

Marriage as Sacrament by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant – 170917

(starting from notes by Father Peter Sabbath)

“From this Day Forward”

Montreal Archdiocesan Marriage Preparation Program

So, here we are at the last topic. How are you doing?

Tonight or tomorrow you will be back to your busy lives....

The time you have now is a gift, an opportunity to review and recap what you have been experiencing since yesterday morning....

As you remember what you have been feeling, thinking about, discussing together, learning, and maybe writing... you can take note of what you want to take with you, what you want to work on, what you want to develop more... for your married and family life together.

First, on behalf of the Team, I'd like to say something to you....

At a time when so many couples just live together...
...you are choosing to marry...
...you are making efforts to prepare yourselves for married and family life...
...you have been applying your attention and energy all day yesterday and today...
...you are trying to make room for God...
...on behalf of our whole Team, I commend you and encourage you on your journey...
...you are exceptional... you stand out among your peers...
...you are like our Team members who are all volunteers...
...each of us has our own married and family life...
...our professional and personal work...
...and we freely and generously choose to offer this service...
...because we believe in God...
...we believe in his Church...
...and we believe in you...
...so as we approach the end of this part of the journey, well done!

RECAP AND REVIEW

Introduction – Julie Waters

Julie said we would try to meet your expectations re...
Communication, compatibility, wedding plans...
...and make you uncomfortable with sexuality, nfp, intimacy...
...family life, stewardship, spirituality...
...moral struggle, and sacramental life...
...learning new skills, using new muscles together as a couple...
...more alert to dangers...
...but realizing the tremendous joy and passion of working towards a goal together...
...in marriage you continue to be an individual...
...but you give birth to a new entity, your couple, in which you invest...
...and which you develop together, and it is the couple that becomes fruitful...

Readiness – Anne & David Dwyer

The importance of who you are...
...being healthy & autonomous...
...willing to put yourself at the service of another...

Communication – Anne & David Dwyer

We continue to be a mystery to ourselves... to the other...
...it is constantly a challenge...
“Being me...
...loving you.”

By living, making mistakes, making up, and trying again...
...we are learning many skills necessary for married and family life...

Sexuality – Pawel Chrobak

Focus on my pleasure, on me = prostitution...
Focus on you, on your good = marriage...

world culture’s view of sex as taking pleasure by using others...
...for the world culture, fertility is a disease to be medicated...
...unexpected children are an evil to be aborted...

VS God’s plan for giving life to the other...
...for God our fertility is one of his greatest gifts...
...for God a child is of infinite value and a gift of life He personally gives to that child...

Satan offers pornography... abuse... prostitution... human trafficking...
God offers marriage and matrimony...

NFP – Natural Family Planning – Monica Lambton

We try to be “green” with cars, homes...
Water, food, and drink...
Power and electricity...
Caring for the natural environment...
Why not be “green” with our sexuality?

Parenthood – Magda Sankeralli

Unique irreplaceable value of the human family...
Children spontaneously look to their mother and father...

Mothers form their children to believe that life is good...
And that they are good, they are worth being cared for...

Fathers show their boys that life is worth living and making efforts...
And that it is good to grow up to be a man...

Fathers show their daughters that they are lovable...
... by cherishing their daughters fathers show them that...
...they don’t need to do anything to deserve love...

...that who they are and what they have is valuable, not to be thrown away...

Stewardship – Julie Waters

It may seem scary that married and family life consists of ...
... so many details and responsibilities...
...but the key is to get information, think about it,
...think of your spouse (and children),
...talk about it, pray about it, and do what is best.
We learn as we go along... one issue at a time...

Sunday Mass – Fr Gilles Surprenant

What God is offering us is a personal relationship...
...with an essential community dimension...
...and it is all about freedom and peace, love and generosity...

Marriage as Sacrament – Fr Gilles Surprenant

You are taking this Marriage Preparation Course because you have chosen to marry in the Roman Catholic Church. Jesus like all Jews believed that God designed human beings for marriage and family. Christians believe like Jesus and the Jews that the power of God's love is at work in a man and a woman who marry in accord with God's design.

What is so special about marriage according to God's plan and design?

