



WHY GET MARRIED?

MARRIAGE: THE BASIS OF CIVILIZATION

Thursday, October 29, 2015

Where did you learn to be human? That may sound like a ridiculous question. You ARE human. But the truth is that everything you are, you learned—how to interact with others, how to be polite, how to obey the rules, how to communicate, and how to love. We learn these human traits as we live.

Remember watching the Jungle Book when you were a kid? The animals raised Mowgli and taught him how to hunt like a panther and climb like a monkey. But they knew that Mowgli was a boy, so they sent him to the village to learn how to be a man.

Like Mowgli, we learn how to be human by watching humans, in the first place we encounter them: our families. We learn love, courage, and perseverance from our families. These first lessons are the building blocks for the people we become, and who we teach our children to be. This is why the family is called the “cradle of civilization”—one generation teaches the next how to be civilized, and how to build a civilization.

Families are built on marriage. When a man and woman make a formal commitment of love to remain with each other for the rest of their lives and to raise their children together, they are building a family. Families require stability and structure to grow in civilization.

Marriage is an act of will that signifies and involves a mutual gift, which unites the spouses and binds them to their eventual souls, with whom they make up a sole family – a domestic church.

Saint John Paul II

The family is the foundation of co-existence and a remedy against social fragmentation. Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity.

Pope Francis

Today’s society is in the midst of a “crisis of the family.” 40% of children are born to unmarried mothers, and an overwhelming majority of these children are born into lower-income families, where single mothers earn less than \$10,000 per year.

When children are born outside of marriage, the consequences lie disproportionately on women and children. Over 30% of households headed by a single woman are poor, compared to just 16% of households headed by a single man. Only 6% of married households live in poverty. Based on these statistics, it seems that



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– Pope Francis

marriage and economic stability are linked. If poor, single parents were to get married, most of their children would be lifted out of poverty.

On average, children in single-parent homes also have lower grades, and greater chances of behavioral and psychological problems that persist into adulthood. While this can be linked to growing up poor, it can also be linked to a lack of stability and cognitive stimulation in divorced, cohabitating but unmarried, or single households.

Marriage doesn’t just benefit children. Married men report less depression. Married women have fewer problems with alcohol. Both are likely to live longer; they take fewer risks and live healthier lifestyles.

When we see the great benefits marriage provides—people are happier, they live longer, and they are financially better off—we have to stop and wonder why fewer people choose to get married. Don’t people want what is best for themselves, and for their children?

To understand why we’ve shifted away from marriage, we have to look at what society believes marriage is, and whether that definition has any value today. Today, marriage is loosely defined as an agreement between two adults who love each other enough to live together and offer support to each other. Society has lost the necessity of lifelong commitment, and the connection between marriage and children.

One look around will tell you that many people behave as if they're married even when they aren't, doing things that used to be restricted to marriage—living together, sharing sexual intimacy, having children. If we can have any of these things whenever we want them, what's the point of getting married?

To answer that, we have to go back to Genesis, to the beginning:

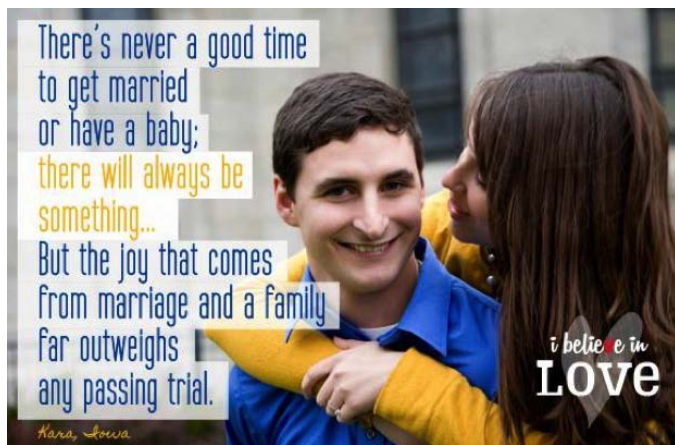
The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.

