



GOD'S PLAN FOR LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Dr. Edward Sri



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God's Plan for Love and Marriage
John Paul II's "Theology of the Body"

BY
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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| SELF-GIVING LOVE | 7 |
| ORIGINAL SOLITUDE | 8 |
| ORIGINAL UNITY | 9 |
| ORIGINAL NAKEDNESS | 11 |
| ORIGINAL SHAME | 13 |
| BACK TO THE GARDEN | 15 |
| A CATHOLIC PRAYER FOR MARRIED COUPLES | 18 |
| REFLECTION QUESTIONS | 19 |
| FOR FURTHER READING | 20 |
| ABOUT THE AUTHOR | 22 |

GOD'S PLAN FOR LOVE AND MARRIAGE: JOHN PAUL II'S "THEOLOGY OF THE BODY"

BY EDWARD SRI

Marriage is not an easy endeavor, especially in our culture today. Many men and women may go into marriage with much excitement, but also with some uncertainty or trepidation about how to be a good husband or wife, a good father or mother. Even couples with the best of intentions may find themselves eventually struggling in their marriages and wondering why their relationship with their spouse didn't turn out the way they had hoped.

Just consider how widespread the crisis in marriage is today. On one hand, it is often pointed out that about half of all marriages end in divorce. This is indeed a devastating statistic, as so many people (parents and children alike) have felt the pain and heartache of divorce in the modern world.

On the other hand, while the 50% divorce rate is tragic, what is not often discussed is the other half of marriage, which I like to call "the other 50 percent"—those married couples who actually stay together. How are *those* marriages doing? Are those relationships thriving? Among the couples that are still together, are those husbands and wives really happy in their marriage? Do they experience deep intimacy, trust and security with their spouse? Day-in and day-out, do their relationships reflect the total, committed, sacrificial love of Jesus Christ?

The picture even of the marriages that remain intact is not often a pretty one. Studies have shown that most married couples do *not* feel close to each other. In fact, only about 12% of all

married couples say they experience emotional intimacy with their spouse.

Feel the weight of that: About half of all marriages end in divorce, but even among couples who are still together, only about 12% feel close to the person they married. Marriage is in trouble, indeed! We must remember that a good marriage is not one that merely stays together. (Imagine asking a man on his 20th wedding anniversary how his marriage is going and him saying, “It’s going great. We haven’t divorced yet!”). Rather, a good marriage reflects the total, self-less, sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. A good marriage is one that builds deep trust and intimacy. A good marriage is one in which husband and wife can look each other in the eye 10, 20, 30 years into their marriage and say “I love you more now than I did when we were first married.” That’s the kind of marriage we want to shoot for in life—not just one that simply stays together.

In an age when there is much confusion about what love truly is and what it really takes to make a strong marriage, Pope John Paul II dedicated much of his life to casting a vision for how great marriage is meant to be. And he offered us a beautiful picture of love, marriage and sexuality that is very different from what the world teaches us, but one that is truly life-transforming if taken to heart.

Some of the most profound teaching he gave on love and marriage is known as the “Theology of the Body”— a set of 129 catechetical addresses he gave in Rome between 1979-1984, which have revolutionized the way many theologians and catechists now teach about love, sexuality and marriage.

However, while some lay Catholics may respond initially with enthusiasm to the ideas they’ve heard about the Theology of the Body, many of those who actually dare to read these addresses

quickly find themselves overwhelmed by the depth of John Paul II's philosophical, theological and indeed, mystical thought on this topic.

In this short booklet, I will look at five key points from the Theology of the Body, focusing primarily on John Paul II's reflections on what marriage originally was intended to be. While I am not intending to offer a comprehensive overview, it is my hope that a short tour through these five fundamental points will help make John Paul II's monumental work on the Theology of the Body a bit more digestible and practical for married life.

