



At Home Marriage Retreat 2023

Marriage...One Flesh, Given and Received

Prelude

The best way to live out our earthly marriage is to model it after the heavenly marriage revealed to us in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is the heavenly marital feast, where Christ feeds us with His very body and blood. This reality gives us not just the model, but the foundation for our lives as married couples.

Marriage is of vital importance for our world and our Church, and it is increasingly under attack in our culture. That's why it is imperative for Catholic spouses to do everything in their power to repair, strengthen, and solidify their marital bond each and every day. Yet it is even more important to grow in our relationship with Christ through the Eucharist, precisely because this gives us the grace to perfect our earthly marriage. In each day of this retreat, we expand on one of the seven habits for strengthening our marital union and strengthening our union with Christ in the Eucharist.

Day One – Time is of the Essence

One of the first destroyers of a marriage relationship - as well as our relationship with God - is the lack of making and taking time for our spouse and for God. The first problem so many couples face in marriage is not falling out of love, but rather falling out of knowing each other. When couples get too busy to spend time together, they fall out of understanding what's going on in the world of their beloved and lose sight of their needs. Similarly, our relationship with God is degraded when we give Him too little of our time each day and each week. The **first habit** calls for couples to purposefully make and take time for God and for each other on a regular basis (*daily/weekly*) in order to minimize losing sight of our beloved and their needs.

Our Relationship with Christ

The Eucharist is all about relationships: relationships with God and with others. At Mass, we partake of the Eucharist in communion with the whole Body of Christ: our friends and family as well as all of the saints and angels in heaven. We enter into this marriage feast to worship God and to give Him love, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. God calls us into union with Him and others through His Church so that we might find unity, peace, and a richness of brotherly and sisterly love. Outside of attending Mass, God calls us to spend time with Him in prayer. Why? Because God longs for us to be in relationship with

Him for *our own good*. He is the source of all goodness and joy. He wants what is best for us, for our own sake. How great is that? So, are we willing to find time for Him each and every day?

The reality is that many of us have too many excuses for not being able to give God as much of our time or attention as we should. We are so distracted by life and all that it throws at us that we rarely, if at all, find time to talk to Him during our busy day. Even at Mass, where we come to worship God and where He is most present in the Eucharist, we can find ourselves allowing our minds to wander off on many tangents that have little or nothing to do with building a relationship with Him. Are we willing to give Him more of our time, or only what's left over at the end of each day or each week? This first habit of making more time is critical for deepening our knowledge of and love for, not only our spouse but also God. Imagine if we gave our spouse as much time as we give to God each week. Maybe 15 minutes each night, and one hour on Sunday. How good would our relationship with our spouse be? This deepening of knowledge and love for Christ, or lack thereof, will inevitably flow out into every aspect of our lives, especially our marriage and family life.

Our Relationship with Each Other

One of the dangers that most couples face in marriage is a tendency to slowly fall out of knowing each other. This dilemma is often the result of couples and families succumbing to the many pressures, stresses, and distractions that are presented in life by our culture. Once we allow our time to be overwhelmed with too many extra-curricular activities, they can break down the marital and family bonding and wear at the fabric of our connection. Time is a great gift, and yet we often fritter a lot of it away on many unimportant distractions. While there are some distractions to our relationship that are a necessary part of life such as working, raising children, and maintaining our homes, there are also many non-essential ones that we allow to dominate a huge portion of our time, like social media, video games, TV, or internet exploring. It's essential to realize how valuable it is for us to keep these extraneous activities to a minimum and to take more time every day to connect with our most valuable life companions, our spouse and the Lord. It is also important not to let any of the 'necessary distractions' of life take precedence over one's relationship with God and one's spouse.

The journey of building a Eucharistic marriage starts when we understand the need for protecting and strengthening our most valuable world-changing assets: our faith and our family. "The future of humanity passes by way of the family,"¹ and so it is vital that our actions protect and nurture this gift. In order to grow more deeply in our intimacy and knowledge of our spouse, we need to make time to get to know them and stay "in the know." And for the sake of our marriage, we need to deepen our connection not only with our spouse, but even more so with God, from whom our greatest capacity to love flows.

