

Spiritual Life of the Newly Married Couples: A Practical Guide

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Introduction

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church (Eph.5:31-32)”. The marital union between a man and woman could be the greatest miracles in all of creation and it is also something more as it has a deep *spiritual* significance. This union calls for physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual intimacy. This marital union which is the foundation of family can change everything for better and for worse depending on the intimacy of the spouses. Today, the contemporary married life in the busy, distracted, individualistic, cell phone obsessed, consumer driven, media (particularly social media) saturated, and work oriented world, is towards less spark, less connection, less intimacy, and less focus on the couple relationship. It gives a clear picture of why many marriages decline over time. It is in this alarming situation, this topic “spiritual life of the newly married couples: A practical guide” becomes so relevant and inevitable to exhort the newly married couples to focus on their spiritual life already in their early years of marriage, as it sustains other intimacies to have a happy and intimate marriage.

As the Judicial Vicar of the diocese of Vellore for the past six years, the personal witnesses have been - the majority of the nullity cases filed by the parties fall within the first five years of marriage. Early years of marriage can be a roller coaster; couples can enjoy all good feelings, at the same time scream due to feelings of anxiety, crisis, incompatibility, insecurity, etc. If the newly married couples take this early years of marriage for granted and assume that they will have the same kind of time and life that they have for each other once kids and careers start kicking in to high gear will be in for a huge and unpleasant surprise.¹ On the other hand, once good spiritual habits are laid down in the early years of marriage, they stay closer, stronger and happier when life starts picking up speed.

Therefore, the newly married couples, who begin their new way of life, must adhere to the spiritual realm of their marriage in order to establish a family that God wants them to have, founded on covenantal love that satisfies not only their bodies but also the souls.

I. Understanding Spirituality: Some Preliminary Notions

1. 1. Spirituality, Spiritual life and Christian Spirituality

“**Spirituality**” no longer refers exclusively or even primarily to prayer and spiritual exercises. Neither does it refer to an elite state nor a superior practice of Christianity.

¹ Greg and Lisa Popcak, *Just Married: A Guide to Surviving and Thriving in the Early Years of Marriage*, Pauline Press, Mumbai, 2014, p. 9.

The term has been broadened to include the whole of faith life as well as the life of the person as a whole, including its bodily, psychological, social and political dimensions². Spirituality is a human experience. Everyone has spirituality, some means of experiencing a relationship with God, or a higher Power. Sandra Schneider describes spirituality as “consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self- transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives.”³

For G. Foley, “Spirituality has to do with the way we live our daily lives. It does not make us other-worldly but more fully alive. Many people relate it to formal prayer and church attendance, even ascetical practices.”⁴ Spirituality can also refer to the attitude of the mind one has towards the ethical or moral codes or standards or values or the norms observed in society for the sake of common good.⁵

“**Spiritual life**” and Spirituality are closely linked with interior life, religious life; however, we cannot say these two mean the same (Spirituality- entire personality- spiritual life facilitates the perfection of that personality). But many agree that they mean the same. We consider both are the same in this paper. Therefore, spirituality can be explained as the nature of the spirit or the soul, or the Spirit of God or the nature of God.

“**Christian Spirituality**” is seeking the divine in one’s own inner core and choosing deliberately to follow a kingdom lifestyle. For Christians this is following the authentic kingdom message of Jesus”.⁶ Christian Spirituality is a life lived in accordance with the spirit (Rom 8:5) and lived according to Christ and Gospel in a given concrete situation/given socio-cultural context. Hence, Christian spirituality is never static, but dynamic according to the signs of the time. This spirituality should be lived according to one’s specific vocation: Vocation to Married life, Vocation to Priestly life, Vocation to Religious life and Vocation to single life. Christian spirituality can be understood as the way in which Christian individuals or groups experience the presence of God, which stems from a personal relationship with God. “Christian spirituality can also be understood as the response of the Christians to the call of the Church, the body of Christ, to holiness.”⁷ Christian spirituality can also be viewed as “the life of the spirit of Christ in man as an entire person in his interpersonal relationship with others and his relationship with the world in the given concrete historical situation.”⁸

² S. P. Pretorius, “Understanding Spiritual Experience in Christian Spirituality”, in *Acta Theologica Supplementum*, Vol. 11, 2008, p.150.

³ Quoted in TONI ROWLAND, “*Amoris laetitia* and a Spirituality of Family Life: A Personal and Professional Response” in *INTAMS Review*, 2016, p. 238.

⁴ G. FOLEY: *Family-Centred Church: A New Parish Model*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995, pp111-112.

