



I love weddings! It's a good thing because we're going to a lot of them lately! It never gets old for me...that courageous and touching moment when the beaming couple faces each other and says "for better or worse, for rich or for poorer, in sickness and in health until death..."

Of course, they haven't got a clue about what that means. Few of us, standing there lighting up the church with smiles on our wedding day, really understood what that promise meant. The promise to "love and honor" one another slowly unfolds over time as we learn to adjust to the fact that our spouse talks excessively in the mornings and we prefer quiet, or that he/she consistently leaves the cap off the toothpaste.

Observers of this annual flurry of summer weddings sometimes ask themselves: "Who in their right mind would ever make a promise like that?" "Why marry?" The not-very-serious response is that you are not in your right mind when you decide to marry...you're in love and the first stage of love is blind, though sight returns swiftly in the first couple of years.

The more serious response from the Christian perspective is that we believe people choose marriage because God calls them to it. We regard marriage as a vocation, a call to holiness not unlike the call to priesthood or consecrated or single life. Every baptized person is called to be "holy," to become an image of God and ultimately to reach heaven through whatever pathway they choose whether it be marriage, religious life, ordination or the single life.

Marriage is one way God chooses to continue our development into more patient, loving, self-sacrificing and life-giving people. Marriage is a life laboratory in which we discover the real meaning of faithfulness, belonging, forgiveness and unconditional love. If you have kids, you know that they speed up the learning curve on all these things.

At a recent conference on marriage, I discovered that marriage therapists and academicians who have thoroughly researched marriage have concluded that marriage is also good for you personally, not to mention its many benefits for children. In their book *The Case for Marriage* based on authoritative research, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher argue that being married is actually better for you physically, materially, and spiritually than being single or divorced. Married

people live longer, have better health, earn more money, feel more fulfilled in their lives than people who remain single, cohabit, or get divorced. The book outlines numerous other advantages of marriage both to individuals and to society.

Celebrating wedding days takes on a deeper meaning when one realizes that a couple's success in married life has vast repercussions not just on them but on all of church and society. In addition to giving gifts and throwing showers, we might all benefit from a more intentional effort to continue our support for married couples long after the wedding. How to do that?

Here's a list to get you started:

- Remember to celebrate anniversaries, your own and other couples.
 - Read a good book or watch a video program on marriage and share it with another couple.
 - Take your own marriage in for an annual checkup...like attending a retreat or workshop to improve **Communication skills**
 - Support married friends during their difficult times.
 - Trade baby-sitting (or dog-sitting for empty-nesters) so couple friends can get away alone together now and then.
- Pray with your spouse, and ask for God's help. Recent research shows that shared religious practices are predictors of marital stability.