

Take-Home 1. From the Beginning

From the Beginning

What We Found

Marriage is not something human beings thought up. Genesis presents it as designed: a communion of persons, male and female, blessed with fruitfulness, made one flesh in a union that leaves and cleaves. The Church names that union a covenant (CCC 1601, 1603), though Genesis itself does not use the word.

The first thing God calls not good is a person being alone, and that is said before anything has gone wrong.

The word translated helper is used elsewhere in the Old Testament for God himself as Israel's help. It is not a word for a subordinate.

Genesis 2:24 has three verbs in order: a man leaves, he cleaves, and the two become one flesh. The sequence invites us to count the real cost of forming a new household, and the leaving comes first.

The chapter ends with two people who can be completely seen without being afraid.

MY GUESS. SEAL THIS AND BRING IT BACK IN SESSION 8

Write your own answer, by yourself. Do not discuss it with your fiancé, do not compare, do not revise it later. Fold this page over when you are done.

What are you actually promising on your wedding day?

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON WHAT MARRIAGE IS FOR

St. Augustine taught, in substance, that marriage carries three goods that belong to it by God's design rather than by our arrangement: children (proles), faithfulness between the spouses (fides), and the sacred and indissoluble character of the bond itself, which he called sacramentum. He grounded these in the way marriage is given in Genesis, before any human law existed to regulate it.

The Church still works with these three goods, though later formulations distinguish ends, goods, and essential properties in ways Augustine did not. In Session 8 you will find all three voiced in the wedding rite, some in the questions before the consent and some in the consent itself.

Summary of his teaching in On the Good of Marriage.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON THE BODY AND THE PERSON

Across his catecheses on human love, St. John Paul II read Genesis 2 as revealing something about every

person: that a human being is made for communion, discovers this by first discovering that he is alone, and that the body itself expresses the person rather than merely housing him.

In his reading, the man's cry at the sight of the woman is recognition. He is looking at someone who is like him and not him, and only then does he know what he is.

Summary of his catecheses on human love, collected as Man and Woman He Created Them.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE COVENANT

The Council taught that the intimate partnership of married life and love was established by the Creator and given its own laws, and that it arises in a human act by which the spouses give and receive one another, an act of irrevocable personal consent.

Two words there are load bearing for this study: covenant and consent. Marriage is not something the couple falls into. It is something they do, on purpose, by free and irrevocable consent, ordinarily expressed in vows.

Gaudium et Spes 48. Quoted in substance at CCC 1603 and 1639.

Live It This Week

- **Read it out loud together, once, this week.** Genesis 1 and 2, the two of you, in one sitting. Do not discuss it while you read. Discuss it after.
- **Fill in the sealed sheet alone.** Take-Home 1 has a box for the question, what are you actually promising on your wedding day? Write your own answer, separately, without comparing. Fold it and bring it back sealed. You will open it in Session 8.
- **One act of leaving.** Identify one decision you have been running past a parent that should now be running past your fiancé first, and change the order this week. Tell your parent kindly what you are doing.
- **Pray Night Prayer together once.** Compline from any breviary app, or simply the Our Father, an examination of the day, and the Hail Mary. Five minutes. This is the habit that survives.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask your parish what documents they need from each of you and when. Most parishes want a recently issued baptismal certificate, a confirmation record, and freedom to marry forms, and the timeline is longer than couples expect. Start it now and you will not be chasing paperwork in month five.

Also ask who will be preparing you besides this study, and put the dates in a shared calendar tonight.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

Before next session: Read Genesis 3, slowly, before Session 2. Twice if you can.

Catechism: CCC 355, 357, 369-372, 390, 1601, 1602-1605, 1643, 1652, 1702, 2331.

Take-Home 2. What Went Wrong

From the Beginning

What We Found

The serpent works on the picture of God first. The eating comes late in the sequence, after God has been quietly recast as someone who withholds.

The first casualty of sin is not the relationship with God but the ability of two people to be seen by each other without covering up.

The first question God speaks in the Bible is where are you. He already knows. It is an invitation to come out. The serpent had asked the first question of all, a few verses earlier.

Nobody in Genesis 3 takes responsibility. The man blames his wife and blames God for giving her to him.

Genesis 3:16 describes a consequence, not a command. The domination of the woman is named as damage, and the New Testament will dismantle it.

Human nature after the fall is wounded, not destroyed (CCC 405). The design of marriage survived. Our ability to live it unaided did not.

In the middle of the judgment God says the woman's offspring will bruise the serpent's head, and then he makes clothes for the two people who betrayed him.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS ON THE TWO WOMEN

St. Irenaeus taught that the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary, setting the two women deliberately side by side so that the undoing matches the doing.

He did not mean that Mary replaces Christ. He meant that God repairs the story with the same materials he used to make it: a garden, a tree, a woman, a word given and either refused or received.

Against Heresies, Book III, chapter 22. The Eve and Mary comparison recurs in Book V.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON WHAT THE WOUND ACTUALLY IS

St. Thomas taught that original sin leaves human nature wounded rather than destroyed, and he named four wounds in particular: ignorance in the mind, malice in the will, weakness in the face of what is hard, and disordered desire.

Read that list against Genesis 3 and against your own last argument. Both spouses will bring all four into the marriage. Neither of them put them there.

Summary of his teaching on the wounds of nature, Summa Theologiae I-II, question 85.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE BLAMING

Preaching on Genesis, St. John Chrysostom pressed hard on the moment when the man answers God by pointing at his wife, and at God for giving her to him. In substance he criticized the man sharply for shifting the blame onto his wife and onto God rather than confessing plainly.

He is a useful voice here because he is unsparing with the man. In a room of engaged couples that lands

differently than a general observation about human nature.

Summary of his teaching in the Homilies on Genesis.