⁵ F. Antony Samy, *Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, St Paul’s Publication, Mumbai, 2002, p. 19.

⁶ A. B. Smith, *A Reason for Living and Hoping*, St Pauls, London, 2002, p.123.

⁷ F. Antony Samy, *Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, p. 21.

⁸ J. Ponnore, *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest in the Context of North Indian Missionary Activity*, p.15.

1.2. Marital and Family Spirituality

Marriage, presented in its identifying elements, is defined as a partnership of the whole of life: a conjugal community of full, complete, total, exclusive, indissoluble life in which the whole person is involved and which embraces one's entire existence in all its aspects, including those most intimate, in order to actualize the biblical 'one flesh' in its full and integral significance. It is this character proper to matrimonial covenant that essentially distinguishes it from every other union which can bind two persons for reasons of specific ends: economic, organizational, cultural, etc.⁹

Marital Spirituality relates to how Christian married couples are aware of the unitive and procreative aspects of their marriage, their lifelong commitment, and seek the active presence of the Holy Spirit in their relationship as they strive to live out that commitment in their daily lives.

Family is "an intimate community of persons bound together by blood, marriage, or adoption, for the whole of life. In our Catholic tradition, the family proceeds from marriage, an intimate, exclusive, permanent, and faithful partnership of husband and wife."¹⁰ In his letter *Gratissimam sane* on the occasion of the 1994 International Year of the Family, St John Paul referred to the phrase "domestic church" (LG 11), and wished it would remain alive in people's minds while being aware of the changed conditions of families today.¹¹ *Familiaris consortio* includes "An ever deeper communion grows with the spiritual bonds of love."¹² In simpler terms this spirituality of family relationships is built on marriage, or relationships derived from marriage, and its purpose is to share love.

Family Spirituality, *Amoris laetitiam* notes that it is linked with one's understanding of family as well as one's worldview and in fact becomes a worldview. The characteristics of a family spirituality include unconditional love, communication, belonging, conflict-forgiveness-healing, family goals, security of permanence and interdependence versus independence.¹³

⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, n.48; Code of Canon Law, can. 1055; L. Chiappetta, *Il matrimonio nella nuova legislazione canonica e concordataria: manuale giuridico-pastorale*, Roma, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1990, p. 10.

¹⁰ NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES, COMMITTEE ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: *a Family Perspective in Church and society*, Washington: USCCB, 2004, 14; The Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family, Marriage and "de facto" Unions*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticana, 2000, p.20.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II: Letter to Families for the International Year of the Family *Gratissimam sane*, 3; available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html; *Lumen gentium* (LG 11), defined family as a domestic Church.

¹² John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*: Apostolic Exhortation, Carmel International Publishing House, Kerala, 2014, n. 21, p. 38.

¹³ Francis, *Amoris laetitiam*, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Carmel International Publishing House, Kerala, India, no. 315, p.260.

1.3. Spouse Spirituality: A Special Concern

Being and Becoming “One” is the Foundation of Spouse Spirituality

Spirituality as one’s personal relationship with God is a very complex concept. It is influenced by one’s values that have been taught and adopted yet is also related to how one works with one’s conscience. Spouse spirituality is unique and doubly complex in “marrying” two individuals on many levels while retaining their individuality too. Marriage is the foundation for spouse spirituality and their oneness. Marriage as an intimate communion of life and love is the closest and most intimate of human friendships. Marriage calls for mutual self surrender so intimate and complete that the two spouses become “one”, yet without losing their uniqueness.¹⁴ Encountering the being of one's partner -- really seeing and experiencing that unique person -- is a deeply moving spiritual meeting, spirit with spirit. Meeting of two elements, two beings, two poles, two intellectuals, two backgrounds, two worlds becoming “one” is the foundation of spouse spirituality.

The “Other” is the Core of Spouse Spirituality

Inter personal relation or ‘being for others’ is fundamental and core of spouse spirituality. “Man cannot be a subject whose centre is himself, condemned to remain enclosed in an impoverishment which lies below his true ontological statues”.¹⁵ Therefore the person is radically a ‘being for others.’ He or she cannot be himself or herself if he or she is not for others. Being for others is necessary in order to grasp fully one’s own nature and identity, in order to ‘recognize’ oneself and develop capacities which could not be unfolded by oneself, in order to increase one’s potential for action by learning from other person’s knowledge, example and difference.¹⁶ Recognizing one’s dignity in other is the spouse spirituality and this particular form of recognition and way of treating someone in the same way as I am is called Love .This ‘Other’, this ‘Love’ is the core of spouse spirituality.

