

## Valentine's Day Catholic Love Connection: 15 Quotes on the Beauty of Marriage

Marking St. Valentine's Day and National Marriage Week, Catholic thought leaders and writers discuss the sacrament and what they have learned sharing in this sacred union between husband and wife.



'Marriage...is the sacrament in which man and woman, called to become 'one flesh,' participate in God's own creative love!' — Saint John Paul II (photo: Unsplash)

Love is in the air this week as we celebrate National Marriage Week, culminating in World Day of Marriage this weekend, along with St. Valentine peeking his head our way with the feast day on Monday.

To celebrate the sacrament of matrimony, the Register asked 15 well-known Catholics to share their reflections on how the sacrament has transformed them, sharing their own personal experiences, and how the richness of our Catholic faith colors this most sacred of unions, *that no man can put asunder*.

### 1. Chris Stefanick, president and founder of Real Life Catholic:

For me, marriage was first a calling to Jesus.

I realize most people don't experience the marriage vocation that way, but I was seriously thinking of priesthood until, in college, I realized marriage was a sacrament. ... Wow, a sacramental source of encounter with God through a human relationship — and a grace to become like him in life-giving love. When I realized that, I felt the call powerfully. I wanted to follow him in that way.

### 2. Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life:

I was a late bloomer, getting married at 42. My humble experience of marriage is that it is a gift from God, and he also gives the necessary grace to live it out well. It is beautifully refining and deeply fulfilling. Plus, it is a ton of fun! Some of the best marriage advice I've received is to pray each day to love your spouse the way he most needs. If you sense you are called to marriage, be not afraid! And wherever God calls you, marriage, religious, single is where you will most flourish and find your deepest joy.

### 3. Ryan Anderson, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center:

Marriage is unique and irreplaceable in how it enables us to love and be loved by others. Obviously, this includes the self-sacrificial love between the spouses and for any children that flow from their union, but it goes beyond that. Marriage is the foundation not just of the nuclear family, but of the extended family: husbands and wives, sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters, yes, but so, too, grandparents and great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, in-laws and godparents and cousins. All of these relationships are founded on that primordial marital union, and all of them provide us with opportunities to love and be loved outside of any market logic or cost-benefit analysis. The family is where we first acquire the virtues, first learn to love God, and first realize the gift of life: You see it in the eyes of children as they dote over their newest baby siblings. Family life is where we find our deepest fulfillment and greatest joys, precisely by making a gift of self to others. Nothing compares to it, and nothing can replace it.

#### 4. Mallory Carroll of the Susan B. Anthony List:

In preparing for the sacrament of marriage, my husband and I read a short book, *Spousal Prayer* by Deacon James Keating. Deacon Keating emphasizes that, through marriage, God intends to love us through our spouse. In turn, we are instruments of God's love to our spouse. I was awestruck by this concept: that not only do I love my husband imperfectly with my sinful human heart, but I am also a vessel of God's most perfect and holy love for Mike. The sacrament elevates my imperfect love, such that I have hope to be a mirror through which my husband can see and feel how profoundly God loves him. I couldn't have known before we said our vows exactly how the sacrament would change our relationship, but it has transformed us both, leaving an indelible mark and bringing us closer to each other and to God.

#### 5. Francis X. Maier, former editor in chief of the National Catholic Register:

We were born five days apart, met in college, and married at 22. That was nearly 52 years ago. We didn't have a carefully thought-through plan for life; we just figured that the future would be good if we loved each other, worked hard and worked together. And we both assumed that we were getting into something with no room for caveats and no convenient escape clause. There's a great, fun line in the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* that proves itself true over the decades: "*The husband is the head of the family ... but the wife is the neck.*" We've both had rewarding careers. Together we've raised four kids. But neither of us has ever believed in "equality" in marriage, at least not in a purely secular sense. It doesn't exist; men and women are too different. Life can be a lonely road; no one is self-sufficient. Loneliness is the curse of our age, and our modern obsession with "autonomy" only makes it worse. Marriage is about supporting and completing each other, lifting each other up, filling in for each other's weaknesses, and bringing new life into the world with the help of God. And God, in the long run, is essential. Life is complicated, with a lot of surprises; some welcome and some not. We never would have made it this far without our Catholic faith.

**6. Carter Snead, director of the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, and Leigh Snead, fellow at The Catholic Association:**

At first, marriage is like the best, longest date you've ever been on — nobody ever has to go home! But as the years go on (24 for us!) and jobs, family, finances get more complicated, and sometimes difficult, you think, "Wow, this stinks, but I'm so happy to go through it with you!"

**7. Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project:**

Marriage matters more than ever. The meaning, direction and purpose afforded by the bond of marriage translates into significantly higher levels of health, wealth and happiness for men and women who get and stay married. Marriage also increases the odds that children enjoy a stable and happy home life. In fact, in a world marked by growing economic inequality and social distrust, I think it is fair to say that the institution of marriage matters more than ever.