Live It This Week

- **Go to confession this week, both of you, separately.** Not because tonight was about how bad you are. Because Genesis 3 is a story about hiding, and the sacrament is the practice of coming out of the trees. If it has been years, tell the priest that at the start and let him help you.
- **Name your move.** Tell your fiancé, in plain words, what you do when you are hurt. Attack, silence, humor, logic, exit. Naming it in peacetime makes it recognizable in wartime.
- **Break one inherited pattern once.** Choose one habit from your family of origin that you do not want, and consciously do the opposite a single time this week. Tell your fiancé you are doing it.
- **Read Hosea 1 through 3 before next session.** It gets uncomfortable. Keep reading anyway.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Both of you go to confession, separately. Then put a recurring date in the calendar for confession in the month before the wedding, and keep it.

Also. Each of you write down one pattern from your family of origin you do not want to repeat, and trade lists. Keep them. You will come back to them later in the study.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, Where are you?

Genesis 3:9

Before next session: Read Hosea 1 through 3 before Session 3. It gets uncomfortable. Keep reading.

Catechism: CCC 390, 397-401, 405, 410-411, 1606-1608.

Take-Home 3. The Covenant God Keeps

From the Beginning

What We Found

God told a prophet to marry a woman who would betray him, and then to go back and buy her back, so that a nation could see what its own covenant looked like from God's side.

A contract exchanges goods, is enforced by penalty, and ends when it is broken. A covenant exchanges persons, is sworn by oath with God as witness, and when it is broken it is mourned and restored at the cost of the one who kept it.

After all the accusation in Hosea 2, God says he will speak tenderly to her, and she will call him my husband rather than my master. Many readers hear in that an answer to the domination named in Genesis 3:16, though the Hebrew words differ and the connection is a reading rather than a direct reversal.

In the betrothal of Hosea 2:19-20, God is the only one doing anything. Every quality named comes from his side.

The nuptial image is not occasional. God is called husband or bridegroom in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, and Christ takes the title for himself in the Gospels.

Ezekiel 16 is genuinely disturbing, and it ends in an everlasting covenant and forgiveness rather than in punishment. No passage of Scripture permits a husband to shame, coerce, or use force against his wife.

Malachi calls the LORD the witness between a man and the wife of his youth. A witnessed oath is not a private arrangement that two people can quietly renegotiate.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX ON WHY THE SONG IS IN THE BIBLE

Across dozens of sermons on the Song of Songs, St. Bernard taught that the soul's union with God is genuinely spousal, and he read the Song's language of desire, allegorically and at length, as the vocabulary Scripture itself gives us for what God wants with us.

The nuptial language of Scripture belongs to every Christian, married or not, because marriage is the sign and not the substance.

Summary of his teaching in the Sermons on the Song of Songs.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: POPE BENEDICT XVI ON THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR US

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI argued that the prophets, and Hosea and Ezekiel above all, describe God's love for Israel in frankly passionate terms, and that this love is at once a searching desire and a wholly gratuitous gift.

We do not learn what God is like by studying good marriages. We learn what marriage is by studying God.

Deus Caritas Est, sections 9 to 11.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF AVILA ON THE MARRIAGE THE SOUL IS OFFERED

St. Teresa of Avila described the deepest union available to a soul in this life using the language of spiritual

marriage, and she was careful to say that it is God who initiates, God who sustains, and God who gives what no amount of effort can produce.

Read that against Hosea. The betrothal formula in Hosea 2:19-20 has one subject throughout, and it is not Israel. I will betroth you, three times, and the woman does nothing at all.

Summary of her teaching in the seventh dwelling places of The Interior Castle.

Live It This Week

- **Read Hosea 2:19-20 out loud to each other once this week.** Not as a sentiment. As a description of the kind of promise you are about to make and the kind of promise God has already made to you.
- **Find the exit.** Each of you name one assumption you have quietly been carrying about what would justify leaving. Say it out loud to each other. You do not have to resolve it tonight.
- **Pray one decade together for a marriage you know that is in trouble.** Do not tell them you are doing it.
- **Read Matthew 19:1-12 again before next session,** slowly, and note every question anyone asks in the passage.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask the parish who witnesses your consent and what the parish requires of your witnesses. Then ask what the timeline is for choosing your readings, and whether Hosea 2:19-20 may be among them.

Also. Each of you name one assumption you have carried about what would justify leaving a marriage. Say it out loud to each other before Session 4.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy.

Hosea 2:19

Before next session: Read Matthew 19:1-12 before Session 4, slowly. Note every question anyone asks in the passage.

Catechism: CCC 219, 1611-1612, 1617, 1639.

Take-Home 4. It Was Not So

From the Beginning

What We Found

The Pharisees did not ask whether divorce was allowed. They assumed it was, and asked how wide the grounds were. It was a live dispute and they wanted Jesus to pick a side.

He refused the question and went behind Moses to creation, quoting the two verses from Genesis that we read in Session 1.

He added a sentence that is not in Genesis: what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. The joining is God's act, and undoing it is not within human competence.

Moses allowed divorce, and Jesus says the permission was a concession to hardness of heart. From the beginning it was not so.

Matthew alone has a clause about unchastity. Mark and Luke state the prohibition without any exception, and Paul, addressing two believers, contemplates a separation and still rules out remarriage. Paul does treat a different case in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, where a believer is not bound if an unbelieving spouse departs, and Session 9 takes that up.

The Church has not defined which reading of the Greek word is correct. She has defined the doctrine: the bond of a ratified and consummated sacramental marriage is not dissolved except by death.

The disciples said that if this is the case it is better not to marry, and Jesus did not take any of it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE COUNCIL OF TRENT ON WHAT ADULTERY DOES NOT DO

The Council of Trent taught that the Church does not err when she teaches that the marriage bond is not dissolved by the adultery of one of the spouses, and that neither party may contract another marriage while the other lives.

Note what the canon carefully does not do. It does not deny that separation may sometimes be right. It denies that the bond itself has been broken.

Council of Trent, Session XXIV, canons on the sacrament of matrimony, especially canon 7.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS MORE AND THE COST OF A MARRIAGE CASE

St. Thomas More was executed in 1535 for refusing to swear an oath, and the whole crisis that produced that oath began with a king who wanted his marriage declared null and could not get it.