Deepest understanding is the essential element of spouse spirituality. Understanding is not about simple knowing of each other, but finding or searching meaning for one’s life in other. It is about one completing the other. Spouse spirituality is all about husband living according to the spirit of wife and wife according to the husband and both together according to the spirit of Christ and gospel values. This extraordinary understanding of spouses is a lifelong process and a risky process too but this risk taking is the starting point and core of the spouse spirituality.

In spouse spirituality husband becomes the replica of wife and wife the replica of the husband. This oneness and other centeredness is the logic of spouse spirituality. It is well portrayed in our ancient Tamil literature குறுந்தொகை 40: “யாயும் ஞாயும்

¹⁴ Christopher West, Good News about Sex and Marriage: Answers to your Honest Questions about Catholic Teaching, St Pauls, Mumbai, 2012, p.50.

¹⁵ Juan Ignacio Banares, “De Matrimonio”, in Exegetical Commentary of the Code of Canon Law, Vol.111/2,Wilson and Lafleur, Montreal, Canada, 2004, p. 1035.

¹⁶ Ibid.

யாரா கியரோ, எந்தையும் நுந்தையும் எம்முறைக் கேளிர், யானும் நீயும் எவ்வழி அறிதும், செம்புலப் பெயல்நீர் போல, அன்டபுடை நெஞ்சம் தாங்கலந் தனவே”.

The underlying difference between family spirituality and spouse spirituality is: family spirituality is extended to children, elders and relatives in the family, where as spouse spirituality is exclusively of the spouses. This spouse spirituality is fundamental for family, and social spirituality. Spouse spirituality is the highest form of spirituality as human beings are fully involved in all aspects.

Well Being of the Spouses is the Upshot of Spouse Spirituality

Good of the spouses consists in the growth and maturing of the spouses as persons, through the mutual assistance, comforts, and consolations but also the demands hardships of conjugal life when lived according to God’s plan”.¹⁷ The partnership of whole life constituted by both spouses contains and develops itself in two dimensions: “first, the relationship itself of the spouses, each one seeking the good of the other, which requires the mutual giving and acceptance of the sexual dimension of each one of them, and consequently of his or her potential fatherhood and motherhood; Secondly, in turn, the ordination of the partnership to the generation and education of offspring.¹⁸ While, each one seeking the good of the other includes the sexual dimension of each one of them to fatherhood or motherhood of the spouse, the spiritual dimension of each one of them to holy parenthood should not be omitted. The key canon on marriage (C.1055 §1) also states that the well being of the spouses (*Bonum coniugum*) which is much broader than ‘mutual help’ (*Mutuum adiutorium*) includes and presupposes a readiness to help one another in all spheres of marital life,¹⁹ that is, not merely a physical sexual union, but a total union on all levels between equal partners.”²⁰

Spiritual Well Being of the Spouses

The Spiritual well being of the spouses refers to their shared care for their souls and pursuit for the spiritual meaning of their life. Sharing life’s ultimate meaning with another person is the spiritual call of spouses or of soul mates. Like yeast in a loaf of bread, spirituality will ultimately direct and determine whether their marriage rises successfully or falls disappointingly flat. Therefore, the spiritual dimension of marriage is a practical source of well being of the spouses and the shared commitment for spiritual discovery gives oneness and a meaningful sense of purpose in marriage²¹.

When we discuss on the well being of the spouses, we address the spiritual well being of the spouses too and communion of persons oriented towards the

¹⁷ D. Kimengich, “The *Bonum coniugum*: A Canonical Appraisal, Pontificium Athenaeum sanctae crucis, Rome, 1997, p.113.

¹⁸ Juan Ignacio Banares, “*De Matrimonio*”, p. 1055.

¹⁹ G. J.Woodall, A Passion for Justice: An Introductory Guide to the Code of Cannon Law, Grace wing, England, 2011, p.359.

²⁰ Gerard Sheehy et al., The canon Law letter of spirit, A Cassel Imprint, London, 1996, p.527.

²¹ <https://www.symbis.com/blog/importance-of-spiritual-intimacy/>

sanctification of the spouses. In explaining the spirituality of marriage and family, it was stated that the spirituality of spouses and family lies in their supernatural communion. "Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion. Just as God dwells in the praises of his people (cf. Ps 22:3), so he dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory."²² Thus, the Trinitarian God dwells in the hearts of the spouses living in His Grace. Therefore, spouses must create a supernatural communion with God and with the spouses for the well being of the spouses in all aspects.

