



Love Beyond Words

One-Week Retreat for Married Couples
National Marriage Week 2024

Prelude

Should we begin with the obvious?
Marriage is a sacrament.

Before skipping this section to get on to the real stuff, take a moment to consider what this statement actually means: *Marriage is a sacrament. Your marriage is a sacrament.* A profound, unseen spiritual reality made tangible through outer signs—namely, through the daily life of your vocation.

On your wedding day, you—bride and bridegroom—conferred the sacrament of marriage upon one another. You made your vows, professing your love and fidelity through *the spoken word*, and later through the language of your bodies: “This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God’s fidelity.”¹ Encompassing all other areas of a shared life along with your physical relationship, that which is intangibly expressed takes on a tangible reality. That reality begins at the altar on your wedding day and echoes through the years to come.

This weeklong retreat will dive deeper into the divine mystery of this tension between the inner and the outer, the spoken word and its real-life effects. It will examine the words that make up the sacrament of marriage, and the experience of living them out.

Calling our Catholic faith a mystery doesn’t mean there are no answers, or that a door is closed to our further contemplation. Rather, a mystery invites us to open the door ever wider, in pursuit of the Lord who so lovingly pursues us. The Holy Spirit is always at work, whispering insights and graces anew.

¹ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1640](#)



Love reaches beyond words, yet it also starts with words. On Day One, you'll reflect on the nature of words made flesh: just as Jesus *embodies* this truth in His incarnation, so is marriage an incarnate love. Days Two through Six dive deep into the promises expressed in your marriage vows, looking at ways the words of these promises can be fully lived out in your daily life. Finally, Day Seven invites you to appraise your communication habits as a couple, knowing that love does require countless exchanges of words and offering a productive path forward. Each day concludes with questions for deeper discussion and a prayer for your marriage.

"In the beginning was the Word."² Your wedding day was your first beginning; each of you made in the image of the Creator, your love for one another mirroring His own love. Every day offers another beginning; another opportunity to live out the words of this holy sacrament. May we begin.

² [John 1:1](#)



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day One: Love Is Word Made Flesh

Reflect

John's Gospel opens with the nature of God, in language so simple yet ceaselessly profound, inviting us to go deeper: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory*" [emphasis added].³

The Incarnation, or the Lord's taking on of a human body in the person of Jesus, is no small or insignificant matter, but a cornerstone of the Catholic faith and a model for our own participation in the divine life. That is, by taking on human flesh, born to suffer, die, and redeem us, Jesus *embodies* the love of God, even to the Cross and beyond the grave, into eternal life.

How can we ourselves participate in this divine life of the Incarnation?

The sacraments make present the reality of God in a way we can experience: through our bodies and our senses, as in the water and oil of Baptism or the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. And, notably, in the bodies of man and woman, given in marriage. Married life is the words of your wedding vows made flesh, day in and day out. "...if we, like Christ, offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God...we too can live a new life, an incarnate life, an embodied spirituality. Only then do we feel at home in our own skin. Only then do the deepest desires of our hearts for intimacy and union make sense."⁴

Throughout the days and years of married life, some seasons feel like a deep unity between you and your spouse in body, mind, and spirit. Others feel more like a season of division, or of ships passing in the night—whether by circumstance or by our choices. While, of course, every aspect of life is never within our control, it's worth examining parts of your life in which you *can* freely make choices that benefit your union.

³ [John 1:1, 1:14](#)

⁴ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2007), 50.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE

Just as we can return to the Word Himself—Jesus Christ—and to the words of Scripture, the Mass, and the sacraments when in need of a reset, so can we return to the words of our wedding vows even months and years after we first spoke them. Each new day together is the words of your vows brought to life.

Tomorrow, we'll begin a closer look at each line of your wedding vows, knowing that the words spoken call you to embody and live out God's love—His Word—made flesh.

Discuss

Consider that heaven and earth meet in the body of Jesus; in God's loving and humble willingness to come to us fully divine, yet fully human and like us. Read Luke 1:26-56 and 2:1-35, which chronicle the Annunciation and the birth and presentation of Jesus. Share the phrases and passages that spark your imagination or lead to new insights.

As husband and wife, your bodies speak the language of your marriage vows. List several ways you can each love and revere the body of the other, in your sexual relationship, in expressions of affection, and in how you care for one another in times of physical weakness or struggle.

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day Two: “I Promise To Be True To You...”

Reflect

Love and fidelity are inherent in a promise to be true. What do these words mean for your relationship, from your wedding day onward?

