

Homily
27OrdB
Oct. 4, 2015
St. Bernard Church

What is the connection between marriage and God's plan of salvation?

It starts right at the beginning, in the story of Adam and Eve, the first married couple.

It's an important principle of the Catholic Church that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it is true. It is free from error.

So how is the story of Adam and Eve true? Is this an accurate scientific account of how man and woman were created?

Well, the truth of the story of Adam and Eve is in what it says about God, about man and woman and about marriage.

The story of Adam and Eve in the Bible is like a painting. Every word, every detail has a meaning, a purpose, and the challenge for us is to discover that meaning.

In today's first reading, from Chapter Two of Genesis, we are told:

"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.

So what's this all about? What is the meaning of this detail? What is the significance of the fact that Adam was put to sleep when Eve was created?

Because Adam was asleep when Eve was created from his rib, he can take no credit for her existence. When he wakes up and sees her, he knows that she is a pure gift, a gift that he does not deserve, that he did nothing to create.

Unlike the animals, which were not suitable partners for Adam, this new being causes him to exclaim with complete joy:

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

Adam can tell, in his first gaze at Eve, that she is like him in many ways, but also that she is different. And even though Adam has had no formal training in engineering, he can see that the physical differences between him and Eve are made to fit together, made for union, that the two of them can truly become one flesh.

In the full account of the creation of Eve, the Bible goes on to say that they were naked, but they felt no shame. What's that all about?

As I said before, Adam knew that Eve was a pure gift. Eve would have known also that Adam was a pure gift to her. She didn't ask to be created. She didn't ask for Adam, but there he was.

Because Adam and Eve both knew that they were pure gifts to each other, there was an innocence at this first encounter with one another. There was no lust, no desire for control, no selfishness. There was just incredible joy at this amazing gift.

God blessed this couple with one another, and said, "Go forth and multiply." God designed Adam and Eve, the man and the woman, for union with one another, and out of this union, this unselfish gift of self from one to the other, God shared with the man and woman his power of creating new life.

This is the foundation of God's plan of salvation for all of humanity: that a man and woman will see each other as a gift, a gift that will lead to a new union out of which new life, children, will be created.

The man and woman will love each other. They will love God and understand God's ways. If they are blessed with fertility, they will love their children, teach their children about love and about God. And all of humanity will honor and appreciate these gifts and share them generously.

That's it. That's God's basic design. Not someone shouting out verses from the Bible on a street corner. That's okay. But the basic plan is about marriage, families and God, households of love, households of faith.

Very, very beautiful.

So what went wrong? Satan, seeing how he was threatened by this plan, immediately took action. He introduced Adam and Eve to the possibility of doubting God. Through Satan, lust, pride and self-centeredness entered the lives of the first married couple. They fell for his lies. They sinned.

Adam, who had been such good friends with God, hid from him. God called out to Adam, "Where are you?," eventually found Adam and confronted him. How did Adam defend himself?

He didn't blame Eve. He blamed God. "That woman you put here with me...", he said. She was supposed to be a gift. Now look what happened. It's your fault for giving me that woman.

This is at the root of all problems in marriage. The temptation to think, at some point in married life, "God, that woman, that man, you gave me. I thought he or she was the right person, the gift I needed. But now I'm not so sure."

When I first saw a young woman named Connie Blanchard, a blind date for a Halloween party, it was an Adam and Eve moment for me. Like Adam, I knew at first glance that we would be married. And, eventually, we were.

Things were pretty rosy until we ran into the world of teen-agers. This exposed the weaknesses in our relationship. There were times when Connie and I both thought we might have married the wrong person.

If I could speak for Connie briefly, there was a breakthrough moment for her one Sunday when she went to Mass, and in the Gospel for that Sunday were the words of Jesus to his disciples: "You didn't choose me. I chose you."

Connie, perhaps under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, translated this statement to mean, "You didn't choose Tim. I, Jesus, chose him for you."

That's it. That woman you gave me. That man you gave me. The one I love but also the one who sometimes upsets me. That man or woman is a pure gift from God. Even the things that annoy us about our spouse, that can be frustrating, are meant for our good. Our spouse is the one chosen by God to help us grow in holiness, to draw us closer to Jesus and to learn to be more like Him, the ultimate giver.

What makes it all work and even become beautiful is grace, the grace that comes from belief in Jesus Christ and a sincere desire to bring him into our lives, into our marriages.

This grace is the source of the blessings, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the humility, the forgiveness, that sustain marriage.

It's a beautiful plan, a fantastic design. We should honor it, respect it, live it and share it.