1.4. Spiritual Intimacy: The Strive after -Factor for the Newly Married Couples

Intimacy is the closeness, togetherness and the interlocking of two individual persons tied up by a bond. It is a relational process involving reciprocal sharing with and coming to know about the private, innermost aspects of another person. Therefore, *intimacy* is defined as "feeling understood, validated, cared for, and closely connected with another person or with God."²³

Marital Intimacy is the relationships with their spouses and it is multi-faceted and depends on several factors like: Feeling safe when expressing vulnerability and during times of conflict are important components of this intimacy. Commitment and faithfulness are also key factors for feeling safe in a relationship. Communication is a vital factor in determining the tenor and perceived closeness of intimate relationships. Communicating personal positive events increase relationship of well-being, perceived intimacy, and a sense of trust.²⁴

Spiritual Intimacy and Intimate Marriage

Spiritual intimacy is the foundation for an exclusive and lasting marriage. It gives the spouses the confidence that they are connected not only emotionally and physically, but spiritually too. The idea of intimate oneness, for the Christian, is a key aspect of spirituality as it characterizes the perceived relationship to God, as stated in Acts 17:28, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." As with marital intimacy, communication is a key to spiritual intimacy. Prayer is one important method of communicating with God. The best predictor of perceived intimacy with God for young people is the use of prayers of praise, whereas for older people it is prayers of thanksgiving that become more selfless and frequent as people age.²⁵

Many of the characteristics that are hallmarks of marital intimacy—commitment, purpose, communication, loyalty, faithfulness, safety, caring, mindfulness, empathy

²² *Amoris laetitia*, no.314, pp.259-260.

²³ Quoted in Karen J. Holland, "Spiritual Intimacy, Marital Intimacy, and Physical/Psychological Well-Being: Spiritual Meaning as a Mediator", in *Psychology Religious Spiritual*, 2016 Aug; 8(3): 218-227.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

and selflessness—have parallel characteristics in perceived spiritual intimacy. These include commitment to God, a God-centered life purpose, communication through prayer, and feeling safe and cared for by God. Because these values lay the foundation for purposeful living and intimacy with God, they positively affect marital intimacy and individual well-being.

Personal interaction and interview with some of the newly married couples and who are in it for some years reveal that Spiritual Intimacy helps their intimate relationship. This Greater spiritual intimacy is tied to Greater warmth, humour, and love for one's spouse, better communication skills in daily life at home, and greater satisfaction with the marriage across the transition to parenthood, less negativity and hostility toward spouse, and above all greater satisfaction with the marriage. These benefits of spiritual intimacy suggest the newly married couples to have a deep spiritual connection with God and with each other in order to be motivated to remain kind and resist the urge to "go negative" when they have conflicts of any sort, in order to preserve and protect their marriage as they cope with the stresses of becoming first-time partners and parents together.

II. Importance of Spiritual Life/Intimacy: The Convictions Necessary for the Newly Married Couples

Spiritual intimacy or Spiritual life is one of the most important, yet least talked about aspects of marital life or marital health. This intimacy encompasses their deepest core values, missions and passion for life. If the newly married couples want to strengthen their marriage for years to come, they ought to give special attention not only to their conjugal relation but also the spiritual relation.

Spiritual intimacy sustains physical, emotional, intellectual intimacy and establishes deeper bond between the spouses and God, not just for comfort, closeness, passion, but also for meaning. It helps the couples to rediscover the meaning of their mission in "transforming the world" as a domestic Church, and "strives towards something greater than themselves" with all of life's ups and downs, says *Amoris laetitia*.²⁶ Therefore, the newly married couples, at the threshold of their marital life must be convinced that their family life is to strive towards something greater than themselves. This part of the paper discusses the importance of spiritual life of the newly married couples that pave way for their lasting and intimate marriage.

2.1. Spiritual Intimacy Strengthens the Marriage and Marriage Strengthens the Spiritual Life

Intimacy on the horizontal (person-to-person) and intimacy on the vertical (person-to-God) complement and reinforce each other. A person who feels to be an emotional isolate in his/her human relationships usually also feels to be a spiritual orphan in the universe, whatever the religious beliefs may be. Conversely, one who feels a strong and stable bond with all other human beings usually has a

²⁶ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 316, p. 261.

sense of connection with God. The ability to establish, nurture, and sustain an intimate human relationship, and the ability to commune vitally with God, are closely connected. Therefore, one who loves his/her spouse, whom he/she has seen, is better able to love God, whom he/she has not seen, and vice versa.²⁷

The interconnectedness of interpersonal and spiritual intimacy is seen clearly in the area of trustfulness. The ability to form a human relationship of mutual trust, that is, a relationship in which one feels accepted, able to relinquish his struggle to prove his worth, and safe to be himself springs from the same as well as the capacity to trust Life.²⁸ The person who knows this reality in his marriage is better equipped to experience it in life generally. Conversely, having a source of regular trust renewal in one's spiritual life provides a steady foundation for trustful human relationships. Vertical trust is particularly helpful in periods of marital stress when horizontal trust is weakened; the same is true in other crises when fragile human trust is not enough to sustain hope and courage. A couple which shares a robust spiritual vitality feels undergirded by life; this stabilizes their relationship when it is buffeted by tragedy.