1. SELF-GIVING LOVE

The most essential aspect of love that every marriage needs is what John Paul II calls "self-giving". Near the beginning of the Theology of the Body, he alludes to this point while reflecting on God's words at the creation of Adam and Eve: "Let us create man in our image and after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). This verse tells us God created human persons to mirror His own inner life, which is all about total, self-giving love. God, as the Trinity, exists as a communion of three divine Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) giving themselves completely in love to each other. And God created man and woman "in his image" to reflect that intimate, loving communion in their own lives. Created in the image of God, we were made to live like the Trinity, which means we were made for relationships of love. It's only when we give ourselves in love to others (thus mirroring the life of the Trinity), that we will find the happiness we long for.

The attitude that erodes a marriage and keeps couples from experiencing deep unity and trust in their relationship is selfishness. Selfishness is the very opposite of the self-giving love we are made for. This is an important message for our times, for

we live in an era that encourages us to approach our relationships as ways of seeking our own pleasure, comfort, interests or gain. Especially in marriage, there is a temptation to want our spouse (and our children) to conform to our own plans, schedules and preferences, and we become easily frustrated when they do not. This kind of attitude could be called “self-*getting* love”—a love centered on self, in which we constantly ask “What do *I* get out of the relationship?” For example, even among devout Christians, a selfishness can creep into a marriage that gets me to focus more on what *I* need (as opposed to what my spouse may need), on what *I* want to do with my time on the weekend (as opposed to using my time to help my spouse and children), or on what *I* want (or don’t want) to spend money on (as opposed to what is best for others in my family).

John Paul II constantly reminded us that such self-seeking is a dead end that will never lead to the love and happiness we long for in marriage. Human persons were made for self-*giving* love—a love that selflessly seeks what is best *for the other person*. It is a sacrificial love that pursues what is good for one’s beloved, for one’s marriage and for one’s family more than it pursues one’s own preferences, interests, pleasures or comforts in life. In the end, human persons were made for self-*giving* love, not a self-*getting* love, and they will find fulfillment only when they give themselves in service to others.

2. ORIGINAL SOLITUDE

Now, let us go back to the Garden of Eden and consider God’s original plan for marriage and the profound unity He intended man and woman to experience in self-giving love.

God created Adam in his image and likeness, and as we’ve seen, this indicates that Adam is made to live like the Trinity in a relationship of self-giving love. Next, John Paul II reflects on

God's interesting statement about Adam in Genesis 2:18: "It is not good for man to be alone."

At first glance, this statement seems odd. According to the narrative of Genesis 2, Adam is *not* alone. God has placed him in a garden with water, trees, and vegetation. He has even put Adam alongside other flesh and blood creatures—the animals. Eventhough there are many other animal creatures with bodies just like him in the Garden of Eden, Adam is still in some sense described as being "alone."

This tells us that there is something about Adam that is not found in other bodily creatures. By noticing how he is different from the animals, Adam comes to realize that he is more than a body — that he has a spiritual dimension, a soul. As a body-soul creature, Adam is unique. There is nothing else in creation like him.

And this poses a problem. If Adam is made to live self-giving love—to give himself in a mutual relationship of love—then Adam, at this stage, is in a certain sense incomplete. He is not able to do this yet, for there is no one else like him to give himself to as an equal partner. There is no other human person, no body-soul creature, like him. This is why God says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

John Paul II explains that man only finds fulfillment when he lives in a relationship of mutual self-giving, living not for himself, but for another person. "When God-Yahweh says, 'It is not good that man should be alone' (Genesis 2:18), he affirms that 'alone,' the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing 'with someone'—and put even more deeply and completely—by existing 'for someone'" (p. 182).¹

¹ All page references are taken from John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 2006).

3. ORIGINAL UNITY

In response to Adam's solitude, the Lord creates another human person, Eve, to be his wife. "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'" (Genesis 2:23). John Paul II notes how this is the first time man manifests joy and exaltation.

Before this moment, he had no reason for rejoicing, "owing to the lack of a being similar to himself" (p. 161). But now he finally has someone to give himself to in this unique way. In ecstatic response, he sighs "At last!," for now he is able to live out the self-giving love he was made for, and thus he becomes who he was meant to be through his union with her.