He did not die making a speech about indissolubility. He died refusing to say, under oath, something he did not believe to be true about a marriage. That is a smaller and harder kind of courage, and it is closer to the kind they will need.

Historical summary. More refused the oath required under the Act of Succession in 1534 and was convicted of treason and executed in 1535 in connection with the royal supremacy. The two statutes are distinct and should not be merged.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: AN EARLY CHRISTIAN VOICE ON REMARRIAGE

The Shepherd of Hermas, an early Christian writing widely read in the second century, addresses a husband

whose wife has committed adultery. In substance it says that he should not continue to live with her while she persists, and that he must not marry another, so that the door to her repentance and return stays open.

That reasoning is worth pausing over. The prohibition on remarriage is presented not as cruelty toward the innocent party but as the thing that keeps reconciliation possible.

Summary of The Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 4.

Live It This Week

- **Say the hard scenario out loud.** Finish the Couple Conversation if you did not finish it in the room. Name the hardest situation in which you would still be married, and say it to each other.
- **Write to someone divorced whom you love.** A parent, an aunt, a friend. Not about theology. Just tell them you are glad they are in your life. Tonight's teaching is about the bond, not about ranking people.
- **Read Matthew 19:6 slowly every day this week.** One verse. It is your memory verse, and it may well be read at your wedding.
- **Read John 2:1-11 before next session.** Notice who runs out of what.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. If either of you has been married before, civilly or in any church, tell the priest or deacon preparing you this week, before any further wedding planning happens. A date cannot always be set until that is resolved, and knowing early costs far less than knowing late.

Also. Finish the hardest scenario conversation if you did not finish it in the room, and put Matthew 19:6 somewhere you will both see it every day.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Matthew 19:6

Before next session: Read John 2:1-11 before Session 5. Notice who runs out of what.

Catechism: CCC 1614-1615, 1618-1620, 1640, 2382-2386. Code of Canon Law, canon 1141.

Take-Home 5. They Have No Wine

From the Beginning

What We Found

Running out of wine at a first century wedding was a serious public humiliation, not a minor inconvenience. The first sign is a rescue of somebody's dignity.

Mary does not ask for anything. She states the need, they have no wine, and leaves the response to her son.

Her last recorded words anywhere in Scripture are do whatever he tells you. She notices, she asks, she points away from herself, and then she goes quiet.

Six stone jars for purification, holding somewhere between a hundred and twenty and a hundred and eighty gallons. The prophets described the age to come as a feast of well aged wine, and the abundance strikingly evokes those images of messianic plenty.

In John, the hour points to his Passion and glorification, culminating in the cross. The first sign, worked at a wedding, is dated by reference to it, and when the hour comes the same woman is standing there and is addressed with the same word.

The steward says the good wine has been kept until now, which reverses how anyone would run a party. With God the best is later.

The Church sees in Cana the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the announcement that marriage would become an efficacious sign of Christ's presence (CCC 1613). She does not claim the sacrament was instituted there by a formula.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON WHY CHRIST CAME TO A WEDDING

Preaching through John's Gospel, St. Augustine argued in substance that Christ went to the wedding to confirm that marriage is his own creation and not something merely tolerated, and that anyone who claims marriage is evil should notice where the Lord chose to work his first sign.

That argument had a live target in Augustine's day, when several movements taught that the body and marriage were beneath the truly spiritual. It has a live target now for the opposite reason: a culture that treats marriage as a lifestyle option rather than as something Christ deliberately entered.

Summary of his teaching in the Tractates on the Gospel of John.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON THE MOTHER AT CANA

In his encyclical on the Blessed Virgin, St. John Paul II read the Cana scene as showing Mary's particular way of being present: she notices a human need, she places it before her son, and she then directs everyone else toward him rather than toward herself.

He also noted the link between the address at Cana and the address at the cross, and read the two scenes together as the frame of her role in the life of the Church.

Do whatever he tells you.

Summary of his teaching on the Cana scene in Redemptoris Mater.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. LOUIS DE MONTFORT ON GOING THROUGH THE MOTHER

St. Louis de Montfort taught, in substance, that everything Mary does terminates in Christ, and that devotion to her which does not end in him has misunderstood her entirely.

Test it against the text. At Cana she speaks twice: once to her son about a need, and once to the servants about obedience to him. Then she does not speak again in the scene.

Summary of his teaching in True Devotion to Mary.

Live It This Week

- **Name one thing you have run out of, out loud, in prayer, together.** Do not add instructions for God about how to fix it. Say the sentence and stop, the way Mary did.
- **Do whatever he tells you, once, specifically.** Choose one thing you already know Christ is asking of you and that you have been putting off, and do it this week. Tell your fiancé which one you chose.
- **Thank the person who notices.** Call or write the person in your life who sees what is missing before anyone else. Tell them you noticed them noticing.
- **Read Ephesians 5:21-33 before next session,** the whole passage, and read it twice. Next week is the pivot of this study.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask the parish what your wedding liturgy can actually include: whether it will be a Mass or a celebration outside Mass, who may read, what the music norms are, and when the choices are due. Then decide together what the celebration is for, and set a budget that will not put you in debt on day one.

Also. Say one thing you have run out of, out loud, in prayer, together, without adding instructions for God.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you.

John 2:5

Before next session: Read Ephesians 5:21-33 before Session 6. The whole passage, twice.

Catechism: CCC 726, 964, 1335, 1613, 2618.

Take-Home 6. This Is a Great Mystery

From the Beginning

What We Found

Verse 21 governs the passage: be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. In the earliest Greek manuscripts verse 22 has no verb of its own and has to borrow it from verse 21.

Wives receive about three verses. Husbands receive about nine, and the content is self surrender: love as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, make her holy, nourish and cherish her.

The Christian household codes address wives, children, and slaves directly, as people with consciences, which is notable against many contemporary household codes.

The Greek word behind head is genuinely disputed. Many Catholic interpreters take the model St. Paul chooses as decisive: Christ's headship is defined by the cross, so headship here requires sacrificial self gift rather than domination.