Spiritual life strengthens a marriage; and a good marriage strengthens the spiritual life of the couple. Spiritual growth takes place best in a relationship in which religious values are experienced. A growing marriage provides such a relationship. A good marriage offers an ideal opportunity to discover each other in depth; in this encounter, many couples experience the central realities of religion. Their marriages become pathways to those spiritual experiences which transcend the marriage relationship. In biblical terms, they discover in marriage that "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him" (I John 4:16b).²⁹ Love is supreme and is available in relationships, including our relationship with God. In the ultimate mystery of love, spiritual truths come alive.

2.2. Spiritual Intimacy Strengthens holiness of Marriage

Spiritual dimension of married life of the spouses is so indispensable as it calls them to attain holiness in their married life and in rearing of their children, as they share the mystery of the unity and faithful love between Christ and the Church (Eph.5:32).³⁰ If we examine keenly the characteristics of happy couples who had been married for decades would reveal that faith in God and Spiritual commitment would have been one of the most important qualities of their life. Religion has proven to provide couples with a shared sense of values, ideology, and purpose that bolsters their partnership.

²⁷ Howard J. and Charlotte H. Clinebell, *The Intimate Marriage*, [https://www. religion-online.org/book-chapter-9-the-spiritual-dimension-of-marriage/](https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter-9-the-spiritual-dimension-of-marriage/) pp. 1-2

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

³⁰ *Lumen gentium*, n.11; Juan Ignacio Banares, "*De Matrimonio*", p.1055.

2.3. Spiritual Intimacy strengthens Virtue of Chastity

The church calls people to be chaste not only until marriage, but even after marriage. It is the virtue that frees all the sexual thoughts, desires and behaviours from self seeking and orders the spouses toward the truth of authentic love. So if spouses are truly to love one another, the virtue of chastity isn't an option, it's an absolute requirement. The way chastity is expressed, of course, depends upon a person's state in life. For the unmarried person, it means abstinence from sex, because that's what authentic love calls for among the unmarried. For the married person, however, it means that all sexual expression must be an honest expression of the marriage commitment. Any type of behaviour that would contradict this commitment would be a violation of chastity.³¹ Spiritual intimacy of couples sustains this chastity, fidelity to marriage, as it helps them to be honest to their commitment.

2.4. Spiritual Intimacy Supports Christian Parenting

There are very meaningful images of spirituality of parenting, in particular in describing pregnancy and childbirth from a mother's perspective while noting the practical tasks and importance of both mother and father.³² While making indirect reference on contraception, Pope Francis takes a nuanced approach to it throughout *Amoris laetitia* and says that: "Married love requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, ...it requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties towards God, themselves, their families and human society."³³ He nowhere calls artificial birth control "intrinsically evil" or that it goes against the laws laid down by God the Creator. He writes: "The upright consciences of spouses who have been generous in transmitting life may lead them, for sufficiently serious reasons, to limit the number of their children."³⁴ The spiritual intimacy gives/will give, the newly married couples, the upright conscience to be generously open to the plan of God in procreating and educating children as responsible couples and parents.

III. The Icons/ Charisms of Newly Married Couples

Icons help identifying the unique Charism, the spirit of newly married couples. As Religious founders/foundresses have Charisms, the newly married couples who are called to holiness in their marital life also have Charisms which would make them happy and holy in serving the family and the Church. The quality of life is the quality of relationship. As there are many Charisms, a few highlights will help the newly married couples to possess and live them.

³¹ Christopher West, *Good News about Sex and Marriage: Answers to your Honest Questions about Catholic Teaching*, p.102.

³² *Amoris laetitia*, nn. 168-177, pp.137-145.

³³ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 68, p.63.

³⁴ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 42, pp.39-40.

3.1. Listening

Every good conversation starts with a good listener and listening, every good listening starts with love and respect for others, much more in the family life. In the journey of married and family life, listening is one of the essentials to know each other, recognize the gifts and charisms in others, appreciate the uniqueness of the spouse, strengthen the limitations, perfect the imperfections, covert the difficulties into grace etc. Listening to the spouse means not only the physical needs but also of the spiritual and psychological needs. Love listens, listener loves on daily basis. Listening through heart leads to perfection of family life. Spouse/Family that, listens stays stronger. "Listening is the Charism and icon of newly married couple. Therefore, every good life, every deep spousal relationship and spirituality lies on good listening much through heart.

