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January 17, 2010

# Christ's Love Fortifies Unity of Marriage

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



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## **Christ's Love Fortifies Unity of Marriage**

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**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell  
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies  
Seton Hall University  
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

## **Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Sunday Readings for January 17, 2010 for Cycle C:

Is 62:1-5, Ps 96; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Jn 2:1-11

### **CHRIST'S LOVE FORTIFIES UNITY OF MARRIAGE**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

The various aspects of the Christian teaching about marriage should be presented time and again as young people mature to adulthood and its responsibilities. A deeper understanding of marriage should come progressively to each couple as they live their vocation, wherein "they signify and share the mystery of the unity and the faithful love between Christ and the Church..." (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church* #1).

This mystery is rooted in the divine plan for the progress of human history toward its goal; its purpose was shown in the natural order since the human couple become one flesh (person) in the permanent, exclusive commitment that they make to each other (see Gn 2:24). This unity can be taken up into the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death-and-resurrection, whereby his altruistic love became the foundation for the new creation. His sacrificial self-giving for the Church becomes the pattern for Christian marriage (see Eph 5:23-33). Would that all preparing for marriage develop a prayerful appreciation of the extent of Christ's love, realizing that he offers them the graces to imitate his example! Like other profound realities of the spiritual order, a lifetime of reflection and prayer is required for its full meaning to be fathomed and applied to each couple's unique situation.

The prophets of Israel followed Moses in trying to alert the Israelites to the many dimensions of the Covenant to which God had called them. The exclusive commitment of the wife to one husband became the human model for them to convey the serious demands of the Covenant. Idolatry was equated with adultery, for which a woman could be repudiated by her husband. Did the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple imply that God had divorced his spouse? Jeremiah thought so, but he declared that God, not bound by the divorce law of Deuteronomy (24:1-4), could take her back (Jer 3:1). The close link between the people and the land should be noted in both texts. The fate of the land depends on the fidelity of Israel and each of its members to the Covenant and to marriage.

During and after the Exile (587-538 BC), teachers following the inspiration of Isaiah assured the survivors that they would return to the land of Judah. God will rebuild Jerusalem and give her a new name, signifying a new destiny in divine service (Is 62:2).

Past taunts and accusations by gloating foreigners would be proven wrong as God renews the Covenant bond. "No more shall men call you 'Forsaken One' or your land 'Desolate'. But you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'Espoused' (Buelah in Hebrew)" (Is 62:4). The intimacy between people and land is clear from the taunts and from the divine names of renewed nuptials. The prophet reinforced this truth by his comment: "For the Lord delights in you, and makes your land his spouse". Having learned the bitter lesson of the Exile, the restored community would now live in fidelity to the Lord. Was this but a prophetic dream? While it is true that some failed to

keep the commandments, just as some betrayed their marriage vows, the people in general did persevere in their commitment to the one God.

Jesus drew attention to his esteem for marriage and family life on many occasions, restoring the nuptial bond to its pristine exclusiveness (Mt 19:1-12). The Fourth Gospel portrays the first great sign of Jesus in the wedding feast of Cana, whereby he manifested the glory that would unfold in the Paschal Mystery and the sending of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 2:11 and 7:39).

The abundance of wine supplied by Jesus was not only to satisfy the petition of Mary, who wanted to ease the embarrassment of the young couple. It was, moreover, the great symbol of joy in the final days (see Am 9:13-15), when people would experience God's presence as at a great banquet (see Is 25:6-10). In Christianity this communion is rooted in the Paschal Mystery as the self-giving of Jesus for the life of the world. Thus this sign at Cana points to the multiplication of loaves and the gift of the living bread (Jn 6:48-58). Did the presence of Jesus make a lasting impression on the common life of the couple celebrating their nuptials? One hopes that they came to realize that they were drawn into the drama of salvation. More important, what impact does Christ's presence have on the life of those entering marriage today? Do all Christians acknowledge both the gifts and the challenges of the vocation to married life?