July 24, 2022—17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

After receiving her medical degree, our patron saint Gianna desired to work with her brother Father Alberto who was a missionary priest in Brazil. God had different plans for her. Several obstacles, including health problems, intervened; it was then with her spiritual director’s advice that she discovered her vocation was marriage. She set up a medical practice in Magenta, Italy and eventually met her future husband at the reception for the First Mass of a newly ordained priest friend. They were married in 1955 by her other priest brother, Father Giuseppe, in the Magenta Basilica where Gianna was baptized. The bride and groom and priest are pictured in the second painting in our sanctuary with the façade of the Basilica behind them.

Their daughter, Gianna Emmanuella has said that you cannot understand the meaning of her St. Mom without understanding the life of her holy Dad and the vocation of marriage that they lived. As God intends, in marriage, the two become one flesh. Husband and wife contribute to each other’s lives in a unique way. I spoke about the priesthood a few weeks ago and Deacon John spoke about the diaconate, so I thought it would be good to spend some time on God’s plan for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

The first point is that God has a plan for marriage. Yes, there have always been various customs surrounding marriage; they may be a little foolish at times but still all healthy cultures realize marriage was designed by God, not invented by man. The CCC teaches: “**God Himself is the author of marriage. The vocation to marriage is written in the very mature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator**” (#1603). Today people insist that they can remake marriage into anything they want it to be, including same sex marriage and multiple spouses married to one man or woman. This breaks the connection with the Author of marriage and makes marriage into something it is not meant to be.

When Pope St. John Paul began his teaching on marriage and human sexuality, called the Theology of the Body, he began with the words of Jesus on marriage. The Pharisees questioned Jesus’ teaching on the indissolubility of marriage by pointing out that Moses permitted divorce. He responded: “**For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so**” (Matt. 19:8). With these words, Pope John Paul went back to the book of Genesis to see the original plan of marriage. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that the first three chapters of Genesis are just a primitive explanation of the creation of the universe. They have many deep layers of meaning. Pope John Paul plumbed their depths to discover God’s plan for marriage.

Genesis tells us that we are created in the image and likeness of God. Male and female, He created us. Pope John Paul pointed out that not only are our immortal souls, which have a mind and will, created in the image of God but also our bodies. It is through the body that we express ourselves, particularly in love. We can’t read a person’s mind to know that someone loves us. They express that love through their body by words and deeds and we respond in kind. The highest expression of this love in marriage is through the marital embrace.

Pope John Paul pointed out that genuine love is the sincere gift of oneself to another. When we give of our time, energy, talents, our very self to another without counting the cost, without demanding repayment, then we are making a gift of ourselves and showing genuine love. Adam expressed this when he saw Eve for the first time, saying “**This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**” (Gen, 2:23). He realized he could give himself totally to Eve in love through the bodies that God created for them.

The Son of God, Himself took on a human body to show us God’s love. He told Philip at the Last Supper, “**Have I been with you so long, and still, you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father, how can you say, ‘show us the Father**’” (John 14:9). The love that Jesus showed in His words and deeds were the visible picture of the love of the invisible God. Then, by making a total self-gift on the Cross, Jesus showed us the depth of the love of God for His creatures.

Pope John Paul taught that God created Adam and Eve in what he called, Original Innocence. There was no tendency to sin in them, no selfishness, no ego or laziness or lust. In a sense, it was easy to make a self-gift of one to the other. That was God’s glorious plan for marital love.

Then, the devil entered the scene in Genesis, chapter 3 with his temptation to disobey God. This Original Sin not only destroyed the relationship of man with God, but also damaged the relationship between husband and wife, and indeed all human relationships. It is now difficult to make a self-gift to another because our human weaknesses of pride and laziness and lust and ego work against it. This wasn’t the end of God’s word on marriage. In the fullness of time, He would send His Son to restore marriage and make it one of the seven sacraments of the Church. To be continued next week.