We believe that God made man and woman different and complementary. We need each other because alone we cannot experience the full meaning and purpose of our life. Initially our love is selfish, but if we accept the challenge of love, our love learns to put our self aside in order to dedicate our self to serve the good of the other. That is the human dynamic.

The divine dynamic – which is at work at the same time – is the **presence** and **action** of **God**. We human beings experience the presence and action of God

- in our own personal and **individual** lives,
- in our relationships with other people, especially in **community**, and
- in **all of life** – in work and play, in sound and silence, in beauty and goodness, in truth and justice, and most especially in nature.

The human experience of God is fluid... our experience tends to change over time as we live longer and experience more of the mysteries and challenges of life. We also learn from one another. Initially, some people experience God indirectly through what are called the universal transcendentals: truth, beauty, and goodness.

WIKIPEDIA: The **transcendentals** (Latin: *transcendentalia*) are the properties of **being** and are connected with three main human abilities; to *think* (*looking for truth*), to *wish* (*looking for beauty*) and to *feel* (*looking for goodness*). They correspond to three aspects of the human field of interest and are their ideals; **science** (the domain of **truth**), the **arts** (the domain of **beauty**) and **religion** (the domain of **goodness**). Philosophical disciplines study them: *logic studies truth, aesthetics studies beauty, and ethics studies goodness*.

Whether or not they realize it, when people embrace truth, goodness, and beauty, they are already experiencing God who is the source of these qualities.

When people come to identify God as the source of all that is true, beautiful, and good, they are then able to enter into a more direct and personal experience of God.

The wide range of human spiritual experience

Dimensions of spirituality	Spiritual arena	Spiritual “objects”
1. personal experiences	work, play, illness, love, etc.	there must be more to life
2. spiritual awakening	nature, cosmos, world, humanity	truth – beauty – goodness
3. experience of cleansing	realizing that I'm a sinner	being forgiven & raised up

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 4. religious experience | prayer, Church, faith, grace | Word, Sacraments, X Comm |
| 5. experience of renewal | spiritual reading, study, retreats | spiritual light and new life |
| 6. mystical experience | God is real and loves me | interior relationship with God |
| 7. spiritual union | What I do to others I do to God | loving in selfless service |

The **individual's** experience and contribution – the woman as woman, the man as man...

The **communal** dimension of our lives – family, friends, colleagues, neighbours...
– faith family – your local parish, the Diocese, the RC Church...

The **spiritual** dimension of our lives – *all life is spiritual*...
– being awake to notice and be in awe...
– discovering God and relating to God... personally, alone...
– relating to God as a couple, in our family, in our faith community...

“In the beginning...” Gen 2:18-25 (creation of woman – summit of creation); Eph 5:25-33 (“Husbands love your wives...”); Rev 19:5-9 (the wedding of the Lamb of God).

From beginning to end, the whole Bible is a story about marriage: from Adam and Eve to the “wedding of the Lamb”, which is the marriage of Christ and the Church.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s love for his people is described as the love of a husband for his bride. It was difficult for the people to remain faithful to God because the distractions of life and the existence of other religions caused them to forget about or turn away from God.

In the New Testament, Christ comes as the heavenly bridegroom to draw us into closest communion with the Father through him. That means that everything God wants to tell us on earth about who he is, who we are, the meaning of life, the reason he created us, how we are to live, and even our ultimate destiny is contained somehow in the truth of God’s love embedded in Marriage as an image of God’s love for humanity made visible in Jesus.

Saint Pope John Paul II says that we can’t understand Christianity if we don’t understand the truth and meaning of our sexuality, because the full meaning of marriage helps us to understand the full truth of God’s love made visible in Jesus to the point of laying down his life for us.

Marriage between a baptized and believing man and woman will be a sign of the presence of Christ through their deliberate participation in their marriage and by the powerful action of the Holy Spirit within them and in their relationship.

SACRAMENTS

“A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality, instituted by Christ, given to us through his Church, to give grace.” The word comes from the Greek for mystery.

What is grace? “Love freely given” “The free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons and daughters, partakers of the divine nature of eternal life”. Cf. “Participation in the life of God”. (CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church – 996-7).

