



NFP and Theology of the Body



St. Pope John Paul II,
author of *Theology of the Body*

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Saint John Paul II uses Theology of the Body as a catechesis to understand spousal love between a man and a woman. He develops spousal love between God and his Chosen people and between Christ the Bridegroom and His bride the Church. Jesus Christ is the model of sacrificial love in gift of self for the good of the other. Married couples participate in Christ's sacrificial love when they consciously, with full will and consent, give of themselves body, mind, and strength for the good of the other and for the children who are a gift of their spousal love. Saint John Paul II not only describes spousal love as a reciprocal gift of self, but he describes spousal love as a reciprocal receiving of the other. He describes married spousal love as a participation and a prophetic witness of the communion of the Trinity where the perfection of the reciprocal gift of self and the reciprocal receiving of the other shares in the love and life of the Holy Spirit. Couples who use Natural Family Planning share in the reciprocal gift of self and the reciprocal receiving of the other in communion with the three persons of the Trinity.

- 1) Many people have never thought about the **relationship between marriage and the Trinity**. But there is a parallel: the Trinity is a communion of persons whose union brings forth life, and marriage involves a communion of persons whose union has the capacity to bring forth life.

Ask a couple how they understand the connection between marriage and the Trinity. You might use the following quote to prompt them:

"Man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning."
(Saint John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 9.3)

- 2) Many people have never thought about the **relationship between the Eucharist and Marriage**. But there is a parallel: Holy Communion is a one flesh union of persons, and marriage involves a one flesh union of persons. The one flesh union of man and woman in marriage is meant to be a sign – limited, but real – of the one flesh union that is offered to us in the Eucharist. Likewise, the Eucharist is a one flesh union that gives life, and marital intercourse is a one flesh union that has the capacity to give life.

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Ask a couple how they understand the connection between the Eucharist and marriage. You might use the following quotes to prompt them:

“For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself...who gives life to humanity through his flesh”. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 16)

“The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 27)

- 3)** Many people have never thought about the **relationship between marriage and the Cross**. But there is a parallel: on the Cross, Christ made a complete gift of his body and blood to us so that we might have life; likewise, in marriage, spouses make a complete gift of their body and blood to each other so that there might be life.

Ask a couple how they understand the connection between the Cross and marriage. You might use the following quotes to prompt them:

“This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross for His bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation; the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ. The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross ... Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross.” (Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #13)

“The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross”. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 766)

SUMMARY

By pointing out some of the basic connections between marriage and the Trinity, marriage and the Eucharist, and marriage and the Cross, you can help a couple begin to form a “theology of the body.” The theology of the body challenges couples to not only believe the faith with their minds, but to live the faith with their bodies. If they develop this theology of the body they will be able to see more clearly how their faith in Jesus Christ, their celebration of the sacraments, and the decisions they make in everyday life can all be connected.



See current links to relevant and up-to-date resources at bit.ly/NFP-TP-Resources