

Fr. Perozich comments —

When I prepared couples for marriage, I was diligent in following what I remembered from seminary training and diocesan requirements: proper paper work, mandatory retreats, counseling, and the premarital inventory questionnaire review to help the couple to know how the other experiences life and their expectations for marriage.

During the homily at a non catholic wedding, I heard the the married pastor tell the couple that if they wished a marriage in Christ, that they should pray together daily.

His technique was to

- set a regular time for prayer together as a couple;*
- encourage each partner to pray aloud what was in the person's heart for which he or she was asking God's help;*
- allow the person to speak with no comment on the prayer of the other either then or later;*
- advise the listening partner to pray for whatever it was that the other was praying for, knowing that God purifies all prayer.*

I began giving this advice also to prospective and already married couples, even including it in the wedding homily for the newly and “oldly” married in the assembly.

My experience with some couples, whom I refer to as the “Bickersons”, is a lack of listening to the other, as well as too much telling the other what to do.

The listening to the partner's heart within an experience of prayer seemed to me to be a good way to open to the other in marriage.

So when I read Fr. Swetland's article, I decided to share it.



- Praying as ‘One Flesh’**



By Msgr. Stuart Swetland, STD

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Dear Father,

I know praying together as a couple is important to do, but my husband feels awkward about it, and honestly, I do too. How can we overcome our hesitation, and how should we start?

— Anonymous, Missouri

First, thank you for your question. Praying together for all Christians is important, but it's particularly important for those who are called to be married.

One of my favorite passages in the Scriptures is Matthew 18:19–20: “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Not only does this passage remind us of the power of intercessory prayer, but our Lord reveals his special, mysterious presence to those who pray together.

It might be helpful to put this wondrous phrase “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” in context. As William Barclay and other Scripture scholars have noted, in the Jewish tradition there is a saying about studying the Torah: “Where two or three are together studying Torah, God’s glory is in their midst.” When Jesus “adapts” this saying, he identifies himself with the glory of God. Jesus is the

manifestation of the glory of God. To see him is to see the Father (cf. John 14:9). Jesus manifests God's glory because he reveals to us all the merciful love of the Father.

As Catholics, we know that Jesus is present to us in many ways. For example, in the liturgy (as Sacrosanctum Concilium 7 teaches) Jesus is present to us in the Word proclaimed, in the assembly gathered, in the priest celebrating, and, especially, in the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Jesus is also present when any group of Christians gather for prayer. This is particularly true when the "two or three" gathered are husband, wife, and children. The family has always been seen as "the domestic church" — the fundamental building block of the Church and society. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls the family "a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament" [Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7] (CCC, 2204). The Catechism continues by teaching:

"The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task" (CCC, 2205).

It is understandable that you and your husband find learning to pray together an "awkward experience." Prayer is among the most intimate aspect of the shared life of a married couple. Our relationship with God is uniquely our own and speaks to the core of who we are as human persons called into an intimate, personal, passionate relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To share that which is most intimate and personal with another can be a daunting experience. **But in marriage a couple must learn how to share all things in Christ. Through marriage the husband and wife truly become "one flesh"**

(cf. Matthew 19:5). This “two becoming one” is “a great mystery” that is at the foundation of both creation (Genesis 1–3) and recreation (Ephesians 5:20 ff).

You have already made huge strides toward an authentic prayer life of depth and substance as a couple and family by admitting your struggles to pray together. **Many couples avoid honest discussions about intimate things. Studies have shown that thoughts and feelings about prayer and sex are often the two most difficult subjects for couples to share.** This is very understandable because these are among the most intimate of subjects. Yet couples, to enter more deeply into their vocation as spouses and parents, must overcome any shyness or hesitation in these areas in order to achieve growth in grace and in intimacy with each other and God. Children also deserve parents who are growing in their spiritual life and in their life of grace together.

I would recommend several things by way of beginning. **First, attend Mass together. Discuss the readings and the homily. Share your own understanding of the various mysteries of our faith with your spouse.**

Each of you should **frequent confession** and, if possible, spiritual direction. If appropriate, you may want to share what your confessor or spiritual director recommends concerning how you can better pray together.

Choose a time and devotion that each of you enjoy praying, and make that time sacred in your house. For my parents, it was Bible reading at dinnertime. For many couples, praying the Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet together is a fruitful way to pray.

You might wish to **share spiritual reading with your spouse.** Also, you should encourage each other’s private devotion. My father would let my mom do her holy hour every morning undisturbed, while she, in return, always encouraged my father to do his daily meditation later in the day. When my

parents were younger, they were mentored by older couples who helped teach them how to pray and guided them in the practical aspects of marriage and parenting. You might want to seek out such couples in your parish.

I would also suggest **developing some traditions in your home associated with the Church's liturgical calendar. Develop ways that your family observes Advent, celebrates the Christmas season, lives Lent, glories in the wonders of the Easter celebrations, and so on.** Choose "name days" and particular saints to commemorate that are special to your family. You also can make "secular celebrations" — such as birthdays, anniversaries, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving — special, by incorporating prayers into the family celebrations.

Every family should procure sacramentals that are special reminders of the faith. A family Bible, crucifix, Advent wreath, and Christmas decorations can all aid in the focus on faith and prayer. Finally, I would recommend days of renewal, retreats, and occasional pilgrimages as a part of the yearly spiritual life of your family.

Obviously this is a long list and cannot be done all at once. But each of these (and more could be added) are steps in your journey of faith together. **The Lord has blessed you with your call to the married life. He has enriched you with the sacramental grace to become "one flesh" and give witness to Christ's love for the Church.** Be assured that God will not abandon you but will remain with you as you live out your vocation. **Your willingness to be open to God's abiding presence will assure you of the graces needed to become the saints you are called to be.**

Praying

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Share



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