Through the sacraments we experience the healing, forgiving, nourishing, strengthening presence of God that enables us to love in turn by the divine action of God within us in our own personal life and among us in our relationships and social dimension.

The ministers of the sacraments are usually bishops and priests. In danger of death anyone can baptize another person who wants baptism by doing what the Church does for Baptism. The only other exception is Marriage, where the baptized man and baptized woman administer the sacrament of Marriage to each other in the presence of an ordained minister and two witnesses.

What is Marriage or Holy Matrimony?

Marriage evokes the lifelong faithful and fruitful commitment of a man and woman.

Matrimony evokes the life-giving and nurturing duties and powers of the mother.

We spoke of a sign: the sign here is the consent of the couple, expressed by the public vows you make, establishing a sacred, indissoluble bond between them, and beginning a new way of life. The Sacrament of Matrimony comes about through a promise made by a man and a woman before God and the Church, which is accepted and confirmed by God and consummated by the bodily union of the couple. Because God himself forms the bond of sacramental marriage, it is binding until the death of one of the partners. [CCC 1625-1631]

The man and the woman mutually administer the sacrament of Matrimony. A sacramental marriage has three necessary elements: (1) free consent, (2) the affirmation of a lifelong, exclusive union, and (3) openness to children. [CCC 1644-1654]

“Marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered into by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children. This covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a Sacrament.” (Christopher West)

Marriage is made by the consent of the two parties. Consent must be canonically expressed between two persons who are capable of giving it. The parties themselves must give their consent; no human power can replace or supply it. Matrimonial consent is defined as the act of the will by which a man and a woman, in an irrevocable covenant, give and receive each other in order to make a marriage (c. 1057). The couple, by their free, mutual consent, make a marriage covenant, and on that covenant they build a life partnership (*consortium totius vitae*).

Marriage is as old as mankind. It predates the fall, is not created by church or state, and the features are written in the design of creation and revealed to us by a loving God who has made marriage a powerful symbol of the mystery of His love for us.

The most profound thing about a Christian marriage, however, is the couple’s knowledge that: “We are a living image of the love between Christ and the Church.” (CCC 1644-1654, 1664) You will be questioned on these at the ceremony.

Intimate communion of life and love: Marriage is the closest and most intimate of human friendships. It involves the sharing of the whole of a person's life with his/her spouse.

Marriage calls for a mutual self-surrender so intimate and complete that spouses—without losing their individuality—become "one," not only in body, but in soul.

Exclusive communion of life and love: As a mutual gift of two persons to each other, this intimate union excludes such union with anyone else. It demands the total fidelity of the spouses. This exclusivity is essential for the good of the couple's children as well.

Indissoluble communion of life and love: Husband and wife are not joined by passing emotions or mere erotic inclination which, selfishly pursued, fades quickly away. They are joined in authentic conjugal love by the firm and irrevocable act of their own will. Once their mutual consent has been consummated by genital intercourse, an unbreakable bond is established between the spouses.

For the baptized, this bond is sealed by the Holy Spirit and becomes absolutely indissoluble. Thus, the Church does not so much teach that divorce is wrong, but that divorce is impossible, regardless of its civil implications. Marriage is triply indissoluble: first, because the essence of love is mutual self-giving without reservation; second, because it is an image of God's unconditional faithfulness to his creation; and third, because it represents Christ's devotion to his Church, even unto death on the Cross. (CCC 1605, 1612-1617, 1661)

Entered by man and woman: The complementarity of the sexes is essential to marriage. It's not that two men (or two women) could marry, but the Church won't "let them." If we understand what marriage is, we will see very clearly that it is impossible for members of the same sex to marry. It should be called something else.

At the design of the Creator: God is the author of marriage. He inscribed the call to marriage in our very being by creating us as male and female. We, therefore, are not able to change the nature and purposes of marriage.

For the purpose of their own good: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). Conversely, it's for their own good, for their benefit, enrichment, and, ultimately, their salvation, that a man and woman join their lives in marriage.

For the procreation and education of children: Children are not added on to marriage and conjugal love, but spring from the very heart of the spouses' mutual self-giving, as its fruit and fulfillment. Intentional exclusion of children, then, contradicts the very nature and purpose of marriage.