3.2. Understanding

A true and lasting relationship can be developed only if there is proper and genuine understanding between a husband and wife. Married life, if it is, lived with the proper love and understanding, will help awaken the feminine within a man, and the masculine within a woman. This balance can eventually help both of them live a happy and intimate life. It is also said, "All beautiful relationships do not depend on how well we understand some. But it depends on how well we manage the misunderstanding." Managing does not mean learning to hide things and lie on happenings but managing means the service of correction when misunderstanding occurs about the marital fidelity itself, inter – personal relations, social relationship etc. misunderstanding sometime should help understand better the spouse, rather mess up the relationship and happiness. The newly married couples are invited to possess this Charism for better spiritual enlightenment in their lives.

3.3. Acceptance

Acceptance is another Charism of newly married. If the spouses learn to accept each other as they are in the foundation years of marriage, their life is going to be a "Big book" (Bible) of happiness or 'Fire book' that devastates the entire life (FIRE is abbreviated as, Fearful life, Irritation of one's presence itself, Resentment and Egoist attitude). Total acceptance is nothing but the total self gift exchanged at the time of consent 1057 §2.

3.4. Forgiveness

Forgiveness heals the wounds. It is the cause of happiness. It is the seed of compassionate acceptance and understanding that must be planted in the hearts of spouses. It will make all difficulties, even the impossibilities in the spousal relations possible to live together happily. There is no, "something called unforgiveable." Christ made it possible. And "Christ who elevated the marriage to the state of sacrament will sanctify the spouses through their own forgiveness.

3.5. Happiness

“Relationship is not where one finds happiness. It’s where one shares happiness.” Happiness among the spouses is the spiritual experience of living every minute with sharing of the covenantal love exchanged at the time of marriage, the grace that sanctifies through living out marriage, and the gratitude for the gift of each other to fulfil the plan of God. Thus, happiness becomes spiritual experience for newly married couples by acceptance, the quality and equality (respecting, treating equal of rights and duties) by right understanding of one’s uniqueness, Charism and gift, by forgiving one’s weaker strengths.

IV. Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage and Family: Spiritual Blueprint for the Newly Married Couples

The biggest threat to good marriages is everyday living, that is to say, it is getting lost in the logistics of everyday life. The spouses spend most of their time at home managing a household, taking care of children, and pursuing solitary activities like watching television or working. Even the time they have is dominated by logistical talk about schedules and household tasks. At best they feel like effective co-managers of a family business. At worst, they feel like ships passing in the night. They may not remember how to be different with each other.³⁵ The key to growth in a marriage that is personal, and not just logistical, is to be intentional about the connection rituals of everyday life. If more couples did this, I am convinced that a lot of lawyers and family counsellors would be put out of business.

Rituals are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant. This is the classical, anthropological definition. Rituals can be everyday interactions, or they could be once a year, but they’re repeated. They’re also coordinated. Rituals are not only repeated and coordinated, they are significant. A ritual must have positive emotional meaning to both parties. Whereas marriage routine is something that is repeated in coordinated way, but that does not have much emotional meaning. Therefore anything can be turned into a ritual of connection, if the focus is on the relationship. It can be small or large gestures. By these gestures in words or actions one partner reaches out to the other and the other responds positively, and when these become part of the fabric of the relationship, they become rituals.³⁶

A reflection on the popular passage from 1 Cor. 13 is full of Pope Francis’ own brand of spiritual and down to earth advice on how to build a successful marriage relationship, while being cognisant of problems. Much of these chapters speak of small gestures that share greater values and that could be applied well to the newly married couples or all family relationships. The following are the spiritual blueprints with suggested rituals to building a happy, dynamic, harmonious and intimate marriage and family.

³⁵ William J. Doherty, *Take Back your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls us Apart*, St Paul Press, Mumbai, 2014, p.165.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.166 & 168.

4.1. Daily Love: A Friendship Forever

Each married couple gives oneself exclusively to the other for entire life. Conjugal love can do no less, as “a person who cannot choose to love forever can hardly love for even a single day” (AL319). There comes a point, however, when each spouse realizes that the other is not ultimately his or her own but has a far greater Master, the Lord. Only God can be the ultimate centre of each person’s life. Accordingly, even the most committed and loving spouse will never completely satisfy all the needs of the other spouse. This realization can lead to a healthy “disillusionment” which is, in fact, an invitation to the couple to place trust ultimately in the Lord. Trusting in the Lord the spouses must be aware of their duty to express their daily unselfish love toward the partner.

