

**Synopsis for “*Eros and Agape: Expressions of Love in Sacramental Marriage*”**  
**Joann Heaney-Hunter**

Pope Benedict’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, restores a positive connection between *eros* and *agape*, and sets out a beautiful vision for the expression of love in sacramental marriage. The purpose of this essay is to explore some ways that sacramental couples unite *eros* and *agape* in their expression of love.

Sacramental couples are invited to see everything as gift, and to embody God’s life, which unites *eros* and *agape* in a unique way. Sacramental marriage is a school where couples learn what it means to be followers of Christ. In pursuing the vocation of active love, in yielding to one another, in being bread for each other, in healing each others’ wounds and helping each other grow, couples conform more closely to the mind and heart of Christ (Phil. 2:5) This sort of love expresses concretely the union of *eros* and *agape*, and, as Benedict puts it, perceives the needs of the world with a “heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 31.)

Sharing of self with others is at the heart of sacramental marriage, where couples in so many unsung ways manifest the vision that *eros* and *agape* can be one in human relationships. Our expression of love is an expression of God’s love – combining *eros* and *agape* in a life-giving relationship that fulfills the individual person and enriches the world. *Deus Caritas Est* can be a reminder of the deeper meaning of sacramental marriage for all who read it.

***Eros and Agape: Expressions of Love in Sacramental Marriage***  
**Joann Heaney-Hunter, Ph.D.**

...Eros and agape – ascending love and descending love – can never be separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church has traditionally presented *eros*, the passionate expression of love often turned inward toward self, and *agape*, the expression of love turned outward toward concern for others, as opposing perspectives. In theological discourse throughout the centuries, the Church has emphasized *agape* and encouraged the suppression of *eros*. It was refreshing and somewhat surprising that Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, restores the connection between *eros* and *agape*. He goes even further, however, in stating that the *eros* can be positive, and that it is essential for *agape*. By doing so, Pope Benedict sets out a beautiful vision for the expression of love in sacramental marriage.

The purpose of this essay is to explore some ways that the lives of sacramentally married couples unite *eros* and *agape* in their expression of love. The question posed to this group was “what are new directions in the understanding of the sacramentality of marriage?” As a new direction, I have chosen to explore the implications of the union of *eros* and *agape* for married love as presented in *Deus Caritas Est*.

**Something old, something new**

For centuries, the Catholic Church has regarded marriage as a sacrament. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the historical evolution of marriage as a sacrament, one can say with certainty that by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (13<sup>th</sup> century) the Church

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 7.

viewed marriage as a sacrament – a vehicle for Christians to receive grace and to experience God’s love.<sup>2</sup> After the Council of Trent, (16<sup>th</sup> century) the valid marriage ceremony became the visible element that demonstrated the sacramentality of the relationship.<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council shifted the emphasis on marriage from legal contract to covenant of love. While not reducing the importance of the contractual elements of marriage, *Gaudium et Spes* in particular highlighted the covenantal dimensions of sacramental marriage. This emphasis was reinforced in Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* and John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio*.

In the last 40 years, the Church has enriched the theology of marriage by highlighting its role as a partnership for the whole of life, founded on the love of God and the love of the spouses and extending to others, especially children. The Augustinian formulation of the hierarchical goods of marriage – *proles, fides, and sacramentum*<sup>4</sup>-- yielded to a theology which focused on the inseparability of indissoluble spousal love and generous openness to life. As we understand sacramental marriage today, it is a sharing of the whole of life, which makes Christ present through the lives of the couples in these relationships. This view of the sacramentality of marriage lays a foundation for understanding Benedict’s vision of love described in *Deus Caritas Est*.

### ***Deus Caritas Est* – Perspectives on love**

One of the most striking elements of *Deus Caritas Est* is Benedict’s explication of love, which he describes not as an abstract concept, but as an eminently practical, vibrant way of living and being. Love, an act of the intellect and will rather than primarily an emotion, finds its

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>. In Canon 66, of the Council, listed under the heading of the administration of the sacraments, clerics are forbidden from extorting money for nuptial blessings.