What makes marriage a sacrament? It models the love after the self-giving love of Christ; it is a sign of his love for the Church, which is complete, willing to give oneself entirely; remember the agape that perhaps you have heard about already (the 4 loves). Couples enter a different level of their relationship when they decide to marry not for what they can get, but for what they can give. That might take years, and for those who don't take that leap, they might resign themselves to a cold life of habit and feeling trapped, or just as often, they divorce at the time when the first bloom wears off. The sacrament of marriage gives sacramental grace, a specific aid from God to help couples live up to the commitment involved in married love. Italians understand the meaning of love, at least the language: "Tivoglio bene": Not, "You make me feel good", but "I wish the best for you."

Sacraments are efficacious signs: they truly communicate what they symbolize. Ordinary signs communicate information, an idea about something; sacraments transmit the reality, the thing itself. So the love of husband and wife is not merely a symbol of the love of Christ and the Church. For the baptized, it is a real participation in it.

The matter of this sacrament is the consent of the man and the woman, expressed externally by words and signs. The form of this sacrament is the man and woman conferring the sacrament upon each other as witnessed by the Church.

Why marry in Church?

Because your grandmother will kill you if you don't? It is also very stressful, family conflicts, exaggerated expectations and details because of TV, etc. It makes no sense for a man and woman to go to classes in advance with a priest for a religion that they don't subscribe to. And all this just to get married in a fancy building. This is the time, the opportunity to reflect on these questions, to experience more deeply the day, not just the party aspects.

What is the long-range purpose of marriage?

This is a Catholic program, but I want to begin with some words from the wedding sermon from the royal wedding last April: "Marriage is intended to be a way in which man and woman help each other to become what God meant each one to be, their deepest and truest selves."

To help each other become holy, to reach eternal life St. Ignatius: in every decision in life, there is only one question to ask: "Is this going to help me to save my soul, or is it going to distract me from saving my soul? Let us do with our eyes on heaven. It is a vocation, a calling, just as real and as special as the calling to priesthood. In everything here on earth, God most intensive schools of love, where he wishes to train most of his pupils. We don't find perfect happiness in marriage or in anything else on earth. Marriage is to mature people, prepare them, for the perfect happiness found in eternal life. Happiness is a consequence of giving, not receiving. Our self-centeredness, selfishness, is the greatest obstacle to happiness.

Contract vs covenant

George Weigel on his friends celebrating their 50th:

"As on their wedding day when Peter and Teresa first exchanged vows, now, on their golden jubilee, the priest celebrating the thanksgiving Mass wound the end of a stole around their joined hands, its other end remaining around his neck, as the couple renewed their pledge of love and fidelity. This custom says something very important about marriage. What it says is that, in the biblical and Christian view, the couple "getting married" are engaging in a priestly act, an act of right worship: They are sealing, not a mere contract, but a covenant in which two become one. And from that unity, from that new family, springs the gift of new life. The Church's official witness to this covenant-making, the ordained priest, exercises his unique form of priesthood by offering the Church's recognition of, and blessing on, what the couple, in their exercise of the priesthood of the baptized, have covenanted together. That stole, touching both priest and couple, embodies the classic Catholic teaching that the couple who bind themselves for life are the ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony."

Covenant: While marriage involves a legal contract, a covenant goes beyond the minimum rights and responsibilities guaranteed by a contract. A covenant calls the spouses to share in the free, total, faithful, and fruitful love of God. For it is God who, in the image of his own Covenant with his people; joins the spouses in a more binding and sacred way than any human contract.

"A covenant (a permanent contract between man and God), by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."

Hahn: "A contract exchanges property, goods and services; covenants exchanges persons, saying "I am

yours, and you are mine”. Contracts set the terms for a business transaction, are only temporary and are made in my name. Every covenant is based upon a contract, since all interpersonal relationships involve some sharing of property and obligations of service, but covenants go further. They create a family bond “and that’s why they are perhaps the central concept in the Bible—the expressions “Old Testament” and “New Testament” would be more accurately translated as “Old Covenant” and “New Covenant”. Covenants have to be sworn not in my name, but in God’s. In terms of relationships, a contract is what happens in prostitution; a covenant is what happens in marriage.