Discussion:

1. What are the main distractions that put a strain on our marital connection?
2. What are some ways we can decrease one, some, or all of these distraction in order to build more time for each other?
3. Let us consider how we can build more prayer time together each day. Each week. Spend time seeking out some prayer resources that you can implement into your daily prayer together.

¹ St. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 86, 1981.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to be able to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help us to make more time in our life for You and for each other. Protect us from all of the ways Satan tries to distract us from You and from each other, and the ways he tries to steal our joy. We offer this prayer to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Two – Understanding God’s Design

Complacency in our spiritual life as well as our marital life can lead us to a point of taking God and our spouse for granted. When we do this, we risk losing our intentionality of truly ‘feeding’ our relationship. We often see ‘emotional starvation’ in relationships when one or both spouses grow apathetic and stop meeting each other’s needs. We see this same type of apathy in individuals who take their faith for granted and who give little effort in growing their relationship with Christ. This **second habit** calls us to be intentional in our relationships with God and our spouse so as to not take either for granted.

Our Relationship with Christ

To grow in our understanding of God’s design for marriage, it is first important to revitalize and strengthen our understanding of what our relationship with God in the Eucharist really means for our journey here on earth. When we truly understand and remind ourselves of what we enter into every time we partake in the Mass, it can facilitate a much deeper and more profound experience of this sacrament. The lack of understanding many people have in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist has created a crisis of faith in our Church today that is causing a lack of reverence for our Eucharistic Lord, a decline in Mass attendance, as well as an increase in people leaving the Catholic faith. If we truly understood the miraculous gift of what Christ gives to us in the Mass, we would inevitably be compelled to fall prostrate before God in deep thanksgiving and awe.

The Mass is the pinnacle of union with Jesus. In the celebration of the Eucharist we receive His body, blood, soul, and divinity. The Mass is the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. It is absolutely vital to our existence. St. Padre Pio was once quoted as saying, “*It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do so without the Holy Mass.*” He also stated, “*If we only knew how God regards this Sacrifice, we would risk our lives to be present at a single Mass.*”² St. John Chrysostom was quoted as saying that: “*When Mass is being celebrated, the sanctuary is filled with countless angels who adore the divine victim immolated on the altar.*”³ The saints understood the power of the Eucharist celebration and taught it to others. Do we also seek to understand? When we truly grasp the power of the Mass, or at least attempt to gain a fuller understanding, it changes the way we experience it and the way in which we convey it to others.

² Father Stefano Manelli, *Jesus Our Eucharistic Love: Eucharistic Life Exemplified by the Saints*, 1996.

³ Ibid.

Throughout his life, Jesus taught us how to love and forgive throughout His life with us and, as He was concluding His time on earth with us, gave us all the eternal gift of His love through His sacrificial death on the cross and through His Resurrection into heaven where He prepares a banquet of joy for all of us. This is what we experience at every Mass. When we seek to understand this truth more deeply, God's grace will expand our love for Him and others more and more every day!

Our Relationship with Each Other

Since "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit," we long to share it with others and to experience it from our beloved. We *need* to share it with others. It is how God's love works.

God's design for the Sacrament of Marriage is mirrored so profoundly in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, that the more we understand the depth of one, the more we can understand the depth of the other. Both sacraments require sacrifice of oneself out of love for another: the life of Christ in the Eucharist and the lives of the spouses on this journey to heaven. In both, there is a sacrificial giving of our bodies so that "life can come from it." We become one with Christ through the Eucharist, and one with our spouse through our nuptial bond and marital union.

Part of the journey toward a deeper love and appreciation of our spouse calls for us to not only understand God's design for marriage, but also for us to understand the beauty and value of the design God created in our beloved spouse. One great way to do this is through learning each other's love language and feeding it every day!