The mere passion that revolves around sexual gratification is not sufficient in itself to establish a lasting relationship and friendship. Unfortunately, too many couples begin their marriages believing this type of love is all they need. There are at least three kinds of love, commonly accepted, each totally unique. They are: affection, passion, and genuine love. Of the three, only the genuine love provides an adequate foundation for the other two types. Genuine love is totally different from affection and passion. Affection and passion make us aware of our own needs and cause us to look to others to meet those needs. Whereas the primacy concern of genuine love is the welfare of another, searching and seeking opportunity to meet the needs of others as evidenced by Christ, (John 15:11-13). If this genuine love is missing the relationship will most likely not be long lasting.³⁷

As St Paul would say, “I submit myself to meeting your needs your needs are my master” (Gal. 5:13-14).³⁸ Therefore the focus of genuine love isn’t receiving; it’s giving. When a person receives genuine love from someone else, it can be one of the most powerfully motivating forces in his or her life. This love unites couples to God and this Conjugal love is the “greatest form of a good Friendship, possessing all traits of a good friendship, concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability, and the resemblance born of a shared life.”³⁹ This love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples. Some of the love rituals are suggested to deepen their love.

Daily Love Rituals

- A Kind Look to open up a genuine encounter, and to see beyond our own limitations to be patient and to cooperate with others to build the bond and cultivate lifelong friendship.
- Goodbyes in the morning, greetings in the evening, and going out for coffee and conversation, “I love you” when parting in the morning for daily work.

³⁷ Gary Smalley, *The Joy of Committed Love: A Handbook for Wife*, St Paul’s, Mumbai, 2012, pp.67-68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.68 -69.

³⁹ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 123, p.102.

- A genuine smile to consistently feel and express words appreciation for who they are and what they do (Eph.4: 29).
- A genuine desire to seek forgiveness (Eph.4:32) when any one hurts the feelings of other and always slow to anger (Eph.4:26,31). The love must be freely and generously expressed in words and acts. Three words: 'Please', 'Thank you', 'Sorry' need to be used to express it.⁴⁰

4.2. Daily Commitment: A Relationship Unending

“Distance never kills the relation, Closeness never builds the relation, it is the caring of one’s feelings that builds faith and maintains a relation”. These words of the unknown author call for an unending relation through faithfulness. Being faithful to the marital commitment is the highest form of spirituality in the spouse spirituality. The commitment to this covenantal love is not just about romance, attraction but the real commitment to this love comes through dedication, sacrifice and devotion to each other. This will help them to overcome all trials and remain faithful to their commitment. The spouses striving to nurture this covenantal love that includes fidelity and exclusivity and Striving towards their holiness through chastity are the nature of spouse spirituality. The indissoluble exclusivity expressed in the stable commitment shapes the couples’ whole life. The lasting union expressed by marital commitment is a covenant before God that Calls for fidelity (Mal.2: 14-16).⁴¹ Therefore the newly married couples should live in accordance with the spirit of total and exclusive self giving without breaching it.

“Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning, without meaning, life has no significance or hope”⁴². The purpose, meaning and significance of marital commitment and family depend on God the author of the same. When the spouses understand God in the middle, then their marital commitment and relationship becomes unending and indissoluble.

The newly married couples must realize at the outset, the Marriage they celebrated and family they constituted is a true and valid way to God and committed relationship with God brings the fruit of family and family flourishes with fruits of Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (Gal 5:22-23b). Developing certain following commitment rituals daily would sustain their commitment to lasting relationship.

Daily Commitment Rituals

- A morning kiss to express each one’s self gift, surrendering, to make Poison (Resentment, hatredness, misunderstandings etc.) into Honey, Doubt into Trust, Anger into affectivity.
- A hug every morning to reaffirm before God and the spouse the decision to be faithful in the course of the day.

⁴⁰ Ibid., n. 133, p.110.

⁴¹ Ibid., n.123, p.102 -103.

⁴² Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, Zondervan, Michigan, USA, 2002, p. 30.

- A Talk ritual: a fifteen minutes of uninterrupted, non logistical, non problem solving talk every day, thus respect each other more important than their work, relatives, friends, and pastimes.
- A sincere approach not try to impose values and ideals upon anyone that he/she is not applying himself/herself, eliminating any double standard.