Even in civil marriages and in pop songs and rom-coms, our culture recognizes something heroic in commitment and faithfulness. In a sacramental marriage, your commitment takes on a reality *beyond words*. That reality is the permanent, indissoluble bond that flows forth from husband and wife’s freely made consent to marry, and from the words of their marriage vows.⁵

Today, you’re invited to look closer at ways you, as spouses, can embody the meaning of being true at this present moment in your marriage. Of course, if you have experienced infidelity or are struggling with serious addictions, it’s worth pursuing clinical and pastoral assistance to foster healing and an appropriate way forward. And if you’re going through an exceptionally difficult time with family, illness, or other sensitive matters, it’s understandable that these matters can occupy significant amounts of your time and energy.

Consider, however, the seemingly more harmless habits that chip away at even the best intentions.

First, consider the habit of distraction. Idols—and idleness—in the form of phones, media, and noise, divert our attention from the person of our spouse.

Second, consider the habits of your speech. Complaints or gossip, even to trusted friends, affect others’ perceptions about our spouse.

And lastly, consider the habit of priorities. The people and places that get the most of your emotional and mental energy (whether for good or for bad) indicate what you value, and can easily overtake your marriage as a top priority.

⁵ See [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1638-1642](#)



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE

Take time today to examine each of these habits. One significant way to bring your go-to distractions, speech, and priorities into better order (and facilitate your vow to be true!) is through a look at your boundaries.

Christian convert Sheldon Vanauken describes falling in love with his wife Davy in his memoir *A Severe Mercy*. As they grew in trust and tenderness, Sheldon and Davy expressed a desire to nurture their relationship by means of a boundary that would protect their hopes to serve one another over themselves and to let love flourish; they called it “The Shining Barrier.”

What The Shining Barrier signified, he says, “was simply this question: what will be best for our love? Should one of us change a pattern of behavior that bothered the other, or should the other learn to accept? Well, which would be better for our love? Which way would be better, in any choice or decision, in the light of our single goal: to be in love as long as life might last?”⁶

Remaining true to one another, and to your marriage, might mean walking away from that which doesn’t nurture your relationship, either temporarily or for good. Consider your commitments and boundaries using the questions that follow, and talk together about the individual and shared pursuits that cultivate a healthy sense of freedom.

Being radically honest about where you spend your attention, your words, and your priorities, ready for the possibility of change and a renewed focus on your commitment, will summon you back to the words you spoke: to be true to one another, in all things.

Discuss

List 3-5 areas of your individual lives in which you consistently invest the greatest effort, time, money, or energy. These areas might include family, work, friendships, ministry, hobbies, exercise, care for a family member, etc. What are each of your feelings toward these areas of investment; i.e. do they leave you feeling drained? Energized? Neutral? Are any of these areas actually distractions that could be changed or reevaluated?

What do you share about your marriage with friends or family? Do you and your spouse agree on how much is disclosed to others?

List several concrete, actionable changes you can make to create or strengthen healthy boundaries around your marriage.

⁶ Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1977, 1980).



Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day Three: “...In Good Times and In Bad...”

Reflect

Think back to when you first fell in love, and as it became clear the Lord was calling you to marry one another. Did you ever have the sense that with this person, even the bad times wouldn't be so, well, bad?

It's a romantic, optimistic notion, with a good deal of truth to it. You picture future trials and loss, knowing that with your beloved at your side you'll take heart. And yet, in the inevitable trials, all these theological, divine ideals can crash back down to the earthly realities of this life. It's worth checking in with each other today on the ways you can best serve each other, your marriage, and (if you have them) your children during the bad times, whether it involves finances, issues with family members, work, tragedy, or otherwise.

Practical preparation for unexpected challenges is prudent and valuable. But where the practical reaches its limit, the spiritual flows forth. The sacrament of marriage “gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799).”⁷ Once again, the words of your vows—“in good times and in bad”—take on a real, concrete weight. Don't underestimate the wellspring of grace in your marriage! Seek out ways, starting today, to spiritually strengthen your relationship against external trials.

Wherever you are in your prayer lives, take one further step after reading this: if you pray individually or privately, take two to three minutes to pray together. If you're most frequently drawn to rote prayers of the Church, say a spontaneous prayer together, or vice versa. Is there a mode of prayer (petition, praise, intercession) you most frequently turn to? Add a new or different expression to your prayers today.

