



Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day this year. Many couples have decided to celebrate their love by going out for a romantic dinner earlier, over the past weekend.

For those who are more inclined to 'marry' the two events which share the calendar, and are willing to look a little more deeply at what our human love relationships and the beginning of lent have in common, the vistas are broader than it first seems.

Marriage, and other relationships based on real love are made of more than just candlelight, gourmet dinners, and chocolate. Lent is about more than fasting. Both are rooted in a love that is willing, in fact, committed, to self-sacrifice for the beloved.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

- John 13:15

What if, this Valentine's Day, and this Lent, we looked past what we are giving up by fasting and abstinence, and instead, took the plunge to love our beloved as Christ loves us. A little less steak and chocolate, a lot more patience and forgiveness. Less presents, more presence. Giving less jewels but more joy.

"There is no greater love within a marriage and a family than for the spouses and children to lay down their lives for one another. This is the heart of the vocation of marriage, the heart of the call to become holy" -USCCB, Pastoral letter: Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan

40 days of laying down our lives in love for Christ and for our beloved here on earth... 40 days of learning to love like God desires us to.

“If a person really loves another, that is, really desires the total good of the other person, then such a person is committed by the very nature of love to give of himself or of herself for the sake, the good, of that other person. Giving of oneself involves sacrifice; it means that I make the other person a priority; it demands dying to self in order to live for the other.” -Bishop of Arlington, Paul Loverde

What if we took this lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday/Valentines' Day to recommit to our vocation- our path to holiness, our marriages, and relationships, in seeking the good of others with love, even when it costs us?

What if, by bringing the two days together, God is asking us to love more, and to love more like He does? If part of the lay vocation is to sanctify the secular world, then this only makes sense. We have a magnificent opportunity this Wednesday- to reclaim human love to be in the image and likeness of God's love for us. It's a chance to reset our selfish fantasies about love and reorder our expectations and commitments to be what they should be, a free and joyful self-giving for the good of the other.

“What some people love is not a person but the experience of being in love. The first is irreplaceable; the second is not.” — Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married*

What if we really took this radical plunge during Lent? Perhaps we would understand better the depth of Christ's love as the bridegroom for us as his bride? Perhaps we would see God, the often overlooked “3rd person” in our marriages, more clearly?

“How can one love self without being selfish? How can one love others without losing self? The answer is: By loving both self and neighbor in God. It is His Love that makes us love both self and neighbor rightly.” — Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married*

Perhaps our relationships would become richer and more precious to us, celebrated more deeply by loving sacrifice than by sharing steak and chocolates...

Speaking of chocolate (which is another of my loves) I recently had the double surprise of indulging not only in a delicious treat but in the strikingly wise poetry on the back of the wrapper... God is awesome in his generosity that way.