

COURTSHIP
OF THE
SAINTS

COURTSHIP
OF THE
SAINTS

HOW THE SAINTS MET
THEIR SPOUSES

Patrick O'Hearn

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

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This book is lovingly dedicated to Our Lady, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, and to my wife, Amanda.

*“We are born to love, we live to love, and
we will die to love still more.”¹*

—Saint Joseph Cafasso

¹ “Saints of the Day-Joseph Cafasso,” CatholicSaints.Info, catholic saints.info/saints-of-the-day-joseph-cafasso/.

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PREFACE

OF ALL THE moments in our short lives, the firsts are what we remember: our first gazing upon the ocean, making our First Holy Communion, holding our child for the first time. For those of us called to marriage, one of the most memorable moments is when we first met our spouse. You can recall it vividly. Perhaps your heart started racing and your palms got sweaty. It was a sacred moment, a moment when heaven touched earth, when God intervened in time and space. Some of us may have experienced love at first sight, while others fell in love over time. Meeting our spouse takes our soul back to the greatest proposal of all time, the time when God sent the archangel Gabriel to propose to Mary on His behalf. By her *fiat*, Mary became the spouse of the Holy Spirit. But before the archangel Gabriel proposed to Mary, she received another proposal—from Saint Joseph. Mary is, in fact, the only person in the world to be proposed to by both man and angel.

When I first met my wife Amanda in graduate school, I experienced an indefinable sense of something sacred. Although I presume I did not have an archangel present at my side like Mary did, I now believe my guardian angel and my wife's joined forces that day. I didn't think, *I am going to marry this girl!*, but there was something different about her that escaped me at the time. Today, I believe it

was the Holy Spirit, a spirit of peace that overcame me and took over my life. And it was a moment that almost never could have happened, save for the word of this same Spirit.

A year after I obtained my undergraduate degree, I joined a Benedictine monastery for nearly three years. At the start of my novitiate, my abbot chose my new religious name—Raphael—after Saint Raphael. Perhaps this was not a coincidence, as Saint Raphael is the patron of those finding a spouse. At one point, a grandmother asked me to pray to Saint Raphael that her granddaughter would meet a holy spouse. She was concerned because her granddaughter was in her thirties and her prospects seemed slim. And so I sought Saint Raphael's intercession every night for a year, asking that he would help this woman find a spouse. A year later, the grandmother told me her granddaughter was engaged, and I became even more convinced that God and His saints truly wish to bring about holy marriages.

It was only recently that Pope Benedict XVI learned how his parents met, which will be recounted in this book along with several other beautiful marriage stories. At some point, every couple ought to write down how they met their spouse and share it with their children and grandchildren someday to inspire in them the confidence that true love is worth the wait.

How I wish I could have read about my grandparents' love story. Sadly, many devout couples, now deceased, have had children and grandchildren who strayed from the faith, and who are now living in sinful relationships and miserable marriages. Perhaps if their children and grandchildren could have read about their sacrifices to

keep the faith and to remain pure, they might have followed their ancestors' holy example.

We live in times when marriage is under diabolical attack. In today's age young men do not know how to pursue a woman chastely and purely because their parents and the culture have failed to show them how. Nowadays a young woman will give herself away to get love, only to be used and hurt. We live in times when more people are cohabitating and postponing marriage than ever before. As a result, young men and women wonder if there is such a thing as true love and whether it is worth fighting for. But there is a remedy for all this, and it is called courtship.

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Finally, I would like to thank God and these saintly couples presented in this book. May all who read this book love with their same passion!

INTRODUCTION

THE ESSENCE OF our existence both now and for all eternity is to fall in love. With each passing day, we ought to love and suffer for God more than the previous day. Should we reach heaven, God willing, we will never exhaust our love for God and God's love for us. Our union will be ever new as we seek to behold the Beatific Vision throughout eternity while God unveils such mysteries too profound for the human mind to grasp. Each moment and each new insight into God's unfathomable mercy shall make us only love and praise Him all the more.

