



Six months to go until Juan and I get married! Everyone keeps telling us it will go by quickly and I have to say, I hope they're right. We've been excitedly preparing for the wedding and counting down to the day with a rosary novena said together on the 18th of every month, the anniversary of when we met, and our soon-to-be marriage anniversary (in July).

Amidst all this anticipation, we had an important milestone a few weeks ago on January 10th. In Chile, it's traditional to have a ring blessing liturgy, which marks the beginning of the period of formal sacramental preparation. This happens several months before the wedding and begins the 'noviazgo' that marks a time of more intense prayer and preparation for the sacrament. During this time, the blessed rings are worn on the right hand as a sign of engagement.

So, in keeping with this tradition, Juan and I had our marriage bands blessed by Father José, one of the priests who says Mass at our parish in Santiago, and we celebrated with Juan's family. This was especially meaningful because some of Juan's family members won't be able to attend the marriage ceremony in Wisconsin.

The ceremony began with an opening prayer and a reading from the Gospel of John which we had chosen beforehand ('No greater love is there than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend'). Father gave a short reflection on the reading and on the sacrament of marriage and then blessed our rings with holy water. Juan and I said a few words as we exchanged our rings and then Father led us in an Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Peace Prayer of St. Francis, which Juan and I had chosen for the occasion. Finally he blessed us and our engagement.

Now we have officially entered in to the time of immediate preparation for the sacrament. Yet how on earth does one prepare for such a monumental gift as the sacrament of marriage? How does one prepare to become a living sign of the awesome, faithful, everlasting, and life-giving love of the Trinity? During the ring blessing, Father José passed along some advice which Pope Francis gave during his Valentine's Day audience with engaged couples last year. He advised us to develop the habit of always saying "thank you" for the sacrifices the other is making,

always asking for forgiveness when we need to, always remembering to ask permission before acting on important matters, and never taking the other person for granted. In addition, Father reminded us to always pray for and with each other.

Such simple and yet profoundly wise advice reminded us that, in addition to prayer, one of the most important preparations we can make is getting into the habit of making sacrifices and gestures that may go unnoticed but are so important. This got me thinking and taking stock of the ways I could spend this time of preparation becoming a less selfish and more loving person. One of the first things that popped into my mind was the sad state of my apartment.

Confession: While I am very good at keeping dates straight, and managing my crazy and frequently changing schedule of work and school, when it comes to physical objects I am not, shall we say, the most organized of people. During the semester, my library books and academic articles tend to take up residence in piles on the tables and chairs of my apartment, and I can go a shameful amount of time without putting my cleaned clothes back into the closet and drawers where they belong.

Juan, on the other hand, is extremely organized; it's second nature to him. His clothes are always perfectly folded, floors swept, dishes cleaned, and bathroom organized. I know that he is less stressed and in general happier when he is in an organized space. Knowing this and thinking about what Father said, I decided to make an effort to get in the habit of being more organized as an act of love for my Juan, so that when we do begin our life together in July, he'll be able to feel relaxed and happy in our shared home.

So last weekend, Juan came over to my apartment and helped me do a preliminary organization. It turned out to be a lot of fun to do this together and it felt good to get rid of the old papers, and to organize my books and closet. My job now is, with the help of God's grace, to keep it that way, because I love Juan and because these are the little acts of love that I think will make our marriage happier and healthier. Six months to go and we are so excited to share our experiences with you all during this exciting time! Please keep us in your prayers. You'll be in ours.