Saint Pope John Paul II

“God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love.” Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"

Origin of marriage & original sin

Marriage is present from the very beginning, then, part of the order in which He created the universe. We see that the action of the first couple also was the time of original sin, and we can see the same psychology that still exists today: (Gen 3:8-13). The author of Genesis is looking at creation as a lover, a poet, not a scientist. It is like the difference between your husband/fiancé looking into your eyes vs. your optometrist.

When God asks what happened, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. “When tempted by the deceitful and murderous serpent (see Jn 8:44), he chose to disobey God and protect his hide rather than lay down his life to save his bride.” (Scott Hahn). Not much has changed. Men still blame their wives, and people in general do not take responsibility for their actions. Our will is weakened after the Fall. Our reason is clouded.

We suffer from concupiscence: the tendency to choose the good things of this earth rather than the great things of God, and they become the centre of our lives, our gods. So we are living under the results of original sin, and we see this everywhere in our world, but through Christ, the order of creation persists and is redeemed. But we need God for that to happen, or we are lost, as we see happening in the world, as people try to live cut off from the order of creation. The real original sin is not eating fruit but not trusting God.

After our first parents discovered they were naked, they were ashamed. This shame had a positive, instructive purpose, because it made them aware that they had stripped themselves of the beautiful “veil of innocence” God had given them, before they sinned. The feelings, including sexual feelings, are a gift from God, not something shameful. What is shameful is the distortion of those feelings into lust: taking rather than self-giving. But our culture in celebrating shamelessness is also degrading those God-given feelings and sensations. We don’t know what Adam and Eve would have experienced in their sexual activity, but something wonderful: they were humans, not angels.

Marriage is not easy, but neither is anything worth doing. Someone said that every marriage is ultimately a mismatch. No one gets all he or she had anticipated out of a marriage. But if the couple are intelligent enough to appreciate this point, then no matter what the storm they will ride out the hurricane. A good example of this is found in a famous British actress. She and her mate were contentedly married for decades. Following his death, she was asked by the media whether she had ever contemplated divorce.

Imperiously she sniffed, "Divorce never! Murder yes!" The first 3 most important words in marriage are "I love you". The next three are "I am sorry".

Are you afraid to get married?

What could be some of the reasons: responsibility, etc. What are the divorce statistics? Well, there is good news and bad news, as they say. We hear of 1/2 marriages ending, but it is not that simple. The methods of calculating the divorce rate is not standard, and depending on the method, can be misleading. In fact, the rate for only first marriages is about one in three, since most second and subsequent marriages have a much higher failure rate. When we exclude civil marriages, and look only at religious marriages, it is even lower.

CatholicMarriagePrep.com

Nominal Catholics have 5% less chances to divorce than average population.

Sunday Mass practicing Catholics: 31% less chances to divorce.

Seriously practicing Catholics, couples praying together and using NFP have a 95% less chances to divorce. It's true that the family that prays together stays together. That's the good news, but first we have to look at the bad news again.

The bad news is that the rate is still high, and if it is only 1 in 3 or 4, that can still create a climate of fear and insecurity: is it a virus that strikes every third and fourth house on any given street? Is there a divorce shot like a flu shot? Well, the stats on religious marriage and practicing families show that how you live makes a difference, and you are meant to make your homes a kind of domestic church, patterned on the life of the Holy Family, where "but word and example, the parents become the first witnesses to and educators of their children in the faith."

There are all kinds of reasons for the divorce rate increasing. You are not even married and I am speaking about divorce, but perhaps you can be aware of what to avoid:

- 1) marriage has become an individual choice rather than a covenant before God;
- 2) easier divorce laws;
- 3) The trend toward individualism and an emphasis on rights rather than duties
- 4) Today's culture encourages people to be happy and fulfilled and marriage is less seen as an institution centered on mutual responsibilities than one based on the pursuit of happiness and companionship.
- 5) So most Westerners have developed a lower threshold of tolerance when their marriage does not meet with their expectations for personal fulfillment.