<sup>3</sup> *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, 24<sup>th</sup> Session*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct24.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-03/npnf1-03-32.htm>.

clearest expression in the Incarnation. Christ perfectly embodies God's love, and is its primary symbol in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Another distinctive feature of the encyclical is Benedict's articulation of *eros* as a fire or passion that can lead us in many positive directions. Rather than seeing *eros* as a problem to be overcome, Benedict notes that rightly understood and correctly ordered, *eros* possesses "authentic grandeur,"<sup>6</sup> and constitutes an essential element of love. He declares: "love is indeed 'ecstasy,' not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward looking self towards its liberation of self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God..."<sup>7</sup>

This characterization is by no means unique or even new, having its roots in the Church's mystical tradition. For example, as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Origen, commenting on the *Song of Songs*, portrayed the relationship between God and the person as a union of lover and beloved – what some would describe as an erotic encounter.

The soul is moved by heavenly love and longing when, having clearly beheld the beauty and the fairness of the Word of God, it falls deeply in love with His loveliness and receives from the Word Himself a certain dart and wound of love...If, then, a person can extend his thinking so as to ponder and consider the beauty and the grace of all things that have been created in the Word, the very charm of them will so smite him...<sup>8</sup>

Julian of Norwich, a 14<sup>th</sup> century *mystic*, described her passionate desire for God in the Long

Text of her work *Showings*:

...there is no created being who can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly the Creator loves us...and therefore we may with reverence ask from our lover all that we

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<sup>5</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no 6.

<sup>8</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Homilies on the Song of Songs*, R.P. Lawson, trans. *Ancient Christian Writers.*, Vol. 26, (New York: Newman, 1957) 29-30.

will, for our natural will is to have God, and God's good will is to have us, and we can never stop willing or loving until we possess him in the fullness of joy.<sup>9</sup>

A final example of *eros* is found in the Teresa of Avila's 16<sup>th</sup> century autobiography, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, where she depicted the role of passionate desire in her relationship with God:

I saw myself dying with a desire to see God, and I knew not how to seek that life otherwise than by dying.<sup>10</sup>

The pain was so great that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying.<sup>11</sup>

A common thread running through these works is that desire *for* God can lead us to union *with* God. Descriptions of individuals who have had an intimate experience of God are found throughout Church history. Their experiences of God were so powerful that they sometimes manifested themselves physically as well as spiritually.

*Eros*, desire for, forms the basis for passionate union with God. If one continues to read the works of these and other Christian writers, we find that profound desire for God leads to action for others – either prayer for the world or ministry for and with others all done for the glory of God. The desire for God, *eros*, leads to a desire for the good of individuals or the world, *agape*. This message, rooted in the Church's tradition, is at the heart of Benedict's understanding of *eros* in *Deus Caritas Est*.

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<sup>9</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, (Long Text) 6, eds. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J., (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 186. According to Gillian Ahlgren, "Julian of Norwich's Theology of *Eros*," *Spiritus* 5 (2005) 51, Julian's entire theology sees *eros* as its root, "the force that draws all things into Godself, and the corresponding root of our urge toward union with God and others."

<sup>10</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, XXIX, no. 10, at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/life>. In this chapter, she feels compelled to defend her visions because confessors have urged her to fight them off as delusions of Satan. She is torn between submitting to the authority of the Church and declaring what she knows to be true experiences of God.

<sup>11</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, XXIX, no. 17 at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/life>.

## ***Eros and Agape: Two sides of the same coin***

Benedict pointed out that *eros* is not emphasized to any great extent in either the Old Testament or the New. Instead, *agape* is stressed.<sup>12</sup> But he was quick to point out that the inextricable connection between the two should be carefully considered. From the point of view of *Deus Caritas Est*, *eros* and *agape*, when perfected, are not disconnected, they are one. Both are necessary for life; they constitute the mutuality of true love, both receiving and giving. According to Benedict, as one receives love and gives it to another, the desire *for* (*eros*) is united to a desire *for the good of* (*agape*.) The more love grows, the more one wants to be present to the other – *eros* becomes *agape* and enriches the experience of love. In Benedict's words, "Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift."<sup>13</sup>

Of course, *eros* and *agape* are perfectly united only in the Triune God, where passionate love and desire for humanity (*eros*) and desire for humanity's good (*agape*) are synonymous. Only God's love can manifest a perfect union of gracious desire for us which exists for our good; all humanity struggles with flaws, mixed motives and sinfulness that prevent us from achieving this perfect union. Despite human imperfection, however, with God's grace, we are capable of achieving some union of *eros* and *agape* in our own lives.

