

Pope: Marriage enables couples to cooperate with God

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The sacrament of marriage helps couples "cooperate" with God by having children and educating them in the faith, Pope John Paul II said.

"Jesus worked his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana, thus pointing to the importance of marriage in God's plan of salvation in the church," the pope said.

He noted that by expressing their mutual consent to marry, Christian spouses themselves become the ministers of the sacrament of matrimony. Thus, the pope said, they "exercise in a distinctive way the common priesthood of the faithful."

Marriage is "oriented toward fertility," which is already a natural human inclination, the pope said at a general audience May 6.

"The sacrament provides the spiritual strengths of faith, charity and generosity so that the duty of procreation and edu-

cation of children can be carried out," he said.

He said the Second Vatican Council had rightly underlined this role of couples as "cooperators" in God's creative love.

The sacrament helps married couples better understand the "sacred nature of procreation and procreative love, and strengthens the orientation of their love toward the transmission of life," he said.

The pope also stressed another major statement by the council: that parents are the first teachers of the faith for their children. For believers, he said, a "Christian education is the best gift that parents can give their children, and the truest and highest manifestation of their love."

This requires a sincere faith on the part of parents that is practiced in daily life, the pope said.

In general, he said, the sacrament of marriage helps couples grow in holiness. In particular, it gives them grace to stay faithful to each other in permanent unity, he said.



File photo
Pope John Paul II baptizes a small child Jan. 7, 1990, in ceremonies at St. Peter's Basilica.

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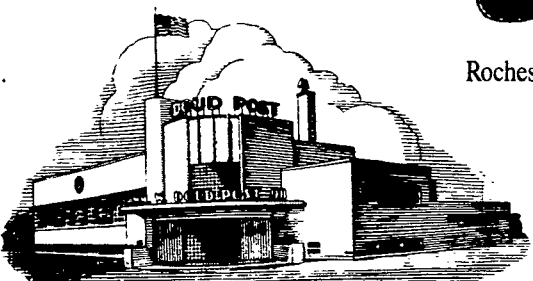
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