We'll talk in a few minutes about some other things that do not enhance marriage success.

Premarital sex & cohabitation

I am going to speak about certain things—including premarital sex and cohabitation—that may upset some of you, but relax, because it is not to criticize anyone, but to give you the best shot, and as a priest, to

share the wisdom and teaching of the Church. This is a Catholic course and so you expect to hear the teaching of the Catholic Church which has developed a certain wisdom and expertise in humanity over 2000 years, notwithstanding the human limitations of its members. Finally, you are adults and will decide how you will live.

Have you ever seen those kind of glass rooms in airports where you can smoke? A lot of people in our culture thinks that the Catholic Church views sex the way those airports view smoking: ok, if you have to do it, at least do it in there, off in a corner somewhere, get it over with. Not to criticize anyone, but that has never been the teaching of the Catholic Church, it comes from a Puritan point of view that was important in the States: Christians that do not permit drinking or dancing or smiling, it seems, and now they have done completely the other direction. Even though Catholics picked some of that up, and we had our own heresies (Jansenism, etc. See *Just for Laughs*: if it's Catholic, it is not fun.), Catholics have always known how to enjoy a good meal, a good drink and a healthy sensuality.

So I hope you have heard by now that, contrary to common opinion, the Church does not consider sex a necessary evil, the Church is not anti-sex, does not denigrate it, but has the highest regard for it, and that is why the Church does not want you to cheat yourselves out of what can be a sublime, deeply spiritual experience, that does not exclude, but is something much greater and more wonderful than the sensual and emotional dimensions of sexual relations. Remember that I said that you need to consummate your marriage by intercourse for it to be valid. God wants to be present in sex to perform one of the two great miracles of life (conception, the other is transubstantiation). It is the culture that is hyper-sexualized that distorts the meaning of sexuality, it is the culture that calls the body parts that co-create with God to bring forth life junk that is misguided.

Sex is a mystery because in it we share in God's power of creation.

That's why the Church asks the couple to refrain from sexual expression before marriage. It is meant to be the act that seals and renews the couple's marriage covenant before God and the community; it is not just a private matter, but between you and God, you and the Church. We don't stop being Christians at any time, not even behind the bedroom door. The gift of your body in sexual intercourse is a profound symbol of the giving of your whole self, meant to strengthen married love and sharing that love with your children, notwithstanding that it has become a form of recreation in our present culture.

In that regard, stay away from pornography: it is a form of infidelity, and it is poisonous to the soul, much worse than chemicals in your food, and is ruining more relationships and marriages than anything else at the moment.

Before marriage, it is an action that says, "I give you my whole self", but in fact while holding back a level of commitment, of fertility, and relationship with God. It implies contraception, which separates the aspect of generation, procreation, from the building up of your love, the unitive aspect, which are always meant to be together in sexual relations.

The Anglicans have in their marriage service: "with my body, I thee worship". This is the attitude to have. "Love can wait to give. Lust can't wait to get" (Google Jason Evert). It is researched and well-known that practicing married Catholics are more often intimate and enjoy relations more than others, and women reach satisfaction more often: giving, not taking.

If a couple has already been having relations, it's not too late to stop until marriage. It doesn't have to be a source of deprivation, but a kind of wedding gift that you make to each other. There will be many occasions in your married life when you will have to abstain for one reason or another, and whether you are being married in 3 weeks or 6 months, it can be a wonderful time of sharing and showing affection in other ways. It will strengthen your marriage, deepen your friendship, foster deeper intimacy and communion, build up your problem-solving and communication skills. No one ever died from abstaining from sex. At least I hope not....

The same applies to couples already living together. The wedding day should be very special, and something of that is lost if you get up out of bed, get all dressed up, go to the church, the reception and come home together.

Why do people live together before marriage?

- 1) Economic advantage
- 2) increased sexual opportunities
- 3) Fear of commitment
- 4) Companionship / time together
- 5) Less complication dissolution of relationship
- 6) Testing for compatibility [a person is not a consumer object]
- 7) Pressure from partner
- 8) Convenience
- 9) Anti-marriage sentiments
- 10) Trial marriage.