Benedict uses the marriage relationship to demonstrate a human realization of the union of *eros* and *agape*. The desire for marriage expresses the way *eros* is rooted. In Matthew 19, Jesus uses Genesis 2:24 to explain how marriage completes individuals – a man leaves father and

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<sup>12</sup>*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 12.

mother to find woman, and joined together, they represent human fulfillment. Ephesians 5 extends the metaphor to Christ and the Church, and uses marriage to explain it.

Moreover, in marriage, *eros* finds its fulfillment<sup>14</sup> in *agape*. A healthy marriage, while creating union, does not lead to enmeshment; it produces a love where both parties can be fully one yet remain themselves.<sup>15</sup> Despite its imperfection, human love as exemplified in healthy marriage serves to point to the totality of God's love. The grace of marriage can help couples move closer to attaining the union of *eros* and *agape* presented in *Deus Caritas Est*. As persons created in the image and likeness of God, *eros*, a profound desire for another, can be a sacred encounter that finds joyful fulfillment in *agape*.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict lays out an elegant definition of love as the union of desire for and desire for the good of another. In principle, this may appear to be clear and simple. In practice, however, this definition can be difficult to implement. I offer these suggestions to married couples seeking to realize the union of *eros* and *agape*:

1. Remember that we are created in the image of the Triune God, the perfect community whose desire for each other (*eros*) leads to a radical love for the world (*agape*.)
2. Remember that we are called to be Eucharistic – people of thanks who give ourselves as bread for the world and servants of others.

### ***Married love embodies the Trinity – the community which unites eros and agape***

In no. 19, Benedict, quoting Augustine's *De Trinitate*, reminds readers that where we see charity, we see the Triune God. In this section of the encyclical he calls the entire Christian community to love one another; I apply this call to the church of the home formed in sacramental

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<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* VIII, 8.12, in *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 10.

marriage. Where love is revealed in the lives of sacramental couples, the Trinity is present. True love reveals the Trinity, the perfect community where *eros* and *agape* are always one.

In her work *God for Us*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna described the Trinity as a community of intimacy of the persons in God (immanent Trinity) that moves toward all creation (economic Trinity).

...Trinitarian theology is par excellence a theology of relationship: God to us, we to God, we to each other. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the essence of God is relational, other-ward, that God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of freedom, love, and knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

Historically, theologians such as John Damascene emphasized the dynamic character of each person of God, as well as their interrelationship by using the term *perichoresis*, a dance.<sup>17</sup> This not only provides a metaphor for the persons in God in relationship with each other and with human beings, but also for persons in relationship with each other.<sup>18</sup> Used to illustrate the Trinity, *perichoresis* expresses an embrace of unity. How does that help us understand the sacramental couple? At their best, couples dance together, developing intimacy through flexible bonds that connect them to each other and encourage their freedom of movement and growth. Couples living the dance of the Trinity develop in intimacy, commitment, and outreach in daily life.

As sacramental couples live the dance of the Trinity, they communicate a message of love with their words and their lives. They tell the world:

1. God is love. Given the circumstances of today's world, this message desperately needs to be proclaimed.

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<sup>16</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) 243.

<sup>17</sup>John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 1.8.

<sup>18</sup>Patricia Wilson Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 131-133.



2. Jesus Christ is the definitive expression of God in the world. For Christians, he is the primordial sacrament, the fullest expression of God in our midst.
3. The Spirit -- God's graciousness itself -- acts in the world today, leading people to live God's message.
4. The Triune God invites us to become God's sons and daughters. This is not possible through human activity alone, but it is possible with God's grace.

In daily life, sacramental couples proclaim this message through word and example.<sup>19</sup> They *tell* others about their faith in God, and *show* what it means through their life's witness. In short, sacramental couples have the opportunity to demonstrate the dance of the Trinity in the world.

Sacramental couples have the potential to be powerful witnesses of the Trinitarian dance. It is both a challenge and a blessing for the entire community to tap the wellspring of marriage and family and draw from their abundant resources. With nourishment and support, sacramental couples can move closer to realizing the union of *eros* and *agape* most perfectly manifested in the life of the Trinity.