Discussion:

1. How can we be more intentional in making Christ and the Eucharist more central to our marriage and learn more about our faith?
2. What are some ways that we can be more deliberate in our relationship with each other? How about with God?
3. Consider taking the 5 Love Languages assessment at www.5lovelanguages.com and sharing with each other the results. Also, let us consider feeding each other our love language every day.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to be able to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole-heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help us to grow in knowing You and each other more deeply, as well as in understanding your beautiful design of marriage and the Mass. Help us to always be mindful of our vows to each other and to honor each other through always seeking to grow in our understanding of each other. We offer this all to You Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Three – Willingness to Look Within

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say "Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye," when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your

own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye. (Luke 6:41-42)

In order for us to start working towards fixing problems in our marriage, we need to start by understanding the part that we play in any problem. The **third habit** calls for us to look inward first and recognize how our sinful or unhealthy/non-productive patterns of division or destruction in our relationship have created or perpetuated disunity in our marriage relationship. We may find that the 'log in our own eye' is actually eliciting the very behavior in our spouse (*their splinter*) that is causing us angst.

Our Relationship with Christ

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Christ calls us to look inward and to be repentant of our sins. Sin can keep us from fully entering into the great mystery of the Eucharist. These sins not only cause greater damage to our relationship with Christ but also to our own wellbeing. In the words of St Paul: *"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying."* (1 Corinthians 11: 27-30) God calls us to recognize and repent from the behaviors and habits that create division in our relationship with Him and others. He calls us to recognize the *"wooden plank in our own eye, rather than the splinter"* (Matt. 7: 3) in our spouse's eye.

We are called to confess our sins to God on a regular basis, especially when we have committed grave sins. It is good for couples to go regularly to confession. Many of us, at one time or another, have felt shame in having to admit to our sinfulness and may have even desired to avoid going to confession for this reason. Hopefully, we have also felt joy and relief when we hear the words of absolution. To facilitate healing, we need to procure a habit of looking within ourselves, on a regular basis, to see how we are disconnecting ourselves from God and each other.

Our Relationship with Each Other

Our mistakes as a couple seem to sit in the middle of our living room like a big stone, and if we don't do something with it, it becomes the very thing that trips us up every day. We resent it; we get mad about it and all the hurt it brings; and at times it seems to keep getting bigger. However, if we actually deal with the mistakes and seek to correct the patterns that caused it, we often can, together, move the stone to the basement of our life where it can become part of the foundation for creating a new home life together. Most people want to ignore the problem or try to get rid of it and "get back to life," but we cannot erase the past. We can, however, learn from it and use it to strengthen the foundation for a new path in our marriage together.

Discussion:

1. What is a moment that we felt most united as a couple when facing conflict? What word would you use to describe how you felt in that moment? What did I do to create this feeling and sense of unity?
2. What is one area in our relationship that I want to improve and change my current patterns of responding during a conflict?

3. Let us consider setting up a time soon for both of us to go to confession in the upcoming week and then go out afterwards to do something special together.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole-heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help both of us to have the humility to look at our own sinfulness and the patterns we have brought into this marriage that have caused division. Help us to do all that we can, with Your grace and assistance, to recognize how our actions or inactions have been hurtful to each other and to have the will to change and eliminate those habits from our life. We offer this all to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Four – Listening to the Heart

“Take time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say. It requires the self-discipline of not speaking until the time is right. Instead of offering an opinion or advice, we need to be sure that we have heard everything the other person has to say. (...) Often the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard, to feel that someone has acknowledge their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes, and their dreams.”

Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 137.

It is important for newly engaged and married couples to build and maintain good communication skills from early on and to maintain these skills through the big changes in life. However, as hard as we might try to maintain good marital communication, eventually we all fall short of the goal. We all grow tired, become irritable, or just have a bad day. This often leads to misunderstandings, snippy responses, and sarcasm. It is important to not let the sun go down without finding some sense of resolve and healing. This **fourth habit** is about building and maintaining strong and healthy communication skills, especially regarding listening to our spouse.

Our Relationship with Christ

How often have we seen it played out in biblical history: God gives directions to His people, but they don't listen to Him? God then redirects His people, but they grumble and disobey. Then they eventually lose sight of Him again and begin to wander off in their own direction. He then gives them several big signs to wake them up (such as the Great Flood (Gen. 7:6-8:22), the Exodus out of Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:10-31), and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). And only, after they find themselves in a really bad place or situation, due to their utter abandonment of God, do they mournfully return to God and plead for His mercy, forgiveness, and healing; to which God so mercifully and graciously complies. Then, when they grow comfortable again, everything repeats itself. How little do we listen to the heart of our heavenly Father pleading with us to come and find rest and healing in Him? He speaks to us every minute of every day, but we are often too busy to listen don't take the time for silence and prayer. If we took time to read or listen to Scripture and to prayerfully and quietly allow it to penetrate our hearts, we would hear that to which God is calling each and every one of us.

