

PDA's

With the approach of summer, the observant French bystander is treated to quite a show. Now that temperatures are into the 70's, Parisians are finally shedding their heavy coats and their bulky scarves, and are instead wrapping themselves in one another: "public displays of affection" are on the rise, and smooching is at least as popular on the streets of Paris as are "PDA's" among the sophomores of a co-ed high school. Another curious sight is that of brides – in full white bridal regalia, of course – on their way to or from their weddings, either parading down the streets of Paris, or crowded into public transportation. In many ways, bride and groom are likewise involved in a public display of affection, making public their relationship which - at least in theory, and hopefully also in practice - will be beneficial not only to the couple, but also to the society of which their family is seen to be the foundation.

Back in the "good old days" when things were clear-cut and shotgun weddings more common than now, they used to sing "Love and marriage ... go together like a horse and carriage". Here's hoping that, for all those planning June weddings, we can count on a certain growth and development which takes the couple beyond the raging sophomore hormones to the public commitment of marriage. The fact that this does not always happen is reflected in the old song: "Falling in love with love with love is falling for make-believe..." For all the songs about "true love", much of what passes for love really isn't.

Of course, in this case as alas altogether too often, my thoughts turn to chocolate, with which I am engaged in my own personal love affair. Wave chocolate in front of me and, not only am I helpless to resist, but I am also unable to function rationally until my addiction is sated. Perhaps love is like that: before we know it, we are enticed into a pleasurable relationship without fully realizing that its benefits are more than fleeting fancy. As my chocolate fix serves only to make me fat and to clog my arteries if it is not regulated, so too can a relationship become unhealthy if long-term goals are subjugated to short-term gratifications that don't go far beyond the splash of the wedding and the thrill of the honeymoon.

Love goes far beyond chocolate. When I wolf down a half dozen Hershey Bars, that's the end of it – until I need my next fix, of course. There is no further commitment on my part, except insofar as I am dependent upon the continued success of the Hershey Company; as for the chocolate, it does nothing but tickle my taste buds momentarily before settling in the dark meat to expand my girth. Such a lack of commitment is evident throughout our society, as people exploit others for their own purposes and then dispose of them like so much accumulated garbage. Perhaps this general trend is mirrored in the decline of marital commitment – both in terms of the number of marriages contracted and in terms of the high divorce rate, both of which wreak havoc not only on the lives of those directly involved, but also on the stability of the society at large.

The Church is counter-cultural. The fact that we continue to crown people in marriage, and to encourage family life within this traditional framework, is indeed counter-cultural. Radical as ever, the Church challenges the society in which it finds itself. However, it does not do so merely to slavishly impose the *status quo*; rather, it hopefully does so because two millennia of experience have shown the positive effects of its teaching. The Church promotes marriage and family life because doing God's will turns out to be good for us.

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Our mothers used to tell us that castor oil was good for us too, but that didn't make it go down any easier. In a sense, the teaching of the Church on marriage is more like castor oil than like chocolate, since it includes not just pleasure but also sacrifice. Some find it to be as outdated as the old song "I give to you and you give to me: true love, true love", with its old-fashioned implication that giving is more important than getting.

What is worse, our Church shoves into the wedding ritual a reading which drives twenty-first century feminists into a rage: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its Savior" (Ephesians 5:22–23). Yikes! Leaving that ideological battle in the background, let us focus rather on what is required of husbands, which is even more challenging: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5: 25-6). In other words, spouses are called upon to give up their very lives for one another as Christ has done for us. The image of Jesus on the Cross with His arms outstretched in welcome, very publicly giving up His life for His beloved people, is the ultimate public display of affection. We are far from the instant gratification which is the only concern of many of our contemporaries: Christ shows us the emptiness of our frivolous, self-centered concerns, offering as a remedy ultimate concern for one another.

Christ is the icon through which we find meaning in our lives. By the public crowning of their commitment to one another, bride and groom are transformed into icons of Christ, and are thereby held up as examples to be emulated. May those being married this month be faithful to this lofty vocation!

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