Sexual union says: "I give you my whole self"—but the cohabiting man and woman are really holding back their commitment, their fertility, and their relationship with God. Before giving your body to another person, you need to give your whole life, and you need to receive your spouse's whole life in return—and that can only happen in marriage." It is more like roommates than a team. Without a clearly defined relationship, a cohabiting couple can more easily fall into the habit of being more controlling and manipulative with each other. This leads to resentment and mistrust and carries over into married life.

The idea was that living together before marriage would enable people to avoid marrying the wrong person and to practice relationship skills. It is counter-intuitive, but it does not work that way. Cohabitation represents, particularly among males, a lesser commitment to marriage and to sexual fidelity. There is also less reason to work at maintaining a relationship that may never have been viewed as a life-long commitment to begin with. So cohabitation is not really a trial marriage, and divorce is higher for those couples. Quoting an article in the New York Times, hardly an organ of the Catholic Church, on April 14, 2012, said: "Couples who cohabit before marriage (and especially before an engagement or an otherwise clear commitment) tend to be less satisfied with their marriages — and more likely to divorce — than couples who do not."

The author speaks of her friend who was heading for divorce within a year of marriage after cohabiting for 4 years. How did this happen? "We were sleeping over at each other's places all the time," she said. "We liked to be together, so it was cheaper and more convenient. It was a quick decision but if it didn't work out there was a quick exit.

She was talking about what researchers call "sliding, not deciding." Moving from dating to sleeping over to sleeping over a lot to cohabitation can be a gradual slope, one not marked by rings or ceremonies or sometimes even a conversation. Couples bypass talking about why they want to live together and what it will mean.

When researchers ask cohabitators these questions, partners often have different, unspoken — even unconscious — agendas. Women are more likely to view cohabitation as a step toward marriage, while men are more likely to see it as a way to test a relationship or postpone commitment, and this gender asymmetry is associated with negative interactions and lower levels of commitment even after the relationship progresses to marriage. One thing men and women do agree on is that their standards for a live-in partner are lower than for a spouse.

Sliding into cohabitation wouldn't be a problem if sliding out were as easy as sliding in. But it isn't. ... In behavioral economics, it's called consumer lock-in. Lock-in is the decreased likelihood to search for, or change to, another option once an investment in something has been made. The greater the setup costs, the less likely we are to move to another, even better, situation, especially when faced with switching costs, or the time, money and effort it requires to make a change.

Cohabitation is loaded with setup and switching costs. The girl in the article said she never really felt that her boyfriend was committed to her. "I felt like I was on this multiyear, never-ending audition to be his wife," she said. "We had all this furniture. We had our dogs and all the same friends. It just made it really, really difficult to break up. Then it was like we got married because we were living together once we got into our 30s."

Others want to feel committed to their partners, yet they are confused about whether they have consciously chosen their mates. Founding relationships on convenience or ambiguity can interfere with the process of claiming the people we love. A life built on top of "maybe you'll do" simply may not feel as dedicated as a life built on top of the "we do" of commitment or marriage. The most recent research suggests that serial cohabitators, couples with differing levels of commitment and those who use cohabitation as a test are most at risk for poor relationship quality and eventual relationship dissolution.

The experience of a less secure, and at times less faithful cohabitation, shapes subsequent marital behaviour and such couples continue to live their marriage through the perspective of the insecurity and low commitment of their prior cohabitation.

Some dioceses require separation before marriage; we recommend it. You remember we said that marriage is not just a private affair, but includes God and the community. What you do and how you live also encourages others in one direction or another; you have a responsibility there. Some couples decide to separate before marriage, some take separate bedrooms, again as a gift to each other, gratitude to God, an example to your friends and relatives that you take this very seriously. Attending Mass each week, having a moment of prayer together, all make a difference, and set up a happy future.

Please don't say, "Why is he discouraging us when we are already living together and going to get married anyway?" We are actually encouraging you because in the Church, there is the chance to begin again by confession, repentance, conversion. You are also a witness, an example, to family and friends and neighbours. Be a good one. I need to say that if you are living together or engaging in sexual relations, although you should still go to church, you should not be receiving holy Communion; if you decide to change your actions, you should go to confession before communion, and, while we're talking about this, all Catholics should make a point of confession before the wedding, as a way of beginning a new life with a fresh start.

