped in one another, we look good to them. They see our strengths and gifts. When a couple is at odds with one another, the Church becomes a problem to them. The level of dissatisfaction in marriage and with the Church run parallel. Many people, especially our women, are unhappy with the Church today. Many changes are called for in the Church. We could and hopefully will make those changes. The unhappiness will remain until the quality of our marriages improve.

The happiness of the couple is, without doubt, strongly tied to the depth and breath of their being in love as well as loving one another. Life is so much more expansive and meaningful when they are in love. Their defects are minimized and their virtues emphasized. Every aspect of their life is brighter and more comfortable. They are at ease within themselves and with the beloved. That reality, however, is expanded beyond the two of them. Everyone, with whom they are in contact, has the quality of their lives enhanced by the power of their sexual delight. The children are never more secure, more comfortable nor do they ever experience unconditional love more fully. Parents and siblings are able to interact with a family member in love with the spouse, more openly and are able to expect understanding, compassion and love. Our God is a smart God. He knows what works with us. That is why He uses falling in love, throughout our life, as a conversion experience, to turn us toward His way of seeing and doing things.

## SACRAMENTAL LOVE

Sacramental marriage is a commission from Christ to enrich the Church in a singularly important way. Being married in the Church doesn't mean to continue the same spirituality we had before we married, except now we have someone going to Church with us. We are called to a marital spirituality, not to be a married person who prays. Like every other aspect of our experience we will have to adapt and change from our previous life style. It runs from the minute - "He likes to sleep with the window up while that's too cold for me," to the more serious, "She's a conservative and I'm a liberal," to "I can't stand my in-laws.". In prayer too, we have our habits, which often are quite different. I've been used to praying alone, or with my family or in a prayer group. I like vocal prayer and she likes centering prayer. I think prayer is too private to share (that's like the couple who make love but are too embarrassed to talk about it). Everything else is less important than that we be together in our prayer. (This does not mean always being physically together when praying. It does mean always being consciously married when praying.) The style or the methodology is nowhere near as important as your being together.

Equally important is the way you interface with the rest of us in the Church. We vitally need you to be a couple in the fullest sense of that term. That has to start at home, by being the most sexually exciting couple you know how to be. That is basic to sacramental marriage. This is for the sake of your marriage and parenting. The love our children should be raised by is the marital love. But it has to go beyond the home. You must bring the fullness of your devotion to one another to all your interactions with us.

Matrimony is a vocation, a call from God through the Church asking the couple: "Will you spend your love for each other on us? Will you allow us to look to you as a sign of how we are to love one another in the Church?". The couple marry one another, the couple is the Sacrament. But you do not speak your vows to one another. We, the people of the Church, elicit them from you. We ask for your commitment. That is the nature of a Sacrament. It is a Church experience. Matrimony is not a ceremony in Church but an experience, lifelong, of the Church. We are calling you beyond



marriage to Matrimony. Marriage can be private, just between the two of you. You can set your own goals and limitations. Matrimony is a special honor we offer to you, like religious life and priesthood. We ask you to live your love in our name, for us. The Matrimonied couple hold a Church office as truly as a priest or religious. Your call is to be prophets in our midst revealing to us, through the totalness of your intimacy with one another how, we, in the Church, are the beloved of Jesus. This is why there can be no divorce in a Sacramental marriage. Not because it is such a terrible sin but because divorce would distort how Jesus loves the Church. It would give the impression that his love could be conditional or temporary.

St. Paul established the glorious parameters of your sacrament and its importance to us in the Community of the Faithful when he said: "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the Church. Husbands love your wives as you love your own bodies...This is a great mystery." Isn't it fascinating the way Paul put those two similes together for the husband. He established, as the marital ideal, that the husband should love his wife, first, as Christ loves the Church and secondly, as the man loves his own body? Those are not two disparate comparisons. He is really saying the same thing, in two different ways. He is clarifying one with the other. He tells the husband he is to love her as he loves his own body. Then he says that is the way Christ loves the Church, as His own body. He makes no distinction between Himself and the Church nor is the man to distinguish between himself and his wife. Christ surrendered Himself for the sake of the Church; He submitted Himself to her. Thus, the man is to surrender himself to the woman, give himself over to her.

Paul starts this passage calling the woman to submit herself to her husband. Immediately, so that there would be no misunderstanding, no sense of subordination on her part, he turns to the husband's responsibility. He makes it clear that the man is to take the leadership in submission. The man's surrender to the woman is to evoke her responsive surrender. Christ took the first step; He is the one who initiated the relationship with us, the Church. Our vocation to become His is in the context of His submission to us. In marriage, the man is to love his wife in the same way. He is to make no distinction between himself and his wife. His whole



purpose in life to turn himself over to her for the sake of her well being and happiness.

What a magnificent vocation you are called to. In a very real way you are the Sacrament of the Church's own identity. Your relationship with one another is to reveal to us how Jesus interacts with us and how we are to interact with one another in his name. You chose one another. He has chosen us. We don't know, though, whether we care for that. We'd prefer he call everyone rather than have a chosen people. It doesn't seem democratic. That is one reason marriage was selected as the prime model of the Church. You have chosen one another. You were not elected to the office of husband, wife. It was not a democratic process at all. The very fact of being chosen is your glory. That this wonderful woman wanted you above all other men; she could have had anyone but chose you. That this gorgeous man could have desired to be yours is so uplifting. Such is the attitude we should have toward being chosen by the Lord to be a member of His Body. This does not make us superior to others any more than the marital selection does. It is, though glorious!

You are irrevocably bonded to one another in a relationship of intimacy with a purpose beyond yourselves - to bring happiness to the other before self and to incarnate your love through your children. We, in the Community of the Faithful, are called to be bonded in one flesh - the Body of Christ and to incarnate others through evangelization. Remember St. Paul's message: "Husbands, your bodies are not your own, they are your wives'. Wives, your bodies are not your own, they are your husbands'." Your example of fulfilling that call enables us to see that we are not our own. We are Christ's. We are his Body. You are to have a special relationship of intimacy with one another which shines forth like a beacon in the darkness. We are to be a light to the world through our intimate relationship with our fellow Catholics in the name of Jesus. Without your prophetic love, the Church cannot be clear as to its true identity - a family of intimates, enfleshed in Jesus Christ, living a life of Trinitarian unity, which glows before all.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is the couple. We are apt to consider the Sacraments something outside ourselves which have a powerful effect upon us. Karl Rahner's brilliant insight was to per-

ceive the Sacrament as the person. So the Sacrament of Baptism is not done to me but I AM now baptized. In other words, being baptized is part of my identity, my very self. So too for the matrimony. They haven't received Matrimony. They are matrimonied. We have corrected the mistake of the past when we said the priest married the couple but are still somewhat inaccurate when we say the couple marry one another. Truly they have created themselves as the Sacrament of Matrimony, in, with and through us. The Church is involved. Each couple is a unique Sacrament of Matrimony, never existing before and never to be again. We might speak of them as the Matrimonial Sacrament of Francine and Byron. Of course, they can't do this on their own. They can marry on their own but they can't matrimony by themselves. This can only be because they are members of the Church through their Baptism and because the Community of the Faithful have given approval to their relationship. Matrimony, like all Sacraments, is not private. It is communal, not merely for the well being of the individuals who participate in that Sacrament but for the sake of the whole Church. So they are called by us to be a Sacrament. This reality is above and beyond their own love potential. Therefore, it is not their ambitions for their love which should determine their goals and hopes in life, but ours. They are our, the Church's, Sacrament, not their own.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is, in a special way, a participation in the sanctifying mission of Christ. We know that sacraments bring sanctifying grace and enable us to live up to our state in life. Our tendency is to consider these graces as protective ones - graces that prevent us from failure and help us to avoid falling into sin. Rather they are creative powers of the presence of the Lord himself, enabling us to perform wonders: "Yes, greater than I". These graces empower us to greatness rather than provide a safety net.

## **SACRAMENTAL INTIMACY**

The Basic gift of a couple to the Church is their intimacy and belonging. They should not be singles to us. We have wonderful dedicated singles. We need the couple's full sacramental relationship. They don't have to be physically together at all times they

are with us, although that mutual presence is definitely the normal way they should appear in our midst. But, at the very least, they should be full of one another, making the other present to us. Their sacramentality is their greatest gift to us, not their talents or skills. They are most aware of one another and most capable of making their spouse present to us, when their sexual responsiveness to each other is at a high pitch. Their sexual enthusiasm should be at a high point whenever they are with us, whether it is to celebrate the Liturgy, working in one of the parish activities, teaching in the school, distributing the Eucharist, visiting shut-ins, whatever.