***Couples live as Eucharistic people – The union of eros and agape as a model for married life***

For Catholic Christians, the heart of sacramental life is the Eucharist, which *Lumen Gentium* calls “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.”<sup>20</sup> In addition to its importance as meal and sacrifice, the Eucharist – partaking *of* the body of Christ *within* the body of Christ – invites us to a life of service, following Christ who asks us to pick up our crosses and follow him. (Mk 8:34). This vision of Eucharist is exemplified in Paul's challenge to celebrate the Eucharist as a meal of unity (I Cor.11: 18-27) and in John's juxtaposition of the Last Supper

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<sup>19</sup>Susan Blum, “The Need for Evangelization Training,” in *The New Catholic Evangelization*, Kenneth Boyack, C.S.P., ed, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 164.

<sup>20</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11 at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

meal and the foot washing (Jn 13: 1-15). Approached from these vantage points, the Eucharist calls believers to nourish and serve each other in the midst of daily life. Sacramental couples, through their daily experiences and events, are called, in the words of St. Augustine, to *become* Eucharist in the world.<sup>21</sup>

A key element of *Deus Caritas Est* is Benedict's insistence that the union of *eros* and *agape* leads to action; he describes sacramental union with Christ in the Eucharist as an encounter that draws individuals out of themselves and toward each other on a local and global level.<sup>22</sup> According to Benedict, union with Christ in the Eucharist is intrinsically social in nature – by sharing in the Eucharist, we say yes to loving God and loving others. This union is nourished by prayer, which helps persons “draw ever new strength from Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Prayer is the wellspring from which all believers draw daily.

Again, it is possible to apply this understanding of the social dimension of the Eucharist to sacramental marriage. Sacramental couples, participating in the Eucharist, are drawn toward the union of *eros* and *agape*, which leads to action. As they say their “Amen” when they receive the body of Christ, they say yes to their relationship, to the extension of their love in children, and to their participation in the life of the community. Furthermore, participation in the Eucharist leads couples to move from their *eros* (desire for the good of the couple relationship alone) to their *agape* (a desire for the good for others beyond the marriage.) Finally, seeing sacramental couples as Eucharistic highlights the joy both of being loved and of loving others in turn. Eucharistic celebrations invite us into the joy of Christ's love, which has first been given to us.

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 272*, in John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., ed., *Works of St. Augustine, Sermons, Part 3, Vol. 7*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1993) 300-301.

<sup>22</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no.14.

<sup>23</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 36.

Participating in Eucharist and becoming Eucharistic people challenges couples to unite *eros* and *agape* through loving service. In simple ways such as lending a hand to someone in need, or supporting efforts to help enhance life in the community, couples demonstrate rather than simply talk about care and concern for all life. On a structural level, it may mean fighting against the causes of poverty among people,<sup>24</sup> or engaging in serious critique of the political process. Couples must consider the world's situation as they live their sacrament each day in the context of the social dimensions of Eucharist.

How does a couple participate fully in and become Eucharist, a celebration which embodies Christ's perfect union of *eros* and *agape*? Here, it is necessary to recall one model of Eucharistic action – blessing, breaking, and sharing – which becomes a paradigm for Christian life, blessed, broken, and shared.<sup>25</sup> In their sacramental relationship, couples unite *eros* and *agape* in the blessing, breaking and sharing of their own lives.

First, marriage can be filled with blessings such as the joy of couples in love, the pride of parents for their children, and the affection of couples who have shared a long life together. One blessing not always mentioned, however, is the unconditional, loving covenant that forms the foundation of a sacramental marriage. Covenant challenges couples to unite *eros* to *agape*, and to consider the meaning of their relationship in the context of a loving relationship with God. The covenant of marriage calls couples to recognize that they are blessed as they embody Christ's unconditional love for us. The blessings of a sacramental marriage covenant are sometimes lost on society today. All too often, people try to find ways to limit commitments and potential

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<sup>24</sup>John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*. (New York: Crossroad/Herder & Herder; 10th edition (October 2002).

liabilities, and to protect themselves from the unknown potential for failure or unhappiness.<sup>26</sup> A Eucharistic life, on the other hand, invites persons to embody Christ, the perfect expression of the covenant. Understanding marriage as a Eucharistic life demands that we love in the same way.