In the Mass, we have the gift of the Liturgy of the Word, during which God calls out to each one of us. But are we listening? Are we trying to figure out what God wants of us when we are sent forth from the Eucharist to go and serve Him by loving others? Jesus longs for us to know Him and, through the Word of God in Scripture, He desires for us to learn more about His Will for us. He wants us to “*have life and have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). He asks that we truly listen, learn, and grow.

Our Relationship with Each Other

Poor communication is one of the major causes of marital emotional starvation. Good communication requires us to seek understanding of our spouse’s perspective. This can be very difficult on many levels because we are so used to living in a culture that thrives on attack and blame. Building a new habit of generosity with each other calls each person to battle against the urge to focus on what his or her spouse has done wrong, and rather to focus more on what the other person is experiencing and struggling with. This can be very difficult because we most likely will not like what we hear. This dialogue, however, should be a two-way street where both persons need to hear and be heard. The key is to not point blame, but rather express our perception and feelings about a particular difficult situation or issue.

By building a habit of using good listening skills, the hope is to achieve a deeper understanding of what the real issues are and to get beyond the ‘Fill-in-the-Blank Syndrome’ [*This is when we stop verbally communicating with each other and merely try to understand each other based on our reactions and interpretations of the other person’s non-verbal communication. In doing so, we risk misinterpreting their motives and intent*]. This is important if we truly wish to work toward solutions that address the problems and not just the symptoms. Often what a couple battles with the most are the many different symptoms that stem from a deeper problem. Therefore, when we try to fix the symptom, it doesn’t resolve the root of the problem which, in turn, can cause more frustration. It’s like trying to get rid of dandelions by chopping off their tops. It takes a lot of work but never prevents them from coming back. The real solution is to address the root and eliminate the cause.

Listening to and understanding the heart of our spouse regularly will help us uncover the deeper issues. It is important to be gentle with each other and to keep interactions as inviting as possible.

Discussion:

1. Are there things that I currently say or do that make you feel misunderstood or that are unhelpful?
2. How can I be more inviting in order to encourage you to talk to me about difficulties that you are having with our relationship?
3. Consider making time every day to have at least 15 minutes of communication to connect, understand each other’s immediate needs, and encourage each other. You may also consider setting up a date together for this week. Start it off by first praying together, perhaps by spending an hour in adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is

in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life. We offer this all to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Five – Reconciling and Giving Mercy

The journey of healing in a relationship requires a heart of humility and mercy. Too often in our disagreements and hurts, we get caught up in standing our ground based on what we believe is fair or just. What may help us to put this type of behavior into better perspective is to realize that if all God gave us was His justice, all we would deserve is eternal punishment. But it is through God’s mercy that Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross for each and every one of us. It is His mercy that absolved us first of our sins as the Son of God asked His “Father to forgive them” from that same cross. It is this same mercy that He requires us to share with each other. We are called to battle against the biggest divider and destroyer of a Eucharistic marriage: Pride! Pride is what often causes us to refuse to apologize for our mistakes or to not forgive our spouse for the mistakes they have made. Yet, we are all human. We all make mistakes. We all long to be forgiven. In this **fifth habit**, we are called to practice both asking for and giving mercy.

Our Relationship with Christ

In the Mass, before we receive Christ in communion, we have the opportunity to make peace with God and others not only through the Penitential Rite, but also through the Sign of Peace and the Lamb of God. In the Sign of Peace, we turn to others around us to offer a gesture of reconciliation and reconnection. This is not just a time for a polite ‘hello’ and a handshake in order to be neighborly. It is, in a sense, saying to them that “I’m sorry for any ways that I have hurt you and want only to have peace between us.” It a good habit to seek peace from your spouse first before you give it to anyone else. It is important to both of you as well as your whole family for you and your spouse to be at peace with each other first. Then, in the Lamb of God, we again seek forgiveness and mercy from God for all the things we’ve done to damage our love for Him. We not only ask for mercy twice but end it with a plea for peace with and from God. All of these avenues for forgiveness and mercy are presented to us throughout the Mass in order to fully prepare us for receiving our Eucharistic Lord in a state of grace and uninhibited by sin.