Genesis 3:16 describes the man ruling over the woman among the consequences of the fall. Many Catholic readers see Ephesians 5:25 as answering that by redirecting husbands toward Christlike self gift.

Nothing in this passage obliges anyone to submit to sin, abuse, coercion, or danger, and the Church has never taught that it does.

St. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and then refers it to Christ and the Church. The Church reads marriage as the sign and the union of Christ and his Church as what it points at (CCC 1616-1617).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON WHAT A HUSBAND IS FOR

In his homily on this passage, St. John Chrysostom told husbands that the love they owe their wives is measured by Christ's love for the Church, which means it is measured by the cross. He taught in substance that a husband should be willing to be cut into a thousand pieces for her, and that a man who rules his wife by fear has failed at the only thing he was asked to do.

He also insisted that the reverence asked of a wife in verse 33 is not the fear of a slave, and that a husband who produces that kind of fear has misread the passage entirely.

Summary of his teaching in Homily 20 on Ephesians.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON MUTUAL SUBJECTION

St. John Paul II taught that verse 21 governs the whole passage, and that the subjection asked of a wife is one side of a mutual subjection asked of both spouses out of reverence for Christ. He saw no contradiction between the general exhortation and the particular one, because the particular one is a case of the general.

He also argued that this passage introduces something genuinely new into the ancient world.

Summary of his teaching in Mulieris Dignitatem, section 24.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: POPE PIUS XI ON ORDER AND LOVE IN A HOUSEHOLD

Writing on Christian marriage, Pope Pius XI taught that the order within a family does not deny the wife her

liberty or her dignity as a person, does not oblige her to obey every request of a husband regardless of its reasonableness, and does not treat her as a minor.

He is a useful voice precisely because he is writing from a tradition-minded position and still draws the line clearly.

Summary of his teaching in the encyclical Casti Connubii.

Live It This Week

- **Husbands to be: do one costly thing this week.** Choose the specific sacrifice you named in the Couple Conversation and do it before the next session. Do not announce it afterward.
- **Read verses 21 to 33 aloud together once, slowly.** One of you reads the wives' verses and the other reads the husbands' verses, out loud, to each other.
- **Correct one misunderstanding.** The next time this passage comes up in conversation, and it will, explain verse 21 and the verse count. You now know something most people do not.
- **Read the Rite of Marriage consent questions before next session** if your parish can give them to you. Session 7 begins the movement toward the vows themselves.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask the parish for the consent questions and the vows from the Rite of Marriage, in writing, and read them once before Session 7. Also ask which form of consent your parish uses and whether you may choose between the forms.

Also. Each of you name one decision you have quietly assumed you would control after the wedding, and say it out loud to each other.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

Before next session: Read the consent questions and the vows if your parish can give them to you. Bring them to Session 7.

Catechism: CCC 369-372, 1616-1617, 1642, 1645, 2204-2206.

Take-Home 7. Not Just a Ceremony

From the Beginning

What We Found

Marriage belongs to creation, so two unbaptized people who marry validly are really married. Between two baptized persons, a valid marriage is by that very fact a sacrament, which means validly married Protestants are sacramentally married.

Consent makes the marriage. Not the ceremony, not the paperwork, not the reception.

In the Latin Church the spouses are the ministers of the sacrament to each other, and the priest or deacon assists and receives their consent in the name of the Church. In the Eastern Churches the priest is the witness of the consent, and his blessing is necessary for validity.

The Church ordinarily requires canonical form of Catholics, and can dispense from it for a just cause. Clandestine marriages produced serious injustice, usually against women, when consent was later denied, and the form protects the weaker party and gives public certainty.

An impediment makes a person unable to marry validly. A defect of consent means the person could have married but did not actually give marital consent. Impediments usually turn up on paper, and defects of consent concern what was interior at the moment of consent. A tribunal assesses both from evidence.

A mixed marriage, with a baptized non-Catholic, requires permission. Disparity of cult, with an unbaptized person, is an impediment requiring a dispensation for validity.

The sacrament gives grace that perfects the spouses' love and strengthens their unity. It does not promise an easy marriage and it does not work on people who refuse it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH ON MARRYING WITH THE CHURCH'S KNOWLEDGE

Writing to St. Polycarp on his way to martyrdom early in the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch taught that those who marry should do so with the knowledge and approval of the bishop, so that the marriage is according to the Lord and not according to mere desire.

This is very early, and it is decisive for one particular claim: the idea that the Church's involvement in weddings is a medieval invention does not survive contact with a letter written within living memory of the apostles.

Letter to Polycarp, chapter 5.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON THE BOND THAT REMAINS

St. Augustine taught, in substance, that among the goods of marriage there is something that persists even when the spouses fail: a bond, which he called by the Latin word *sacramentum*, that is not dissolved by separation or by the sins of either party.

He is arguing from the Church's practice rather than from a lexicon. Christians already refused to treat a broken marriage as an ended one, and he is explaining what that practice implies.

*Summary of his teaching on the goods of marriage, especially in *On the Good of Marriage*.*

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE COUNCIL OF TRENT ON THE SEVEN

The Council of Trent taught that matrimony is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the Gospel, instituted by Christ, and it condemned the contrary claim.

Trent did not invent the doctrine in the sixteenth century. It defined, under challenge, what the Church had long held and practiced, which is the ordinary way doctrine gets defined.

Council of Trent, Session XXIV, canons on the sacrament of matrimony, canon 1.

Live It This Week

- **Take your outstanding list to the parish this week.** Every document, permission, or dispensation still open. Ask the office directly what is missing and what the deadline is.
- **Ask the priest or deacon the one question you wrote down tonight.** Do not carry a canon law question around for six months.
- **Read the vows once, alone, each of you.** Do not discuss them yet. Session 8 is next week and it is the center of this study.
- **Bring your sealed sheet to the next session.** If you have lost it, write a fresh answer tonight, alone, before you hear anything else.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Take your list of outstanding documents, permissions, and dispensations to the parish office and ask what is missing and when it is due. If either of you was married before, or married civilly, or if one of you is unbaptized, confirm with the priest which category applies to you.