Next, John Paul II reflects on how man and woman "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). He notes how this oneness in flesh does not refer merely to a bodily union, but points to a deeper spiritual union, a union of persons.

Recall how a human person is not just a body, but consists of body *and* soul. John Paul II expounds on how this union of body and soul in a person sheds light on human sexuality. The body has a language that is able to communicate something much more profound than information or ideas. What one does in his body reveals his very self, the "living soul" (p. 183). The body expresses the person and makes visible what is invisible, the spiritual dimension of man (pp. 176, 203).

This has dramatic implications for understanding sexual intercourse. The marital act is not meant to be merely a physical union. It is meant to express an even deeper *personal* union. Since the body reveals the soul, when man and woman give their bodies to each other in marital intercourse, they give *themselves* to each other. Bodily union is meant to express a deeper spiritual union.

The physical intimacy is meant to express an even more profound personal intimacy (cf., p. 176).

John Paul II calls this unique language of the body “the spousal meaning of the body.” This means that our bodies have a marital significance in the sense that they have “*the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” (pp. 185-6).

In this light, we can see that the body will be an important arena in which the drama of relationships between men and women will be played out—for better or for worse. We can approach the bodily union of sexual intercourse as a means to deepening personal communion in marriage. Or we can engage in sexual intercourse primarily with our own pleasure in mind and without any regard for the body’s capacity to express self-giving love—in other words, without any regard for spousal meaning God has given to the body.

Put starkly: A man can view sex as a way of deepening his personal union with his wife, giving himself completely to her and expressing his total commitment to her as a person and to what is best for her. Or he can approach sex merely as a physical act with some woman who happens to give him pleasure—without any real commitment to that woman’s well-being. Instead of being truly committed to the woman as a *person* and to her good, such a man is committed to the woman in that moment primarily for what she provides him: his own sexual satisfaction. This denigration of sex, which is pervasive in our culture today, certainly is a far cry from the beautiful “spousal meaning” God has given to the body.

4. ORIGINAL NAKEDNESS

Next, John Paul II addresses a crucial aspect of the theology of the body—a fundamental concept that he calls “Original Nakedness.” What does it mean when Genesis 2:25 says Adam and Eve were “naked and not ashamed”? Shame involves fear of another person, when we’re not sure we can trust that person. We fear being used or being hurt, so we are afraid of being vulnerable in letting others see us as we really are.

Originally, Adam and Eve were not ashamed. They each had complete confidence, trust and security in their relationship. Their bodily nakedness pointed to an even deeper *personal* “nakedness”, in which they felt free to bear their souls completely to each other without any fear of being used, misunderstood or let down. Adam and Eve understood “the spousal meaning of the body”—not just the body at face value, but the body’s capacity to express love and the communion of persons.

How were they able to have this ideal relationship?

Imagine living in a relationship in which there was absolutely no selfishness. You knew that your beloved was always seeking what was best for you, and not just his own interests. He truly viewed you as a gift that was uniquely entrusted to him and he took this role seriously with a profound sense of responsibility

This is the kind of relationship Adam and Eve had in the garden. Before the fall, sin had not yet entered the world and human persons had self-mastery over their passions and appetites. Thus, with total purity of heart, they each were free from selfish desires and approached each other with reverence, seeking the good of the other and never viewing the other merely as an object to be used.

John Paul II explains that Adam and Eve saw each other with a supernatural perspective—with “the vision of the Creator himself” (p. 157). In other words, they saw each other the way God Himself saw them. Adam saw not just the beauty of Eve’s body, but the whole truth of his beloved as a person. And just as God rejoiced in creating man and woman by saying, “It is good!,” so would Adam have looked upon his wife with a profound sense of awe and wonder, seeing her as the daughter of God who had entrusted herself to him in marriage.

