

INTRODUCTION

M a r r i a g e

It has been said that "To love another person is to see the face of God." And that is a perfect summary of the Christian theology of marriage. For such a vision of marriage enables the impossible to become possible; two people, drawn together by human love, are invited to transform that love into a sharing in the creative love of God and in so doing transform themselves and their partner into being more fully alive, to become the unique persons God created them to be.

Every marriage is special. No two marriages are the same. It doesn't matter what kind of marriage a family expects a couple to have; it doesn't matter what kind of a marriage society says is "usual"; all that matters is that the marriage is right for each of the partners. The way they make love is what will make it their marriage and no one else's.

When we talk about "making love" we usually mean sexual intercourse between two people. But if we stop to think about it "making love" is much more than that. Sexual intercourse is transformed when, within the permanence of marriage, it becomes a sign of creative love. A love which is revealed in unselfishness and a forgiving spirit which re-creates each partner. In addition there is the special and unique sign of love-making; the creation of a completely new human being. The future of every new baby depends so much on the quality of the love of the couple throughout their life together.

Falling in love is a very human experience. But when we decide to consecrate that love in Christian marriage our human love becomes a sign in the world of God's love. When a couple pledge themselves to unconditional love for life they show what Christ's own self-sacrificing love is like.

Such a vision may sound too idealistic when we look at the disappointment and face the debris of broken relationships and smashed dreams. But often the clues about what can go wrong can be found in the earliest days of the relationship, although they pass unnoticed at the time. Careful marriage preparation can draw attention to such vulnerabilities but in a certain sense nothing can prepare a couple for the shared years ahead. And that is where the Christian dimension of their personal faith is so important. In Christian marriage God offers his strength and love to sustain the couple and to make perfect love possible. To describe this mystery and miracle of love the Church uses the word sacrament. This word simply means that in marriage the intimate sharing of love between husband and wife is a sharing in God's love; in looking at one another each partner will indeed "see the face of God". And they will reveal that face to the world.