
WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE (2)



My prayer is that this excerpt from my 2004 pastoral letter help us discover the beauty and greatness of the sacrament of matrimony.

SPIRIT OF INTELLIGENCE

The gift of intelligence is given first of all to enable us to understand the Word of God and to apply it to our daily lives. As the earth needs water, to bear fruit, the Christian couple welcomes the Word of God to help them grow and blossom. Holy Scripture helps us understand more and more the wonderful covenant which the Lord has concluded with humankind. To make us better understand these bonds of affection and friendship which the Lord develops with his children, Scripture sends us back to the image of the union of man and woman. We have only to recall the book of the Song of Songs which praises the love of man and woman, a sign of God's affectionate and passionate love for us. "My lover belongs to me and I to him. Set me as a seal on your heart... For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion; its flames are a blazing fire. Deep waters cannot quench love." The book of Hosea helps us better understand God's relationship to His chosen people, in the guise of the beloved: "So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart... I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord."

SPIRIT OF COUNSEL

Among the varied and wonderful gifts which the Spirit gives us, there is the gift of counsel which helps us choose what we must do in order to live according to the Gospel, especially in those more difficult moments of life. The Christian couple chooses from the many influences which nourish them, and needs to use the gift of counsel especially when the time comes for making important decisions. This does not mean the Spirit directly whispers answers to our deepest interrogations, or that he clearly indicates the path to follow, in life. However, he puts into our hearts and along our paths all that is required for us to discern correctly regarding our choice of lifestyle and careers, and our daily decisions. By becoming aware of all the qualities, powers, talents, and attitudes the Lord has put in us, by becoming aware of the needs and expectations of our milieu, through prayer we gradually come to determine along which paths the Lord is leading. The Lord is not untouched by the prayer of his Church, nor by the humble prayer of the lovers.

SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE

If in the Garden of Eden there were strange and mysterious trees – especially the tree of knowledge of good and evil which our first parents were forbidden to eat, such is not the case in the Church. The gift of knowledge which the Spirit gives us helps us understand life's true meaning and answer the important questions which plague man and woman: Why death? Why suffering? Why love? This gift of knowledge helps us enter more deeply into God's intimacy. It really helps us better understand the meaning of life, and the place of God in the midst of our life's adventure in Church and world. The prophet Micah puts it this way: "You have been told, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: only to do right and love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi. 6:8). This gift of the spirit helps us better understand our Father, one another, and others; it helps us see ourselves and others generally as Christ himself sees us, and to look at our brothers and sisters with his eyes, listen with his ears, and love with his heart. In such a context, the way a lover looks upon his beloved and the way the beloved listens to the voice of the lover are part of a wonderful exchange.

SPIRIT OF FILIAL LOVE

The Pharisees asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, and he answered: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with you whole soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well" (Mt. 22:37-40). Far from opposing one another, love of God and neighbour attract one another. Saint John even says: " Love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God. The man without love has known nothing of God, for God is love" (1 Jn. 4:7-7). We must ever keep in mind that the source of all love between man and woman is God, and that this love is a manifestation of God's own love. The gift of filial love moves man to love woman day by day and week by week, and woman to love her spouse in difficult times as in good times.

TESTIMONY: GOD AT THE CENTRE OF OUR LIFE AS A COUPLE

It was in 1982 that our adventure took root. One was still studying and the other was at the other end of the country: our love grew through letter writing. Not an easy way to start a relationship! That is why we firmly believe that God has been with us at each stage of our lives. It was only at the end of my studies – that is, four years later – that we decided to marry. We reached this decision because of our desire to know one another better, to share a common life and establish a family. Who among us does not have challenges to take up, at some time? Jules and I believe that our biggest challenge, the one which convinced us of the strength of the love we had for one another, was to see this love grow and develop despite the physical distance separating us. This, to us, was the biggest obstacle we had to overcome. Through force of circumstance we have had to move several times to look for a good job to support our family's needs. We have had to face precarious financial situations. And who among us is immune to illness? One of us has already been afflicted by illness for over a year. The loss of loved ones was another difficult time of trial. The Holy Spirit gave us strength and courage, and thanks to our union with God, thanks also to dialogue which is most important in our life as a couple, and to what we were taught by our parents regarding joy and sorrow, we, too, have learned to thank God for His wonders and the splendour of His creation all around us. He has graced us with two beautiful children whom we dearly cherish. When we take the time to look around us and we see separated couples, unhappy children and broken families, it frightens us and makes us think. It is up to us to nourish our life as a couple, for our family life to continue to grow. We know that we are aware that the future has other stages for us to go through, but through the sacrament of matrimony we have learned that by placing God at the heart of our couple He will always be there to guide us, support us, and enlighten us. Let us make room for Him! To God we are His children, and he loves us.

– Jules and Nicole

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