

Spirituality and Sexuality in Marriage

By Joe & Patty James

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Patty and I are in love. We think our love is unique; it is to us. But we also know that every couple in love is unique in their own way. After 20 years of marriage and six "unique" children, we realize even more the life-giving value of our love. Our love is a mysterious source of energy that gives our family vitality. Our sexual intimacy is the most personal, physical expression of our love. It is, in fact, its symbol and seal. And our love is visibly represented by our children as the natural yet marvelous fruit of our physical unity. We treat our sexuality with respect and dignity because we believe in the dignity and sacredness of life. It is a gift to us from God in our Sacrament. Our expression of love in sex and its connection with the creation of new life causes us to marvel at its beauty.

Joe and I cannot separate the growing depth and holiness and beauty of our intimacy, our physical oneness with each other, with our growing depth, awareness and oneness with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our ideal as a married couple is our call to holiness. We are proud to be among the vanguard of an ideal here in our own encountered community, and, in fact, a part of a community that crosses oceans and continents. We see our call to unity, to holiness, as a plea from the many couples and priests in our "community" who have a stake in our marriage, as well as a plea from Our Lord to our Heavenly Father "that they may be one, just as You and I are One, I in them and You in Me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that You sent Me and that You love them as You love Me."

As a Catholic couple, Patty and I seek Jesus as the Foundation of our holiness Through Him we experience the Father's love. Through His Word we find direction, meaning, and hope in our life Through the Sacraments of His Church we find His healing touch As a husband and wife, we have worked for many years to establish a strong Catholic family where love for God and one another is lived out. Patty and I have tried to live out our call to holiness in spite of making our share of mistakes and struggles. As a result, our family has come to a place of stability based on sound Christian principles for our life together. Unity is the goal of our married relationship and our family relationship.

Our love in our marriage is a sign of God's love for His people. Our love grows through our communication. Communication in our marriage is the means by which Joe and I build unity, and our sexual relationship is very important to us in establishing and maintaining our unity. This is God's plan in our marriage, a gift from God.

Patty and I see our sexual union, our love making, also as a mystery. No rational explanation can fully account for its powerful and pervasive influence in our marriage relationship, and indeed, in our life itself.

Even though it is primarily a physical act it draws from us much more than mere physical sensation. Even though its primary purpose is procreation, it is not usually its immediate objective in our desire for the uniting of our bodies. And somehow, the mystery of our sexuality so merges and unites us that the Bible speaks of us as "one flesh."

Our love making is a deep and total giving of oneself to the other. As our relationship grows with each other and with our God, Joe and I see more clearly and experience more wonderfully the mystery of our physical intimacy. This is God's plan for Joe and me. Our spirituality as a couple is our caring and reaching out to each other in a physical and emotional way. We are human beings made in God's image and likeness. We are temples of His Holy Spirit. In our Sacrament, God intended that the mystery of our physical oneness would have wonderful consequences which would make us fully human and fully alive. It has!

As a Sacramentally married couple, Patty and I have a commitment to each other. In the presence of our God, every time we experience the joy and the closeness, the fun and the physical pleasure of our love making, we are living out our commitment to each other and to our God. We ask Our Lord to be the core of our relationship and be in our midst. Jesus said, "Where two or more are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them " And so, as I reach out to Patty caring for her and loving her, embracing her and drawing her close, I know that God is really asking this of me. In fact, this oneness becomes our living mark of holiness as a couple in love.

God uses the mystery of our sexual relationship to affect our entire relationship. It affects our relationship with our children and with the world that God has called us to serve and show His love. The miracle of our physical oneness allows Joe and me to reach out to each other in love, to heal each other when the pressures of life are pressing in on us, and to celebrate the joys of our life together. Our physical intimacy is an outward sign to each other of the Sacrament that we are. We are focusing on each other, putting each other first, giving each to the other with all our hearts.

The Church teaches through the Gospel that I must love Patty as Christ loves the Church. When she is close at my side I must love her tenderly, unselfishly, patiently, and warmly. The teachings of our Catholic Church call us as husband and wife to make Christ present to one another. Married people influenced by the world's pull to ego, self-gratification, and self-satisfaction may read this with disbelief. Nevertheless, it is a fact; we are called to make Christ present to one another in our Sacrament of married love. When Patty sees me coming home from work late after a long day weary and overworked, and I see her chasing the children to bed amid the chaos of socks and undershirts, school books and lunchboxes, bath towels and pajamas, I admit the first thought to come to us is rarely "Ah, yes, here we are making Christ present to each other."

Actually, we are slow to see this even during the happier moments that we are making Christ present to each other. The reason is because our lives are very ordinary, very human. But, it is just this ordinary, human day-in and day-out relationship in our marriage which has the extraordinary possibility of showing each other the love of Christ;

or rather, letting Christ show Himself to us, through each other. Joe and I, in our Sacrament, have been given by God a special opportunity to learn about His tremendous love for us by the mystery of our physical intimacy and because we have pledged ourselves to a life-giving relationship of love with each other for life.

The physical expression of this total pledge to each other in our Sacrament is our sexual intercourse; making love. "Making Love" is a good description of intercourse because that is just what it does - or should do. It not only expresses the love between us but it also makes our love for each other grow. And that is what Joe and Patty and their Sacrament are all about. We are not using up the love we started with 20 years ago, but we are continually making our love grow. This doesn't only happen through our sexual relationship, but through all the experiences that we share as a couple. Not only do we experience the presence of Christ in our tender affectionate experiences, but in our sacrifices, and through our mistakes and inadequacies, and in our decision to love and forgive each other. At these times, "Making Love" says "Yes, I love you, Darling; I forgive you; I accept you; I will heal you; we will grow and change together."

As a Catholic couple, so strongly influenced and blessed by our Catholic Faith, Joe and I believe with all our hearts that because we share in Christ's life, our love is His love. We believe that in loving one another, we bring Jesus to one another; we bring Him to life in each other. We are transforming each other.

Patty and I are eager to grow in our love and in our intimacy. We know that we can grow to understand the true nature and mystery of our married love as we grow in the true knowledge and awareness of our God, who "is Love." He called us into being because He loved us. He has called us to newness of life because His love is unending!

It is this kind of unending love that He has called us to. Our love is creative because we share in God's love. When we love each other and when we hold one another close, Patty and I are bringing "new life" into existence in each other. We are, in fact, making each other "Dulcinea."

Our love for each other in our Sacrament helps Joe and me to grow and develop as human beings, as a Christian couple facing a non-Christian world, and best of all, as God's children. Yes, I can honestly say, our love for one another is truly life-giving, for it gives the highest life of all, Christ's life.

And, that is why our marriage is a Sacrament, because it is a sign of the love of Jesus for us and for the world. When Patty and I stood at the altar of Holy Trinity Catholic Church on our Wedding Day that snowy, wonderful December 31, 1960, Our Lord, Jesus Christ reached out to us, and His loving gesture transformed our human love into the love of God Himself, and we became a *Sacrament*.