On earth, human love ought to mirror the Divine Love: the eternal exchange of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Only those couples who seek to resemble the Trinitarian love and Christ's love for His Church by holding nothing back from their spouses all the days of their life can obtain the perfection of love. Couples who madly love and sacrifice for each other lead their children to heaven. These couples become living icons of the Blessed Trinity. And their children cannot help being drawn into the Divine Love when they experience their parents' unconditional love for them, or when they see their parents lay down their lives for one another. A child who sees his father gaze into his mother's eyes or his mother gladly serving his father is given a glimpse into eternity.

Long before every married couple met, it was God who peered into the future. He saw every child who was to be conceived and every marriage that ought to be. It was God who put the desire for marriage in many hearts, and it was God who created us not only for Himself but, in a mysterious way, for our spouse, intending us to be the perfect helpmate just like Eve was created for Adam. It should come as no surprise, then, that when we met (or will meet) our spouse for the first time, there was a lot of “pre-planning” that went into this moment (as in, planning from all eternity!). I imagine God smiling when He hears our hearts saying, “Wow. This person is perfect for me. I want to spend the rest of my life with her.” God, who created the world out of nothing, knows what He is about. His designs are perfect even though at times we don’t see them amidst our fallen world; they are perfect in spite of our sinfulness. Yes, God wills that His children experience marriage the way He intended it to be: one of joy and one of sacrificial love as we traverse this valley of tears to eternity.

Many people have entered marriage blindly. They “fall in love” based solely on physical attraction, social status, and material wealth, while overlooking virtue, the most fundamental quality. They would have been much happier had they put virtue over the externals.

At many weddings today, God is not even invited to the celebration. Beaches and scenic gardens have replaced God’s holy house. Many of us blindly enter marriage only thinking about what we can receive instead of what we can offer. We have accepted the false notion of emotional love instead of true sacrificial love seen most visibly on

the cross. When we do the former, we are walking into a minefield and we fail to turn to God, the only Person who can make our marriage what it is meant to be.

Some cultures offer an alternative to the current plight of divorce. For instance, in some cultures, the bride walks down the aisle with a crucifix in her hands and not a bouquet. And before the couple exchanges their kiss on the altar, they first kiss the cross, because the cross is the only remedy to the alarming statistic that nearly half of all Christian marriages end in divorce. Sadly, as more people cohabit and enter into same-sex relationships, not to mention nearly a fourth of our generation being aborted, many devout, single people will sometimes ask the question: *Will I ever meet the person God intended me to marry?*

As a disclaimer, this book does not promise that if you pray a novena or imitate these saints presented here that God will help you meet the person of your dreams. Truth be told, God owes us nothing. Isn't God's grace and love enough? Is not seeing God face to face in heaven greater than any experience on earth, including falling in love with another person? This book sheds light on the reality that many in the Church forget—that marriage is a vocation.

In every vocation, we are expected to carry the cross that will lead us to heaven. When we idealize the notion of some perfect person whom God will send us, it's helpful to recall the words of J. R. R. Tolkien to his son: "When the glamour wears off, or merely works a bit thin, they think they have made a mistake, and that the real soul-mate is still to find. The real soul-mate too often proves to be the

next sexually attractive person that comes along.”¹ Tolkien believed that finding one’s soulmate was at the “root” cause of the divorce culture. To overcome the endless quest to find that “one person,” Tolkien argued that “the ‘real soulmate’ is the one you are actually married to. You really do very little choosing: life and circumstance do most of it (though if there is a God these must be His instruments, or His appearances).”²

The average seminarian spends at least eight years in preparation before becoming a priest, a religious brother at least four before final vows, and religious sisters at least ten before final vows. On the other hand, many couples spend less than two years together before getting married. But in all truthfulness, God has been preparing them for the sacrament of Matrimony since birth. For many, it began with their parents’ beautiful witness of sacrificial love, even their parents’ hidden prayers for their future spouse from their infancy. It began with other devout married people who planted seeds through their openness to life and love for each other and their children.

God expects much of those called to marriage. Specifically, every parent has a solemn duty to prepare their children for their future vocations: “It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to

¹ Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 51.