A Eucharistic marriage is meant to be a relationship that not only seeks understanding and love but also exemplifies mutual healing and peace. Over and over again in Scripture, we see God calling us to repent of our sinfulness and to forgive others. *From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17) and *“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will you Father forgive your transgressions”* (Matthew 6:14-15).

Through our gestures of peace and resolution, we should be making a conscious effort to bring about reconciliation between us and our companions on the journey. In the second reading above, Christ is very clear that our forgiveness of others is vital to our own salvation. So much so, that if we refuse to forgive others, we can expect no forgiveness from God.

Our Relationship with Each Other

Scripture often speaks about the importance of forgiving and seeking forgiveness. The ultimate purpose is to open the gates for healing so that we can again find joy in discovering our deepest desire in and through our marital relationship. We need to decide whether we are going to be like the apostle Peter or Judas. Both apostles were sinners. Both made an egregious mistake in betraying our Lord and not standing up for Him in His time of need. However, both had a choice after their mistake to either accept responsibility for what they had done and run back to the Lord to seek forgiveness or to lose hope in the situation and to progress further into their sinfulness. Peter sought to be forgiven and found that, although it wasn't an easy road, the result was incredibly rewarding. Judas, however, lost hope. Not only did he refuse to turn to Christ for forgiveness, but he compounded his sin by becoming hopeless. This is an extreme example, but the question still remains: Will we admit our sin and seek the journey of healing, or will we refuse to face our sins and find ourselves on the journey of self-destruction? Peter or Judas?

To apologize is to humble ourselves and to admit that we hurt someone else. To hold back an apology is to hold onto our pride instead of being willing to admit that we were in the wrong. It is also a way of avoiding having to do the difficult work of cleaning up the mess that was created. It is hard to be wrong, especially when the sin was really egregious or hurtful. But far too often we try to blame others instead of admitting to our own faults because the consequences can be very hard to bear. If we are quick to blame someone else, then we are attempting to make the problem their burden to bear rather than ours. However, if we never face our faults, they will continue to grow and begin to affect other areas of our life.

Just as it is critical to seek forgiveness, it is also essential to grant forgiveness. It is important to understand that we all make mistakes, some big and some small. As we hope to be forgiven, so do those around us hope for forgiveness from us. We must remember that God first forgave us and continues to, every day, despite our daily failings against Him and our neighbors. He has forgiven us even to the point of suffering and dying for us. So why can we not do the same for others? Forgiveness is not forgetting the issue, trusting the other person immediately, nor condoning their misdeed. Piling on blame, accusations, and shame often drive our spouse deeper into avoidance out of frustration or hopelessness and is a sure path to dividing our marital relationship even further. Forgiveness is one of the first steps toward healing, because *we choose to let go of the anger that holds us bound and keeps us bitter.*

With help from God's grace, mercy should flow from a desire for peace and reconciliation with our spouse, our children, and others. Forgiveness is critical for all relationships in order for them to survive *and* thrive. Seek to apologize and forgive as quickly and sincerely as possible. Why? Because our marriage is the heart of our home. If there is peace in our marriage, there will be peace in our home.

Discussion:

1. What does an apology look like for you? What helps you feel like an apology is truly sincere?
2. In what ways can we add more gentleness into our responses to apologies?
3. This week, let us seek to find more opportunities to bring healing and mercy into our home through apologizing and forgiving quickly and sincerely.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole-heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help us to have the humility to apologize when we have done something to hurt each other. Help us, with Your grace and assistance, to learn how to grant forgiveness freely to each other, knowing that holding back our forgiveness only keeps us bound in anger. Lord, Your grace is enough for us. May

we forgive as You have forgiven us. We offer this all to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Six – Resolving to Change Our Ways

This **sixth habit** calls couples back to the promises they made to each other at their wedding. It is a call to assume the hard work of changing our lives, for God, our spouse, and our children, with our wedding promises as our anchor. It should move our hearts toward a deeper commitment to the Lord, followed by a renewed resolve to change our lives out of love for Him.