Also. Ask whether your wedding will be within Mass, and if one of you is not Catholic, ask what the parish recommends and why.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32

Before next session: Read the consent questions and the vows once, alone, and bring your sealed sheet to Session 8.

Catechism: CCC 1601, 1621-1624, 1625-1632, 1633-1637, 1638-1642. Code of Canon Law, canons 1055, 1057, 1108.

Take-Home 8. I Do

From the Beginning

What We Found

Before any vow is spoken, the Church asks in public about freedom, permanence, and openness to children. They make the Church's understanding of the commitment unmistakable and invite an honest answer.

Marriage preparation often summarizes the consent as free, total, faithful, and fruitful. That is a teaching summary rather than an official formula, and it maps onto what the Church actually requires.

The vows promise actions and a disposition of the will, not feelings. To be true, to love, to honor, to remain. Nobody is asked to promise an emotion.

The hard conditions are named inside the promise: bad times and sickness. The vow does not assume a good outcome.

Excluding an essential property of marriage by a positive act of the will invalidates consent. Being afraid of failing does not, and neither does doubting your own strength.

To love, said St. Thomas Aquinas, is to will the good of another. A person can promise that for life.

The Church speaks of the spouses giving and receiving one another. Love can be given in portions. A self cannot.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH'S OWN WORDS AT THE WEDDING

Before the consent, the Church asks the couple in front of witnesses whether they have come freely, whether they will love and honor each other for life, and whether they will accept children lovingly from God and raise them in the faith.

Consider what kind of institution asks those questions out loud before allowing the wedding to proceed. She is not decorating a decision already made. She is making sure, publicly, that the thing being consented to is marriage.

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, the questions before the consent. Use your parish's own ritual book for the exact wording.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON WHAT LOVE ACTUALLY IS

St. Thomas taught that to love is to will the good of another. Not merely to feel warmly toward another, and he does not despise feeling or reduce love to it, but to will their good.

This is why a vow to love is not a promise about emotions and is not dishonest. A person can promise to will another's good for life. Nobody can promise a feeling, and the Church does not ask anyone to.

Summary of his teaching on love, Summa Theologiae I-II, question 26.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. FRANCIS DE SALES ON THE ORDINARY WORK OF IT

St. Francis de Sales taught, in substance, that devotion belongs in the married state as much as in the cloister, and that married people become holy through the actual conditions of their life rather than in spite of them: patience, faithfulness in small things, and the daily work of preferring one another.

He wrote for lay people in the world at a time when spiritual writing largely assumed a monastery. That is why he is worth quoting on a night about vows: he is describing what keeping them looks like on a Wednesday.

Summary of his teaching on the married state in the Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III.

Live It This Week

- **Keep both sides of your sheet.** Put it somewhere you will find it on your first anniversary. Do not throw it away.
- **Say the reserved thing.** If you named a private reservation in the Couple Conversation, say it out loud to your fiancé this week. If it is serious, bring it to the priest together.
- **Ask for the nuptial blessing text** and read it aloud together once this week.
- **Read the consent aloud, once, to each other, in private.** Not as a rehearsal. Just to hear yourself say the words before the day arrives.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask your priest for the text of the nuptial blessing and read it aloud together once. Then choose which form of consent you will use, if your parish offers a choice, and tell the parish your choice.

Also. If either of you named something you have been privately reserving, say it to each other this week. If it is serious, bring it to the priest together before the next session.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death.

Song of Songs 8:6

Before next session: Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 before Session 9. Notice which cases St. Paul treats differently from each other.

Catechism: CCC 1625-1632, 1627, 1628-1629, 1643-1645. Code of Canon Law, canons 1057, 1101 §2, 1103.

Take-Home 9. What God Has Joined

From the Beginning

What We Found

St. Paul himself distinguishes cases in 1 Corinthians 7. For two believers he gives a ruling he says comes from the Lord. For a believer married to an unbeliever who departs, he says the brother or sister is not bound. The Church's law builds on that passage, and canon 1143 supplies the precise conditions: two unbaptized parties at the time of the marriage, one of them later baptized, and the unbaptized party departing.

A declaration of nullity says a marriage never came into existence because, for example, consent, capacity, or canonical form was defective at the beginning, or an impediment stood in the way. It is a finding about the past, not a dissolution.

The Church cannot dissolve a marriage that is both sacramental and consummated. She can dissolve a ratified but non-consummated marriage, and certain marriages in favor of the faith.

Grounds for nullity concern what happened before and during the wedding, not what happened afterward.

Children of a valid or putative marriage remain legitimate in the Church's law (canon 1137), and a declaration does not remove the natural obligations toward a former spouse or toward children.

Being divorced does not bar anyone from the sacraments. The Church commends those who are separated and remain faithful.

Those divorced and civilly remarried without a declaration are not excommunicated and are urged to remain part of the Church's life. Ordinarily they are not admitted to Eucharistic communion while the situation persists, and where they cannot separate for serious reasons the Church has spoken of living in complete continence. Anyone actually in that situation should speak with their pastor.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN FISHER AND THE PRICE OF A MARRIAGE CASE

St. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was executed in 1535 for refusing the oath at the center of the same crisis that killed St. Thomas More. He had defended the validity of the king's marriage when nearly the entire English hierarchy found a way not to.

He was the only English bishop who publicly and consistently opposed the king's cause, and the only one executed for it.

Historical summary. Fisher was tried and executed in 1535 for refusing the oath required under the Acts of Succession and Supremacy.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON THOSE IN A SECOND UNION

St. John Paul II taught that the divorced and remarried belong to the Church, that pastors and the community must care for them so that they do not consider themselves separated from her, and that they should be encouraged to hear the word of God, attend Mass, pray, and raise their children in the faith.

He also reaffirmed that they are not admitted to Eucharistic communion while the situation persists, and spoke of the case of those who for serious reasons cannot separate and undertake to live in complete continence.

Both halves of that are his. Quoting only one of them misrepresents him.

