

Garabandal's Reverence For Marriage

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by Gabriel Garnica

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It is clear from the Garabandal events and messages that the three central aspects of these apparitions are prayer, the priesthood, and the Eucharist.

Below this main level of focus, however, are a number of secondary, but quite important, aspects of the Garabandal story. Among these secondary areas of focus is marriage. The importance of matrimony as a spiritual battlefield has only increased over the years since those distant, early 60s.

Our Faith's View of Sacred Marriage

In Ephesians (5:32), St. Paul describes marriage as a "mystery", which is a sacred reality bearing and communicating grace. Marriage is viewed as a symbol of the mystical marriage between Christ and the Church. Marriage is also a double covenant; on one level, it is a covenant between a man and a woman and, on another level, it is a covenant between two people and God Almighty. According to Christ and the Bible, once one makes that commitment, one is expected to do everything in one's power to keep it. Marriage is based on faith and trust, which is necessary as one cannot predict how life will affect that relationship between a man and a woman. When one chooses a spouse and then marries that person in the presence of God, one is vowing to do everything possible to make that marriage work and thrive. It is not enough to say that one is doing everything possible; one *must do everything possible!*

Based on the above view of marriage in our faith, it should be easy to see why marriage is considered a sacred, indissoluble bond. It is not about flowers, caterers, reception halls, limousines, or expensive dresses. It is about a holy, transcendental union between a man and a woman that is bathed in the love of God and is likewise a unique, sacred bond with God as well. A marriage not entered into in the presence of God is not a sacred or holy marriage; it is at best an earthly imitation of a marriage.

The View of Marriage from The Pines

The holy and sacred character of marriage was often seen in the Garabandal events and messages. To begin with, the Blessed Virgin very often kissed wedding rings. A ring is just a ring, but when it symbolizes a marriage before God, it becomes a sacred, holy, blessed object, and is a sign of the sacramental union between the wife and the husband and of the sacred union between Christ and the Church as noted above.

I believe there is a meaning to the prompt and precise return of these rings to their owners. The Virgin was not trying to show off to the crowd like some psychic performer; she was making it a point to show that these rings, these blessed objects, were not sacred on their own. Their sacredness was derived from the fact that they were the symbols of a sacramental relationship between a man and a woman before God. The married couple thus became the "owners" of that relationship just as they were the owners of those rings. As in any ownership situation, the owner is expected to care for, nurture, and maintain their property. This sacred union is a serious, important thing, and the people involved are expected to care for, protect, nurture, and maintain that special union like they really mean it!



The other side of this marriage issue was also present at Garabandal. On a number of occasions, the seers were able to guess the false matrimonial state of people in the crowd. *Legal issues aside, people can call a marriage whatever they want, but a union not made in the presence of God is a fraud, a counterfeit, a fake sacred marriage. Carried a step further, it is not enough to enter a marriage in the presence of God; each partner of that marriage must do all he or she can to keep that marriage in His loving and protecting presence.*

Certainly the life of the seers since the apparitions also reflects much about how God sees matrimony. Their marriages, like those of all of us who have entered into this unique and special union, have seen happiness and difficulties, but that is part of life. What is important is that they have done their best to live the kind of life that God wants us to live, in whatever our station in life, including marriage.

The View of Marriage in Our Society

With each passing day, the view of marriage in our society becomes more distant, more deviant, from the view of marriage in the eyes of God. While marriages always have faced difficulties, the present society looks at marriage in a much more trivial, superficial, temporary, and selfish manner. At one extreme are those who completely ignore marriage and decide to live together. Then there are those who marry, but do so only in a legal fashion, ignoring the spiritual, religious aspects of the union. There are also those who marry within a spiritual, religious framework, but treat that framework as a civil arrangement, opting out when things "don't work out". And there are those who marry in a religious manner, then try to some degree to make it work, but ultimately fail anyway because they have a limit to the amount of effort they will put into the relationship.

Of course, also there are those who work hard to make their marriage work, and then are happy to maintain it at some decent, reasonable level of success. Finally, there are those who marry within a religious setting, work very hard to make the relationship work, sacrifice and compromise as needed, dedicate and commit themselves to continually improve and develop the relationship, shed tears of happiness and sadness in the struggle, welcome children as God blesses them with each, work hard to nurture and raise those children into loving, caring, responsible adults, and live into their old age with each wrinkle bearing witness to an experience along the way. More and more in this society, that last group has become the rarity, the exception. Our society's obsession with materialism, self, and independence has greatly weakened the marriage bond. People no longer feel the responsibility, the commitment, the duty, to work hard and *make their marriage work*. No-fault divorce laws and modernism have created a superficial, trivial, almost comical view of marriage. Young people see marriage as a car purchase: you go out for a test drive and return the car if you

don't like it or if you see a model you like better. People's tolerance for difficulty in marriage has been reduced to the point that many will not accept even reasonable marital problems, jumping ship when things look tough. All of these problems are caused by a society which devalues marriage not to a sacred bond between people and between those people and their God, but to a shirt one tries on for size.



PHOTO: Marriage as depicted by the Garabandal events and messages: holy and sacred

The family and friends around the couple often do not help matters. These "spectators" instead often encourage people not to work at it, but to get out when things look tough or inconvenient. In the interest of family peace, parents and other relatives look the other way when a couple acts against God's commandments regarding marriage, justifying their passivity with cries of "it is their private matter", "who am I to judge?", or "family comes before religion". Some priests make things worse by agreeing with the above rationalizations and compromises, becoming accomplices or even false leaders instead of standing firm for the faith and stressing compliance by the people. Marriage today often seems a shell, with the religious ceremony a plastic flower on a cheap decoration. Many guests, for example, do not attend the religious ceremony because they are busy preparing for the reception which, in their eyes, is more fun anyway!

Our Judeo-Christian tradition is based on a sound, traditional family structure, and such a structure is based on a sound, sacred, loving marriage. The forces of evil are ever on the march to destroy our traditional family and marriage structures. In order to do so, they are infecting our everyday and religious life with New Age ideas designed to weaken and cloud the traditions and truths we have held for many years. While we are busy taking the kids to soccer practice, planning picnics, and watching reality shows, these forces are steadily but surely creeping into every corner of our daily lives. By the time we realize it, if we have not already, their

views will be the "accepted norm" and we will be cast as fanatics, outcasts, extremists, much as were the dissenters in Hitler's time.

We must protect the family and our sacred marriage institution if we are to survive and overcome this onslaught. Instead of compromising and surrendering our traditional family and marriage foundations, we must be willing to stand firm and hold on to our beliefs. In this effort, we look to Garabandal as a guide to the sacredness and holiness that marriage has in the eyes of a loving, caring, and ever merciful God.

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