Interestingly enough, we would not permit someone to be a Lector without preparing. Rightly so. Being unprepared, shows a disrespect for the people. It shows an equal disrespect for a couple to be a Lector or perform any other ministry in the Church, unprepared maritally. We should ask you as part of your commitment to any office in the Church to be fully committed to sexual delight in one another when you are serving us. Devoted couples before they teach Religious Education sincerely get their lessons ready. Before attending Mass, they attempt to open themselves to the Lord. That is well and good. However, even more importantly, they should evaluate how delighted they are with each other. They can do the most for our children and be most prepared to listen to God, when they are at their best with one another.

Matrimony is not something the couple receives but who the couple become. Sometimes, on the day we marry, we think: "That's it. Now all we have to do is fulfill our responsibilities.". No, it's like being born; it doesn't stop there. That's essential, but there is much physical, mental and personal caring, nurturing, and growing still to come. Matrimony is a lifelong process. It is a vocation of sacramental growth and development which only comes to full blossom when we are called to join our Father in heaven. We are called in this vocation to develop a way of being completely different than anything we have ever lived or experienced before. It will take all our attention grace and love to accomplish this.

Each Sacrament has its own proper way of symbolizing the graces it causes, e.g. The Eucharist nourishes us with bread and wine. Matrimony's expertise is sexual intimacy. There is no Eucharist

without those elements of food, no matter how sincerely the person says the prayerful words, no matter how desirous the person wishes to receive the Lord. So too, sexual desire is essential for the sacramentality of our relationship. That is the essential way we live out the vocation we have accepted.

Sexual desire and intimacy is the human foundation of the Sacrament of Matrimony. That makes them such a unique sign of God's love for us in the Church as well as an encouraging sign of our love for one another in the Church. The nature of their love for one another calls us to full unity, to desire to intimately share our lives with one another, in the Church. When the couple do not express this love of intimacy they are "insignificant" as a Sacrament (i.e. not a sign). A Sacrament is an outward expression of an interior reality. For example, the outward sign of the Sacrament of Baptism is water poured on the head of the person. Water is water but suppose it is muddy. That would certainly take away the effectiveness of the message of cleansing. The same is true in regards to the Sacrament of Matrimony. Matrimony is a sexual Sacrament. Without the sexual dimension of their relationship being strong and fervent between them and evident to those around them the message of intimacy and belonging will be unclear, at the very least. Their love has to be true to itself, unique, special and different from all other forms of love. The sexual awareness and responsiveness to one another differentiates them from all others.

Without the sexual dimension of their relationship, a married couple would be indistinguishable from two friends or two family members living together. They can have a wonderful relationship, be very kind and loving with one another and be mutually pleased with the way things are between them but that is not their vocation.

Falling in love sexually is a conversion experience; it brings out the best in us and is an antidote for our failings. When absorbed in one another, we can't do enough for one another. We don't measure. The plaintive cry, "What am I getting out of this?" doesn't occur. We want to be with one another as much as possible and please one another. Our defects are softened and our virtues high lighted. We put the best possible interpretation on everything the beloved says and does.

What is the special spirituality unique to married life? It is their sexual intimacy day in and day out through out their life as a couple. Whenever we talk about spirituality we tend to think of Churchy things, activities and practices taking place within or under the auspices of the institutional church. Or, at least, things, though in the home or private, would be considered “religious”. We might give spiritual credit to those things we do in the home which call for sacrifice such as : biting our tongues, going out of our way to do a favor, doing extra chores cheerfully, etc.. But we find it difficult, almost impossible, to consider sexual responsiveness to have anything to do with being pleasing to God. Oh, possibly a wife who responds sexually when she doesn’t feel like it might accept a spiritual pat of the back for a job well done. But it is not the sexual responsiveness she sees as virtuous; she gives herself credit for her generosity and self sacrifice. (Actually the really spiritual thing for her to do would be to examine why she wasn’t sexually responsive, in the first place and what she can do to prevent herself ever being like that again.)

Actually, all the things we have mentioned above are wonderfully spiritual but the key to a couple’s spirituality is their sexual devotion to one another. That has to be the seed bed of all their other expressions of spirituality. Without that perspective in their approach to God, their spirituality is not marital. We’re certainly not saying it is bad, much less wasted or displeasing to God, merely that it is inappropriate for a married man or woman. Without the sexual overdrive they have lost their identity. They are not their full selves. It is like being distracted in prayer. We know that happens sometimes, even when working very hard to overcome it. But we are so concerned with something on our minds, or there is too much noise when we are trying to pray or there is some pressing appointment we must get to that we find ourselves constantly having to remember we want to enjoy God’s presence right now. So too, some of the same distractions or something in our relationship can get in the way of our awareness of our spouse and distract us from him/her. We have to be patient with ourselves in such circumstances and non condemnatory but, nonetheless, insistent to come to ourselves and be who we really are: a lover and a beloved. Otherwise, no matter how sincere we are in our attitude toward God, no matter how much we want to be close to Him, we create a barrier. Part of us is missing - the husband or

wife part.

If I'm a grown man but pray as I did as a little boy I'm limiting God in how He can respond to me. There is so much more of me to bring to Him. Nothing is wrong with what I am bringing. What I'm not bringing is the problem. I'm establishing that He cannot treat me in a mature way; He can only deal with me on a childish level. So too, when I go to God as a married man, without a sexual awareness of my wife, I only approach Him as part of who I am. I restrict His interaction with me because I am so much less capable of responding to His promptings to me about my relationship with my wife when in that condition. My response to Him is quite different when my sexuality is turned on full force.

Sexual desire is not an obstacle to sanctity but, for the spouses, an instrument of sanctity leading to intimacy with one another and God. When sexually devoted to one another, they will never take one another and their marriage for granted. Matrimony is a community of love - sexual. The basic spirituality of a husband is to love his wife sexually. Couples are called to be "one in mind, one in heart, one in affection" - all three sexually. Sex is a positive, God given force for the sanctification of the two spouses and their children. Sexual intimacy is the heart of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Sacrament of Matrimony is a life of heat and energy which generates tender affection and devotion. When we love one another with total sexual devotion, immortality becomes not only possible but necessary. It becomes impossible to believe our love will ever end. It is too good, too full of life force to ever die. We can accept a temporary separation but it can't be over. We haven't finished loving one another. We have only just begun.

Sex is a grace to husbands and wives - the grace of their vocation. (Grace is God present to us in a specific way. Through His presence we are empowered to bring His love to others.) A married couple are called to be sexual all the time. Once they fall in love, they have to stay there, even fall further in love. Otherwise, their sacramental symbol will be lessened, damaged or destroyed. Their sexual devotion to one another is their sacramental commitment. Couples in love exude an aura. Their sexual desire is the spark which sets their relationship apart from all others. When sexual with one another they simply are not the people they

once were. Sexual yearning for one another makes Matrimony a luminous revelation and causes the presence of God not only to themselves but to the Church at large.

Sexuality in matrimony is a spiritual power, “the love of God poured forth in our hearts”. It can’t be emphasized enough that the Lord’s will for the married couple is their continuing sexual desire for one another. When we are enthused (with God) and, for the couple, that enthusiasm is sexual, we are most open to the Father and most disposed to be the greatest possible husband or wife. That is what He most desires for us. He wants us to be happy and He knows that is where our true happiness lies.

Sexuality is integral to the spirituality of Sacramental couples. Sexual love is a constitutive part of Matrimonial Spirituality, not secondary or accidental. Their union is with sexual awareness, responsiveness and participation. This distinguishes the marital from all other relationships. Matrimony is a vocation, we are called to in the Church, a way of life, not a practice. So our spirituality has to be in accordance with our vocation. A couple has a totally different spirituality than those in other vocations. Not so much in the spiritual things they do but in their frame of mind and heart.

This cannot be stressed sufficiently. We keep sexuality and spirituality apart. We see them as separate, if not opposites. Matrimony is not a Sacrament with sex. It is a sexual Sacrament. In other words, it is not just that sex is OK in our sacrament or even that it wouldn’t be a marriage without sex. No, we are saying that a truly sacramental couple must be salted in their sexuality. Every dimension of their lives from the most mundane to the most glorious must be filled with sexual awareness of each other. The fact that they sometimes fail in this and don’t always live that way does not, at all, change the vocational ideal.

The special spirituality unique to the married couple is sexual intimacy, day in and day out throughout the life of the couple. Any other expression of spirituality could be adopted by those in other states of life. By this we don’t mean that the couple merely have sex but that they are completely, totally and continuously sexual with one another in all facets of their life experience. Of course,

they will not always be successful in their efforts. Their humanity will intrude. This, however, must be their goal.

## **NOT MERELY HUMAN**

Sexual intimacy is the work not only of human effort but of the Holy Spirit. Sexuality is very human but is a divine gift. We need divine empowerment to truly live up to our sexual potential. It is relatively easy to fall in love with our husband or wife. It is not even too difficult for a good couple to put a shine on their sexual appetite, on a more or less frequent basis. That is wonderful, to be strongly encouraged, but we are after much bigger fish. We are not merely addressing love making but the whole aura of their relationship. It is highly probable that Catholic couples should have sex more frequently than is their present practice. However, it is even more essential that every interaction between them be sexually charged. The constancy and all pervasive quality of this causes us difficulty.