Our Relationship with Christ

In comparison to the promises we made in marriage, let us consider how we also make a promise to God in the celebration of the Mass. After the Liturgy of the Word, we usually recite the Creed. The Creed is the climax of the Liturgy of the Word, at which time we restate our beliefs and commit to them with our lives. The Creed is our profession of faith and a renewal of our Baptismal vows to God. We are called to ponder the commitment we made to God, in the presence of our family and friends, and to live out these teachings of Christ in our world today.

The Creed is not only what we believe, it is also our victory cry. It is what we dedicate ourselves to every time we say ‘amen’ or, with some forms of the Creed, when we say, ‘I do.’ It should be a statement of what we believe and are willing to die for at any moment. These premises are what so many saints in the past held on to as they were persecuted, tortured, and killed. The Creed should inspire us to persevere in making our lives a living witness to our Lord and Savior. It should inspire us not only to live our faith, but to proclaim it to the whole world in word and in deed. The Creed should be declared with a heart resolved to better live out God’s Will. So, it raises the question, “Are we willing to do whatever it takes to live out a more loving and Christ-centered life from this point on?”

First read or ponder the words from the Our Father prayer. Through this prayer, we are asserting that we want God’s Will to be done here on earth *as it is in heaven*. Are we willing to do what it takes for His Will to be accomplished through us? Often this means a denying of ourselves and taking up our cross to follow His commands to love and sacrifice for others. Are we ready to do this? When we state, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” are we ready to start truly forgiving others who have hurt us, knowing that God will forgive us in the same manner we forgive others? God calls us to a heart that is contrite and humble, one that is searching to become more Christ-like. He is calling us to recommit our hearts and lives to Him by resolving to change our lives and to improve our relationship with Him out of love. In the prayer, we seek the gift of being fed by our Eucharistic Lord as we ask Him to “*give us this day our daily bread.*” Lastly, we state our dependence upon Him for help in changing our sinful actions that separate us from Him and ask Him for the grace to make our lives better as we conclude with, “*and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Christ Himself gave us this perfect prayer. It not only acknowledges our commitment to and our love and honor for God, but also declares the way in which we want our lives to reflect His Will. This recommitment and resolve enable us to more profoundly enter into the reception of our Lord in the Eucharist and is a great model for building our marital union with our earthly spouse.

Our Relationship with Each Other

For true healing to occur in a marriage that is emotionally ‘underfed,’ it must undergo a transformation. Since sin has been at the center of all interpersonal relationships since the fall of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, every relationship is forced to deal with the complications that come from it. Whether we like it or not, we all sin and we all need daily grace in order to fight against our sinful inclinations. If we don’t intentionally work against them, they tend to become deeply rooted patterns in our lives that can be very difficult to remove or change. Therefore we must undergo a transformation in order to find healing.

Being committed to the promises that we made to our spouse in marriage is critical for building a truly Eucharistic marriage. It is one thing, to say that we are sorry for the mistakes we have made. Without a determination to change our negative behaviors, however, we communicate to our spouse that we are not truly sorry nor serious about making things better in our relationship. We can ask for forgiveness, and we can be forgiven, but if we don’t start changing the patterns that created our original problems, then we will eventually find ourselves moving away from building marital unity. Our old destructive patterns will keep us stuck in the cycle of marital division. Instead, by amending our negative patterns, we work towards healing and rebuilding broken trust.

Spouses are in this journey together to encourage each other, to pick each other up, to care for the wounds along the way, to be joyful during success, to cry during sorrow, and to help each other discover one’s deepest desire in the midst of learning how to deeply love God and each other. Every day should be a recommitment of our lives to our spouse. Our marital promises should drive us to make the changes necessary to eliminate barriers to our love and to build up new ways to generously serve one another.

Discussion:

1. What is one pattern in your life that you would like to change for the sake of our relationship and how can I be supportive of you accomplishing this?
2. What tools can we utilize to keep our marriage growing and on a healthy path?
3. This week, let us seek to intentionally make changes to certain behaviors that will benefit our marriage.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help us to recognize the patterns in our own life that are destructive to our marriage and give each one of us the strength and the knowledge to change them. Help us to always keep our wedding promises ever in our heart, so that they may motivate us to give honor and love to each other. We offer this prayer all to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

Day Seven – Eucharistic Giving

Scripture proclaims God’s desire for us to love others as He has loved us. To be Eucharistic in marriage means that we are called to love our spouse as Christ loves us, which is the **final or seventh habit**.