² Tolkien, 51.

engage in honorable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own.”³

The stories you are about to read are better than any romantic novel because they return to the source of love: God Himself. Our Lord was clear when He said, “For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). When couples, especially the saints, meet each other for the first time, God is there. He is the divine gaze behind their gaze, He is the divine touch behind their touch, and He is the breath behind their kiss. From Adam and Eve to the lives of the saints, God rejoices in holy marriages between His sons and daughters. What architect does not delight in his finished masterpiece? Yes, God invented marriage when He created mankind in His own image as “male and female” (Gen. 1:27).

Despite the circumstances surrounding the meetings of these saints and their courtship, whether it was arranged or was love at first sight,⁴ it was God Himself who orchestrated everything, for He had their spouses in His mind when He created them. It is important to note that the stories you are about to read do not include all the stages of courtship, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Our culture will only be renewed when the family is strong, that is, when marriages reflect Christ’s radical

³ CCC 1632, quoting *Gaudium et spes*.

⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien said to his son about love at first sight, “Often love at first sight, we catch a vision, I suppose, of marriage as it should have been in an unfallen world. In this fallen world we have as our only guides, prudence, wisdom (rare in youth, too late in age), a clean heart, and fidelity of will.” Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 52.

love for His Church; when couples love each other madly through the good times and the bad, and are open to the number of children God wants to provide them. And this begins when people learn from the best—the saints—how true love can be found and lived out. In the words of Saint Joseph Cafasso, “we are born to love,” but even more so, we are born to love madly like Christ, now and for all eternity. The quest for true love can only be found when we pursue our spouse as Christ pursues us.

Some marriage stories are naturally more inspiring, miraculous, or romantic than others, yet the common theme in all these stories is how God intervened in a real way. At every Mass, heaven intervenes in a miraculous way when Jesus becomes truly present on the altar. Sadly, this greatest of miracles is often downplayed because we grow accustomed to it. Similarly, many people can trivialize the beauty of a man and woman falling in love because it, too, seems so commonplace. Yet, despite its seemingly ordinary nature, marriage is truly extraordinary because at the right moment God intervenes and brings two people together, people whose lives will impact generation upon generation—spanning into eternity.

PART I

SAINTLY ENCOUNTERS

CHAPTER 1

COURTSHIP DEFINED

“Since marriage is beautifully sacred, so should be the courtship that precedes it. Your courtship must be pure if it is to be happy; and pure and happy, it will provide the test of character that is necessary for a blessed and a happy marriage. Only too frequently an improper courtship results in an unhappy marriage.”⁵

—Father Lawrence G. Lovasik, SVD

THE WORD “COURTSHIP” carries a sense of mystery and valor, such as a knight clad in armor rescuing a distressed maiden from her looming, unhappy, arranged marriage. Not surprisingly, courtship harkens back to the medieval era. The term, introduced in the 1570s, meant “behavior of a courtier,” from the words “court” and “ship.” A courtier was a person who attended the court as an adviser to the king or queen. During the sixteenth century, courtship was referred to as “the wooing of a woman, attention paid by a man to a woman with the intention of winning her affection and ultimately her consent to marriage.”⁶

⁵ Lovasik, *Clean Love in Courtship*, 1–2.

⁶ “Courtship,” Online Etymology Dictionary, etymonline.com/word/courtship.

In 1830, courtship was described as a time when couples developed a romantic relationship with marriage as the end goal. In other words, courtship is a means to an end. From a Catholic perspective, courtship is a period of serious discernment when a man and a woman determine whether to enter the sacrament of Matrimony together.

The question of how long a courtship should last will be discussed in detail below; for now let us consider some great general advice on this issue from Father Lawrence G. Lovasik, SVD: “While the Church warns against courtships of undue brevity, *she likewise counsels against those of excessive length*. No hard and fast rule can be laid down determining the exact length of courtship. It should be of sufficient duration to allow young people to learn the character and disposition of each other quite well.”⁷

At the heart of courtship lies a discernment of the other’s virtue or lack thereof. It is a litmus test of sorts. Whether the person is attractive or has a lot of money is not a reason for choosing to marry someone. Unfortunately, these are the primary reasons many do marry, and they are some of the many reasons why divorce is so prevalent.