Summary of his teaching in *Familiaris Consortio*, section 84.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH REFORMING HER OWN COURTS

In 2015 Pope Francis reformed the process for judging nullity: the requirement that an affirmative decision be confirmed by a second court was removed, a briefer process before the diocesan bishop was created for cases of evident nullity, and episcopal conferences were asked to ensure, insofar as possible, a free process, while preserving just remuneration for tribunal workers, so that cost would not bar access.

The stated reason is worth repeating to a room that has heard the cynical version: that the faithful should not be kept waiting for years by the structures meant to serve them.

Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus, 2015.

Live It This Week

- **Correct one false belief this week**, gently, in a real conversation. Most families carry at least one of the four myths from tonight.
- **Call the person you thought of.** The divorced aunt, the remarried cousin, the friend whose marriage ended. Do not bring up theology. Just call them.
- **Disclose anything outstanding to the priest.** If the Couple Conversation surfaced something, book the appointment this week.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 before Session 10**, and note what St. Paul says the body is for.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. If either of you has anything undisclosed in your history that the priest preparing you does not know, make the appointment this week. If a nullity case is pending for either of you, confirm with the parish that no date is being held on an assumption.

Also. Call one person in your life whose marriage ended. Not about theology. Just call them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

Matthew 19:8

Before next session: Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 before Session 10. Note what St. Paul says the body is for.

Catechism: CCC 1629, 1649, 1650-1651, 2382-2383, 2386. Code of Canon Law, canons 1095, 1098, 1101, 1103, 1141-1143.

Take-Home 10. The Language of the Body

From the Beginning

What We Found

St. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 in the middle of an argument about a man and a prostitute. Nobody in that transaction thought they were marrying, and he says one flesh happens anyway.

On this Catholic reading, the meaning of the act is not assigned by the participants. The body has a language, and what we control is whether we speak it truthfully. The Church's plainer claim underneath it is that sexual acts have an objective moral meaning.

The body is for the Lord, is a member of Christ, is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and is not our own, because we were bought with a price.

St. John Paul II's theology of the body reads the marital act as saying what the vows say: I give you all of myself, permanently, exclusively, open to whatever comes. Note that the act does not by itself make a marriage; consent does. When the body says that and the will has not yet said it, the body is saying something not yet true.

Chastity is the successful integration of sexuality within the person, not its suppression, and it is asked of the married as well as the unmarried.

The social science on cohabitation and divorce risk is genuinely disputed, and the Church's position does not rest on it. Her argument is about what the body says, and about keeping the question of freedom genuinely open until the day it is answered.

The creation account ends with two people naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). Getting back there requires honesty, forgiveness, and a covenant strong enough to make being known safe.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON WANTING IT AND NOT WANTING IT

In his Confessions, St. Augustine describes praying, in his younger years, for chastity and for continence, and asking God to grant it but not yet. He is honest that part of him was afraid the prayer would be answered.

Summary of his account in Confessions, Book VIII.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON USING A PERSON

Before he was pope, St. John Paul II argued that a person is the kind of being who may never be treated merely as a means to an end, and that this holds inside a relationship as much as outside one. The opposite of love, in his account, is not hatred but use.

Applied to a couple: the question is not only whether both parties agreed. It is whether each is being received as a person or employed as a source of something.

Summary of his argument in Love and Responsibility.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON ORDERING AN APPETITE

St. Thomas treats chastity as a part of temperance, whose work is to order an appetite toward the good rather than to eliminate it. On his account the chaste person is not the person with the weakest desires but the

person whose desires have been ordered by reason toward the true good.

She is not asking anyone to despise desire. She is asking that desire be purified and ordered by reason and love, and wanted truthfully.

Summary of his treatment of chastity, Summa Theologiae II-II, question 151.

Live It This Week

- **Make the plan, not the intention.** Write down what changes this week, with specifics, and tell one other person besides your fiancé.
- **Go to confession.** Anyone conscious of grave sin should go before receiving communion, and everyone here is warmly encouraged to go this week regardless. If it has been a long time, say so at the start and let the priest help.
- **Say the avoided thing.** If the Couple Conversation surfaced something about your past or present that has gone unsaid, say it this week.
- **Read Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 127 before next session,** and notice how children are described.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Decide your living arrangements between now and the wedding, and write down the plan with specifics rather than an intention. If separate residences are not possible, tell the priest preparing you honestly and ask for his counsel directly.

Also. Both of you go to confession this week, and schedule one more for the month before the wedding.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Before next session: Read Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 127 before Session 11. Notice how children are described.

Catechism: CCC 1632, 2332, 2337, 2348-2350, 2354, 2390.

Take-Home 11. Be Fruitful

From the Beginning

What We Found

The passages we surveyed present children repeatedly as a gift, a heritage, and a reward, and they take the sorrow of childlessness seriously rather than explaining it away.

The marital act has two meanings that belong to it by nature: it unites the spouses, and it is the kind of act by which new life comes to be. The Church teaches that these are inseparably connected and that the connection is not ours to break.

Contraception performs the act while acting against one of its meanings. In vitro fertilization breaks the same connection from the other direction. One principle, two applications.

There is a difference between declining to make a promise and making a promise while intending not to keep it. The outcome can be the same. The acts are not.

A child conceived through any technology is a person of full and equal dignity, and no judgment attaches to that child.

Spouses may space births for just reasons. The Church deliberately does not publish a list of qualifying reasons, and asks for genuine discernment rather than a form.

Natural family planning is not the rhythm method. It ordinarily benefits from qualified instruction, from both spouses taking part, and from time to learn the chosen method, which is usually months rather than days.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. PAUL VI ON THE CONNECTION THAT MAY NOT BE BROKEN

In *Humanae Vitae*, St. Paul VI taught that there is an inseparable connection, established by God and which man may not break on his own initiative, between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the marital act.

That sentence is the foundation of the teaching. Much of what the Church has said since about contraception and about reproductive technology applies it, alongside her teaching on the dignity of the child and of embryonic human life.