If you call yourselves Catholics, start living like Catholics: many people around the world are suffering and dying for their faith, and you are picking and choosing what you are willing to accept: pre-marital sex, living together, not going to church. No wonder Muslims have contempt for the west, where people call themselves Christians but live as 'pagans'. You are being married in the Church, live like Catholics.

Pope Benedict points out that in giving ourselves to God, we are not losing anything: the same goes for self-giving. And it is mutual: we cannot be passive. There were two gates to heaven, one for those who obey their wives, another for those who do their own will. Lots of men were at the first, but only one man at the second.

St. Peter asks him why he is there. “My wife told me to stand there.” Think about beginning married life by choosing what is right, not what is easy or convenient or inexpensive.

We spoke of the long-range purpose of marriage as leading to eternal life. This might seem unrelated to your daily life, but as Christians, we are always to live with our feet on the ground and our eyes looking towards heaven, so that we do not become completely immersed in what’s around us to the detriment of the higher meaning of life. We often hear it said that marriage has three persons involved: the man, the woman and God, and this “trinity” of persons should mirror the life of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is a communion of love, as your life should be a community of love, for each other’s well-being, in respect with God at the centre; and the procreation and education of children.

The primary properties of marriage are unity, indissolubility, permanent (consent for life), fidelity, and openness to children. Don’t get overstressed about wedding details, don’t overload yourselves with debts and houses, etc., that will impede having children, whatever.

What happens if you differ?

Always assume the best of intentions in the other's words and action, not the worst. I heard you say such and such: is that what you meant? But what happens if you genuinely cannot agree? Morally neutral differences, important differences. Somebody on the radio said the secret to a happy marriage dialogue, compromise, and don't sweat the small stuff because it's all small stuff. Is that true??

Race differences are unimportant, even with some consequences. Faith differences are important, and need to be addressed before marriage. You who are not Catholic have already agreed to allow your children to be brought up as Catholics, but there is more, they cannot be both. A sign of human maturity and of Christian virtue is that each of you does the right thing, even when the other does not. We are speaking about conscience and its formation. We have an obligation as humans to seek the truth.

Royal wedding: “You have chosen to be married in the sight of a generous God who so loved the world that he gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And in the Spirit of this generous God, husband and wife are to give themselves generously to each another and overcome selfishness. Marriage should transform, as husband and wife make one another their work of art. It is possible to transform as long as we do not harbour ambitions to reform our partner.”

The results of an extensive inquiry made in more than 20 countries, with more than 40 researchers asking questions to more than 17,000 families.

A happy marriage has the following characteristics:

- the couple spends time together, in quantity and quality;
- they know how to express their affection for each other;
- they show commitment to family life;
- they know how to discuss in a constructive way;
- they have shared spiritual values.

What happens if one of you is more religious than the other?

You often hear spoken of conjugal love. The word “conjugal” comes from the Latin “conjugium”, meaning yoke, not as a burden, but something to keep two animals linked together to work in the same direction, to prepare the ground for fertility of life, with the same vision, same goal, same bond of love. This conjugal love is sacred, because God uses it as a sign of his love for us. Pope John Paul II wrote: “Through the sacrament, the two spouses are united in Christ, not only in a communion of persons between themselves. Christ seals their love, their self-gift, and unites them in himself. It is as though Christ writes the name of each person on the soul of the other.”

Statement of intention and consent:

My dear friends,
you have come together in this church
so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love
in the presence of the Church's minister and this community.
Christ abundantly blesses this love.
He has already consecrated you in baptism
and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament
so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity.
And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.

(Woman) and (Man), have you come here freely and without reservation
to give yourselves to each other in marriage?
Will you love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?
Will you bring up your children according to the law of Christ and his Church?

Consent

Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands,
and declare your consent before God and his Church.

I (Man), take you, (Woman), to be my wife.
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health.
I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

I (Woman), take you, (Man), to be my husband.
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health.
I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

You have declared your consent before the Church.

May the Lord in goodness strengthen your consent and fill both with his blessings.

What God has joined, men must not divide. Amen.