And what about the good times, or even the seemingly mundane, just-fine times? Consider how you can order your marriage toward the good, traditionally defined by the Church as the fulfillment of whatever befits someone or something, ordered toward that which it desires.⁸

⁷ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1661](#)

⁸ See Fr. John Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Image, 1980, 2013), 193.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE

If we as humans are made in the image of an all-good, all-loving Creator, our ultimate desire (whether we recognize it or not) is to imitate His goodness and love and return to Him. We imitate God's goodness and love when we treat our spouse with reverence, mercy, and dignity.

In any season, it's helpful to envision the end result of a conversation, argument, event, or challenge: do you hope to conclude this experience more unified, or more separated and broken apart? It's the small, daily choices of words and actions, the dismantling of your pride, your idols, and your walls, that make up the overall health and fulfillment of your marriage—for good or for bad.

Discuss

What words and actions does your spouse find most meaningful during difficult times? What practical steps can you take to bolster your personal, professional, and family life against external challenges?

List concrete ways (e.g. words, actions, attitudes) you can support your spouse during the good times. How can you be most supportive of your spouse's accomplishments? How can you help your spouse fulfill his/her dreams and goals? How can you affirm one another's character and strengths?

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day Four: "...In Sickness and In Health."

Reflect

Yesterday you reflected on the vow to love one another in good times and in bad, considering how to best support one another through life's surprises and challenges. When you make efforts to remain united in Christ, knowing the graces of marriage are a bedrock and a haven, external trials feel easier to carry and your aspirations feel more within reach.

But what about when trials come from the inside; specifically, from physical or mental illness?

Suffering and illness are *hard*, and even isolating. Suffering, though, is one of the most human experiences we can undergo, and it truly can bear fruit. We are alive, and alive in Him. Consider the ultimate act of suffering: Jesus Christ, fully divine *and* fully human, humiliated and bleeding, pouring Himself out to the end. "By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion."⁹ Though before the Fall we were never meant to suffer or get sick, Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection bring about our redemption. His sacrifice makes it possible for us to experience the Garden once again, in the glories of heaven.

Jesus's willingness to weaken himself, even unto death, brings meaning to our own experiences with sickness, and offers married couples a choice: will you embrace these trials and carry them together, or will you reject and belabor them, ending up more divided?

Your individual experience of sickness, from a common cold to an extended hospital stay, can leave you feeling alone, helpless, and separated from your spouse. A division. Yet with communication and courage, times of sickness can refine and deepen your love.

Fr. Jacques Philippe writes that "If welcomed trustingly and peacefully, suffering makes us grow. It matures and trains us, purifies us, teaches us to love unselfishly, makes us poor in heart, humble, gentle,

⁹ [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1505](#)



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE

and compassionate toward our neighbor. Fear of suffering, on the other hand, hardens us in self-protective, defensive attitudes...”¹⁰

In other words, times of suffering can bring forth growth in love and draw you and your spouse into deeper union. As you are drawn closer into the heart of Jesus, knowing he redeems our trials, you’re drawn closer to each other. Words can feel empty when your spouse is unwell, leading you to wonder how you can be most supportive.

One solution? Talk! Sit in prayer with your feelings, individually or together, and identify specific ways you and your spouse can support each other. Instead of the self-protection and defensiveness Fr. Philippe identifies, you can make efforts to enter into one another’s personal experiences with life’s challenges. Through words, prayer, and acts of service, walls are dismantled, armor comes off, and you embody your vow to love through all things, in sickness and in health.

Discuss

When you think of suffering, what are your gut reactions? Do you and your spouse feel similarly disposed to the idea of suffering and redemption, or differently disposed? Talk about your dispositions and meditate on Jesus’s own suffering: read Mark 14:32-72 and 15:1-39. Share the phrases and passages that spark your imagination or lead to new insights.

Sickness and suffering easily lead to feelings of division, as you and your spouse undergo different, individual experiences when one of you is ill. Identify ways to support one another through sickness, from a common cold even to serious mental or physical deterioration. What words and actions will comfort, protect, and encourage your spouse?

What acts can contribute to the health of your marriage? Name at least one action, habit, or dialogue that can strengthen your relationship in these areas: trust, respect, honesty, intimacy, communication.

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

¹⁰ Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom* (New York: Scepter, 2007), 47.



Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day Five: “I Will Love You and Honor You...”

Reflect

The past several days have invited you to grow in unity with your spouse, by reflecting on what it means to be true; to endure good and bad; sickness and health. What about the times you feel less united? Today, seek out a renewal of your love by looking closer at what love means, and what it asks of us.

