

## Make a total gift of ourselves

God is love. These three simple words describe the most basic and fundamental reality of all creation. God is love.

This perfect truth is the fabric that binds the entire universe together, and gives meaning and purpose to the covenant of marriage. All God desires in return is that we love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength: that we make a total gift of ourselves. It is the complete outpouring of our spirit in loving sacrifice that is the foundation of the married life.

Jesus promises his followers that his love will remain in them if they remain in his love — if they obey His greatest commandments exactly as he obeyed the Father's mandate to love. Every action in the marriage relationship goes back to what Jesus did for us on the cross. With his last ounce of strength and last breath of life, Christ gave everything. The cross is the meaning of love and sacrifice. This is important to keep in mind when we are enduring a difficult period in our marriage and it becomes hard to say, "I love you."

We must remember that it



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is through loving each other as husbands and wives that we can learn to speak the language of love that reveals our life in God. Loving as God loves means that we must be willing to completely sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the other, thereby entering more deeply and profoundly into relationship with Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. Living in God's love means that married love must be permanent (that is, until death) since, as creatures made in His image and likeness, we are truly ourselves when we make an absolute and unconditional commitment to covenant love and a culture of life.

In the Gospels Jesus says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it and whoever loses his life for

my sake and the Gospels, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35. See also Luke 9:23-24 and Matthew 16:24-25).

The Lord gives us the key for understanding how we are to love each other as husbands and wives. Christ asks us to pick up our cross and follow him to eternal life. To turn away from the world's ways and to keep our eyes fixed on him. When life gets difficult, it is tempting to put the cross down and to walk away. The key to staying together is understanding that the more we act under God's spirit, the more we seek to know and to do His will in our married lives, and the more we employ the assistance and the grace of the Holy Spirit, the more we grow in holiness as a couple. When we live out the vocation of marriage in a spirit of sacrifice and service, listening to the Lord with the ear of our hearts, we become the person who God created us to be.

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