

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGED AND NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES

You chose to marry in a setting, in a context, and in time by making room for God. But wait... LOVE is a fundamental human ability and need – humans don't really need God to love – or do we? If love comes so naturally to us humans, then why is our loving so fraught with difficulties and failures?

We are broken or if you prefer infected... we have difficulty living in the present... haunted by the past, anxious and worried about the future... our mind and heart are pulled both backwards and forwards and find it almost impossible to live fully in the present moment.... Our distress as humans affects all that we are, all that we do, all to which we aspire, and all that we experience.

FAITH & HOPE What difference does God make in life, in Marriage, in Family Life? God is the specialist of the present moment because He created both time and the universe. When we put our faith in God we develop our ability to open up to others and resist the urge to isolate ourselves. The more we open up to the mysterious but personal experience of God, the more we discover how steady and reliable God is, what vitality there is in the Holy Trinity, and we feel hope for the future.

God offers to help us calm down and become increasingly capable of living in the present moment, of giving our full and undivided attention to the person in front of us... This is exactly what we need to live married life, to welcome children and be significantly present to them every day, to defend our personal, home, and family life, and to nurture a rich couple life and a rich family life together.

SUGGESTED LIST OF PRIORITIES for everyday life – not the quantity of time but how to navigate our awareness and attentiveness of mind, heart, body, and spirit. This is taken from “Contemplative Retreat An Introduction to the Contemplative Way of Life and to the Jesus Prayer” a book by Father Franz Jalics, a man and priest personally familiar with the drama of human life. (Pages 299-300)

1. **SLEEP** – give your body the hours of sleep it needs – or you and others will pay the price
2. **EXERCISE** – give your body the exercise it needs, especially if you sit for many hours a day
3. **PRAYER** – visit with God freely and generously – early morning, starting work, meals, at a quiet time, while commuting, in the evening, and before going to bed. You need personal prayer visits with God, couple prayer, and family prayer moments. Need ideas? Call me.
4. **PEOPLE** – giving real time and full caring awareness and attention to the people you love and with whom you live – spouses need each other, and children need their parents.
5. **WORK** – strange to give work the last priority? No because work already generates very strong pressure of demand on our attention and energy, as well as the motivation we already have to work and succeed. If we don't put the other priorities first, our work can abduct us and cause us to be physically present at home but as unavailable as if dead.
6. **AVOID** addictions of any kind, especially to alcohol, drugs, pornography or anything else that promises pleasure but drains your interior life and kills your relationships.

Qualities and characteristics of vibrant married couples and life-giving parents

Humility is a gift from God and a disposition to be developed to realize our true place in life, society, and the universe. I am not the center. Opening myself to others I learn much about them and about myself. Opening myself to God I discover that God is real, I allow Him to encounter me and myself to encounter Him, and I accept to receive many things and be taught by the Creator of the universe.

Love takes interest. In order to truly love others for who they are and for the value they have in themselves, I need to **observe** and **study** them: my parents, siblings, my spouse, children, and all the other people in my life. This is also true of God. I can observe God by the “work of his hands” in all of Creation, which includes human beings, the universe, and angelic supernatural spirits.

Prayer is the **experience of encountering God** in a variety of ways. I can learn much from God about the Holy Trinity, about life, people, and myself from Sacred Scripture – the divinely inspired Jewish and Christian writings in the Old and New Testaments – and from the direct but mysterious contact with God. We have direct contact with God, whether we have insights or not or feel anything or not, in various forms of prayer – alone, married couple, family – and also in a public setting as in church, most notably at the Sunday Liturgy or Sunday Mass.

There are **enemies** of Marriage and of Family Life. They may present themselves as speaking and acting in our interests, but the truth can be observed in the damaging effects they have on us and our relationships. They can be individuals who feel threatened or just jealous of our rich experience of Marriage and Family. It can be opposition or persecution from those who disagree ideologically with our values or behaviour. The culture in an impersonal way can push values that are disruptive of married and family life. They are opportunities for us to **stand firm** and **defend** what is precious .

Forgiveness controls the door to the human heart. When I won't forgive it usually is because I am brooding over my hurt but this is a poisonous trap out of which there is no escape. I can only forgive when I make the act of will to stop looking at my hurt and turn to God as the source of life and love and mercy. There is no need for me to forget my hurt or to repress my feelings but only to accept them as real, as what they are, and turn to God. I must go to the source of life and be replenished. A simple way to do that is to at least express the intention to forgive and ask God to enable me to forgive from my heart. God will do this by healing my hurt as I give my whole hearted attention to Him which we do when we read Scripture and visit with God in any form of prayer, and especially through participation at Sunday Mass. (Thoughts on forgiveness from Fr. Franz Jalics chapter 8)

Jesus as a human being was **awake** and **aware** of everything inside Him and all around Him. Even now Jesus risen from the dead and forever present to us is our best teacher in how to live a life that is awake and aware of everything, which we call **living contemplatively**. A contemplative look at the one who behaves as an “enemy” realizes the poverty of a person who behaves as they do. A perfect way to return not evil but good to those who mistreat us or others is to pray and simply ask God in a sincere desire for their good to do in them what they are missing. I accept to endure whatever life brings, believe in God, look with love at Jesus and absorb life from Him. This is a secret to happiness.