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that “to love is to will the good of another,”¹¹ in a call to self-sacrifice and true freedom—an honoring of who your loved one *is*. Pope Saint John Paul II delves deeper into the nature of that word, *another*, in relation to love, saying “love is always a mutual relationship between persons.”¹² The value and dignity of every human person is boundless. It is so because the person bears the image and likeness of God, calling every person (and, in a particular way, every spouse) to love that looks outward, gazing upon another with reverence and enduring beyond feelings.

John Paul II encourages couples to integrate goodwill with love and even attraction, with the goal being no divergence between how we *do* embody love and how we *should*. He writes that “Genuine love as good will can keep company with love as desire, and even with desire itself, provided that desire does not overwhelm all else,” and that “People who, for all their weakness, none the less bring genuine goodwill to their love try to base reciprocity on an ‘honest good,’ on virtue which may still be imperfect but is none the less real.”¹³

It feels good knowing that even the saints understand our human imperfection and the limitations of the will, despite our best intentions. Today, consider the times you and your spouse fall short of these good intentions in love—specifically, on occasions of resentment that push back against a spirit of goodwill, of lust overwhelming love, and of plain old laziness or apathy. Whether you’ve been married several months or several decades, it’s no secret how easy it can be to fall into habits of indifference or taking your spouse for granted. In your speech, in your physical and emotional relationships, and in your approach to conflict, how can you better show true, selfless love and honor to your spouse?

¹¹ See [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1766](#)

¹² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981 and 1993), 73.

¹³ Cfr., 84, 87.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE

Talk today about how each of you best receives attention, respect, and amends. Maybe it's through a particular Love Language¹⁴, which can function as a helpful tool for understanding, or through specific words that indicate apology, forgiveness, and closure. Love and honor are a high standard to rise up to, precisely because they're such a high and worthy calling. With a willing spirit and the reality of grace, a truer, ever more pure-hearted love is within reach.

Discuss

Individually, write down how you define *love* (in your own words! No quoted material allowed!), then show it to your spouse. Do your definitions have common features? How do they compare to Aquinas' and John Paul II's thoughts on love? Talk together about any shifts or widened perspectives on love that might take root from the words of these saints, and how their thoughts can help you grow in love as a couple.

Do you know how your spouse receives your love most meaningfully? How does your spouse receive an apology most meaningfully? What, for him or her, makes a conflict feel fully forgiven and resolved? Share how you can express love, apology, and resolution in the ways most personally important to your spouse.

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.

¹⁴ See Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield, 1992 and 2015), or 5lovelanguages.com.





Day Six: “...All The Days of My Life.”

Reflect

It’s no coincidence that the Christian life and every vocation, marriage included, is a call to the Cross: “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ...Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her...that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”¹⁵ Spouses are called to lay down their lives, imitating Jesus’s Passion and death—and, ultimately, His leading us to the gate of heaven. What a great gift, and great responsibility, it is to live out your marriage and family life with an eye on eternity.

Love endures beyond this life, where at the heavenly wedding feast we behold God face to face, clothed in glory. The sin of Adam and Eve brought about death and cast them out from the garden (though not without mercy and love). Jesus, the new Adam, defeats death and opens the door to eternal life. And Mary, the new Eve, surrenders to the will of God in her motherhood, healing the wound of Eve’s distrust and participating with her Son in the redemption of all.

Heaven, then, is a restored creation; a return to the garden. “Our first parents experienced the original dimension of this grace in the beginning. We participate in it now through faith and the sacraments. However, this grace will only reveal itself ‘in all its penetrating depth’ to those who partake in the ‘other world.’ There, the grace already given in creation and restored in redemption will ‘be experienced in its beatifying reality’”.¹⁶

All of it sounds so promising, so beautiful. Yet do you ever feel...apprehension? Dread, even? The sense of *I want to get to heaven, just not for a long time?*

When you find deep joy in your marriage and earthly life, even among imperfection, it can be hard to imagine a more fulfilling reality. The fear that heaven couldn’t possibly be as joyful as living out your vocation on earth--one you’ve probably dreamed of and prayed--brings a counterpart: fear of death.

¹⁵ [Ephesians 5:21, 25, 27](#)

¹⁶ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2007), 314.