Humanae Vitae, section 12.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

St. Gianna Beretta Molla was an Italian pediatrician, married with children, who in 1962 faced a serious medical condition during pregnancy and chose the course of treatment that preserved the life of her unborn child. She died shortly after giving birth, and was canonized in 2004 with her husband present.

Two things are worth saying carefully. Her decision was extraordinary and the Church has never taught that a mother is obliged to make it. And she was not a martyr to a rule; she was a working physician and a wife who loved her marriage, which is why she is a fitting patron for a room of engaged couples.

Historical summary. Canonized in 2004; her husband attended the canonization.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON THE CHILD AS GIFT

Teaching on reproductive technology, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that a child is not owed to anyone as a right and may not be treated as an object of ownership, but is a gift, and that the child has the right to be conceived within the marital act of his own parents.

That framing is the reason the Church's objection to certain technologies is not a suspicion of medicine. It is a claim about how a person ought to come into existence.

Summary of the teaching of Donum Vitae (1987), developed in Dignitas Personae (2008).

Live It This Week

- **Book the course.** Find a certified natural family planning instructor this week and register. Not research it. Register.
- **Say your number.** Tell each other how many children you have quietly been assuming, and how strongly you hold it.
- **Read Humanae Vitae 12 and CCC 2366 to 2370, together, once.** It is short. Read the actual text rather than commentary about it.
- **Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before next session.**

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Find a certified natural family planning instructor and register for a course. Ask the parish for their recommendation, and put the class dates in your shared calendar before the wedding planning fills it.

Also. Tell each other how many children you have quietly been assuming, and how strongly you hold that number.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Psalm 127:3

Before next session: Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before Session 12.

Catechism: CCC 1654, 2366, 2368, 2370, 2373-2375, 2376-2377, 2379.

Take-Home 12. What Marriage Is and Is Not

From the Beginning

What We Found

Questioned about divorce, Jesus answers by appealing to God's design in Genesis, quoting two verses rather than making an argument: Genesis 1:27, male and female, and Genesis 2:24, the one flesh union.

The Church's claim is that she cannot redefine marriage because she did not invent it. That is a limitation on the Church before it is a limitation on anyone else.

Sexual difference is treated as constitutive rather than incidental because marriage includes a bodily union, and a bodily union means two persons coordinating toward an end neither can reach alone.

The Church's criterion is the kind of act, not its outcome, which is why she marries the infertile and the elderly without hesitation, provided they are capable of the marital act, and calls those marriages real, and sacramental where both spouses are baptized.

Civil marriage is a legal status defined by the state. The Church holds that the reality of marriage precedes the state and is not created by it.

Every person is to be received with respect, compassion, and sensitivity, and every sign of unjust discrimination is to be avoided. This is integral to the Church's teaching and it is not optional.

The marriage of two baptized spouses is a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, which means the manner in which this teaching is spoken is part of what is being signified.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON WHAT SHE CAN AND CANNOT DO

Teaching on proposals to give legal recognition to unions between persons of the same sex, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that marriage exists as a reality prior to any state recognition, that it is ordered by its nature to the procreation and education of children, and it argued on that basis against granting other unions legal recognition equivalent to marriage.

Note what the argument does not appeal to. It does not appeal to majority opinion, tradition for its own sake, or the preferences of believers. It appeals to what marriage is.

Summary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons (2003).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON WHAT AN INSTITUTION IS FOR

St. Thomas argued that marriage is natural to human beings not because we feel drawn to it but because of the ends it serves: the begetting and raising of children, which he treats as the principal end and which requires a stability other creatures do not need, together with the mutual help of the spouses. Later magisterial formulations order these differently, so do not flatten the two together.

His method is worth as much as his conclusion. He asks what the thing is for, and reasons from there. It is the same method the Church uses tonight, and it is why she thinks the question is not hers to settle by preference.

Summary of his treatment of marriage as a natural institution in the Summa Theologiae.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA ON THE DEEPEST POVERTY

St. Teresa of Calcutta taught, in substance, that the worst poverty she encountered was not hunger but the experience of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for, and that this poverty exists in wealthy countries as much as in poor ones.

She is here for a reason.

A thematic summary of a teaching repeatedly associated with her.

Live It This Week

- **Call the person you thought of.** Not to discuss anything from tonight. Just to talk to them.
- **Practice the sentence.** Write down, in two sentences, how you would explain what the Church teaches to a friend who disagrees. Read it to your fiancé and ask whether it sounds like contempt.
- **Settle one guest list question this week,** and settle it on the side of generosity if you can.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 13 before next session.** Not as a wedding reading. As a description of what is about to be asked of you.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Settle one guest list question, and settle it on the side of generosity where you can. If a family situation is genuinely difficult, ask the priest rather than deciding it while tired.

Also. Write down, in two sentences, how each of you would explain the Church's teaching to a friend who finds it painful. Read them to each other and ask whether they sound like contempt.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

Before next session: Read 1 Corinthians 13 before Session 13, as a description of what is about to be asked of you.

Catechism: CCC 1601-1603, 2331-2333, 2357, 2358, 2359.

Take-Home 13. When the Cross Comes

From the Beginning

What We Found

1 Corinthians 13 describes love's concrete practices, and a striking number of them are things love refrains from doing. That part of the list is tested most when we are provoked. It describes year eleven, not a wedding day.

Scripture is full of marriages that suffered, and it never presents suffering as proof of failure. In several of the passages we read, the couple never received an explanation.

In sickness and in health is already in the vow. The consent itself will not need renegotiating, though practical arrangements may rightly change. What is needed is knowing where the help is.

The bond is permanent, and no one is obliged to remain in danger. The Church recognizes legitimate separation while the bond remains, and permits civil divorce where it is the only way to secure protection or the care of children.

Forgiveness releases a debt and is commanded. Reconciliation takes two people. Restored trust is earned over time. The absence of consequences is not part of any of them.

When your spouse is grieving, offering yourself as compensation is well meant and does not work. Sit with them instead.

