

Along the track

Marriage

Marriage is a relationship of equals, a partnership. One person's needs are not more important than the other's. Differences don't mean one is subordinate to the other, just that they will do things in their own way! That doesn't require subordination but rather support, co-operation and appreciation of the different gifts and abilities each one brings to the relationship. That may be one of the reasons we came to love them.

One of the great gifts of married life is the discovery of the wonder and mystery of another person. That is not a one-off revelation but an unearthing, so to speak. That takes a lifetime, a daily journey and in that we come to know ourselves as well as the other person. That is one of the gifts that love brings. It involves a personal transformation which is quite a journey, coming to look out through my companion's eyes. Life is not now just my way of seeing things, my way of doing things. It is true, different roles emerge, different ways because we come to recognise the particular gifts of each person and sometimes life throws up challenges that one or other is better suited to tackle. One person does not have to always be in control. Marriage asks of us an open mind and heart, a trust that is open to the world and the wonder of the other person. It is not about manipulation or control but rather a listening ear that brings a sensitivity to the needs of the other.

Marriage is more a verb than a noun. Relationships don't stay static. They need to be nurtured often. Marriage is arguably the deepest relationship any of us will enter into, so it needs the deepest and most regularly nurturing.

While there is such a thing as 'the state of marriage', it is much more than that. It is an 'art' in that it relies in part on human creativity, a skill, so to speak, that one can learn by observation and most of all, practice and doing. Marriage helps us to discover each day that, at our deepest level, our own happiness and fulfilment lies not totally within ourselves. We find that together.

The joy and the challenge of married love is to go through each phase of our lives and come out even more committed and more mature than we were when we began. And more holy, because holy really means 'wholeness' and that is what God wants for each of us. Marriage is not a mold that makes two people the same person. Married love is meant to enable both to be their best person—together.

St Paul is often misunderstood in his writing about marriage – the 'wives must obey their husbands' quote! In another place, Paul offers some very helpful advice in building relationships (Colossians 3:12-17): He lists the following qualities: compassion, kindness, humility, patience, the openness to be able to hear the other's complaint, forgiveness, gratitude, an attitude of prayer, love which leads to harmony.

None of us have all these qualities in abundance – we need to continually work on them. Different stages of marriage can require a greater call on particular qualities. In the early stages of this relationship, when we are learning 'how the two shall live as one', patience, the openness to hear the other, gratitude and forgiveness might be more called on. Conflict and disagreement will happen but both can be positive if we decide to make them that way. Holding grudges is very destructive.

Then someday, when life changes and we come to know the inevitability of death, in the midst of the pain of loss, we come to appreciate more fully the love we have known and needed in life and give thanks for it.

May each of us grow together in our married life, as we daily discover how the two shall live as one.
May we not be possessive of each other
May we always be open to hear the other's complaint and be quick to forgive.
May we never go to sleep angry.
May we never be filled with self-importance or take the other for granted.
May we always take time for God, to become aware of God's loving presence in our married life, in the good days and the tough ones.
May we be determined to continue the romance, never being too old to hold hands or to say "I love you".
May the home we create together be always a place of welcome.
Amen.

Regards
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