It is as if Adam realized he was holding his wife’s heart in the palm of his hand. Feeling the magnitude of the gift that was entrusted to him, Adam would have been so careful with every word and with every interaction with Eve, always attentive to her needs and gently avoiding anything that would in the slightest bit hurt her. Likewise, Eve would have welcomed Adam as a gift and responded to him with a tremendous sense of responsibility to care for whatever was best for her husband. “Seeing each other reciprocally, through the very mystery of creation as it were, the man and woman see each other still more fully and clearly than through the sense of sight itself...They see and know each other, in fact, with all the peace of the interior gaze, which creates precisely the fullness of the intimacy of persons” (pp. 177-8).

In this kind of environment of complete, mutual love and responsibility, personal intimacy could flourish. In such a relationship of total security and total trust in the other person—when there is no fear of being used or hurt—one feels free to give himself as he really is, knowing that he will be welcomed and fully received as a gift. “The ‘affirmation of the person’ is nothing other than welcoming the gift, which...creates the communion of persons” (p. 188). Thus, originally man and woman did not experience the walls of shame in their relationship. They had no fear that the other would use them, hurt them or ever reject

them. Free from sin, they were free to love. In a relationship of total reciprocal love, the walls of shame are not necessary. Indeed, as John Paul II explains, “immunity from shame” is “the result of love” (p. 191).

5. ORIGINAL SHAME

However, once sin entered the world, man lost the self-mastery necessary to keep selfish desires from growing in his heart and poisoning his relationship. Wounded by original sin, man finds that it is no longer easy for him to control his passions and appetites.

No longer does man easily look upon his wife with “the vision of the Creator” (“It is good!”). No longer does he easily see her as a *person* who has been entrusted to him and as a gift which he longs to serve with selfless love and responsibility.

Now his heart is tainted by selfishness, as he notices himself pursuing his own desires and preferences instead of seeking her well being first. His love for his wife is stained by desires to use her. He even begins to view her primarily in terms of her sexual value—the value of her body or the value of her femininity—as an object to be exploited for his own sensual or emotional pleasure. In sum, he no longer easily sees her value as a *person* to be loved for her own sake. Indeed, this selfishness and lust cannot be overcome without the grace of God.

Imagine the shock Adam must have experienced at that first moment in which he felt the effects of original sin in his life. John Paul II says it is as if Adam “experienced that he had simply ceased...to remain above the world of” animals, which are driven by instinct and desires (TOB, p. 245). Almost like the animals, Adam now finds himself powerfully swayed by his desire to satisfy his own sexual desires, rather than serve his beloved’s good.

No longer mastering their passions, man and woman tend to approach each other with selfish and lustful hearts. That's why Adam and Eve instinctively conceal their sexuality from each other the moment sin and lust enters their lives. They each no longer have total trust that the other is truly seeking what is best for them. They instinctively know that their beloved may use them. Thus, the Biblical account of the fall tells us that right after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they were "naked and ashamed" (Genesis 3:7).

The introduction of sin shatters the original unity of man and woman and hinders personal intimacy in their relationship, for now the defense mechanism of shame enters their relationship. Shame replaced the absolute trust connected with the earlier state of original innocence in the reciprocal relationship between man and woman" (p. 250).

John Paul II explains that the original unity of Adam and Eve dissolved at the Fall because without the total, mutual, selfless love and trust, they no longer felt free to truly give themselves to each other: "Obviously, the first parents did not stop communicating with each other through the body and its movements, gestures, and expressions; but what disappeared was the simple and direct self-communion connected with the original experience of reciprocal nakedness. Almost unexpectedly, an insurmountable threshold appeared in their consciousness that limited the original 'self- donation' to their other with full trust in all that constituted one's identity..." (p. 247).

BACK TO THE GARDEN?

In closing, let's consider some practical ways we can strengthen our spousal union to live out more fully God's original plan for marriage.

First, knowing is half the battle. Simply becoming more aware of God’s plan for marriage helps us to evaluate our own lives, inspires us to be better husbands and wives and helps enkindle a desire to build stronger, deeper marriages. That’s why it is so important to study the rich Catholic vision for marriage and family life—a vision that is very different from what the world has to say about these matters. Especially in an era when there is so much confusion about love, about marriage and about how to be a good husband and wife, we must go out of our way to take time to discover more about God’s plan for marriage. If we are not proactive—if we do not make it a priority to form our minds in the Catholic vision for marriage and family life—we will end up following the ways of the world, which too often lead to disappointment, loneliness and heartache with the one person on earth we were meant to be closest to. Below, there are some recommended resources for feeding our minds on the Theology of the Body and good Catholic perspectives on marriage and family life that can help us build the kind of marriages God wants us to have.

