

Catholic Couples

Love

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How do you define love? As married people we know that love has many forms and various definitions. However, as Christians we have a perfect model to follow—Jesus! Father Britto Berchmans guides us to a deeper understanding of what it means to love the way Jesus loves.

Love The Way Jesus Loves You The Christian Paradigm of Love in Marriage by Father Britto M. Berchmans

A week before his wedding, the groom-to-be asks his best man: “How much does a marriage license cost?” He replies, “Thirty dollars for now and all the money you make the rest of your life.”

There are some people who view marriage more as an expense than as an investment. They do not realize that the output depends on the input. Unfortunately, people invest far more energy and time into their work, their investments and their golf game than they spend on their marriage and relationships. I insist with couples over and over again that you cannot put your marriage on cruise control. Our relationship will be vibrant depending on how and how much we are willing to love our spouse on a daily basis.

Every newlywed couple will tell you that the essence of married life is love. However, individuals define love as they please. Often our idea of love is shaped more by popular culture, social trends, Hollywood movies and pop music than by the gospel. Jesus has set the standard by which we must measure our love. The norm is Jesus himself. As John reports: “Love one another as I have loved you.” To love as Jesus loves is the challenge facing every Christian couple.

How did Jesus love?

- He expressed his love by the words he spoke and the gestures of affection that he shared (communication and affection).
- In every relationship, the hallmark of his love was fidelity.
- His life provided the definition of sacrifice. “There is no greater love than this that someone should lay down his life for his friends.”
- The hallmark of his love was forgiveness. On the cross he prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” His forgiveness was a pure, gratuitous gift.

Love means communication.

An American Jesuit, John Powell, wrote a very popular book years ago entitled *The Secret of Staying in Love*. The author points out that the secret of staying in love is total and honest communication. Talk to couples who have been married for many years and they will tell you that nothing sustains love better than communication.

- As long as your lines of communication are open, your relationship will continue to deepen.
- Express appreciation, discuss difficult things, and share feelings. Do not keep things bottled up.
- Your spouse should be your best friend. There should be absolutely no secrets between the two of you.
- According to a study, a two-career couple spends on average twenty minutes conversing per day. Make time for heart-to-heart conversation.

Love means affection.

Even though I am a celibate, I am a hopeless romantic. What is so wonderful about falling in love? Look at it this way. The universe is cold and indifferent. When you were born, it did not take notice. When you die, it will keep going without missing a beat. In this cold and indifferent universe, suddenly there comes this individual who says to you, "You matter to me. I cannot go on without you." Suddenly you have become significant to someone.

- Affection consists in making your spouse aware of how significant they are to you. You can convey that sense by words, gestures, cards, physical intimacy or other means.
- Affection presupposes respect.
- One of the best forms of affection is admiration and appreciation. John Gottman lists the following as one of the seven principles for making your marriage work: "Nurture your fondness and admiration for each other."
- Don't take your spouse for granted. The Italian expression for "taking someone for granted" is "dare qualcuno per scontato." It can be literally translated as "to give someone away on a discount." When you take your spouse for granted, you are saying, "My spouse is on sale, 50% off!"

Love means fidelity.

Whereas our technological expertise to make photocopies or music CDs that exhibit high "fidelity to the original," fidelity in our life commitments seems to be on the decline. To make long-term commitments and live by them is an impossible challenge for some. The sacrament of Christian marriage demands that the marriage bond be indissoluble just as Christ's love for his bride, the Church, will never disintegrate.

- If you care about your marriage, make efforts to protect it. You must agree on certain principles and guidelines that will build a hedge around your marriage. See to it that no other relationship can compromise your relationship with your spouse physically or emotionally.
- Some people, however, view marital fidelity in minimalist terms. Fidelity is not just a matter of staying together, but growing together. Two friends of mine said at their thirtieth wedding anniversary, "We are not married to the same people." This readiness to grow with the other person will make your marriage relationship vibrant and alive.

Love means sacrifice.

In our "me-culture" of instant gratification and socially-approved, market-driven selfishness, sacrifice is hardly ever mentioned even in wedding homilies. Yet, without sacrifice, there can be no true love.

- When people fall in love with each other, they cannot do enough for each other. They do not calculate. They do not count the cost.
- Sacrifice entails giving up something legitimate for the sake of a higher good. For married couples the higher good is the health and strength of the relationship.
- Newly-weds must make many adjustments including sharing the same physical space with another. Two independent individuals becoming one is a painful process. It calls for a certain amount of dying to oneself.
- When children arrive, they will make sure that you make sacrifices in your life. You will automatically become selfless.

Love means forgiveness.

Years ago I saw the romantic movie, "Love Story." The billboards for the movie all over my city screamed, "Love is never having to say you're sorry." Nothing is further from the truth. Forgiveness is integral to healthy marriages.

- Forgiveness is possible only when the spouses are committed to foolish loving without calculating the cost. It is born of sacrifice.
- Forgiveness is a gift. The offender does not deserve your forgiveness. You give it all the same because in the process you give the gift to yourself.
- We find it hard to forgive because we are so proud. When we are humble, we are ready to go beyond the offense and forgive.
- We find it hard to forgive because we focus on the hurt and not on the person. A man named Jim had a sports car that he loved. He washed it and waxed it every week. It was the love of his life. One day his wife drove him to the office in his car and on the way back, she was involved in an accident. After inspecting the damage, she thought to herself that her husband would be terribly upset with her. When she opened the glove compartment to look for the insurance papers, she found the documents wrapped in a piece of note-paper. On the paper was this message scribbled: "It is you I love, darling, not the car. Jim."

A few months ago I was called to the bedside of an elderly woman who had just died of cancer. Her head was shaven and her skin had a strange color. As I finished my prayers, an elderly gentleman took my hand and thanked me. Then pointing to her, he said, "She was the only one I ever loved. I met her a few days after I left the service in World War II. We have been married for over 54 years. Look at her! She is as beautiful today as she was when I saw her the first time." He saw the beauty that I couldn't.

Your marriage too can be as vibrant and as long-lasting. Make the commitment today to love as Jesus has loved us!

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