

# **Something Worth Dying For**

## **A Reflection on St. Valentine's Day**

**On February 14 every year, couples around the world celebrate one of the heroes of Catholic history.**

As the story goes, Valentine was a Roman priest who married young couples in secret despite the decree of Emperor Claudius II forbidding all weddings. The emperor did this to more readily recruit young, unattached men into his armies. Valentine was discovered, arrested and eventually executed.

St. Valentine didn't officiate secret weddings simply out of compassion for local, love-struck couples. He did it because Catholic marriage is about a whole lot more than just two people committing to live together and maybe raise a few kids.

**Catholic marriage has a purpose beyond the fulfillment of the two spouses.**

It is a call to honor God by living in service to each other, helping each other, and our children, to grow closer to God and to our destiny to be with Christ, our eternal bridegroom, for all eternity.

It is also a Sacrament – a living witness of God's presence in the world. As such, it has a number of characteristics that define it. Encapsulated in the Marriage Rite, these characteristics include permanency, sexual intimacy, sexual exclusivity, unconditional sharing, openness to children and a willingness to raise any children in the Catholic faith.

**That makes it something quite different to the secular understanding of marriage which sees marriage more about the personal happiness of each spouse.**

In the secular model, marriage doesn't need to be permanent. Nor does it need to involve children let alone raising them Catholic. The popularity of pre-nuptial agreements indicates a choice for limited and conditional sharing rather than unconditional sharing. Sexual infidelity is frequently indulged, often by mutual agreement in so called 'monogamish' or 'open' marriages.

It's hard to imagine anyone giving their life to defend such an impoverished concept of marriage as defined by our present secular culture. But St. Valentine didn't die for this idea of marriage. He died defending a much grander idea; the idea that the freely-given, total, faithful and fruitful love of a man and woman in marriage could point us to God. The idea was that this kind of relationship revealed the inner life of the Creator of the universe.

**So, dear Christian couples, this St. Valentine's Day, set your sights high! Do not be limited to the reductionistic view of marriage that the culture puts forward, but lean into a bigger, grander vision. Tap into the aspirations of your youth and to which God invites us to pursue with diligence and persistence.**

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