We need the intervention of the Lord and His Spirit to take us beyond our human expectations and desires. The first favor and grace to ask of him is to believe this is possible. We have certainly been brainwashed enough into believing it an unreasonable hope to be as sexually excited about one another ten years down the road. We even have a saying to explain and excuse: "We have a more mature love." Which leads me to think to myself, "Oh, I'm so sorry." It's wonderful that we know each other better, that we have a history of taking care of one another, that we have so many fond memories of times, occasions and loves together, but these should be in addition to the same continuing sexual enthusiasm we had for one another, when we first met and fell in love.

It shouldn't be a trade off. God is not an Indian giver. He doesn't give us something and then take it away, even to replace it with something better. But, until we open ourselves to the hope of having this kind of love, we won't experience it because we won't allow the Lord to give it to us. Once we have allowed hope into our lives then we have to ask for humility because once I am sexu-



ally excited I am not in control of the relationship anymore. We can say to ourselves that it is worth it but, if we are honest with ourselves, we often like being in control. When we delight in each other sexually we most fulfill the Gospel call to 'death to self'. We are filled with the other person and their happiness means more than our own.

## **ECCLESIAL SPIRITUALITY**

Even more importantly, the graces we receive for our love are for the sake of the whole Church, which is to share in Christ's mission to evangelize. Can you imagine the effect on the town, if we became the sexiest parish in the neighborhood? Why everyone would be flocking to join us. That is real evangelization. Not preaching on street corners, but giving a witnessing response to a felt human need. That wonderful statement of the pagans about the early Church: "See these Christians. See how they love one another," would be fulfilled through our sacramental homes, if we were fully in touch with one another.

Mentioning evangelization in this context might seem strange. What, we could ask is, has the sexual responsiveness of the couple got to do with proclaiming the Glad Tidings, much less being a core element to it? The Church is not to be a religion, a service organization, a set of rituals and beliefs. Those are significant, as expressions of who we are. But our inner nature is none of these, nor all of them combined. We are in Peter's words: "A holy people, a nation set apart." We are chosen by the Father to be His people. Again Peter says: "Before you were no people. Now you are my people". We are a chosen family. Our sacramental couples have been given us to prophecy to our true identity. Only when they are their true selves, that is sexually absorbed in each other, is their message believable to us.

They not only need the Church but the Church needs them for us to be our full selves. So often, when speaking of Family Ministry, we mean the response of the institutional Church to the needs of families. We refer to services we can provide to families that are broken, poverty stricken, suffering from physical or mental illness,

bereaved, out of work, struggling etc. Without doubt, all of us in the Church are called to reach out to the needy until they are taken care of. We don't do enough in that regard. Much more attention and generosity is called for from us, in regards to suffering families. But we need to concentrate on the Ministry OF the Family as well as the Ministry TO the Family. It is what our families can give as well as what they require that we should look to activate.

The core of the family is the couple. Its greatest resource is the Sacrament of Matrimony. This Sacrament, by its very nature, is sexual. The couple's sexual devotion to one another is the greatest gift they bring to the rest of us in the Church. We will not call forth the full potential of the sacramental couple, when we restrict ourselves to serving them or asking them to serve us as singles or celibates could. Their sexual attention to one another is the most wonderful gift they offer us. That is the intrinsic nature of their vocation.

The passion of sexual intimacy builds the Church by continually widening the circle of those who love one another. The most obvious expression of that reality is, of course, their children. Children are the most powerful indication of and testimony to their totality with each another. But it goes beyond that to the blood family and friendship. One of the biggest fruits of sexual responsiveness to each other is the virtue of hospitality - opening our homes and hearts to others. The more secure we are in our responsiveness to one another, the more we want to share our love.

The way they live their lives will have a profound effect on how the Church lives its life as a people. The key to happiness and holiness in the big Church is the well being of the Little Church. A parish can be no more prayerful, praising, caring, generous, forgiving than its families are. Our families set the tone and create the environment for our parishes. When there is not much warmth and pleasure in one another in our homes, can we be surprised to find our Sunday Liturgies cold and unmoving? If husbands and wives look to the other to please them, then it should certainly not be unexpected when parishioners judge their parish in terms of what they are getting rather than what they are giving. If the level of intimacy between husband and wife is low or intermittent and their

relationship is directed toward living up to their responsibilities and doing what is required, then we can understand parishioners acting the same way toward one another. Our level of appreciation and generosity will certainly be no higher than in our own homes. If marriage and family life are important but a sideline to my prime concentration, something fitting into my profession or career, then being a member of the Church will be treated in the same fashion. It will be very important to us but something we squeeze into our lives.

A vibrant sexual experience of our spouse has no substitute. A husband, in the full sense of the term, is not one who does good things for his wife because he is so good but because he can't help himself. He finds her irresistible. He is overwhelmed by her attractiveness and goodness. It is so much easier to accept someone being nice to me and doing good things for me when it is drawn out of that person by what they see in me rather than when they do it on the basis of principle or living up to their ideals. None of us want to be the object of charity, to have someone being good to us out of their own personal integrity. On the other hand, when someone wants to do good things for us because they find us so enjoyable it is easy to accept that goodness.

Our sacramental couples are best at understanding this. Their whole way of life is to respond to the other, simply to please the beloved. They are most living out their Gospel vocation when they act this way. They are much more generous when doing something to make the other person happy than when they do something because it is right. They are most motivated to live this generosity with one another when the sexual aura they create is strong.

## **INCARNATIONAL SPIRITUALITY**

Marriage, in its own way, is an experience by means of which God's eternal love and faithfulness, revealed in Jesus Christ, are made historically present. Everything since Jesus is incarnational. All graces, all divine powers are enfleshed. Jesus came to reveal that his Father and ours did not want merely obedience from us

but that He was offering intimacy and yearned for us to allow Him to enter totally into our lives. In other words, sending His divine Son to us was a proposal saying: "Will you be mine? Will you take on my way of being and living?". That is exactly what a couple do and, in so doing, model to the rest of us what being members of the church is all about. A couple chooses one another. We are chosen by the Father. In both cases, we often wrestle with that. We would rather be our own woman/man. We think we do the choosing. We recognize being chosen is such a great honor and, when in love with our spouse or God, we delight in that choice. But, when we have cooled off, we try to escape being selected. Marriage is a total way of life not a series of duties. So is being a member of the Body of Christ. Marriage is intimate relationship, so is our call to the Community of the Faithful. Matrimony is fruitful - bringing forth new life, so is the Church. Evangelization, not salvation, is the primary mission we have received from Jesus. Matrimony is a call to belong, to find my identity in, with and through the beloved, so too is being a member of the Body of Christ.

Matrimony is the most incarnate of Sacraments, affording the most insight and experience of an incarnate God. It is hard to accept a fleshed God. The Incarnation is a challenge. The tendency, on the one hand, is to so concentrate on his divinity that we ignore, or at least de-emphasize, his humanity or, on the other, to so focus on his humanity so as to ignore or place in the background his divinity. The same is true of love. We can tend to "purify" our love, make it less fleshy. That is a tragic mistake. Actually the more sexual, in the full sense of that term, we are with one another the more loving we will be in all dimensions of our life. God wants us to carry out His plans. But He wants to make it easy for us. He doesn't want us struggling, all the time, to be good. For the couple, the Father gives them sexual desire to make being loving not only a desirable goal but an exciting one, filled with joy.

Enthusiasm means "with God" - enthusiasm for a couple is passion. Whenever the sexual desire is strong between a husband and wife they are definitely enthusiastic about one another and their marriage. They love being with each other and that enjoyment pervades all their interactions. This is not just human. It is definitely from God. That is the way the Lord created us. When

we allow our sexuality to take us over we are most living out His plan for our marriage. Remember the Last Supper. Jesus was so excited about being with his loved ones. He said: "With desire have I desired to eat this meal with you." We can eat many meals together, or sit around the house or go out together or take care of the kids, without this desire. Then our time with one another is flat and dull. These occasions seem so ordinary. But these very same activities when we are sexually alert to one another have a specialness about them, a shine and sparkle. Nothing can replace passion in a couple's life. Furthermore, when we are that way, we are most pleasing to our Father and are most wrapped in His love.

A married couple's attractiveness comes from their total vulnerability, as they see and respond to one another through the prism of their sexual awareness and desire. We have all experienced the opposite. If we visit a couple with a coldness between them, it chills all present. Even, when both partners are specially nice to their guests, it isn't enough to overcome the temperature they have created between them. All of us are affected by their lack of warmth with each other. On the other hand, if they are obviously in tune with one another, it is a delight for all of us. Their love for one another puts us at our ease. We are most comfortable not only with them but with ourselves. It leads us to look at our own relationships and want to be more involved with each other. Such love is truly catching. It really evangelizes.

