

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is 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.” - CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1.

In 1981, I began the 4th grade at Brown Elementary School in Kilbourne, Ohio. That year, the schools in the district were combining classes from two schools to make one class and 4th grade students from Ashley Elementary in Ashley, Ohio combined with our class at Brown. In the small group of kids that came over, there was one in particular that I remember best.

She was someone I clicked with right away. We became friends and even, dare I say, used the terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” for what it meant to a couple of kids. We hung out at recess always, attended after school functions together (roller skating was the big thing then), passed notes in the class and did pretty much everything that would be expected of a young “romance”. We even had a falling out one day at the beginning of recess and by the end we had fixed the misunderstanding and were back together. Probably the shortest break-up/make-up in my life.

I distinctly remember at one point during the year, asking my mom one afternoon “how do you know you are going to marry someone?” she looked at me in precisely the way anyone should look at a 9-year-old asking that question and answered precisely the answer one would expect to give the same 9-year-old:

“You just know”

“Then I just know that I am going to marry (the person whose name will remain unsaid to protect the innocent).”

“That’s great, dear,” she responded, “Get your homework done.”

Everything went swimmingly for the rest of that year, but we knew it needed to change. Because they only combined schools for the 4th grade, we would need to part ways, but we even had a plan for that. As luck would have it, her now 4th grade sister was bussed over to my school and was a willing participant as the conduit for our love letters and small gifts to each other. Through the 5th grade, the romance continued...

And then came the day I both longed for and dreaded – the day my family moved to Illinois.

Long distance relationships are hard enough, but for couple of 11-year-old kids with no income and 400 some miles between, it was fatal. There was one last long-distance phone call, a few mailed letters arriving at longer and longer intervals...

...and then silence. And life moved on.

“The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws.... God himself is the author of marriage.” GS 48 § 1.

In the spring of 1995, I was living in Carpentersville, freshly dropped out of college, looking forward to getting out into the world and doing my own thing. I was in a band that was enjoying a certain amount of success and had some other writing projects in the works, but most exciting of all, I had just unburdened myself of a rather abusive relationship and was enjoying the feeling of freedom one gets when a weight of that nature is lifted from their soul and schedule.

It was in this blissful and exciting time that the phone rang.

Thinking back, I am pretty sure I knew who it was before I even answered, but that could just be what my memory wanted rather than what was real.

The person whose name will remain unsaid to protect the innocent was on the other line. Her sister was planning on visiting a college nearby and she was wondering if we could meet up while she was there.

We did. And after a few months of driving back and forth and a move from Carpentersville to Palatine, she moved in with me.

We made an agreement at that moment that we would remain our own people – we had both recently freed ourselves of abusive significant others and we were in no way going to sacrifice who we were to meet anyone else's inflated expectations. We also planned on not having kids until we were at least 30. And finally, we agreed that we could not live with each other as we were.

So, on March 9, 1996 we were married in the Rolling Meadows Courthouse by a judge whose name I would have to look up to remember. We nailed that one. As for the other two? Not so much. But it was in those failures that we learned the most about what it truly meant to be married.

“By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.” - GS 48 § 1; 50

In early June 1996 I was at a friend's house when I got the call. It was my wife. She was crying. In a shaky voice, she explained that the pregnancy test she was holding in her hand read positive. I said, they are not 100% accurate all the time. She said it was the second one.

It was then that we learned that if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.

In one phone call, the prospect of being our own people and our decision to remain childless until 30 had been decided for us. And as much as it was hard for us to see then, it is exactly what our marriage needed.

Whether we recognized it or not, God was the one who brought us together and ordained that we should be married and continues to guide us to this day. It did not matter that we were 400 miles and 15 years removed, that there were mere months between her finding me, us moving in and then getting married, that we both still had the sting of former relationships and lives to overcome completely, our openness to His movement in our lives helped us to see why it was that we were together and slowly that openness brought us to where we are today – married in the church, blessed with two children and continuing to grow in our love for our faith, sanctifying each other still, only in different ways than before.

The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason, the family home is rightly called “the domestic church,” a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.

Marriage is not merely some social contract between two adults, a promise to live together and share the bills and the like, although that is part of it. It is a covenant of love, but of true love. True love is to will the good of the other, to give oneself to the other in complete obedience and through self-sacrifice, to hold hands while you both walk towards eternal life and this can only happen when God, who brought you together and sustains you throughout, is at the center of your relationship, the center of your marriage, the center of your family, the center of your life.