

On Love II

Philos is the Greek word for the love of friends. This love is important for married love as much or more than *eros*. It is a higher form of love than the love of legitimate pleasure, and is of great help in keeping a marriage intact and holy.

Young people thinking about marriage should reflect on their friendships. If their friendships are superficial, then they should consider waiting before entering courtship. There is nothing wrong with superficial friendships (perhaps better called acquaintances), but they are of little help in a vocation, except to say that pleasant diversions are a good thing in themselves. Going fishing with the guys is fine. But all the trout and beer in the world won't do much to make a man into a good husband.

I remember reading Christopher Lasch (a good sociologist) years ago, about the phenomenon of marriage being based on friendship. He noted that by 1930, the idea of marriage proclaimed by Hollywood was one of a long and witty - if not brilliant - conversation. One thinks of the great teams in those years, such as Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn, or Cary Grant and whomever. So what's the problem with basing a marriage on friendship?

The same thing with basing marriage on the love of pleasure...these kinds of love are just too temporary. The pleasure from a good meal is too fleeting as a basis for matrimony. And friendship often comes and goes. One day, the conversation and all aspects of friendship can seemingly vanish in a marriage, or in other vocations too. In other words, if a woman enters the convent because she wants holy conversation about spiritual things with the other sisters, or because she loves the architecture of the place or because the habit is cool, then she will not last. These external things can attract a young woman to begin a vocation, but they are not enough to complete it. On one hand we must avoid the cynicism of Jean-Paul Sartre, who said that "Hell is other people." But on the other hand we must be realistic and understand that the best companions in the world here below, are severely damaged by original sin.

Same with the priesthood. Sure, every young man wants to be in with a group of great guys who will always have his back, and provide excellent company in season and out of season. But while the friendships in the priesthood are wonderful and life-long, they are not sufficient to base a vocation upon. Some different kind of love is needed for a vocation, even though *eros* and *philos* are very helpful.

The next and higher kind of love is transliterated as *storge* (pronounced store-gay), and it is the love of the institution. This love (or dedication) is expressed by the vow or the promise. A dogged fidelity to the institution of marriage (for the sake of one's word which was given at the wedding), for the sake of the children, for the sake of family honor...all these things are a higher love than the first two kinds of love, if nothing else because one can receive so little in return for the love.

There is an immediate return on the love of *eros*, which is usually a physical pleasure. There is an immediate return on the love of *philos*, which is usually a spiritual pleasure.

But this does not always hold with *storge*. Very often one can determine to stay in the marriage or the vocation to the priesthood not because of the immediate or even proximate reward, but because of the conviction that the institution is good for one's soul, and for the common good too.

But such convictions can be rather abstract. Like the soldier in the foxhole wondering why in the world he is eating cold, watery rations in the midst of the dreary, rainy, muddy existence that is often the lot of infantry, who comes to a conclusion of sorts, we find that the conclusion or motivation is rarely abstract. The motivation might be the simple fear of his commanding officer, but most often the greatest motivation is the men around him. It's for them. He may not even like them particularly, but he cannot bear the thought of letting them down.

Motivations like "defending the constitution" or "preserving our way of life" are thin gruel when the chips are down and you're hungry for a real motivation. But the idea of defending *this* man's life to the right of you in your foxhole...that can be enough, and usually is.

It's similar to fidelity in marriage. Fidelity to "an integral understanding of the theology of the body" is a bit too abstract to keep one in marriage. But a dogged determination not to let *this* spouse down, or to mess up *these* children's lives (my children, my flesh and blood) can be enough to keep you going when the friendship peters out, and when "...the years draw nigh when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them," to quote Ecclesiastes.

But not even real people, not even the welfare of our own flesh and blood is enough for us to stay true. We need some cement – even in the natural order – that will hold the marriage or the vocation together in season and out of season. That cement is the vow.

To swear fidelity to the institution is absolutely necessary. Whether the soldier swearing allegiance to his country, or the nun swearing allegiance to the order or the young man swearing allegiance to his bride, the vow is essential to practicing the love called *storge*.

Before we move on the fourth kind of love, we should look more carefully at the vow; it's nature, it's fulfillment, and the preparation necessary to make (and keep) it.