Second, we must be patient with ourselves—and with our spouse! Years of selfishness in our own hearts and patterns of behavior and relating to each other are not going to be changed overnight. In fact, as sinful creatures constantly battling concupiscence (the disordered appetites and desires resulting from original sin that produce an inclination toward sin)², we will never be able to return to the ideal relationship of pre-fallen Adam and Eve.

However, there is hope. Through Christ’s redemptive work in our lives, we will begin to experience the healing of those selfish passions that keep us from the great trust, love and

² See 1 John 2:16 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 405, 1264, 1426, 2515.

personal communion that God wants us to experience in our relationships. And we can access this healing power of God's love in the Church through prayer and the sacraments. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation especially, we can examine the ways our selfishness affects our marriage, seek God's forgiveness and receive grace to help us overcome those sins in the future. Going to confession once a month, for example, can have a huge impact in our marriages.

There is hope even for marriages in crisis. First, we must remember the life-long vow we made to our spouse on our wedding day: "I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life." Second, we may need to seek outside help to salvage a marriage that's heading toward disaster. Many couples have benefited from good marriage counseling or seeking guidance from a priest. Others have benefited from movements such as "Marriage Encounter"—a weekend retreat that has served 2.5 million couples, 80% of whom have said the retreat helped them "fall back in love" and gain new respect for their spouse. One Catholic marriage ministry that offers parish seminars, marriage "coaching" and many resources is Alexander House. They even offer marriage coaching over the phone for couples around the world, whether it be for marriage preparation, marriages in crisis or couples simply wanting to strengthen their union in Christ. For more information, [see http://www.thealexanderhouse.org/colinfo.htm](http://www.thealexanderhouse.org/colinfo.htm).

Finally, *all* married people—whether they are thriving or struggling in their marriages—need to pray. Certainly, we should pray for our marriage. We should pray for our spouse, and we should even pray *with* our spouse. Below you will find some recommended guides on prayer as well as a prayer that spouses can recite together for their marriage. But most of all, we need to

pray for ourselves that we may grow in deeper union with Jesus, so that Christ's love begins to radiate through us in all our words and actions with others, especially our spouse. With my own weak, impatient, prideful, selfish self, I am not able to love my wife the way I would like to. However, by living deeply in union with Jesus Christ, I can begin to love with Christ's love. The more the Holy Spirit transforms our selfish hearts with the total self-giving love of Jesus Christ, the more our relationships will begin to recover something of the original unity of man and woman and the spousal meaning of the body that John Paul II so beautifully described.

A CATHOLIC PRAYER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

Lord Jesus,
grant that I and my spouse may have a true
and understanding love for each other.
Grant that we may both
be filled with faith and trust.
Give us the grace to live
with each other in peace and harmony.
May we always bear with one another's weaknesses
and grow from each other's strengths.
Help us to forgive one another's failings and
grant us patience, kindness, cheerfulness and
the spirit of placing the well-being
of one another ahead of self.

May the love that brought us together
grow and mature with each passing year.
Bring us both ever closer to You
through our love for each other.
Let our love grow to perfection.

Amen.³

³ Accessed at: http://img.soulmatch.com/prayeroftheday/more_prayers.asp?paid=57&faid=1

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Our modern world often views love primarily in terms of one's own feelings. John Paul II stresses that real love consists of "self-giving." What is self-giving love, and how is it different from modern notions of love?
2. What are some specific ways you tend to focus on your own desires and preferences instead of serving the needs of your spouse and children? In other words, what are some ways you fall into selfishness in your marriage?
3. Think about your relationship with your spouse and moments or areas in your life where you have been selfish, focusing more on your own interests and goals than on your beloved's needs and well-being. *How has your selfishness affected your relationship with your spouse? Give some specific examples.*
4. What are some specific things you can do to focus more on the good of your spouse in your marriage? How do you think that would affect your relationship if you did these things?
5. Why was it not good for Adam to be alone? Was it simply because he was lonely? Explain.

