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## TO ENGAGED COUPLES ON THE OCCASION OF ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

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Hello!

As shortly you will be taking the marriage preparation course, I would like to take a few moments to tell you how good it is to know that you plan to have a Christian marriage, if such is the Lord's desire. I thank the Marriage Preparation team for its dedication to this cause: they are competent, and you can count on them to better appreciate the commitment of Christian couples in the world, as well as their mission of love, their mission of life.

With you I welcome the word of God which reveals His kindness and His passionate love for each and everyone of us. With you I want to share in the life of the Lord, so that our world be more vibrant and more loving. With you I give thanks that through Christian marriage a bond is created between divine life and human life. With you I pray to the Lord.

A beautiful text from the *Song of Songs* reminds us of the greatness of human love which is a sign of God's love for us: "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely..." "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine... [He said to me:] 'Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it' [2:14; 6:3a; 8:6-7a]."

I wish that all lovers would never tire of repeating daily to one another these marvellous, loving, poetic words, and that you also would be able to repeat these simple and moving words to your spouse. "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice:" This is a deep never fulfilled yearning. In the lover's gaze and voice can be discerned the full measure of tenderness and passion of two lovers who are filled with mutual admiration, regard, and respect of one another. And this craving to see and to hear must not disappear from one day to the next but must become ever stronger, ever more intense. One should never tire to look into the face of the beloved...

How we would wish that like feelings exist among engaged couples, married couples, and families. Our greatest wish would be that these sentiments contribute to a civilisation of love... The singer Raymond Lévesque sings, "When people shall live in love." And Jacques Brel sings "When all we have is love." There is such a yearning that love last forever. It does one good to see happy people, loving people!

Through this special gaze and special voice one can perceive another gaze and another voice: the gaze of God, the voice of God. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are signs of God, reflections of God. And when a couple are united in the sacrament of matrimony they become for one another, "Face of God" and "Word of God" in a very special way. Through those Christian couples we meet, we can observe through faith the very love of Jesus for each and everyone of us. "Abide in my love," says Jesus, "so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" [John 15:10a, 11b]. Isn't it true that loving one another warmly, tenderly, and always is worth it?

"So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." This does not mean that there are no more problems, that one is insured against all risk. What is certain is that for the Christian couple there is this loving presence of two lovers and the marvellous, abiding presence of Jesus at the heart of their love. "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" [Matthew 28:20b]. With such a presence, we need fear nothing; with Jesus, the biggest crosses are turned into glorious ones.

In the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we read the following on the sacrament of matrimony: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament[...]" "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws... God himself is the author of marriage.' The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator[...]" God who created man out of love also calls him to love[...]" Since God created man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation[...]" [No. 1601, 1603, 1604].

"Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Saviour, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony. Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, [...] to bear one another's burdens, [...] and to love one another with supernatural, tender and fruitful love." [No. 1642] May these words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remind you of the greatness of the vocation and mission of Christian marriage.

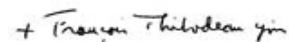
I have found a beautiful prayer for you which I would like to share with you in friendship. I believe that you will very quickly make it your own, so that you may always be attentive to the gaze and voice of the other.

"Lord, we offer you our love, so that it never die. May it be rooted in you, so that both of us may seek to love and to give more than we receive. May the days of happiness not engulf us in indifference for everybody else. May the days of sorrow disable us but rather strengthen our love.

Lord, you are Life, may we never refuse life that would be born of our love. Lord, you are Truth, may we never refuse the truth but always be open to one another. Lord, you are the Way, may we never make it burdensome, but may we ever walk hand in hand.

Lord, you gave us Mary your Mother, the ever faithful, strong, and faithful one, may she be watch over the family we want to have. May her faithfulness, her strength, and her love keep us faithful, strong, and loving... forever."

With all my friendship and gratitude.



+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston

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