Passion gentles people and enables them to be at their best with their spouse and the rest of us - soothing their hurts. It affects people in the deepest roots of their personality - the ability to trust, love, give up their defenses and become vulnerable to intimate relationships.. Human love makes divine love credible. That is why Jesus called us, at the Last Supper, to love one another in the Church rather than to love him directly. Wouldn't you have thought, at this most solemn time in his life, he would have entreated us to love him? Or, possibly, considering how orientated he was toward his Father, that he would have directed us to be devoted to the Father? Instead he said: "Love one another as I have loved you." He did that because he realized that the love of him and the Father which is in our hearts has to be externalized and made visible.

St. John understood that very well. In his epistle he says: "Love the brethren.". A tradition in the Church holds that this was his constant message. He preached that all the time. Yet, he was the beloved disciple, the one closest to Jesus. We could have reasonably expected that his most insistent message would have been to love Jesus. It wasn't, precisely because he was so close to Jesus. He understood him so well and took most seriously to heart what Jesus desired. The sacramental couple, as the prime model of the Church, is to take the leadership in this. They are the ones, who are to most love one another, in order to encourage the rest of us in the Church to do the same. The expression of marital love is different from the way we are to express our love for our brothers and sisters in the Church but the goal is the same: intimacy and belonging.

(Because of the single's orientation in the Church we tend not to see the couple's sexual love for each another as an essential dimension of Church spirituality. We tend to offer prayers, rituals and practices suitable for singles and celibates as the way Catholics express their devotion to the Lord. This results in a tendency for our wives to be into Scripture and Jesus, while the husbands pat them on the back and say: "Isn't she wonderful?".)

Passion must be deliberately cultivated. Otherwise, it fades in and out. Usually, it is only present when one or the other party is interested in having sex. This is too restrictive and makes the essence of their marriage, their sexuality, incidental and intermittent. Normally, when we get up in the morning, we ask ourselves how we feel: groggy, energetic, stuffed up, clear headed, down in the dumps or raring to go. The most important aspect of how a husband or wife feels should be how they feel toward one another. In other words, they should take their sexual temperature and do something to raise it, if necessary. They can't just shrug their shoulders and say : "It is just not in the cards today".

## **SPIRITUAL CLIMATE**

Sex can become an event, not a total atmosphere. The loss of sexual urgency, which constitutes their basic identity as husband

and wife, is enervating. They become merely friends. This is so much the “normal” circumstance of most marriages that it even appears desirable. Many couples set as their goal in marriage to be comfortable with one another. This is an old shoe situation, far from where they were when they first began their marriage. They certainly, then, would not have considered such an eventuality attractive. Nor would they have believed it possible. At that time, their whole responsiveness to each other was sexually charged. That was the magic of it; that was what made their whole existence exciting. This was not intended by our Father to be a passing gift. He wants it to be a permanent, fulfilling, overriding aspect of our experience of one another.

Sexual desire causes us to be fascinated with the beloved. We can't get enough of him/her. Passion makes us irresistible to one another. Each of us must be totally passionate (aware of the spouse's desirability), regardless of the other's response. It is not a trade off. I will give as much as you. I have to give my all. Falling in love must be a continuing experience not solely a pleasant memory. Married couples ought to be more obviously in love than any one else. Unfortunately, today, when we think of overriding love affairs, it brings to mind pre marital or extramarital couples. That is so different from God's plan. The ones He wants to be most sexually in love with one another are His sacramental couples.

Sexuality is central to who we are as persons. I succeed as a man/woman to the degree I am sexual. No matter how successful I may be in terms of making money, achieving power, even friends, I need to be a success, specifically, as a man/woman, with myself and others in order to have a fulfilling life. This is true for all. Each of us are sexual beings. There is a tendency today to claim personhood separate from sexuality. That can reduce our sexuality to something extrinsic and incidental to our personality. It becomes almost like an overcoat. Something accidental, we can put on or take off at will. In reality, there is no such thing as an undifferentiated person. Every person is sexed. We are all male persons and female persons. Our sexuality is an essential note of our personhood. Our maleness, femaleness is not an extra or an incidental, like left-handedness or dark hair; it is essential to our self definition. (We still have an inclination to be puritanical about

sex. Some husbands and wives are more comfortable with pretending that she is still a virgin or, at least, that she is doing it more for him than for herself.)

One of the startling factors involved in sexuality as essential to my self understanding and self revelation is that my sex reveals me as a person for others. In fact, I can't even define myself as a sexual person except in the context of the opposite sex. Woman can only be described in terms of man. Man can only be defined in terms of woman. Without women, there would be no men. We don't mean this in the simplistic, half mocking sense of the term when we say: "Without women there would be no babies," but in a much deeper and more existential sense. If everyone was a man, there would be no men. If everyone was female, there would be no women. Man and woman are totally dependent upon one another for their very self identity. They are comparative terms and cannot exist in themselves, by themselves. Even more wonderful and, at the same time, more threatening, because so vulnerable, our sex is not for our sake but for others. Men are made for women and women for men. We are not suggesting a user mentality here but the simple fact that our sexuality was given us to complete the other person. God is both masculine and feminine. To understand God we need to reunite man and woman in relationship.

Sex is much deeper than a pleasure package or a means of procreation. It is core to our very being as images of God. In ourselves, each of us is incomplete in that imaging. As Scripture says: "Male and female he created them. In the image of God he created them." So we cannot even approach our understanding of God with a single sex mentality. But it is even deeper than that. The essential nature of God is persons in relationship. So it is not just men and women, taken separately, that we need to look at in order to seek out God but men and women in relationship. That, of course, means sexual relationship. Not necessarily genital but definitely sexual. Since we are sexual creatures, all our relationships are sexual. We do relate to one another as men and women.

But the vocation of the Matrimonied is to be our role models. Couples owe their passion for one another to the Church. This is what they vowed to us, when we called them to be our Sacrament.



They didn't promise to love one another as friends or, even, as brother and sister but as a sexually devoted couple. It is the core element of their sacramentality and evangelization. We will not come close to any understanding of God except through exposure to matrimonied couples. This is the totality of the man/woman relationship in which the fullness of each one's manhood and womanhood is most openly expressed and experienced. Through our couples, in the fulsomeness of their sexual devotion to one another, we can come closest to understanding the inner being of God.

All the world loves a lover and a lover loves the whole world. It is sexual lovers the world admires so much and to whom it is so attracted. One aspect of this attraction, of course, is that lovers are so pleasant to look at and be with, in themselves. Isn't it true that, when in love, our physical attractiveness increases immensely? Even people objectively ugly look completely different, when in love. But the second and deeper reason we are attracted to lovers is that they are different toward us. Their sharp edges are smoothed down and their best points highlighted. Someone in love is disposed toward all the rest of us.

By their sexual desire for one another every aspect of a couple's relationship is heightened and perfected. Everything they do with and for one another is colored beautifully. They are conscious of each other's presence even when apart. Without this desire, they can be physically present with one another without being personally present. This desire is fundamental to their spirituality. We have to be our full selves in our relationship with our Father. When we are not sexual, as a spouse, we have returned to the single state. We are not who we should be. When our sexual desire for each other is fully developed and at its peak it pervades our day and enables us to interact with others in that context. Our reaction to others: our children, fellow employees, friends, our brother and sister Catholics, those in need, is positive and loving.

Couples who have such sexual urgency are more willing to forgive and not just each other. They are less touchy, sensitive, fickle, more gentle with one another and the children, less into consumerism. This need for possessions is strongly connected to the sexual climate in which we live. A traditional bit of advice given

to husbands is that if your wife is always looking to buy new rugs, curtains, furniture, etc. The answer is not to talk about budgeting. It is to pay more attention to her as a person. When a man or woman are deeply sexually loved by their spouse, they don't need things to fulfill them.

In Matrimony, sexual desire is not just a great psychological force but its power is transformed by the Sacrament to a healing, redemptive, God given grace. All of us realize sex is one of the greatest driving forces and motivations human beings have. In God's plan, it is intended to empower sacramental couples to make their marriages a little bit of heaven on this earth by opening us up to our full potential to love.

A couple's attractiveness to each other comes from their total vulnerability as they see and respond to one another thru the prism of their sexual awareness and desire. We can be attracted to people for many reasons: intelligence, generosity, practicality, long history together, Godliness. All those qualities and more can be present in a good husband and wife. But what expands and intensifies the beauty of such attractiveness, and even more importantly, makes them specifically marital, is when they are perceived and experienced in the context of sexual responsiveness. That sexual perception changes everything. It invigorates us and helps us to perceive the full beauty of the other person in a way that no one else can see. It removes from us the temptation to be so aware of what we don't have that we miss the wonder of being loved.

