

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.