Mary at the cross is not fixing anything and is not being spared. Remaining present at something you cannot fix is not failure. In that passage the center is Christ's self-offering, and Mary's faithful presence is a profound witness of persevering love.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: STS. LOUIS AND ZELIE MARTIN

Louis and Zelie Martin married in 1858, had nine children, and buried four of them. Zelie ran a lace business and carried much of the family's income, and died of breast cancer in 1877 while the children were young. Louis raised the surviving daughters, suffered a severe decline in his final years, and died in 1894. They were canonized together in 2015, the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux.

They are here because they answer the suspicion that holy marriages are the ones that go well. Four dead children, a business, a long illness, and a widower's decline. The Church looked at that and said: this is what a holy marriage looks like.

Historical summary. Canonized together in October 2015.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. MONICA, WITH A NECESSARY QUALIFICATION

St. Monica prayed for the conversion of her husband and of her son for decades. Her son, St. Augustine, records in the Confessions that her husband was difficult and that she persevered, and that both were eventually baptized.

Augustine also reports counsel she gave other wives about enduring difficult husbands, and the Church today does not counsel anyone to remain in danger. What is worth taking from St. Monica is the perseverance of her prayer across decades, not a model for handling a violent household.

Confessions, Book IX, on Monica and Patricius.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON SEPARATION

The Church's law holds that spouses are to maintain their common life unless a legitimate cause excuses them, and it recognizes such causes: adultery, subject to the conditions of canon 1152, grave danger of spirit or body to a spouse or to the children, and conduct that makes common life too hard. In urgent cases a spouse may act on their own authority.

The bond remains and neither is free to remarry. Nobody is required to stay in the house.

Summary of the Code of Canon Law, canons 1151-1155.

Live It This Week

- **Name your two people, and tell them.** Call the two you would ring at two in the morning and ask them, out loud, to be those people. Most will say yes and be honored that you asked.
- **Full financial disclosure this week.** Every debt, every loan, every obligation, both directions. Sit down with actual numbers rather than summaries.
- **Write down where the help is.** Your parish's number, a counselor your parish recommends, and the domestic violence hotline. Put them in both your phones now, while nothing is wrong.
- **Read Revelation 19:6-9 before the last session,** and read Ephesians 5:31-32 one more time alongside it.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Make full financial disclosure to each other: every debt, loan, and obligation, with actual numbers. Then put three phone numbers in both your phones while nothing is wrong: your parish, a counselor your parish recommends, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233.

Also. Name the two people you would call at two in the morning, and actually ask them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7

Before next session: Read Revelation 19:6-9 before the last session, and read Ephesians 5:31-32 once more alongside it.

Catechism: CCC 1615, 1642, 2383, 2842-2845. Code of Canon Law, canons 1151-1155.

Take-Home 14. The Domestic Church and the Marriage Supper

From the Beginning

What We Found

Scripture opens in a garden with a marriage and closes in a city with a marriage supper. The whole Bible is bracketed by weddings.

The invitation to communion in the Roman Rite adapts Revelation 19:9, right after behold the Lamb of God. We have been hearing an invitation to a wedding since childhood.

In Revelation 21 the Bride turns out to be a city. She is a people with a common life, which is why a Christian marriage is never a private arrangement.

Jesus says that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Marriage is a sign, and a sign gives way to what it signifies. The Church's hope is that nothing good is lost in God, and no spouse has to be anyone's final happiness.

The Council calls the family a domestic church, and the Catechism calls parents the first heralds of the faith for their children and says they bear the first responsibility for their education. Not the parish. The parents.

Ordinary and repeatable beats ambitious and abandoned. A decade in the car every day for thirty years will form a family.

The good wine was kept until now. With God the best is later, and Scripture's final vision includes a wedding feast, which makes your wedding a rehearsal for a bigger one.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: AN EARLY CHRISTIAN DESCRIPTION OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Writing to his wife around the turn of the third century, Tertullian described the beauty of a marriage between two Christians: two who share one hope, one discipline, and one service, who pray together and fast together, who instruct and encourage one another, and who are found together in the church and at the table.

What he describes is what tonight is about, and Christians were doing it by the early third century.

Summary of To His Wife, Book II, chapter 8.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE FAMILY AS A CHURCH

The Council taught that the family is, in a sense, a domestic church, in which parents by word and example are the first heralds of the faith to their children.

The word to notice is heralds. Not supporters of the parish's efforts. First heralds. The Catechism carries the same language at CCC 1656 and says at CCC 2223 that parents bear the first responsibility for their children's education.

Lumen Gentium 11, and CCC 1655-1658.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON MAKING A HOME INTO A CHURCH

Preaching to ordinary married Christians, St. John Chrysostom urged husbands and wives to make the household itself into a church, and to take up Scripture together at home rather than leaving it to the assembly.

He is a good final voice because he asks for nothing exotic. Read together, pray together, eat together, and let the house be consistent with the faith.

Summary of a theme in his preaching to married Christians, associated especially with Homily 20 on Ephesians.

Live It This Week

- **Start the one practice this week.** The single thing you named in the Couple Conversation. This week, not after the wedding.
- **Put the sealed sheet somewhere you will find it on your first anniversary.** Both halves. Do not read it again before then.
- **Work the Before the Altar list as a checklist.** Fourteen weeks of items are now one page of things to finish before the day.
- **Invite somebody to dinner.** The first Christians broke bread in their homes, and some churches met in houses. Start before the wedding rather than after, because the habit is easier to begin than to add.
- **Go to confession together before the wedding,** and read the nuptial blessing aloud once more the week of.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

The list is now a checklist. Take the fourteen Before the Altar items and finish them: documents and permissions, the ritual choices, the readings and music, the natural family planning course, the financial disclosure, the two people you would call at two in the morning, the guest list decisions, and confession before the day.

This week. Start the one domestic church practice you named, and put your sealed sheet somewhere you will find it on your first anniversary.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:9

Before next session: Nothing further is assigned. Go to your weddings, and tell your leader how they went.

Catechism: CCC 1618-1620, 1642, 1655-1658, 2204-2206, 2223.