It is said that passion, such as we are describing, is not possible twenty four hours a day. But we were that way when dating. No one had to tell you then to warm up toward one another. In fact, if someone told you to cool off, you would have said it was impossible. You were totally sexually present to one another at that time. Sure, it was the freshness and the stunning surprise of it all but you also worked at it. You were constantly thinking about one another: when you would be able to see him/her again, when you could embrace once more. You couldn't wait. You planned what you wanted to talk to each other about; you thought of things you wanted to do to surprise and please your beloved. You talked to anyone, who would stand for it, about the virtues of your beloved. So it is possible. We just have to get into the habit again. We

think we are too occupied with all sorts of responsibilities that don't permit us time to be so absorbed in one another. But it doesn't take time, it does take interest. We were very busy when young, yet, then, it was no problem. Actually, it should be easier now because we have more to go on. We have all those years together. Then, we had just met one another but still had plenty to attract us. Now, we have a much fuller awareness of the beloved's attractiveness.

Early romance is not illusion but revelation. It is the beginning of a powerful transformation that deepens with time. There is a tendency to put down or scorn the early love experience. We talk about being so young, carried away, being giddy and lacking sense. Actually, in truth, we long for those days. We were never happier. We've given up on them. Much of the put down comes from sour grapes. Rather than seeing that period as lacking, we should see ourselves as presently lacking something from that time in our lives.

Sexual desire is not restricted to the early years of marriage. It is an interpersonal achievement won over a period of years through cooperation with the Spirit. We really do need to let God into this. Sexuality is His gift and desire for us. We will not do it without Him. We will fall into the customary marital pattern of intermittent sexuality. We will take the world's view of what is expected in marriage rather than God's.

## **MATRIMONIAL SPIRITUALITY**

Matrimonial spirituality is an on going dimension of the couple's relationship measured in terms of the couple's continuing sexual desire, affection, attentiveness (sexual) and longing for each other throughout their marriage. If there is no sexual passion between a couple, there is no matrimonial spirituality either. This is not saying that they could not be spiritual people singly but it is not a marital spirituality. If the level of passion is low, then so is the matrimonial spirituality. We are not saying the individuals in that relationship are not faithful; they could be most saintly. It is, however, not in accord with their vocation.

Tragically, many, if not most people in marriage, not only do not see this, they take it even further. They tend to believe, when they are tender and good to one another because of the power of their sexual urgency for each other, that they are less spiritual than when responding lovingly to one another when not feeling passionate. They believe the more difficult it is, the more pleasing to God it must be. While, if it comes spontaneously out of joy and eagerness to please, they don't deserve much credit. Our God is not like that. Harder is not necessarily better and more spiritual. In any case it is not marital. It is admirable, even impressive. But it is an emergency type of thing. Because we are human, we will fail in our devotion to one another, at times, and we have to use our will power to do the right thing. But our Father wants our usual love to arise out of being drawn to each other by our desire.

We would certainly see prayerfulness as a necessary characteristic in the life of a religious. It would not be sufficient for a man or woman religious to pray, they must be prayerful. That is a different ball game. Naturally, if prayerful, they will actually pray and pray a lot but it is possible to engage in a fair amount of prayer and not be prayerful. Yet, that should be the essence of their commitment to their religious way of life. The same is true for the sacramental couple. It is not just having sex, even with great frequency and delight. Their whole way of life is to be sexual. That is not just accomplished by making love. Just as the religious does not accomplish their vocational life style by praying. The couple must live sexually. They must eat, drink, sleep and breath sexually.

The point, of course, for the religious and the couple is not to be perfectly successful all the time. We do mess up, we get distracted. The point is to see what we are truly about, to have our horizons set. We will never completely live up to our ambitions since we are not perfect but the lower our ambitions the lower our level of success. It's like school or sports. The ones doing well want to do so and they look for more. When we establish sexual activity as our goal that is all we achieve. When we set our horizons on sexual awareness we will do much better in making love. Our whole day will be a love making. It will not just be limited to the occasions of intercourse.

Sexual desire is a powerful internal impulse to fulfill the grace of their vocation, to be other centered not self centered. This is not only important for their dating days and the beginning of their marriage. It is even more important throughout their marriage. Our Father wants them, not just to be good to one another, but to enjoy one another. He wants us not just to do the right things and avoid the bad ones but to be happy together. That is what we wish brides and grooms on their wedding day. We wish them happiness. We don't hope rightness for them. We don't suggest in our best wishes for them that they be comfortable. We want so much more, as does our Father. He has gifted them with the necessary power to accomplish that happiness with one another and for one another through their sexual responsiveness to each other.

Sexual intimacy should be fully present before we discuss any thing between us. When that is absent or low grade we can be amicable in the way we converse, we can carry on a very informative conversation, make intelligent decisions. Of course, it is equally true that we can be hostile or indifferent in our interchange and hurt one another. But even when putting the best possible face on it, for example, the good conversation, something is missing. Without the sexual, it is not a marital exchange. Often we forget that, especially, if there is some real urgency involved in the issue we are facing. We must discipline ourselves to focus on ourselves as lovers, first, before we start on anything else. No matter how important the decision, no matter how pressing the time lines may be, we should stop and embrace each other tenderly and become fully present to one another before talking about anything. This cannot merely be a swift, routine hug and kiss. We should continue until it works in bringing us fully together. Then we can conquer the world. Without operative sexual intimacy, we rely on human capabilities. When sexually intimate, we bring the grace of the Sacrament into play.

## **PREDISPOSITION FOR PRAYER**

Sexual passion is not a distraction from prayer in Matrimony. Sexual passion is the predisposition a married couple should bring to their prayer. It is a necessary preliminary for a husband or wife in

their approach to God. He wants us to pray not as an undifferentiated person, He wants our prayer to be within the context of our vocation. Unfortunately, because the leadership of the Church has been single, the theological and ascetic development has been "single minded". Thus, the instructions we have received about prayer come from the perspective of singles. They are often very holy and insightful people, most sincere in sharing with others the fruits of their own prayerfulness. But it comes from an entirely different perspective. We are directed to have an isolated relationship with God. This is not even proper, much less good, for singles but is terribly malformative for couples. It goes completely against their vocation.

For a couple, it is not sufficient to pray as an unmarried person would. This doesn't merely mean that the subjects of their concern with God will be different from their unmarried brothers and sisters. No, their whole personhood must be different. In the absence of passion, we are more single than married. We are not our full selves. The Lord wants us to come to him filled with joy and delight for our spouse. On any occasion, when that attitude is missing that must be the concentration of our conversation with him. Talk to him and beseech from him a change of heart. Too often, when we pray without sexual awareness of our spouse we ask Him to change the partner, to make him/her more responsive to us or we ask His help in coping. Rather, everything has to stop until we return to our vocation of passionate love for the one chosen for us by the Father. Then we can continue with our interaction with our Father. Now we have become the person He has called us to be.

Usually, when passion is missing, it is because we are so concerned about something on our minds or there has been some minor failing on the spouse's part, at least from where we stand. In the first case, we should reprioritize. Nothing is more important than our loved one. Nothing can be allowed to distract us from being most conscious of her/him. When some action or omission on the spouse's part has turned off our desire, we must bring to the forefront of our consciousness all the good and lovable things we can think of about him/her. They far outweigh any transgression.

Sexuality calls forth greatness from both husband and wife. It

makes the other come first. We are not so conscious of ourselves and our own needs and wants. When we are not self conscious, we can get beyond ourselves. We discover a capacity we did not realize we had, to be responsive and all embracing. In the church, we should not put limits on our couples sexuality. Their sexuality is not to be inhibited but proclaimed. Just as we would praise some one for living up to their intellectual or work potential we should celebrate the sexuality of our Sacramental couples.

Spouses are to be sexually aware of each other in all their interactions. Their sexuality is not solely to be called upon when making love but is to pervade their total experience, when they are with one another under any circumstances and when they are apart. There should be a sexual flavor to their whole relationship. This should not be left to the occasions when they are feeling sexy. That is a response to self rather than to the spouse. This is a feeling within me, not one necessarily drawn out of me by my spouse. It has more to do with how I wish to be seen rather than how I perceive my spouse. We have to make sexual awareness a deliberate concentration and make a daily commitment to be sexually focused on the spouse, as the priority of my consciousness. As you recall, we offered many examples, in the beginning of this booklet, of ways to develop our sexual awareness. Each couple, though, is there own expert on this. They have done this periodically throughout their marriage. The point we stress is that our efforts should be constant.

The decline of passion is a violation of marriage vows. This sounds like an extreme statement but isn't. Fr. Andrew Greeley has stated: "Fidelity is not staying out of someone else's bed but enjoying the one you are in." When "un" or "a" sexual, we are not truly enjoying one another as husband and wife. We might be content with one another, neither party might be upset at the situation but we have fallen away from the identity to which we pledged ourselves on our wedding day. In our vows, we had promised to be sexually present to each other all the days of our lives. That is what we mean when we say we will be faithful. That is the essence of our Sacrament. It is not sufficient to do all the "married" things; we have to be married. That means to be absorbed in one another sexually.

