

You, too, are asking me for a book of meditations! You will have to learn to decipher the book that God has given you: your marriage.

Let me explain. When I was young priest, I used to enjoy visiting a painter friend of mine in his studio. True artists have a quality of soul that seems to be their privilege (I do not say their monopoly, since this quality is also found in the saints). It is a certain freshness of feeling—perhaps I should call it candor—that is closely akin to spiritual childhood. My friend possessed this quality in a rare degree. The years had, as it were, filtered and purified this precious quality of soul in him. When he took his visitors around his studio, presenting his canvasses to them, and marveling at them like a young mother before her newborn child, no one was annoyed. For there was no trace of vanity in his manner, only fervor.

Even more than his paintings, I loved to contemplate his beautiful, vibrant face. His astonishingly mobile features reflected different nuances and vibrations, depending on the canvas he was describing. He did not love all his works equally. He would linger with special predilection before some of them, no doubt the ones in which he had expressed the best that was in him. He delighted in them with a childlike joy, watching for my reaction. This joy intensified as I began to understand his canvas better (or rather his feelings, of which the canvas was simply the reflection).

Many a time, after leaving his studio, my thoughts turned to God. God, in the vast studio that is the universe, leads us by the hand to present his works to us. He wants to help us spell them out and to discover their deep inner meaning, so that he can introduce us through them to his own thoughts and sentiments. God is not engrossed by all of his creatures in the same degree. There are some before which he stops, and before which he makes us pause at greater length. They are the ones into which he has put the best of himself, through which he reveals his loftiest perfections to us. Love, the union of man and woman, is among them.

Everything had been created, one day after the other, and on the sixth day the creation of man had been the crowning achievement. However, God's divine endeavor was still unfinished. It still remained for marriage to be instituted. And so God formed Eve and united her to Adam. This union of man and woman spoke eloquently of his magnificent plan, still hidden in the mists of the future: the union between his Son and redeemed humanity. How could he not have a predilection for marriage, the last of his creations in point of time?

It is no surprise, therefore, that we are constantly making discoveries about life in the married state. No surprise that all the mystics, following the Bible, speak of marriage as a symbol of the riches of love that

union with Christ holds for us. Paul and Monique, please understand that your married life is filled with meaning. Don't be like those illiterates who look at a written page and don't realize that it means something, that it is perhaps a beautiful poem.

Your marriage is not only a great human reality. It is also rich with supernatural meaning. There is Someone who reveals his heart to you through marriage, who reveals his impatient desire to establish between each of you and himself bonds of love that will give far greater happiness than those of marriage. There is Someone who, through your marriage, wants help you understand what he hopes from you, what your relationship with him should be throughout life.

I want to cite three texts that will show you how we are to read and understand the parable that is human love. I am correct in saying "parable," because human love is written in a cipher. A certain "innocence of the eyes" is needed to decipher the divine message that lies hidden within marriage.

The first text is in a letter from a friend who lives in Morocco. His wife had spent her vacation in France, far from him, but was soon expected home. He was preparing himself for her return. In so doing, his thoughts rose to noble heights:

"I am expecting Françoise in a week. If we prepared for our Communion the way we prepare to see our spouses again, I think we would make serious progress in the knowledge and love of Christ."

I excerpt the second text from Jacques Mailliet's *Lettres à sa fiancée*. He was deeply convinced that divine love surpasses human love, without thereby lessening the value of the latter. His love for Madeleine made him think of God, and his love of God made him think of Madeleine.

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"To think of you, Madeleine, is to be obliged to regain a more naive joyousness, to be forced to combat sadness, so as to be worthier of one of your glances. My attitude toward the one I love teaches me the attitude I should have toward God. It gives me a keener desire to be in his presence, to do his will which is never capricious. It teaches me an interior recollection where his presence should eclipse all lesser concerns. If only I yearned for God the way I yearn for my little Mad! If only I was as eager at every moment to cast aside everything that separates me from God the way I strive to remove every obstacle that furtively comes between you and me!"

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Last, there there is this testimony cited among others in the report on the Inquiry on Mental Prayer published in a special issue of *L'Anneau*

*d'Or*: "Seigneur, apprends-nous à prier" ("Lord, teach us to pray").

One woman recounts that she discovered the meaning of mental prayer from her dialogue with her husband. Does not this dialogue (which sometimes attains a superhuman quality in an atmosphere of silence) bear the same relation to human love, that mental prayer does to the union of the human person with God? Is it not the moment of intense intimacy, in which love expresses itself most perfectly and is at the same time renewed?

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"Once I had decided to practice mental prayer, I simply "jumped in" without really knowing how to go about it. And then suddenly there was a light....First and above all, I probably had to establish a state of spiritual intimacy between myself and God. After that, it was very simple, since I have been in training in that kind of "gymnastics" in my married life.

"When I want our evenings together to be times of true intimacy, I silence within me all the buzzing of domestic worries, of problems with the children, of various jobs to finish. I try to free myself from all that, so as to make myself available to my husband in heart, mind, and soul, ready to listen to his worries, his thoughts, his difficulties. And afterwards we may talk about our children, about my worries, or my work, but we do it in a purified atmosphere.

"Reflection on our married life was my first initiation into mental prayer.

"Several times when I had the feeling of treading in place, I wanted to delve into St. Teresa, for example, but then something would keep me from it. I then understood that there is another biography to consult, the biography every married couple writes together day day.

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And now that I have shown you the way, Paul and Monique, it is up to you to decipher the parable of your marriage, and to make your own discoveries about it. But following the example of the Apostles, be sure to ask Christ to explain its meaning to you. Otherwise you will be like those of whom the Master said: *"they look but do not see, they listen but do not hear or understand....Sluggish indeed is this people's heart...they have firmly closed their eyes; otherwise they might...understand with their hearts, and turn back to me, and I should heal them"* (Mt 13:13, 15).