

INTRODUCTION



Getting married is exciting! And also a bit scary. Behind the frantic details of The Big Day lie important questions: Is he or she the right person? Will our love last? Will we be happy together for a lifetime?

Pope Francis understands both your excitement and the importance of these questions. In his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of Love*, he spent many paragraphs stressing the need for good, solid, faith-filled marriage preparation for engaged couples — what he called “a pedagogy of love” — so that your celebration of the sacrament of matrimony will not be fleeting but will continue throughout your married life.

This little booklet is addressed to you, the engaged couple coming to your parish to be prepared for marriage. Your *wedding* is only one hour out of your life together — your *marriage* is your testament not only to your love, but to God’s presence in your union.

Here are thirty days of reflections based on sections of *The Joy of Love*. May they support your preparation and strengthen your commitment, and may you always know that the Holy Father himself is taking great joy in your decision to marry!

1 | DIGNITY AND BEAUTY

Couples need to be guided to understand that their union elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence and gives an enduring model to the family they will form.

Pope Francis' exhortation is frequently filled with lovely and poetic language. But behind it all is his hope that, as you prepare to celebrate the sacrament of matrimony, you will grow to understand the depth and seriousness of what you are undertaking. Far beyond the lovely details of the wedding itself lie the dignity and beauty of your covenant with each other—and with God—for the rest of your lives.

PONDER

How do we understand the word “sacrament”?
Or the word “covenant”?

PRAY

God of love, open our ears and hearts and minds to receive all your good news!

2 | YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Preparation for marriage engages the entire community, tying this sacrament together with the sacraments of initiation—this too is a threshold a Christian crosses.

Pope Francis always highlights the reality of Catholics living in a secular world. In terms of matrimony, he stresses the importance of the whole parish community as witnesses of the covenant of love that you as a couple are about to undertake. Think of this sacrament in terms of the others you've celebrated: How did they change you? Have they changed you? Have they helped you grow closer to God? Pope Francis adds that being an active part of your faith community is a wonderful way to see love in action and to find support for your own journey as a couple.

PONDER

Are we regular churchgoers? If not, can we begin?

PRAY

God of love, set our path straight and focused on you—and on the gift of each other that you have given us.

3 | YOU, TOO, ARE WITNESSES

As a couple commit themselves to grow together in love, this witness strengthens the entire faith community. Their love is a powerful force for change and growth.

If your wedding is on a Saturday afternoon, don't be surprised if people coming to confession or Mass arrive early in hopes of catching a glimpse of you in your newly married state. Pope Francis emphasizes that your new, fresh love is a tonic for the entire community. If you have become closer to your parish, you will find the folks in the pews very supportive and interested in you, for your love is a strong sign of hope and renewal. You also help your parents, family, and friends to remember their own young love—and be themselves reborn.

PONDER

What signs are we giving to our faith community?

PRAY

God of love, help us always to mirror your love in all that we do!

4 | MARRIAGE — A NEW INITIATION

*The best marriage preparation is framed
as an “initiation” to the sacrament,
so that couples receive the help they need
to make a solid beginning of family life.*

If you were baptized as an infant, your parents went through preparation so that they could celebrate with you the sacrament that initiated you into the life of Christ. If you were baptized as an adult, the RCIA was part of your initiation process. It is the same with marriage, says Pope Francis. Just as baptism changes you, so the sacrament of marriage unites the two of you with Christ in a special, permanent way. The preparation you are undertaking now helps to “initiate” you into that lifetime of love.

PONDER

Are we open to and accepting of all our preparation program is trying to teach us?

PRAY

God of love, make us open and ready to accept you!

5 | LEARNING TO LOVE

The object of this preparation is to help the couple learn how to love this very real person with whom he or she plans to share his or her whole life. It does not happen automatically.

As parents preparing for their child's baptism learn many things about being responsible Catholic parents, raising their child in faith and love, so too, says Pope Francis, marriage preparation helps a couple learn how to help their love grow over the years and decades ahead. Good marriage preparation will awaken in you an awareness of the power that love has already played in your life and will help you identify ways to keep your love always fresh and new.