Strong sexual desire has no substitute in a couple's relationship with one another. We, certainly, do not say they cannot be good people or even that they can't be good to one another without it. We are saying that sexual desire is as essential to the couple as is the air we breathe is for life. They simply cannot be their real selves as husband/wife without it. When sexual desire is high, so is their awareness of each other and their responsiveness. All husbands and wives can testify to the truth of that statement. This is such a powerful and miraculous gift which the Lord gives them to be at their best with each other. Even if the external circumstances are not the greatest, they are at their best as a couple, whenever their sexual awareness of each other is fully present.

Without passion we sharply diminish the quality of being irresistible to each other or even lose it. We get used to one another and live a brother - sister relationship with suitable sexual interludes. This is such a subtle trap we don't even realize we are that way or that anything is wrong. In order to see the reality of this, all we have to do is compare the young couples walking on a college campus with married couples walking into church on a Sunday. With the young couples, the sex is so thick you could cut it with a knife. With the married couples, at best you sniff an air of pleasant, long term comfortableness in each other's company. The Lord introduced us to one another through sexual desire and He wants that to be a continuing part of our relationship. With passion, we delight in one another continuously.

If it is not sexual, it is not marital. This, naturally, does not suggest a constant sexual performance but we must be continuously sexual in our whole relationship. The most commonplace of activities can be fully sexual when that predisposition is present between us. It could be painting the ceiling, driving in the car, preparing a meal, doing the taxes. We don't even have to be physically together in order to be totally present to one another. Passion, whenever it is present brings the other totally present to us. We can't get the other person out of our mind. He/she is so dominant in our thinking that everything else is in the context of our love for one another. That is what it means to be truly married. That is when our love for one another is at its best. That is when we are most the way our Father wants us to be.



## MODELS OF LOVE

In the sexual intimacy of Matrimonied couples, we have a model of the intimacy all humans are called to that is clearer, more dramatic and easier to understand than any other model. We all know and are deeply moved by the reality of God's call to us to love. The Bible is filled with His urgency for us, made in His image and likeness, to live up to the purpose of our creation, which is to love. His Beloved Son said that the two greatest commandments are love of God and love of neighbor. We know God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. But, it goes without saying that love doesn't always happen. Not only the horrible crimes evidence the absence of love but we constantly run into its loss in so many little ways in our homes, parishes, neighborhoods, jobs, etc. Our couples in their lives and loves together set the tone for all of us. Certainly none of us can be better at loving than couples. We might be worse but can't be better. In a society in which our couples loved one another with complete passion, the level of love of all of us would be raised to a much higher level.

Sexual spirituality is prophetic. Couples are the exemplars of love. We might think we love or not, irrespective of how you are to one another as a couple, but that is not true. First of all, each of us grow up in homes and the love of our mother and father for one another create the love air we inhale during the most formative years of our lives. Then our companions, in school, and later on at the job, have also been permanently influenced by their parents' love. We marry a man or woman, molded by love or its absence which they have experienced. When passion is strong in our homes, all is right with the world, no matter what the external circumstances. If our parishes were filled with couples saturated with sexual devotion toward one another, all of us: married, single, divorced, widowed would have the quality of our lives vastly improved. You would be witnesses to what life is all about. Your love for one another would call forth from us an ever greater capacity for compassion and tender heartedness. Those not married are called to express their love differently but the seed of all love is the sexual love of our couples.

All love, all unity, all intimacy should resemble marriage. Marriage is the prime human relationship. Furthermore, it is the human love experience which most closely reveals the inner life of the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not love one another with the love of benevolence. They don't do anything for one another. They don't need anything. They love each other with the love of intimacy. They are totally personally present to one another and totally personally responsive to each other. That is their inner nature, their core being. The total personal presence and responsiveness most marks the couple. Sure, they do things for each other but those things are not what most signifies their true identity as married. Their unity of personhood, being two in one flesh, marks them off. No relationship can compare with marriage in this totality of intimacy but all relationships, worthy of the name, must have personal closeness as an essential note. Otherwise, it is not a relationship but a partnership, or a convenience. But our couples must take a strong leadership in this. Their are to be the prime exemplars of what it means to be intimate with and belong to one another. Their sexual devotion to one another is what most enables them to be totally present to and responsive toward each other.

## **EMPOWERING SPIRITUALITY**

Instead of becoming one segment of marriage, sexual passion must become the total aura and context of the life of spouses. Everything they do, together and apart, should come out of and be colored by their sexual desire for one another. To see the validity of this, we might consider the situation of a young couple thinking of marriage. They had all you would ask for. Both were very mature, coming from good families, deeply spiritual, fine jobs, very committed to a good marriage, etc. - but had no sexual spark between them. Wouldn't we say they shouldn't marry? Why do we see passion as essential to getting married but not for being married?

Sex not only reveals love but has a special power to make love real. We know we would never have found one another and have become devoted to one another without sexual desire. We

might have known each other for some time but until that spark lit us up we did not see anything extraordinary about one another. Once we fell in love, that all changed. There is no question that it altered our lives. Everything about the world was different. It all revolved around our love. That is just as true today. Our whole life has a different feel when we are in love with one another. Everything else is the same, the problems remain problems, but we are above them all. Love is in the air.

Sexual desire is at the very heart of a couple's spirituality. It cannot be separated from their way of life. It is the very core of whom they have been called to be. By sexual desire, we mean the attitude of mind & heart which permeates every aspect of the couple's relationship. It is based on their awareness of their spouse as a desirable man/woman, who have been brought together through that desire in the first place. Every facet of their life is enhanced by their sexual awareness and responsiveness to one another. If you were to take away that sexual consciousness, their relationship would be totally changed. It might be a room mate situation with a lot of affection, a wonderful brother/sister experience or the closest possible bonding of friends (although, to be honest, it is not likely to be on such a high scale. When we step away from the marital core, we are not usually about to establish the highest dimensions of other intimacies). It will not, though, be an experience with marital awareness. For that, to be seeing each other as my man, my woman is required. When we use the word 'my' we are not referring to a selfish possessiveness. We mean it is the sense of identifying with and being completely responsive to this dear person. We are celebrating our relationship.

The decline of sexual passion allows other things to take priority instead of one's beloved: job, children, possessions, status, etc. When we got married most of us had very little, other than one another. That enabled us to be total to one another. Over the years, we have accumulated many things, material, personal and spiritual. They are wonderful gifts from our Father intended to expand our delight and appreciation of one another. We cannot allow these gifts to distract us from His prime gift - us.

The exchange of vulnerabilities is what intimacy is all about. Such trust comes from a high level of sexual acceptance and leads to

an increase of that receptivity. Being vulnerable is threatening and most difficult, even for a husband and wife who truly love one another and who have lived together in peace and harmony over a number of years. So much of me I feel inadequate about and am not proud of which I'm not sure I want you to know about me or, even if I realize you know, am not too keen about having it come out into the open. This is especially true of men. In the context of sexual delight, some of my fear is lessened and my confidence, that what is lacking in me will not turn you off, is increased. In God's plan, this atmosphere is intended to enable us to be fully open to one another, holding nothing back.

## **MARITAL CULTURE**

The meaning of life is love. There is a possibility for confusion here. It is easy enough to believe we all know what the word love means and that it has only one meaning. Actually there are two basic loves: the love of benevolence and the love of intimacy. Benevolent love is required of each of us for all people. It is what Scripture means when it says: "Love your neighbor as yourself." We are our brother's keeper and have a responsibility to reach out to anyone in need, whether we know them or not. We are all God's children and whatever we have materially, economically, educationally, personally is His gift to us that we are to share generously with those not as well off. The love of intimacy, though, is restricted to those with whom we are in a permanent, bonded relationship, intended to be irrevocable. For example: blood family, religious life, marriage, priesthood, deep, life long friendships. All of these call for more than just a response to physical, emotional or personal needs. They call for us to be one with the other, not only to be good to the other.

In other words, such relationships call for personal revelation and closeness. Look at Jesus' life for examples of the difference. What marked his relationship with the holy women and the apostles was not good deeds. Actually he ministered to them very little: the calming of the storm, the cure of Peter's mother-in-law. Only a handful of other such occasions are mentioned in the Gospel. His benevolence (ministry: miracles, cures, teaching) was concentrated primarily on the multitudes. What he offered to the holy women

and the disciples was something much deeper and more powerful - intimacy. At the Last Supper, he referred to it by saying: "I shall not call you servants any longer. I call you friends because I have told you everything I have learned from my Father." In other words he attests to The specialness of his relationship with them. The proof he offered was not what he had done for them but how intimate he was with them. In other words, he shared with them what was deepest and most vital to his very personhood - his relationship with his Father.

