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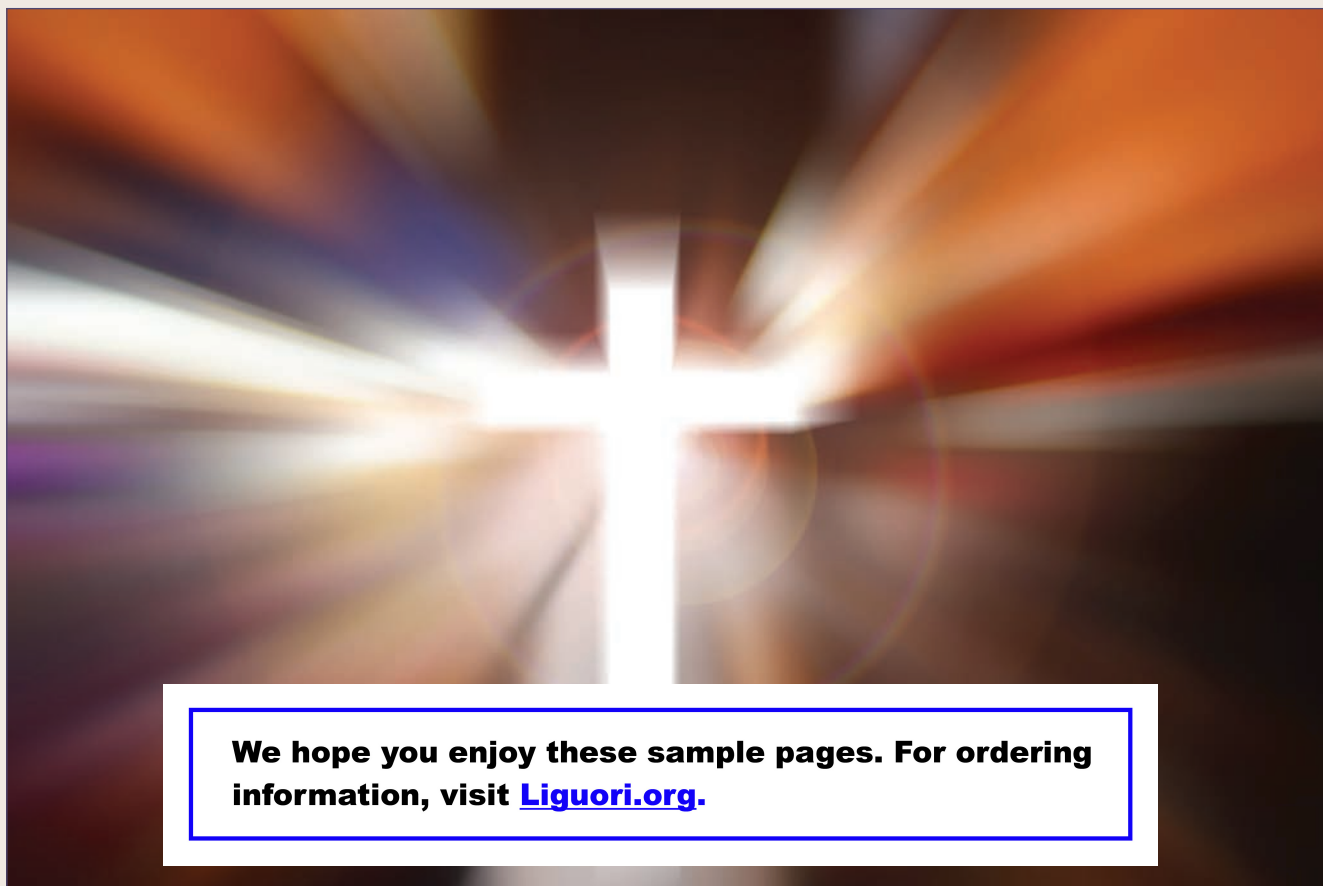
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THE SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE

BECOMING SIGNS OF GOD'S LOVE

BY CAROL LUEBERING

A couple's married life is a gifted and graced journey through which husband and wife experience the power of God's all-consuming love. They become signs of that love to the world around them.



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Marriage is a vocation, so I learned in Catholic elementary school. And I never had any doubt that it was my vocation. Some years later on my wedding day, the rite spoke of marriage as a sign a couple makes to the rest of the community—a sign of Christ’s love for the Church. Through the passing decades of my marriage, I came to understand that learning to become that sign is a lifelong call, a constant divine whisper in the ear. It’s more than a promise made in one sacramental moment; it’s an ongoing process of discovering God and learning what God is like from the experience of married life—from honeymoon to old age.

LEARNING GOD’S NAME: LOVE



There is, someone once said, no surprise as magical as the surprise of being loved: it’s God’s finger on one’s shoulder. Feeling the touch sets the world aquiver with wonder and teaches a couple that God’s other name is Love—that “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

I suspect it’s that sense that love is something larger than two people, not just the desire for a pretty church wedding, which sends couples to the parish office when they decide to marry.

The prayers of the rite stress that husband and wife are the sacrament, the living signs of God’s love—first to each other and then to the world. The spirituality of marriage, the sense that God is part of it through good times and bad, is what makes Christian marriage truly sacramental.

REJOICING WITH THE CREATOR (HONEYMOON)

Ever since Adam gasped in wonder at the creature who was like him yet so deliciously different, the honeymoon phase has been a romp in the garden, a discovery of creation’s goodness. As they explore the many moods of lovemaking—tender, passionate, playful—and the various ways they can give pleasure to each other, newlyweds sing with the psalmist: “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (139:14).

The delights of physical intimacy aren’t the only surprises. I had forgotten how little newlyweds know about each other, no

matter how long their courtship, until we had a recent bride and groom as weekend guests. “You do?” she exclaimed in response to something he said. “I didn’t know that!”

The surprises aren’t always pleasing. Men and women are different in more ways than the obvious, whether by nature or by training. Each couple differs in the family-shaped expectations they bring to marriage, in personality, in habits, in the rhythms of daily life. The first task is to get to know—not necessarily understand—how the other ticks.

Certainly a sense of humor is the salt that makes the effort of learning to live together palatable. This is the stage when couples begin to learn the art of compromise, to learn to appreciate the other’s uniqueness in a union that necessarily differs from the marriages of other unique individuals—skills that enrich community life as well.

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