

The Sacrament of Matrimony

By SISTER JANE GEIGER

A father was asked to reflect on the way he had raised his children and to say, if he had to do it over again, what he would change. He thought and said, "I would love their mother better."

A man and woman marry one another because they experience a oneness that makes them feel whole. Ideas, hopes, interests, values, concerns are shared or affirmed in one another. They feel comfortable in the thought that they can journey through life together supporting each other in all that is most precious to them in life.

For the Catholic couple, the most important reality in life is their relationship with God. The Sacrament of Baptism committed them to a graced life with the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit — a call to walk with God and be faithful. Intimacy with and fidelity to God is a journey one makes together with others in a community of faith. We call this community "the Church." No one makes the journey alone. In a sense all of us are ministers to each other as we walk in faith—each one in some way mediates the presence and experience of the Lord to the other. Often we think of Matrimony as "the other choice," not a (religious) vocation or "a calling" when in fact it is a very definite choice of ministry. In the Sacrament of Matrimony the person chooses some one in particular to be that

mediator of Christ in his or her life, and in turn chooses to minister to the other.

The father we mentioned in the beginning wished his relationship with his wife had been better. Perhaps he was saying that he wished he had been more aware of his mission to call forth and enrich her faith; perhaps he wished she had asked more of him or that he had been more responsive when she challenged him to a deeper or a more active faith. A desire for God and the need for intimacy with Him lies deep in the heart of each one of us and our striving for human love is a parable of that deeper love. For too many, the tragedy of their lives is that they are never able to identify and satisfy this deep hunger. Part of the beauty of loving and knowing another intimately is to be able to own our deepest desires, to put them into words, to strive for them, to actively support one another in the striving and to call one another to an accounting when we let down, compromise, or fail.

The Sacrament of Matrimony calls a couple to this kind of openness and accountability in their relationship with God. It is a kind of contract they need to discuss before they are married and a topic which demands open and honest communication all along the way if their marriage is to assure the happiness and growth it should mean for them and their children. God does not intrude Himself into their lives if they are

heedless and unaware; but He does show His face to a man and wife when they consciously seek Him and invite Him to walk with them through the joys and sorrows; hopes and fears, successes and failures that are a part of every lifetime.

Prayer and the sacramental life of the Church help to give them this sensitivity; these are signs that assure, "I am with you." Rooted in this experience of being nourished and loved by God, the couple becomes careful of all life-of every life they touch. Their lifestyle, every decision and choice from the most important to the most trivial, speaks of love of God, concern for neighbor, and reverence for all created things. They are faithful children of the Father and good stewards of the material goods He places in their hands. Their

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message is clear as they live their lives together and communicate their gift, better than any other teacher to their children and to the Church: "Let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice he has shown." (Ps. 22:31-32)

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