6. Explain what John Paul II means by “the spousal meaning of the body.” In light of the spousal meaning of the body, what is the profound significance of marital intercourse? In other words, what is the marital act meant to communicate?

7. What kind of unity did Adam and Eve have originally, before sin entered the world? Why were they able to have such a profound intimacy and trust with each other?

8. What are some practical resolutions you can make to help you build greater intimacy and trust in your marriage?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- ¹ Edward Sri, *Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights from John Paul II's 'Love and Responsibility'* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2007).
- ² Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).
- ³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).
- ⁴ Mary Healy, *Men & Women are from Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2005).
- ⁵ Mary Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2002).
- ⁶ Carl Anderson and Fr. Jose Granados, *Called to Love — Approaching John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Doubleday, 2009).
- ⁷ Jason & Crystalina Evert and Brian Butler, *Theology of the Body for Teens* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2006).
- ⁸ George Weigel, “How Should We Love?” chapter in *The Truth of Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 92-111.
- ⁹ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 335-43 (Historical background and explanation of John Paul II's “Theology of the Body”).
- ¹⁰ Covenant of Love: A parish-based marriage ministry to help build and enrich Christ-Centered Marriages. Founded by Greg and Julie Alexander. <http://www.thealexanderhouse.org/colinfo.htm>

- ¹¹ The Retrouvaille Program: A Catholic weekend marriage program with follow up sessions that help couples heal and renew their marriages. <http://retrouvaille.org/>
- ¹² The “Together with Jesus Couple Prayer Series”:
A non-denominational Christian 6-week program for parishes or small groups to help couples enjoy the gift of praying together in close, lasting ways. <http://www.coupleprayer.org>.
Recommended by epriest.com at
http://www.epriest.com/best_practices/view/102
- ¹³ Peter Kreeft, Prayer in The Luke E. Hart Series Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, 2001)
- ¹⁴ Peter John Cameron, *Lord Teach Us to Pray* in The Veritas Series “Proclaiming the Faith in the Third Millenium” (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, 2000).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Edward Sri is professor of theology and Scripture at the Augustine Institute's Master's in Catechetics and Evangelization program in Denver, Colorado. He is a nationally-known speaker and the author of two Catholic best-selling books, including *The New Rosary in Scripture: Biblical Insights for Praying the 20 Mysteries* (Servant) and *The Da Vinci Deception: 100 Questions About the Facts and Fiction of The Da Vinci Code* (Ascension Press) (coauthored with Mark Shea).

His most recent book, on men-women relationships, is called *Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights on John Paul II's Love and Responsibility* (Servant).

He also is the author of *Mystery of the Kingdom: On the Gospel of Matthew* (Emmaus Road), *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary's Queenship* (Emmaus Road) and *Dawn of the Messiah: The Coming of Christ in Scripture* (Servant) and a co-author of the popular apologetics series, *Catholic for a Reason*.

Edward is a founding leader with Curtis Martin of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). He appears on EWTN and regularly writes and speaks on marriage, Scripture, apologetics and the Catholic faith. He also serves as a visiting professor at Benedictine College, where he taught full-time for nine years. Edward holds a doctorate from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He now resides with his wife Elizabeth and their four children in Littleton, Colorado.

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis. The Synod Fathers have gratefully taken note of the work of catechists, acknowledging that they "have a task that carries great importance in animating ecclesial communities." It goes without saying that Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children...; however, we all ought to be aware of the "rights" that each baptized person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.

Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by the Venerable Servant of God Father Michael J. McGivney, is the world's largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit www.kofc.org.

Whether you have a specific question or desire a broader, deeper knowledge of the Catholic faith, CIS can help. Contact us at:



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Proclaiming the Faith in the Third Millennium