## 8. Teresa Tomeo, EWTN radio host and author of *Intimate Graces: How Practicing the Works of Mercy Brings Out the Best in Marriage*.

My husband, Deacon Dom and I, were really moved by the title and theme of this year's National Marriage Week, "Called to the Joy of Love." When we give our marriage retreats and share our journey back to God and each other, we always refer to that word — "joy" — as an acronym: Jesus first; others second; yourself last. How many couples realize that the sacrament of marriage is one of the sacraments of service in the Church? We didn't know that, and when we really broke open the teachings of our faith concerning marriage, it hit us like a ton of proverbial bricks. What a profound and beautiful gift and responsibility to understand that you're there to help each other get to heaven through serving each other with love and respect. God's plan for marriage isn't about servanthood as the world sees it, in terms of lording our wants over someone, but as Christ sees it: truly giving of ourselves because we want what's best for our spouse.

We spent too much time in our early years following our consumer-driven culture. That Janet Jackson number, *What Have You Done for Me Lately*, comes to mind, as opposed to what can we do for each other. And there is true joy in that.

There is also a deeper joy when you work through your issues, as opposed to walking away because marriage is not what you expected it to be. Father John Riccardo says most couples give up when they're on the verge of breakthroughs.

A sense of humor is key, along with not sweating the small stuff. Maybe it's because we're married almost 40 years (and came so close to divorce at one point) that we're able to move quickly beyond any disagreements and apologize. Life is too short, and our love is a gift that we no longer take for granted.

## 9. Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, EWTN radio host and Catholic author:

Husbands must accept the responsibility of being the chief servants of their wife and children. Every decision you make cannot be on your own: You must always place the best interest of your family first, above everything else. The greatest gift you can give to your children is to love your wife. Open your heart and share the deepest parts of who you are with her. Don't be afraid to make yourself vulnerable before her, just as Christ made himself vulnerable before his bride, the Church.

Wives are the heart of love, and the love they carry within them flows from the very heart of God himself. You share that love in so many ways, especially in your tireless commitment to your family. That love must be focused and centered in your marriage covenant with your husband. Allow him to serve you. In turn, nurture him with patience, gentleness and understanding; let him know that your heart is ever open to his love.

**10. Mary Fiorito, the Cardinal Francis George Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center:**

Marriage is a gift to two people who want to unite their lives to each other and the Lord. When united in a sacramental way, couples not only grow exponentially in love for one another, but serve as a witness to all those they encounter of the covenantal love God has for each of us.

**11. Thom Price, director of radio programming for EWTN:**

I love the word *agape*. That's what my wife, Adrienne, and I have for each other ... unconditional love. It's a true gift from God! Our Catholic faith shows us the way. I remember the Marriage Encounter weekend we made many years ago. One of the main things they focused on is really listening to each other; not listening in a distracted or superficial way. And we try to do that every day.

The other big blessing for us is the respect we have for each other. I know that love and respect are acts of the will, but every day that goes by, the acts get easier and better!

**12. Thomas W. Carroll, superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Boston:**

God's design for holy matrimony is that man and woman enter a sacred union which foreshadows our union with God in heaven. This journey will no doubt bring challenges and crosses, but with Jesus at the center of the union, he gives us what we need to fulfill our vocation and help our spouse get to heaven. Holy marriages and families that seek to glorify God provide a weary world with hope and a beautiful glimpse of heaven!

**13. Ashley McGuire, senior fellow at The Catholic Association and author:**

These days it feels like sacramental marriage is an almost rebellious act. It's certainly a revolt against the narcissism and hyper-commercialized and sexualized deification of the self that penetrates seemingly every aspect of life. Almost every road sign in our culture points us away from marriage, especially a sacramental marriage that takes permanence seriously and remains open to life. But our culture's road signs are wrong: Marriage is an exhilarating off-road adventure, with a permanent partner to boot.

**14. Damon Owens of Joyful Ever After:**

It's hard to overstate the dignity and value of marriage when it's placed in our salvation story: creation, the Fall and redemption. Ultimately discussing anything about sexuality and marriage really has to be understood through the Catholic Church as a story of joy. It's a joyful story about the truth of who we are, the truth of where we are called to be ... and then how we live our lives according to that destiny. It's a good-news story.

## 15. Lisa Hendeby, Catholic author and speaker:

The graces of our marriage are a gift that keeps on giving. Every day, in new and wonderful ways, we discover new aspects of living life together and loving God more fully through our mutual service to one another and the world around us. Nearly 36 years after our wedding day, Greg continues to surprise and bless me. I aspire to the unconditional love I witnessed between my parents and hope to pass that same gift along to our children.

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