



*Why do you want to get married?* It was the first question posed to the group of 30 couples gathered together for the mandatory diocesan marriage prep day. As two people deeply steeped in church-work, Tommy and I could've given any number of answers, probably all mostly theologically correct. But, it was early...on a Saturday morning...and here we were with the biggest question of our lives being posed to us without any coffee running through our systems. Instantaneously, we looked at each other and giggled as we said, *the tax break*. It should be duly noted that we had been working on our tax returns the night before, so that was fresh in our minds. As other couples began to share their answers, a second question was posed: *Why do you want to get married in the Church?* Continuing on with our silly answers, we whispered to each other, *better pictures*.

Obviously our answers were not meant seriously. We were just trying to make a long day a little more fun by playfully goofing around and easing the tension of having to sit in the same room with couples we didn't know and talk about cervical mucus and monthly budgets for the next 8 hours. As the marriage prep day progressed and every topic from Natural Family Planning to conflict resolution was introduced and discussed, the initial question began eating away at me. Why do I want to get married? Really? At the end of the day, why do I want to stand in the front of a church and commit myself to Tommy McGrady (making me Katie McGrady, a name that rhymes on the Dr. Seuss level!) for the rest of my life? Why would anyone want to give up their independence, freedom, care-free schedule, or opportunity to date around? What benefit could there possibly be to settling down and grabbing on to "the ole' ball and chain"?

Needless to say, I kind of let my mind wander during the marriage prep class...

In His infinite wisdom and perfect love, God created man and woman in His very image and likeness. What a powerful idea. God, who is love itself, created us in the image and likeness of love, and calls us to live in and give love every moment of every day. To be in His image and likeness doesn't just mean we're sort of like God (on the good days), nor does it mean we physically look like him (because I certainly don't look like a 1st century Jewish man with a super intense beard). To say that we are created in God's image and likeness is to say that we are the most precious, valuable, unique, and important beings

that God ever made, and as such, we are meant for something great. We're not meant to just be independent, carefree, "dating around" people with selfish attitudes or relativistic outlooks on life. We're called to use our freedom and independence to choose the things that will unite us more closely to the will of God. We "date around" so that we can eventually find the person to "settle our hearts" and lead us ever closer to the One who calms all restlessness. We're called to give freely, not take without limits. We're called to pursue, embrace, and share Truth, not accept the easiest idea that's simply pleasurable or convenient.

To be made in His image and likeness means that we are called to greatness, and ultimately called to holiness. We are meant to soar above the mediocrity of selfishness and mere pleasure into which the world tries to push us. We are designed to image the Creator of light, beauty, and goodness. We are meant to follow the Way, embrace the Truth, and live the abundant Life, and in so doing, we will answer the call that reaches into the depths of our hearts: to love and be loved. We are meant not to be self-referential, inwardly-focused, selfish men and women who seek to use others for profit, power, or pleasure. Instead, we are meant to give without ceasing and love without limits. We are meant to be the very image of the "absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man" (CCC, 1604).

To do and live that, I will get married. It is the vocation to which God has called me. The Sacrament of Marriage will allow me, the future Katie McGrady, to grow in greatness, increase in love, and become holy.

Marriage will demand sacrifice and require honesty. Marriage will include the pursuit of beauty and joy with Tommy. Marriage will force me to look beyond my care-free desires or selfish ambitions and instead seek to serve the well-being and good of my spouse. Marriage will help me grow in holiness because every single day I will have to lay down my life for the man who helps give meaning and brings happiness to the most mundane and simple moments. Marriage will give me the awesome responsibility of imaging the unfailing, never-ending love of the Lord in a unique way, as a sign of His love for His Church. And marriage will allow me to experience that love through Tommy's love for me.

Marriage will help make me the person I am meant to be: an image of God whose likeness radiates holiness into the world. To gain that great gift, what better place to enter into the Sacrament than in the Church whose primary purpose is to help me grow in relationship with the Lord who loves me without limits, conditions, or fail?

If I could miraculously go back to our marriage prep day and answer "why do you want to get married?" again, I'd probably still say the tax break and better pictures. After all, cutting up and laughing with Tommy is one of my favorite things to do. But, I would add an extra answer as well. Why do I want to get married? Because it's what I'm made for.