That's what makes us intimates, knowledge of one another. The more complete the knowledge the more total the intimacy. We can carry out our responsibility to the needy, in our midst, by doing the right thing by them, even when it is not possible or, sometimes, desirable to expose my personhood to them. But the love of intimacy cannot be accomplished without sharing my inner self and wanting you to share your inner self. This, as we have mentioned, is not restricted to the marital relationship. The Church, itself, is to be a communion of intimacy among its members.

But the couple is the example, par excellence, of intimacy. All intimacies take marriage as the model. Unfortunately, in today's society, we are inclined to make marriage a form of friendship and use the ideals of friendship as the horizons for the couple. Instead, we should see marriage as far beyond friendship but something friends can look to in order to improve their own relationship. It is said, frequently today, that a husband and wife should be friends. That is like saying someone who has a doctorate in Astrophysics should be able to read. Matrimony is a call to total, absolute, unrestricted intimacy. Such complete intimacy is only possible in a sexual context. That is why the Bible uses the word 'know' to mean sexual intercourse. The vulnerability such totality calls for is so awesome - there is nothing of me left to me - that it can only be approached in a sexual environment. The couple's experience of intimacy is spiritual, holy and participating in the life and nature of God.

Intimacy means IN another. It doesn't mean side by side, even squeezed next to one another in the closest embrace. It means to internalize the other within me and to become internalized by the other. So intimacy doesn't so much mean to do things intimate

in themselves. It is much deeper. It means to be intimates of one another. Many husbands evaluate their love in terms of the things they do for their wives. They are very sincere in this, often admirably self sacrificing and generous. But they miss the point. The true test of their love for their wives is how much they let her get inside of them, how much they share their personhood. They have to share with her their innermost hopes and fears, dreams and feelings. Moreover, they have to be intensely desirous of taking on hers. Not merely knowing intellectually what is going on inside her and sympathizing, but truly internalizing.

To enter Matrimony is to enter another culture - a sexual one. Couples, when they marry, recognize things will be different and changes are to be made. But they basically believe they already are the kind of person they are going to be and the changes will be external and incidental ones. Furthermore, the way those changes will come about will be by trade-offs, sort of like labor/management negotiations. "I'll give up this, if you'll give up that." "I'll start to do this because I recognize it is important to you but I expect you to reciprocate." That's all very well and good but it is a roommate situation not a marriage. It may well help us over the bumps in the early days, which is worthwhile, but in all honesty is much too surfacy, only the barest beginning. Our initial romantic passion makes us anxious to change for each other: "I only want to please him. I'd do anything for her." Only in the absence or decline of passion do our changes become give and take.

It's as though an Anglo man married a Hispanic woman and thought he was entering her culture by allowing her to have pictures of Mexico on the walls and went to her family's house on some of the holidays. That's simply being nice and respectful of the other person; it is not becoming enculturated. In order to do that he would have to learn the language, immerse himself in the customs and fall in love with the Hispanic way of perceiving life. It's not by being tolerant of, or even good willed toward, some Hispanic practices. He will have to think differently, change his instinctive way of seeing things.

Now that's exactly what husband and wife must both accomplish within themselves and together. They must recognize that each of them has come from a "singles" culture. Now they must progres-

sively establish a marital one. Day by day they have to increase their capacity to think “married”. This doesn’t mean merely to be considerate, to take into account what the other person might like or dislike. It means to think in a totally different way than they have been accustomed to thinking. Each has to think as an us not as I and you. But it is not only in thoughts; but in awareness and responsiveness. It is as St. Paul said: “I live, now not I but Christ lives in me. In him I live and move and have my entire being”. That should be the motto every husband has in terms of his wife “In her I live and move....” And the same for the wife. But many couples even after years of marriage are still in the compromise phase - “I’ll do it your way this time and you’ll do it mine the next.”. They still haven’t graduated from your way and my way to our way. In practical terms, the only way we can hope to achieve this is by developing to the highest possible degree the sexual climate of our home. This is what we mean when we say that Matrimony is a sexual culture. It is a whole pervasive way of being that effects the way we think, talk, act and react.

Inhibited passion leads to inhibited intimacy. The lower the level of sexual awareness experienced by the couple, the less close they are. Desire fuels the openness of all their communication. Passion should be the basic orientation of a spouse’s life, a powerful force to de-center people from themselves. It is intended by God to make the other person the center of our lives. Passion is not to be a part of our life together, it is to be the life’s breath of our marriage. We cannot excuse ourselves by comparing ourselves to other people or to some average among married couples. We cannot substitute something else about our relationship as a replacement. We have to seek the fullness of our sexual potential. That is where our full happiness lies and even more importantly, that is where the happiness of our spouse rests.

Lifelong, all pervasive, sexual desire is possible to spouses of all ages, physical condition, no matter how long they have been married or how short a time, no matter what their level of education, type of personality or socio economic condition. That is the beauty of it and the totality of God’s gift to us. We never run out of sexual desire. It is never beyond our capability. We can be this way with our beloved any time we wish. Nothing, no one can stop us but ourselves.

Sex can become an event they engage in with one another rather than the context in which they do everything. Then, their sexual love is not the focus of their perception of themselves. In which case, they can concentrate on the activity of sex, making sure that it is done correctly for the two of them but they then become absorbed in sex rather than one another. A separateness exists there even in the mutuality. Without doubt, there is intimacy but it doesn't last. It is a positive experience but temporary in its effects.

Sexual desire leads to a transfiguration of self and spouse. We perceive ourselves and our beloved completely differently through this prism. Through the eyes of love we see each other through rose colored glasses. We never have a problem with our self image and self appreciation in such circumstances. It truly is an experience such as Peter, James and John had on the mountain with Jesus when he was transfigured before them. We see each other in ways that we never had before. We see ourselves and our beloved at our best.

## **CREATIVE SPIRITUALITY**

In this area of marital spirituality we have been primarily addressing the mutual love and affection of the spouses and the centrality of sexual devotion to the fulfillment of that goal. However, there is a purpose of equal significance and priority which is intermeshed with their aim of mutual love and affection. It is not a secondary purpose of their life with one another but has the same urgency and value. That is their ability to share in God's creative power. They can bring forth life from and to one another. Ignoring that awesome ability, making it important but peripheral to the centrality of their love, sharply circumscribing the part it plays in their life, is damaging to the fullness of their trust in each other and their vulnerability to their beloved.

The most awesome, intimate thing a wife/husband can ask is "Will you make me a father/a mother?". Sometimes we think intercourse is the ultimate human experience of intimacy. But maternity and paternity are far more so. I will have intercourse with someone long before I would think of having a child with them. The



permanence of that is awesome. We are linked for life regardless of what else happens. The child is an indelible mark of our relationship. The trust such a consequence calls for is wonderful. In addition, the spouse's participation is essential. I cannot make myself a mother, a father. This brings forth a great experience of humility and gratitude. No one has ever or could ever give me a greater gift or empower me in greater fashion.

A child is a living memorial, love incarnate. The very existence of the child testifies to the reality of our love. God believes in our devotion to one another so much that he empowers us to bring forth new life. He enables us to be co-creators with him. The child is a constant reminder that we cannot resist one another. The marks of that reality are all over the child's face, stance and personality. In God's plan, a child is a persistent messenger from Him to remind us of what we mean to one another. Memories are terribly important. That is why we are so insistent on having a good photographer for our wedding, so that we have a wedding album. We have other pictures and mementos that bring to our minds the high points of our relationship. The child is the greatest memento of all.

Maternity and paternity are to flow primarily from the love and desire of husband and wife for each other, not out of a direct love or desire for the children. Children are to be a marital experience, not a separate interaction between parent and child. When the child is loved reflexively as a ricochet off the awareness of the beloved he/she experiences the greatest tenderness and acceptance. The child doesn't have to prove anything, doesn't have to be good or live up to expectations because their goodness is already contained in the wonder of the spouse. All parents should always wrap their children in the sexual devotion they have for their spouses.

A wonderful characteristic of children is that they reflect how attractive their father is to their mother and vice versa. That is the very source of their existence and it must remain the prime motivating factor in a parents interaction with the children. They are an expression of our love for one another. One of the biggest and most far reaching defects of parents with their children is treating them as separate entities, as individuals who exist in and of themselves. That takes away their true identity. They are our love in the flesh. If they do not experience that reality in our interactions

with them, they will always be searching for who they are and what life is all about.