4.3. Daily Care: A Partnership of Whole Life

Caring is an adorable spiritual element which exposes one's involvement in another's life. Caring is not an abstract noun, it is an absolute action. Caring is an absolute attention and the most precious gift we can offer to someone. It is an act of love, fidelity in the context of family life. The virtue, the newly married couples can possess and strive after is the caring involvement in the partner's life. Caring or care is a mandatory medium or syringe through which the life giving virtue of love, marital fidelity is injected for the exclusivity or longevity of marital life. Caring in the spousal relationship means, honouring one another as it strengthens each other. Caring is the well being of the spouses which includes, physical care for procreation relational care for fulfilling the rights and obligations of marriage, spiritual care to be the living sacrament of marriage in the Church and Society at large.

Caring relationship is everything of the couples. Imperfections are not something unworthy of its life and difficulties are not impossibilities in the married life. Therefore, the imperfections and difficulties should not be an obstacle for loving and caring relationship. The newly married couples should start the relationship with a vision. Caring is sharing everything: body, soul, responsibilities, creative ideas, parenting, money etc. Therefore caring is partnership of whole life not relationship of business partners.

Daily Care Rituals

- A quality time spent with the spouses on daily basis to experience the togetherness, warmth felt dining together, entertaining together, outing together, taking care at the time of physical ailments etc. respecting the individuality, responding to couple than reacting, listen to the couple to understand etc.
- Care rituals like asking: "Did you eat? Is everything okay today? Is there anything you want me to do today? Etc.
- Taking your spouse's hand in yours on a walk is a care ritual; it changes an exercise walk into a way of connecting as long as your spouse holds your hand back.
- A generous heart to understand each one's unique physical and other limitations and enthusiastically take an active part in dealings with the spouse, children and household responsibilities.

4.4. Daily Prayer: A Fellowship Indispensable

“Spouses that pray together stay together.” Daily prayer sustains conjugal love, commitment to marital fidelity and the partnership of whole life of the spouses. In daily prayer, the newly married couples celebrate their togetherness. Spiritual habits like prayer, established in the life of newly married couples help them realize their married life a miracle and everything a miracle. In the words of Albert Einstein, “There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle; the other is as though everything is a miracle.” The spouses who come together to pray, see everything a miracle and become themselves a miracle in the family, society and in the church. If prayer becomes a habit to them, the miracles become their life style. The personal interview with the newly married couples, invariably, expressed the need of daily prayer and they believe that it strengthens their conjugal love, togetherness, commitment to fidelity and sensitivity to the needs of the other to care for.

Spouses who have an abiding union with God will be able to take full part with Him in what lies ahead. This union with God will strengthen the union with spouses. It is “through prayer that this deepening Union will come to pass. Not just prayer of intercession or prayer for getting things to happen, but prayer of friendship, prayer of joy and prayer celebration in being with God, prayer of dedication and commitment in following Him and putting Him first in our lives, prayer of peace and silence, adoration and love”⁴³. Therefore, the newly married couples should realize that in prayer they know not more about prayer, but that they know God more and desire Him more, and cleave to Him more. Consequently this will help the spouses to know their spouses more, desire them more and cleave and committed to them more.

Spiritual fellowship of the spouses is developed through their spiritual activities together, such as attending the church besides daily prayer. It is also a kind of direct reflection of their journey inside. Their spiritual activities are external; while their spiritual values are internal and part of their core self, which go hand in hand. Therefore, finding a quality time and a way to share this sacred time with each other is pivotal in developing spiritual intimacy. Newly married couples, praying together each day, meditatively reading the bible verses together, praying rosary etc. will help them set their spiritual values for the better future of married life. Prayer has psycho – spiritual effects of feeling relaxed at the feet of the lord.

Daily Prayer Rituals

- A daily personal, couple and family prayer strengthens paschal faith and a coming together each day before the living Lord transforms their life and brings good to the couples and family.
- Daily Eucharist offers the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a domestic Church.

⁴³ Ralph Martin, *Hungry for God: Practical Help in Personal Prayer* St Paul’s, Mumbai, 2000, p. 15.

- Daily reading of bible verses to get nourished by the person of Jesus.
- A Five minutes meditation to fill the body, family and cosmos with love, gratitude and forgiveness energy.

Conclusion

The experience of loving intimacy is a pathway to those spiritual realities which give ultimate significance to the relationships and the existence of the couples. The ability to faithfully live a life long committed love, as 'Christ loves the Church' is supplied by God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The prayer and sacramental life of the couples in which they realize the need of God's help is the foundation of their spiritual life and holiness. The effect of their spiritual life is, as their marriage and partnership deepen and grow they find their life something new and exciting. The meaning of spiritual life is, more and more it's a joy to have such a remarkable mate to share the journey. The walking together of spiritual life is, believing that everything will be Okay, no matter what anyone else says or does. The spiritual urge is the orientation of the newly married couples will inspire for an enlightened life.