So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man the man said:

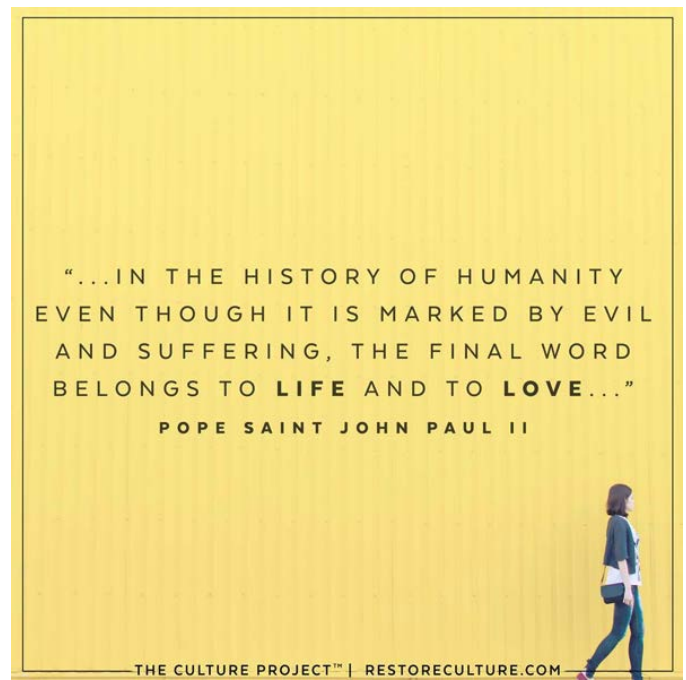
"This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of man this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.

Genesis 2:20-24



Man and woman were created to be helpmates to each other, not just in the way friends or co-workers help each other, but in the way that makes them become “one body,” forming a union together. This union does two things: creates a new entity called marriage, and forms new life through the creation of children.



The union of man and woman is the only way to make new human life. This is how God designed the world, and because of that, the conjugal relationship between man and woman is protected in every civilization across the world. When two people become one body, it is an extraordinarily powerful act, with the potential to create an entirely new being—a child who has never existed before, and who will live forever, in the world and in eternity.

This reality of marriage is built into the very meaning of who we are. We can pretend it's not important, or try to define it as something else, but ignoring the true meaning of marriage only creates chaos. God created the world so that marriage would be the foundation of family, and family would be the foundation of civilization.

I urge you to lift up yet another truth about marriage: that permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity, and fruitful love responds to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Pope Francis

Marriage creates a bond that cannot be forged in any other relationship. When two people get married, they vow to love each other in sickness and health, for better or worse, until death do they part. As Christians, we know marriage is a sacrament, and the grace that flows from that sacrament makes the bonds of marriage strong enough to endure any hardship.

In the stability of a sacramental marriage and the promise of exclusivity, two things can happen: a couple can love each other entirely, without reservation or fear of rejection, and children can be created with respect to their true dignity.

It can be hard to tell another person you love them. What if they don't love you back? What if they say they love you, but then they stop? The nature of love is the basis of every romance novel and teen drama ever written. But in marriage, the insecurity and uncertainty of love is erased.

Once a couple vows to love each other in marriage, they never have to worry whether that love still exists. This doesn't mean marriage is easy, or that people don't mess up. But once two people have given each other every bit of their love in marriage, their bond can never be broken.

Because a husband and wife share a sexual bond as well, they are likely to have children. All children have the right to be raised by their married parents, if possible. Marriage enables a couple to be prepared to welcome a child. Because they have vowed to love each other, they have also made a commitment to love and raise any children they may have, either naturally or through adoption. Marriage provides children the stability to thrive, and to become civilized, and it creates a family that provides protection, support, and love.

No matter what celebrities and politicians do to shift the cultural understanding of marriage, the fundamental reality of marriage does not change.

Do not fall into the trap of being swayed by political notion. Family is an anthropological fact—a socially and culturally related fact. We cannot qualify it based on ideological notions or concepts important only at one time in history. We can't think of conservative or progressive notions. Family is a family. It can't be qualified by ideological notions. Family is per se. It is a strength per se.

Pope Francis

Because our society is misinformed about the nature and benefits of marriage, more and more people are failing to get married. We are called to share the joys of marriage with the rest of the world. Whether you grew up with married parents or not, you can still know the reality of marriage, and realize that it speaks to the deepest longings of your heart.

Living the reality of marriage is counter-cultural. Not everyone agrees with us. As Christians, we are called to share the good news of the world as God made it. It can be intimidating, but God is on our side, and he will give us the strength we need to live the lives he has planned for us.

Have no fear of moving into the unknown. Simply step out fearlessly knowing that I am with you, therefore no harm can befall you; all is very, very well. Do this in complete faith and confidence.

Saint John Paul II



DISCUSSION

1. What is the sociological purpose for the family in cultures? Upon what is family based?
2. What makes marriage sacramental?
3. Based on the evidence that married parents can pull children out of poverty, do you believe the state has a compelling interest in promoting marriage? Why or why not?
4. Is marriage external to our human condition or something that speaks to our human nature?
5. As you discern your vocation, why might you look forward to marriage?