FOR YOUR
MARRIAGE

Recall, again, the garden. We were never meant to be separated from God, and subsequently, never meant to be separated from one another. We inherited the pains of sin and loss from our first parents, yet we aren't meant to dwell there. Through Baptism, through the earthly spiritual life, and ultimately on through eternal life, we experience a renewal of perfection. If you've struggled with this tension of the earthly and the heavenly, pray specifically today for the Lord to increase your desire for Him, to quiet any anxieties you feel when you consider eternity.

We live in longing as humans--imprinted with a restlessness and a desire for the fullness of the divine from the moment of our creation. Pray that your longings, both for many years of happily married life on earth and for the glories of heaven, be well-directed. Talk together about ways to embrace this life, while knowing the next life lies ahead, trusting in the Lord to grant you a sense of peace and joyful anticipation of all that's to come.

Discuss

Discuss your feelings about mortality and the hope of heaven: is there worry? Sorrow? Joy? Read Genesis 2:18-25, the account of the man and woman's creation, and Revelation 21:1-5, a vision of the heavenly banquet. Share the phrases and passages that spark your imagination or lead to new insights.

How can you live today with eternity in mind? Identify steps you can take in your marriage and family life to actively sanctify one another, grow in faith, and embrace the responsibility of leading one another to heaven. Consider steps like beginning a daily prayer routine as a couple or adding a prayer to a routine you already have, dedicating yourselves to more frequent reception of the sacraments like one daily Mass per week or one confession per month, or interceding for one another in prayer and offering up each day for your spouse.

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast. Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE



Day Seven: Communication Check-In

Reflect

This week, you've spent time considering all the ways love goes beyond words. In their personhood, in action, in the sacramental realities of married life, and in the hope of heaven, spouses embody the incarnate love of God and are called to live out the promises of their marriage vows.

But remember the times when words are, in fact, a needed and important part of your vocation. Today concludes this week of retreat, with a more extensive discussion section designed as a roadmap for the months and years to come.

Whatever insights have stirred your hearts this week, don't close the door to them after today's concluding prayer. Open it wider. Perhaps one particular aspect of your vows has been more difficult to embrace, or one particular aspect of your Catholic faith (sexuality, suffering, or mortality, to name a few). Know that even the greatest saints have wrestled with the Gospel and the spiritual life, trusting in the Lord's wisdom and providence even when it felt like all the lights were out. Endure in faith, seeking Him in all things and believing that "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life".¹⁷

May your marriage be abundantly blessed, and together may you encounter the Lord wherever you are today, and for all eternity.

Discuss

Recap this past week in conversation. Did any particular days or reflections inspire you to action or deeper spiritual contemplation? How will they influence your relationship going forward?

Some individuals process their thoughts and decisions internally, reflecting on matters more independently and nonverbally. Others process externally, with a greater need for expressing things aloud, seeking outside perspectives, and talking them through. Which form of processing do you and your spouse tend toward? Are there parts of your individual lives you desire to share more with each other (work, hobbies and interests, spirituality)? Identify practical ways for each of you to feel your

¹⁷ [John 8:12](#)



needs are met in your communication, such as daily or weekly check-ins on particular topics. In times of change or larger decisions, what words and actions will help each of you feel aligned with the other?

What areas for growth do you see in your marriage? Consider the spiritual, physical, emotional, and financial dimensions of your relationship. Make a list of several resolutions you can take on, individually and as a couple, to make productive changes in these areas.

Dream together! Write down at least one goal for your marriage in: one month, six months, one year, five years, and ten years. Consider how you hope to feel at each of these landmarks, how you hope your relationship will be compared to now, and what life might look like.

Take a picture together today and store it in a new album on your phone. Set reminders to take another one month, six months, and one year from now. What will you hope to see in these future images of yourselves? What feelings will you see in your eyes? Talk about your hopes for your marriage and reiterate the steps you'll take to fulfill them.

Pray

Father, we give you thanks for the gift of our vocation. We kneel before you in humility, in hope, and in openness, desiring to embody your incarnate love and live out the words of our wedding vows. Grant that this time of reflection strengthen us, stretch us beyond comfort and beyond words, and draw us closer to your love.

Jesus, you suffered, died, and redeemed us on the Cross. May we imitate your sacrifice of love, pouring ourselves out in body and spirit. In our thoughts, words, and actions, may our love be like yours, resurrecting that which is dead in us and bringing forth abundant life.

Spirit, come down. Inspire, guide, and bless our conversations and the whole of our married life. Fill us with the grace to sanctify one another, to live in the sacraments, and to lead one another to the heavenly feast.

Amen.



FOR  YOUR
MARRIAGE