

# Bridal Love

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Marriage customs in the Bible center around the two events of betrothal and wedding. The wedding itself did not include a religious ceremony, although it is probable that the betrothal was ratified by an oath (Ezek 16:8; Mal 2:14); and after the Exile written contracts were drawn up and sealed. On the day of the wedding the bride dressed in white, elaborately embroidered robes, bedecked herself with jewels (Isa 61:10), and put on a veil (Gen 24:65) and a garland. The bridegroom, attended by friends and accompanied by musicians and singers, went to the bride's house (Matt 25:7); and then after receiving her from her parents with their blessing he conducted the whole party back to his own house. On the way other friends of the bride and groom joined the party, and there was much music and dancing (Ps 45:15). A feast was held at the bridegroom's house. Later in the evening the bride's parents escorted her to the nuptial chamber (Gen 29:27; Judg 14:12). The wedding festivities included much music and joking.

## Wedding Imagery in the Bible

Both in the Old and New Testament, God uses wedding imagery to describe His union with His Church. He says, "For your Maker is your husband. The Lord Almighty is His name" (Isa 54:5). God goes on to say, "For the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be merry. As a young man marries a virgin, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isa 62:4-5). In Jeremiah 2, God says, "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me through the desert.'" Further on He repeats, "Return, faithless people, for I am your husband." The most beautiful imagery is used in the book of Hosea where God asked His most unusually loving prophet Hosea to marry an unfaithful spouse. And then God says, "Remember, I am God, not man." In short, we should never be so foolish as to compare Hosea's love for his wife Gomer with the love God has for us, for He is God, not man. He loves us beyond worthiness or unworthiness. He loves us in the evening sun and the morning rain. He loves us without regret or breaking point. He says, "Israel, My beloved, I cannot stop loving you." "I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord" (Hos 2:19-20). But the most beautiful of all the Old Testament Scriptures on the bridal union of God with His people is found in the Song of Songs. It would have to be read in its entirety to get all the marriage and even romantic overtones.

## New Covenant

The New Covenant of the Messiah with His new people, the Church, is also described using this same imagery: John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom, and to Himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn 3:29).

Jesus describes His followers as His intimate friends, the friends of the bridegroom. We have been invited to participate more intimately in the joy of the wedding banquet, which is a figure of

the boundless happiness of the Kingdom of Heaven. On many occasions Our Lord honored His followers by describing them as His friends. One day the Master, stretching out His hand over His disciples, pronounced these consoling words: "Behold My mother and My brethren" (cf. Mt 12:49-50). And He taught us that those who believe and follow Him with deeds, "Whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven," occupy in His heart a place of privilege and are united to Him with bonds that are stronger than those of blood. In the discourse at the Last Supper He tells them, in tones of endearing simplicity and sincerity, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you... I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:9, 15).

## **Jesus is Example**

The most powerful example of a true and faithful friend is Jesus Himself. Even while we were sinners, He proved His love for us to the shedding of His blood. He calls us to be His friends. Different people responded to that friendship. Some of the Pharisees and Scribes rejected it. The common people, in general, accepted Him, but when Holy Week came they, too rejected Him. Seventy became His acquaintances. Twelve would become His friends, three of the twelve would become His close friends, and St. John alone would be an intimate friend. He would even lay his head on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper.

## **An Example for Us**

Jesus said, "Just as much as the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." He went on to say, "Love one another as I have loved you." Thus the love the Father passed on completely though Jesus works in and through us to each other. Like Jesus, we are to love one another with His unconditional, affirming and sacrificial love. We are to love, to try to understand, to think well of others, to serve them, to offer our lives at least in some way for them. We are to strive to be as sensitive to the feelings of others as Jesus proved Himself to be for us. Jesus tells us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

## **The Focolare Method**

Chiara Lubich started a lay apostolic movement after World War II called the Focolare Movement. Focolare is the Italian word for "hearth", the center of warmth for the home. Every month her members would meditate upon a primary Scripture. One month, their Scripture was to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. They were taught to be so forgetful of self that when a person entered their lives who was sad and weeping, they were to enter that sadness even though they might be happy at the time. Conversely, if the new person was rejoicing, they were to fully enter into their joy, even though they themselves may be sad.

## **Love Means To Be Empty of Self**

This is the kind of self-emptied love that Jesus taught us to forget about self and to concentrate on others. On the cross, during the Passion, Jesus forgot his own pain and suffering and concentrated on Simon the Cyrenean, Veronica, the women of Jerusalem, His mother, St. John, and even the good thief.

## **Kenosis**

St. Paul understood that when he said, "Let that mindset be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, that even though He was God, He did not see divinity itself as something to be clung to. Rather He emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, was born into lowly human estate, became obedient, even obedient to death on the cross."

## **Qualities of Friendship**

A true Christ-like friend shows forth certain qualities of love. First, their love is faithful. A faithful friend is a friend indeed, standing by you both in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, in weakness and in strength, on sunny days and on rainy days. A friend is, secondly, open. A friend opens their heart to you and trusts you to walk gently through it, passing over some of the foolish and weak things you cannot help but notice. Third, a friend is honest. They play no games with you nor your heart. They are true to the core. If you want to know what they really think, all you have to do is ask them. Fourth, and most important, a friend is loving. They love you and try to understand you. They always see your good and they care about your feelings. Fifth, a true friend is humble. They strive to get pride and arrogance out of their own heart so that they can humbly serve you. They respect your friendship and you too much to use you. Sixth, a true friend is pure. They would never go beyond the moral boundaries that God sets up for all friendship. Seventh, a true friend is zealous for your salvation, even to the point of correcting you at times. As the saying goes, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." We add to that, "Friends don't let friends go to hell."

## **Girl Scout Motto**

There is a Girl Scout motto that says, "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold." Friendship has to be persevering. We shouldn't change our friends the way children do, who allow themselves to be tossed about by the fickle motions of sentimentality. "I will not be ashamed to protect a friend" (Sir 22:25). Don't abandon him in his hour of need, don't forget him, don't deny him your affection, because friendship is the mainstay of life. Let us carry one another's burdens, as the Apostle tells us. If a man's prosperity benefits all his friends, why shouldn't he count on their help in moments of adversity? Let us help our friend with our counsels. Let us unite our efforts to his. Let us share his afflictions.

## **Loyalty**

And when the occasion arises, let us put up with great sacrifices out of loyalty to our friend. We may perhaps have to face antagonisms to defend the cause of an innocent friend, and be prepared to receive insults when we try to reply and rebut those who attack and accuse him. In adversity true friendship is tested because in prosperity everybody appears faithful.

