

- Both the second reading and the Gospel today come from St. John the Beloved Disciple. And both of these readings focus on love, reminding us that as the children of God, we are called to love one another just as God – Who Is Love Itself – has loved us.
- Indeed, love is one of those topics that we cannot over-emphasize in the Church because our Lord teaches us that the greatest commandment is to love. We are called first to love our Lord above all things, and then to love one another as we love ourselves.
- Love comes in many forms: there is the charitable love that exists between friends and neighbors, the nurturing love that exists between parents and children, the fraternal love that exists between siblings, and, of course, there is the life-giving love that exists between a man and his wife.
- While I could give homilies on any of these forms of love, I want to focus today on this last type of love: marital love, because in many ways this is the most important form of love that we exercise with one another.
- Marriage forms the basis of family life, and families are the building blocks of any human society. For better or worse, marriage is public; it's not just a private arrangement between two people, and therefore the success or failure of a marriage has an impact on society as a whole.
- Therefore, it's important that we all be invested in protecting the institution of marriage, which is very sadly under attack today. It's also important that we live out our marriages in conformity with God's laws. But to do this, we must understand what marriage is all about.
- If you look at the documents of Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*) and Canon Law, you'll find that marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered into by a man and woman. God designed this sacrament for the procreation and education of children and for the purpose of the spouses own good.
- "Marriage is a holy mystery, a symbol of Christ's love for the Church." It is a vehicle for holiness! Marriage is not simply a social institution; it also has religious implications. Specifically, marriage is a conduit for God's grace to flow to a couple and to their children.
- So marriage has both natural and supernatural dimensions, and both must be recognized.
- Thus, for Christians, marriages are actually triangular relationships: husband – wife – and God. All three are necessary to make a marriage work. And in living out a marriage, all three parties must be respected. All three must be willing to love.
- Furthermore, the love that is shared in a marriage is a particular type of love: a covenantal love, which requires an exchange of one's whole self. A man gives himself fully to his wife, and a wife gives herself fully to her husband in a mutual embrace of love and fidelity.
- And this covenantal love that is shared in marriage is intimate, exclusive, indissoluble, and hopefully fruitful through a growth in holiness and the bearing and education of children.
- So the whole purpose for the covenant of marriage is growth in holiness and the bearing and education of kids. Sadly, one thing that our modern western society refuses to acknowledge is that ***marriage is fundamentally oriented toward the creation of life.***
- We know this not just from revelation, but also from natural law. This is where Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body is indispensable. Pope John Paul has taught us that our bodies are designed to be in union with another body.

- Because the male body and the female body are complementary and actually “fit” together, we know we are called – in the very depths of our being – to give ourselves fully to another and to receive another fully unto ourselves.
- But even more than that, by creating man as male and female and calling us to be one flesh, God has stamped within our bodies an image of the reality that He desires to be one flesh with us. That’s why you often hear the Church being called the Bride of Christ!
- This is because we are called to be one flesh with God, as well as with our spouses!
- This one flesh union is meant to help us grow in communion with one another and with God, and thereby grow in holiness. But it’s this one-flesh union that also brings about children.
- Because the marital act is the one way that we participate with God in creating life, we know that the marital act is sacred. And it’s from this sense of sacredness that all of the Church’s sexual teachings are derived.
- Because it is so sacred, the conjugal act is not something we can just enter into as we please and with whom we please. It’s not simple recreation.
- On the contrary, it’s an action that carries serious responsibilities, and thus it should only be entered into by people who have accepted and vowed to live out these responsibilities: namely a man and a woman who are married to each other.
- You see, the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, and the secondary purpose of marriage is the intimate, exclusive, and indissoluble unity of the couple.
- These fundamental purposes are most perfectly realized in the marital act. *Thus, neither purpose should ever be divorced from the marital act because doing so distorts the purpose of the act and breaks down the marriage.*
- This is why contraception is intrinsically evil and gravely sinful. Contraception and sterilization willfully undermine the marital act by suppressing or destroying one’s fertility. Contraception divorces the procreative purpose of marriage from the marital act.
- By eliminating the possibility of procreation, we severely limit the love of the act because we take away part of that gift of self that is fundamental to the act, for by its nature marital love is meant to be fruitful and boundless.
- Understanding that marriage is fundamentally oriented toward the creation of new life also helps us to understand why same-sex unions are wrong. By their very nature these types of unions can never be procreative, and therefore they can never be a true marriage.
- Because same-sex unions lack the fundamental complementarity that makes the procreative and unitive purposes of marriage possible, because same-sex unions are contrary to the natural law, and because same-sex unions close the conjugal act to life, the Church has always taught these unions are gravely sinful.
- Now I realize that the subject of same-sex unions is a very sensitive issue, and I am not here to condemn or upset anyone. I’m simply here to let you know what the Church teaches.
- Specifically, the Church is very clear that people who struggle with same-sex attraction are not to be discriminated against, but rather are to be supported, treated with compassion, and encouraged to live a life of celibacy. This is very important to remember.
- The Church condemns the sin, not the sinner. But She also recognizes and speaks the truth about the sinful nature of homosexual acts. Speaking this way is nothing more than true compassion combined with a frank recognition of the disordered nature of these acts.
- There is currently a movement in our country to legalize same-sex marriages in many states. So let’s be clear about something: the Church’s opposition to recognizing gay marriage is

not a matter of the Church being prejudiced, unloving, or homophobic. It's a matter of the Church speaking the truth. And speaking the truth is an act of love.

- The Catholic Church opposes homosexual acts because they are intrinsically disordered, and they abuse our human nature. Homosexual acts make us less than who God is calling us to be. And legalizing same-sex marriage will weaken an already damaged understanding of marriage in our society.
- In the Gospel today Jesus tells us that: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." And this notion of self-sacrifice is at the very heart of marital love. In fact, by dying on the cross, Jesus shows us that sacrifice is the very essence of love.
- If we are to be truly loving, we have to die to self. There is no other way to love. And in today's world, that often means that we must sacrifice our own feelings and desires in order to love as God calls us to love.
- As we now prepare ourselves to become one flesh with our Lord by receiving Him in the Eucharist, let us pray that all married people will grow in their sacrificial love for their spouses and children.
- And let us pray as well that all people will grow in a greater understanding and respect for the sacrament of marriage, for the good of our society, and for the good of our souls.