Second, couples striving to embody the union of *eros and agape* in their lives also experience breaking, a manifestation of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. As couples defer to the needs of others, they live out the sacrificial character of the Eucharist each day. They enter not only into the resurrection of Christ, but into the brokenness and death that precedes it. Just as Christ died, we are called to die, and just as resurrection, not death, was the final answer for Christ, so it will be for us. (Romans 6:3-6)

Brokenness is a part of every married life. For example, individuals face their own brokenness as they work to create a relationship prior to marriage, bringing to it unrealized dreams, shattered promises, and perhaps lives challenged by circumstances or actions. They experience brokenness by recognizing that no freedom is absolute, and that some renunciation of freedom is necessary for the good of the relationship – that desire for another often requires self-sacrifice as they grow toward a more perfect union of *eros and agape*.

Couples with children at any stage of life know what it means to be broken. From the time toddlers assert their independence by saying “no,” parents face the brokenness associated with a child’s movement from one stage of life to another. All parents know the heartbreak of letting children make their own mistakes when they could step in and prevent the problems from happening. Couples who have children with serious illnesses experience the trials associated with trying to enhance a child’s quality of life. Adopting couples face challenges that may

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Farley, “The Meaning of Commitment” in Michael Warren and Kieran Scott, *Perspectives on Marriage*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 110-122.

stretch them to the breaking point as they navigate painfully complicated systems, and deal with unforeseen difficulties as they raise their children. Some couples experience the agony of a child's death, and the ensuing struggle that results as they continue to hope in the resurrection.

On the other end of the spectrum, many couples today are broken as they care for aging relatives. How do families cope with elderly parents and other relatives who may have a longer but not necessarily higher-quality life? Even when issues such as arranging care and balancing the needs of the senior with those of the rest of the family are resolved, the daily hurdles faced by those who care for the elderly are numerous. In sacramental marriage, as in the Eucharist, we experience lives broken in the same way that the bread is broken. Each day, we come to terms with our own brokenness as we celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ in the Eucharist.

A third aspect of the Eucharistic action is sharing food and self within the body of Christ. The Eucharist is the most powerful Christian symbol of sharing food and life, and it is in participating in this celebration that we come to know Christ. Joining together to share any meal is an intimate activity that requires people to set aside their differences, work at conversing, and begin to build community.

Unfortunately, many Americans today have lost sight of the significance of the family meal. It takes effort to see the Eucharist as an intimate sharing of food that unites us in love. This union, of which sharing food is a metaphor, is the point where Eucharist and family intersect. Developing an intimate relationship is at the heart of marriage, because it is in becoming close, sharing deeply, trusting and respecting each other that we can come to understand the depth of God's presence in our lives. Intimacy for couples leads to growth in relationships and provides individuals with the support to reach out beyond themselves. Achieving intimacy does not

happen overnight. It takes time and consistent work, and involves the risk of revealing oneself to another.

A final dimension of Eucharistic sharing is that sacramental couples take their awareness of the transforming power of God's love and unity in their lives and reach outward to bring it to others.<sup>27</sup> This concept is perhaps best defined by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as "bringing the Good News to all humanity, and through its influence transforming it from within and making it new."<sup>28</sup> Eucharistic couples allow God's life to transform their minds and hearts,<sup>29</sup> and are led by desire for the good of others to reach out to them.

In the spirit of Christ's radical gift of self to all, couples are called to create a Eucharistic culture in their homes – a culture of covenantal spirituality (blessing), intimacy (which inevitably involves brokenness), and generosity (sharing). While we live in a society that emphasizes the importance of material things to the detriment of everything else, a Eucharistic stance toward life demands that people look beyond the material to create a culture of sharing Christ's love in the midst of their homes and beyond it. Participating in the Eucharist leads us to a life of service. *Eros*, which leads couples to desire each other, is transformed through Eucharistic participation into *agape*, love of others. God builds on the blessings, the brokenness, and the sharing we experience each day, and makes them holy. God comes to us disguised as our lives.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Washington D.C.: USCC, 1981) 17-64.

