



# Marriage is a Vocation

COMPANION RESOURCE FOR *MADE FOR LOVE:*  
EPISODE 6, *REAL LOVE VS. THE IDEAL*

*This podcast and reflection guide is for  
engaged or newly married couples.*

## Opening Prayer

### *Prayer in the Defense of Marriage*

God our Father, we give you thanks for the gift of marriage: the bond of life and love, and the font of the family.

The love of husband and wife enriches your Church with children, fills the world with a multitude of spiritual fruitfulness and service, and is the sign of the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, for his Church.

The grace of Jesus flowed forth at Cana at the request of the Blessed Mother. May your Son, through the intercession of Mary, pour out upon us a new measure of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as we join with all people of good will to promote and protect the unique beauty of marriage.

May your Holy Spirit enlighten our society to treasure the heroic love of husband and wife, and guide our leaders to sustain and protect the singular place of mothers and fathers in the lives of their children.

Father, we ask that our prayers be joined to those of the Virgin Mary, that your Word may transform our service so as to safeguard the incomparable splendor of marriage.

We ask all these things through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sts. Joachim and Anne, pray for us.

## Listen



Take time to listen to *Made for Love: Episode 6, Real Love vs. the Ideal*, which can be found at <https://soundcloud.com/usccbclips/made-for-love-ep-6-real-marriage-v-the-ideal>.

Listeners should take notes while they listen. Allow quiet time for reflection and discussion when the podcast ends.

## Further Reading

### *Love for Love's Sake*

Four months. Four months since I sobbed as my bride walked down the aisle. Four months since we promised the rest of our lives to and for each other. These months have been full of memories, stories, laughter, frustrations, and transition. In the midst of this newlywed adventure there has been one question that has worked its way into every single conversation we have had with other people. "Sooooo...How's married life?" It's a common question, and I shouldn't be surprised by it, or frustrated to answer it. But when you're asked the same question by everyone you see, literally all the time, it gets a little grating.



And I say that knowing I've asked the same question of newlyweds myself... To be clear, it is not the question that I have problem with...it is that the intended answer is saturated with expectation. There is only one acceptable answer to this ever present question. There's an approved script, and it goes like this:

Family/friend/stranger:

Soooooo, How's married life?

Married Couple: Oh it's so wonderful, my husband/wife is just the best!

F/F/S: Awww newlyweds!!

Married Couple: We highly recommend it!

F/F/S: Just...just so happy for you! (usually tears in the eyes)

This conversation has occurred in every family, in every country, since the beginning of marriage itself. In fact, I'm convinced that this was the ice breaker that the snake used in the garden of Eden! This has to be the exchange lest the people you are speaking with conclude that your new marriage is doomed to fail. With this reality in mind, everyone we had ever talked to had always given the same answer, until two people in Northeast Pennsylvania shattered the mold and offered freedom to the rest of us. Katie and I were visiting with some really good friends who were newlyweds themselves (and also expecting their first child this month! Pray for them!) When we went over to their house for a reunion, we caught up for a few minutes, and then we asked the question. "Sooooo, how's married life?" Their answer: "The most difficult thing in the world." THANK GOD! These two had the courage to articulate the truth about newly married life: it is indeed the best, but it is also the most difficult thing that we have ever done.

The reason for the difficulty is simple. For 28 years I have done my own thing. I've gone where I wanted to go, when I wanted to go there, and no one else's schedule or needs superseded mine. But this rhythm of life comes to a screeching halt once the I do's are exchanged, primarily because for 27 years, my wife has also done her own thing, gone

where and when she wanted to go, and no one else's schedule or needs superseded her own as well. Now, I could argue I've been doing it longer, therefore I should get to keep doing it...but our couch isn't all that comfortable, so I won't. In these four months I have come to experience that the graces of the sacrament are real. No one can speak to, love, and heal me like my wife, and the promises we made were not just something nice to say, but rather vows to die to self for the sake of the other. Always.

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Would you like to know what happened on the trip? We fought. A lot. We criticized, we complained, and we dug our heels in. Feelings were hurt, tears were shed. Marital bliss, right? It was sadly simple: I wanted my act of selflessness to be praised and lauded and my picture put up in the Husband Hall of Fame. But even though I did choose to drive her because I love her and knew that was what was best for her in that moment, my desire for praise and affirmation from her and everyone else changed the act from selfless to selfish. I was playing the martyr. Katie probably should have said, "Get off the cross Tommy, we need the wood."



Marriage isn't just hard. It's sneaky hard. The choice to drive Katie to her speaking gig was easy. Keeping myself from creating an imaginary scoreboard of selflessness was impossible. Therein lies the core challenge and chief lesson

I have learned in these four months of marriage. Dying to self for the sake of the other is not just about the choices you make. It's ultimately about the reasons you make those choices and what you expect in return for them. This is a lesson I have seen time and time again in the marriage of my incredible parents. I witnessed their sacrifices, time and time again. Whether building our home with their bare hands, scraping by on one income so one parent would always be home with us until we were old enough to go to school, or going to every concert, game, or performance my sister and I ever had. They didn't do these things for a pat on the back, to score points, or to hold it over our heads. They did it because they loved us, and each other, and would do anything to pursue

and achieve that love. I am forever grateful, and I know I must do better. This lived lesson on the difficulty of merging two lives together is paralleled in St. Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching on the four degrees of love. He speaks of them as the love of self for self's sake, the love of self for God's sake, the love of God for self's sake and the love of God for God's sake. I think his teaching works as a parallel for marriage because it speaks of love as a process. Yes, today I may make choices that show I love Katie for my own sake, but every day I am working hard for a tomorrow where I will love her for her own sake and for the sake of the God who brought us together.

Marriage is hard. Marriage is a process. I love giving that answer, because it shows that we aren't permanently wearing rose-colored glasses about this sacrament. We love that it is tough. We embrace the challenges. Pray for us. We'll pray for you.