Too often, in the mind of the mother and father it is “my” son/daughter. Oh, we recognize the other person had something to do with it and has equal right to say “my” but I have my relationship and the other parent has theirs. That is single parenting, even in a couple situation. A little better, but still inadequate and ineffective, is the attitude that it is “our” child. The true approach, that serves the child best is this is my beloved’s child. Then I will always interact with this son/daughter with the beloved in mind. My dealings with him/her will be wrapped in my devotion to my beloved. It is so important for the child’s sake for the sexual devotion of the couple to always be as intense and total as possible. Then the child will not be a separate being, needing to be the kind of person I would have chosen, acting the way I would want them to act but the true gift of love they are. They are my beloved’s most intimate, total and generous gift to me. I treasure that gift as absolutely precious and irreplaceable.

The greatest vocation shortage in the Catholic Church today is not that of priests but of truly sexually devoted Matrimonied Couples. The couple is the base of the Church. All of us depend on the success of our Sacramental couples for our own success in the Church. For example, celibacy depends upon Matrimony. Churches that do not see marriage as a Sacrament, also do not see any value to celibacy. In other words, only those Churches: Episcopalian, Catholic and Orthodox, that treat marriage as a Sacramental experience have established celibacy as a way of life in their community. Celibacy and Matrimony are not opposite ways of life but complimentary ways of expressing our sexuality. We need one another. There is much talk today in the Church about the difficulties of celibacy and what we can do about it but it all focuses on the celibate. Actually we could apply to celibates the saying applied to guerrillas. They must swim in a friendly sea of the married. The odd thing is that there is some tendency to believe that the solution to any problem in celibacy is marriage. Actually, marriage has hardly ever been less attractive than today. If we want to help celibates, we have to improve the quality of marriage in the Church - not theirs but ours. The atmosphere of our homes determines the quality of life in the parish not only for

priests and nuns but for all.

## **PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY**

There are practical ways a sacramental couple can increase and intensify the power of their sexual devotion to one another. In truth, good couples do this with one another. The purpose of mentioning some examples here is to remind and encourage. Actually, couples who work on their marriage have in all probability, been doing these all along. But, hopefully, saying them here will be a reinforcement and a stimulus to do them more consistently.

The prime way for a couple to improve their sexual desire for one another is to talk about it together. Regular verbalization provides constant affirmation and consciousness raising so that all our decisions and behaviors are based on our sexual relationship. Sometimes, it is not discussed between them unless something is missing in their sex life. That very expression needs to be addressed. Their sex life is not the act of intercourse. That is a special and powerful fulfillment of their devotion to one another. But their real sex life is much fuller. It is the total aura of eagerness and sexual awareness they have of one another. That climate must be discussed. If the sexual atmosphere in the home is full blown, then there will never be any concern about their love making. They will have been making love constantly. Talking about their desire should be a daily interchange between the two of them.

It should not merely be along the lines of, "Is everything alright between us?" We should be looking for positive signs rather than potential problems. We should be considering what most turns us on about the other tonight and speaking of that lovingly. Too often, we think the other person knows how attractive they are but they need to be told in order to fully believe it. Furthermore, when we say what it is, it will encourage the other person to dress, act, speak, be that way more frequently. Don't just mention these things in passing but spell out in great detail the attractiveness you feel toward her/him. This is the first thing you should do when you greet one another after returning home. Too often, we get caught up in the hustle of getting back to the house and preparing for sup-

per. We have to come first.

It would help this practice immensely if we were to spend the last ten minutes before arriving home just thinking lovingly of the beloved. It takes a little discipline to do this but it is immensely worthwhile. Deliberately, bring to mind sexually attractive qualities of your husband or wife and mull over them so that you are full of him/her when you come together and are eager to hold one another. Regardless of what else you are concerned about, hold it off and bring the desire you have for your beloved front and center. Nothing is more important than that. If you are home before the other arrives spend the time getting ready. Put a comb thru your hair, a dash of after shave or perfume, shave or put on make up, put on something more attractive. Romantic music would be nice. All of this would be a big improvement over heading for the paper or getting the chores started.

The children, interestingly enough, can be a big help. Ask them to evaluate the degree of warmth they detect between you on any given night. Also ask them to tell both of you what most turns you on to one another. It will be amazing to discover how insightful they are. They have, after all, been living with you all their lives and do notice. It is their business. They do love you and want you to be at your best with one another, not only for your sake but for their own. They will have a lot to say. It will be most profitable to listen to them. They will probably say it in different terms than you would, but you will get the point. It would be quite amusing to ask them to act out how you are when you are obviously attracted to one another. It might be a little embarrassing initially, but stick with it. Don't just make this a pastime, something to keep the kids occupied. Listen to them as they reveal you to you.

Good couples are always on the alert to improve themselves in their relationship with one another. The purpose of this Booklet has been to set the stage, to establish a foundation. Many practical tips are contained in the Booklets on Prayer and Marital Prayer in the Celebrate Love Series to fill out what has been said here. Whatever specific form of prayer we adopt, though must be in the context of our sexual devotion to one another. That is what makes us who we are in our mutual relationship with one another and the Lord. Nothing can replace that. No matter how sincerely we ap-

proach our Father we are not the spouse He calls us to be when we are sexually neutral.

In that climate, some general suggestions are helpful to develop our closeness to the Father. They are externals. The heart you bring truly matters. Nonetheless, externals do make a difference. They help us to make the most of our opportunities and to make those chances more frequent. We do, after all, live in the real world, we are creatures of habit. We are effected by time and place. We will not do as well in our prayer without paying attention to the externals.

First of all, we must make the time to pray. Our days are crammed with many demands and activities. Unless, we set a specific time for prayer, it is not likely to happen. The same applies to how long we pray. These two factors, faithfully followed, can add immensely to the effectiveness of our moments with the Lord. Secondly, we should have traditions and practices of prayer. This is not to be rigid. Various approaches can spice our interest. But it is helpful to have an accustomed way to pray. Thirdly, most important of all, pray together as a couple. Of course, this suggestion in no way is intended to discourage you from praying when your spouse is not present. It is saying that the normal and basic prayer life of a couple should be with each other.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Father Chuck Gallagher, S.J. is the founder and Executive Director of the Pastoral And Matrimonial Renewal Center, whose focus is on the development of lay spirituality and leadership in the Catholic Church. He was the driving force behind the Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement and its first Executive Director.

Father Chuck is the author of dozens of books, audio and video tapes and programs devoted to strengthening marriage, family life and the life of Faith. As a renowned popular speaker, he has travelled extensively throughout the world, giving workshops and implementing these programs. He is the initiator and co-author of the Living in Love Retreat Workshop for married couples and the author of the series of Living in Love Companion Booklets.

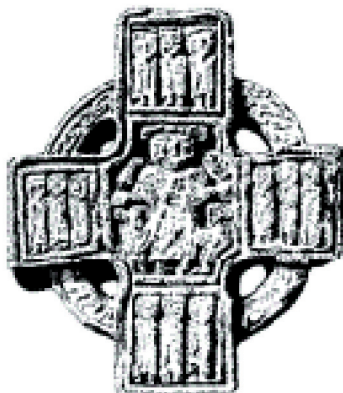
Father Chuck's great love for people and his constant encouragement enables them to develop a fuller and deeper love for one another. He has touched and changed countless lives. He is not only a priest and counsellor but a friend to many. His magnetism, vision and enthusiasm has developed faith communities throughout the world. Across the globe, people feel his understanding love and have responded overwhelmingly.



The seal of the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center is of the ringed head of a High Cross from Castledermot, Ireland. The crucifixion represented on early Irish crosses is almost universally the crucifixion according to the Gospel of John (Jn: 19:37). It is the glorified Christ who is represented: Christ as king and as priest, breathing forth the Spirit at the moment of his death. The spear pierces his side and blood and water flow out: the water symbolic of the Spirit and of Baptism, the blood of Redemption and the Eucharist.

The crucifixion in early Irish art is not shown as Jesus alone and abandoned, but it is a peopled crucifixion - it is Jesus among his disciples, Jesus risen and present among the people of his Church. Jesus Reigns in the midst of his disciples, gathered in unity, who are also his apostles, sent to proclaim his salvation to the four corners of the earth.

Drawing by Sr. Pauline McGrath, O.P.



## THE PASSIONATE COUPLE

### Mixing Spirituality and Sexuality

Sexuality and spirituality can come across to us like oil and water. We don't think they mix with one another. That is such a tragedy. Such an attitude really is the basis which makes our couples second class citizens in the Church. This Booklet is an attempt to correct that fallacy. It enthusiastically calls husbands and wives to a passionate prayerfulness and a prayerful passion. It celebrates the beauty of their sexual devotion to one another and encourages the couple to increase their sexual love day by day.

Sexuality is not an interference with our approach to God for a couple but an enhancement of it. In fact, it is a necessary condition in the prayerfulness of a husband and wife. Their vocation, in the Lord is a sexual one. That is what Matrimony is - a sexual Sacrament. The Lord wants the good spouse to come to Him in the fullness of their devotion to one another. Passion should be their normal state of life. That is when they are at their best with one another and Him. He always wants a couple to be at their peak of closeness with one another when they are with Him.