PONDER

What has been the witness of love in our lives?
How has this formed how we love each other?

PRAY

God of love, fill us with your Spirit so that we may always be open to your presence!

6 | FROM THE VERY START...

*For every couple, marriage preparation
begins at birth.*

While speaking of marriage preparation, Pope Francis asks couples (and the parish teams preparing them) to consider the family you were born and raised in. The picture of marriage you expect is probably based on the image of marriage you received in your own home. It is so important, Pope Francis says, to know your own background and that of your spouse so that you may come to understand at a deep and profound level how you each see your married life ahead and how you will proceed together.

PONDER

Are my parents married? Divorced? Happy?
What does this say about how I see marriage?

PRAY

God of love and fidelity, guide us always in your path so that our union may reflect your own faithfulness to all your children.

7 | FACING HARD TRUTHS?

Too many couples marry without really knowing who they are. They have spent lots of time together, but without facing the challenge of revealing who they really are...and who their partner is.

You may wonder why your marriage preparation asks “nosy” questions. Pope Francis will tell you that such questions are meant to help you face truths about each other *now*, before the big day, perhaps bringing issues to the surface that need to be discussed and resolved before you are ready to take your vows. You will spend a lifetime together—you want to get started on the best possible foot.

PONDER

How well do I really know my future spouse? Are there parts of my life I've been reluctant to share?

PRAY

God of love, help us to be unafraid to reveal ourselves to each other. Help us remember that you love us in all our weakness.

8 | FULLY READY TO COMMIT

Family problems frequently arise when partners are still dealing with emotional issues from childhood. It takes a long time and patience to develop a mature, genuine love.

Pope Francis stresses that couples need to be honest and forthright with each other about their past—their family life growing up, what scars or hurts or addictions they carry. Developing a mature, genuine love depends on facing all this. Dealing with these issues *now* may be painful, but growing through them together can build an even stronger relationship. Do not be afraid!

PONDER

What makes this relationship “right”? What baggage are we each bringing to our union? What should we bring to the light of day?

PRAY

God of love, heal us and make us whole!

9 | DISCOVERING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Unresolved issues involving one's parents and siblings can hurt a marriage. Some people become adults without ever knowing unconditional love. It is important to seek resolution, for in resolution comes liberation.

Trust, openness, willingness to communicate honestly—these are the qualities that you will need throughout your marriage. Nothing hurts a relationship faster than an inability to trust. Sometimes this arises because one of you had family issues. Sometimes it arises because of selfishness or complacency. Now is the time to face these issues head-on so that you both can come to know the joy of true acceptance, one of the other, and grow in the freedom of that love!

PONDER

What dark corners do we need to examine? Do we trust each other?

PRAY

God of love, make us unafraid to trust, and make us courageous to face our failings!

10 | FAITH DIFFERENCES

Marriages involving a Catholic and a non-Catholic offer the chance for greater interreligious dialogue, even with the difficulties they present.

When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic, Pope Francis says, there are sure to be difficulties in resolving faith issues in the family. However, he says, honest and open discussion of the differences in faith expression can also lead to what he calls “a privileged place” for interreligious dialogue. Plan to face these issues now, before you marry, and remember that even two Catholics marrying are themselves an interfaith marriage—no two Catholics have exactly the same upbringing or faith practice. The secret is to keep love of God central in all that you do!

PONDER

Do we have faith issues to resolve? Have we discussed them well enough?

PRAY

God of love, open our hearts to accept all the ways you speak to us!

11 | COME BEFORE THE LORD

It is also important to remember the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation, which allows a couple to bring their weaknesses and failings before God before celebrating matrimony.

In his days as a priest, Pope Francis has prepared many couples for marriage. He has been privy to lots of different situations that couples bring. No couple is perfect, so Pope Francis strongly recommends celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation before the wedding day. What better way to start off your life together on the right foot, full of God's grace for the days and years ahead!

PONDER

How do I feel about confession? Has going to confession entered our minds as an important part of our marriage preparation?

PRAY

God of love, help us to remember that receiving your forgiveness before our wedding is a wonderful way to welcome you into our family.