<sup>28</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 19. He further describes evangelization as: "proclaiming the Gospel of Christ through testimony and the witness of an authentic Christian life."

<sup>29</sup>Patrick Brennan, *Reimagining Evangelization*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995). See also Robert Oliver, *The Vocation of the Laity to Evangelization: An Ecclesiological Inquiry into the Synod on the Laity (1987)*, *Christifideles laici (1989)*, and *Documents of the NCCB (1987-1996)*, 18, (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997).

<sup>30</sup>Richard Rohr, "Epiphany: You Can't Go Home Again," <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Jan2001/Feature3.asp>. This stance also is revealed in Ignatian spirituality, particularly in the maxim, "Find God in all things." See, for example, *Complementary Norms to the*

Sacramental couples embody the Eucharist, the sacrifice of thanksgiving which makes present Christ in bread, wine, and people. In celebrating the Eucharist, the Church gives thanks for Christ in our midst, and for the people that make up the body of Christ. A challenge of the Eucharist is to maintain its social dimension. For sacramentally married couples, a key task is to keep it always present in their lives, to give thanks for God's gifts in a mindful way, on a daily basis. Sacramental couples live the Eucharist by embodying its actions of blessing, breaking and sharing. As they build a culture of covenantal spirituality, intimacy, and generosity, they demonstrate Eucharistic life daily. Through the witness of sacramental couples, we experience in their lives the union of *eros* and *agape* described in *Deus Caritas Est*.

### **Conclusions**

Love is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God.<sup>31</sup>

This passage from *Deus Caritas Est* speaks to our dignity as persons created in the image of God, and implies a basic principle of sacramentality; because we are created in God's image, we can become sacramental -- symbols of God. In these few words, Benedict sets forth a profound challenge, calling us to become sacraments in the midst of the world. While the encyclical is addressed to all believers, I hope to have shown how Benedict's understanding of love can be applied specifically to sacramentally married couples, who, by virtue of their vocation, embody God's presence in their relationship with each other.

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*Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Norms, Part VI, Sect. 5, Ch. 1, no. 223.3 in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms*, (Institute of Jesuit Sources: St. Louis, MO, 1996) 255.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 39.

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)

As sacramental couples created in God's image, we are called to see all things, people, and activities as gifts, and to embody God's life, which unites *eros* and *agape* in a unique way. While certainly not able to enflesh perfectly God's union of *eros and agape*, sacramental couples are called to work toward that union, and to spread the Good News and be engaged in the world through their vocation.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict reminds the entire Christian community that we must be a "community that practices love."<sup>32</sup> This reminder can be applied to sacramental couples, called by their vocation to lead the church of the home as a community that gives glory and praise to God and finds God in all things. Primarily, these tasks are accomplished through the loving action of couples within the family and outside of it. "Who is my neighbor?" the question asked by the scholar of the law in Luke 10, is answered for married couples by *Deus Caritas Est*. Part of the responsibility of the vocation of marriage implies providing material assistance to others, and also to offer "refreshment and care for souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support."<sup>33</sup>

Sacramental marriage is a school where we learn what it means to be followers of Christ. In pursuing the vocation of active love, in yielding to one another, in being bread for each other, in healing each others' wounds and helping each other grow, couples conform more closely to the mind and heart of Christ (Phil. 2:5) This sort of love, a constitutive element of the sacramentality of marriage, expresses in a concrete way the union of *eros* and *agape*. It is a love

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<sup>32</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 29.



that does not just desire another – it is love which perceives the needs of the world with a “heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”<sup>34</sup>

As the letter of James reminds us, faith without works is dead. (2:17) In a similar vein, Benedict reminds readers that service without love is empty. He declares that Paul’s hymn to love in I Cor 13 “...must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter.”<sup>35</sup> He points out that practical activity is insufficient without love that is nourished by an encounter with Christ, the union of *eros and agape*.

Sharing of self with others is at the heart of sacramental marriage, where couples give of themselves, and in so many unsung ways the manifest the vision that *eros and agape* can be one in human relationships. Our expression of love is an expression of God’s love – combining *eros and agape* in a life-giving relationship that fulfills the individual person and enriches the world. *Deus Caritas Est* can be a reminder of the deeper meaning of sacramental marriage for all who read it.

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<sup>34</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 34.