This is the weight of our words in marriage when we promise to be true to our beloved in good times and in bad, in health and in sickness, in times of wealth and in times of poverty. We should be willing to die to ourselves, for them, every day for the rest of our life! Life is most lonely and depraved when we remain in a state of being self-focused and self-gratifying. True joy is found in a life that is shared and poured out with love to others. This sacrificial love is at the heart of Eucharistic giving. The more both spouses intentionally give to each other, the deeper their marital love grows, and also the ability to endure difficult struggles in life together.

Our Relationship with Christ

The Eucharist is the *source and summit of the Christian life* (CCC, 1324). Through it, Christ gives life to the world. Through the Eucharist, Christ feeds us with the spiritual grace we need in order that we may have the ability to increase our love and to “remain in (Christ) and He in us” (John 6:56). He feeds us so that we in turn can feed others.

What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh “given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit,” preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum. (CCC, 1392)

The Eucharist is about God feeding and caring for us, and about us giving gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word “Eucharistia” meaning “thanksgiving.” At Mass, we give thanks to God for His gift of salvation, His gift of love, and His gift of His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity that feed us on this journey through life. At the Offertory (or Preparation of the Gifts), we, the faithful, bring forth the fruits of our labor, the bread, the wine, and the collection. We offer what little we have to God so that He, in return, uniting it with His suffering, will use it to bring life through the Eucharist. In the liturgy, our humble gifts to God, our first fruits, are transformed right before our eyes into this Holy Gift which He then gives back to us as spiritual and eternal food.

Our Relationship with Each Other

In response to His gift, God is calling us to also be Eucharistic towards others, especially our spouse. Being Eucharistic in our married life, means that we desire to take up our cross daily and live out Christ’s example of love toward our spouse. It means that we intentionally strive every day to understand the needs of our beloved and work hard at helping them meet those needs. It also means being, inwardly and outwardly, thankful for the gift of our spouse and for the ways they, in return, feed us.

Being Eucharistic in our actions requires us to not only understand what our spouse needs, but also to be willing to make sacrifices in order for them to meet those needs. For most of us, this is exactly what we did back when we were dating each other. When we were trying to win the heart of our beloved, we took time to discover and understand their needs, wants, and desires and we made a concerted effort to please them by listening to them, spending time with them, and even getting things they needed. We did all of these things, sometimes sacrificing our own needs and comfort, out of a desire to win their heart. We didn’t complain about doing this, because we, too, were often getting fed and receiving appreciation. We

fed each other because we knew it would not have helped us bond together if we were demanding, unkind, or self-serving. We fed each other's needs through the special things we did for one another. Being Eucharistic in our marriage calls us to rediscover and re-establish this same kind of awareness and intentionality.

Lastly, as we are being fed by Christ in the Eucharist and by our spouse in marriage, we are then called to outpour that love to our children and the rest of the world around us. Cultivating a heart of generous and sacrificial giving to God and our spouse (*through our love, time, talents, and tithing*) should make our hearts and home a fruitful place for love to generously flow out to the world around us.

Discussion:

1. What are some of the ways we show each other gratitude on a regular basis? What are some ways you want to experience more gratitude from me?
2. What is one emotional need that you need me to meet? Be specific about what that looks like.
3. Let us consider writing a letter of gratitude to each other and giving it to each other sometime in the next week, as a gift, when it is least expected. On our own, let us seek to state gratitude to God every day for one or more blessings in our life.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to walk this journey of making our marriage, whole-heartedly, into a Eucharistic Marriage. Help us to recognize the needs of our spouse and give each of us the strength and the knowledge to help our spouse in getting their needs met spiritually, physically, and emotionally. May we never expect or demand from our spouse any action that is detrimental to their well-being or goes against the teachings of the Catholic Church. Help us to always to be grateful towards each other for the small and big things every day. We offer this pray to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary and in union with St. Joseph.

This at-home couples retreat is an adaptation of "Building a Eucharistic Marriage" by Greg Schutte, MSW, LISW-S. For more information, visit: www.eucharisticmarriage.org.