Since many readers of this book are discerning marriage, the following quote from the Venerable Fulton Sheen is too rich to omit. He declared,

Beauty in a woman and strength in a man are two of the most evident spurs to love. Physical beauty and vitality increase vigor in each other, but it is to be noticed that beauty in a woman and strength in a

⁷ Lovasik, *Clean Love in Courtship*, 61.

man are given by God to serve purposes of allure-ment. They come at that age of life when men and women are urged to marry one another. They are not permanent possessions. They are something like frosting on a cake, or like the electric starter of an automobile motor. If love were based only on the fact that she is a model and he is a fullback on the football team, marriage would never endure. But just as frosting on the cake leads to the cake itself, so too do these allurements pass on to greater treasures.

Once on congratulating a wife who had a very handsome husband we heard her reply: “I no longer notice that he is handsome; I notice now that he has greater qualities.”⁸

The greater qualities, the virtues, are the magnets that draw holy couples to each other and keep them bound for life with God’s grace. When the body breaks down, love remains. At the same time, one ought to be attracted to their spouse. But attraction, like the “bells and smells” at Holy Mass, ought to lead one deeper into the heart of the person, just as those qualities of the Mass lead one deeper into the Eucharistic Heart of Christ.

Courtship looks to the future—to eternity. Courtship asks the following questions: Does this person have virtue? Is this the best person to lead me—and, God willing, my future children—to heaven? Does this person have what it takes spiritually, emotionally, and financially? Specifically, does he attend Mass every Sunday? Does he

⁸ Sheen, *Fulton J. Sheen’s Guide to Contentment*, 15.

pray daily? Does he go to confession regularly? Does he avoid mortal sin? Does he have a good relationship with his family?⁹ Ultimately, does this person desire to become a saint with me?

Dating, on the other hand, focuses mostly on the present and forgets the ultimate purpose of meeting someone special: to enter into a holy marriage. Because some people use dating and courtship interchangeably, the lines have become blurred. According to author Beth Bailey, “the first recorded uses of the word *date* in modern meaning are from lower-class slang,” by way of Chicago author George Ade in 1896.¹⁰ During the beginning of the twentieth century, dating referred to lower-class men and women going out in public.¹¹ In the years leading up to World War II, dating had nothing to do with sex or marriage, but was more of a measure of one’s popularity.¹² Today, our over-sexualized world has made it worse. When asking a woman out, many men are only concerned with that night and how far they can go. A person interested in dating typically has no real desire to preserve virginity or grow in virtue because the moment is all that counts.¹³ There are

⁹ A more complete checklist, almost like an examination of conscience to find the right spouse, can be found at the back of this book. It is called, “How to Choose Your Spouse.”

¹⁰ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, 17.

¹¹ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 17.

¹² Bailey, 26.

¹³ For these reasons, courtship is recommended over dating, though the latter can also be holy, provided it is chaste and never loses sight of the end goal of marriage. Not every person will go through the four stages of courtship that will be spelled out shortly. In fact, as fewer

no fast rules for dating, while courtship involves a more formal process.

Because dating is less “formal” than courtship, it seems more concerned with the externals: Where did he go to college? What is his profession? What type of car does he drive? How physically fit is he? Does he share my interests? Is he a Democrat or a Republican? This is the secular world’s checklist for finding a future spouse. Little is said about God or virtue.

On the other hand, the Catholic Church and her shepherds like Venerable Fulton Sheen have stressed the beauty of chastity and purity when it comes to marriage preparation. Most notably, Sheen highlights four phases of life: togetherness, separation, crystallization, and courtship.¹⁴

Togetherness involves the innocence of two children playing together. This phase occurs when children are very young. During the separation stage, boys and girls distance themselves from each other, allowing them to develop their proper psychological and physical qualities. In crystallization, they bestow upon each other various

people are getting married, dating can be a holy way that leads to marriage if God and His commands are the focal point of the two people’s lives. This type of dating resembles more “friendship dating,” listed under the first stage of courtship and mentioned in the later section, “For Those Discerning Marriage.” It is a period of getting to know someone without any signs of affection or expectations. Whether a man ultimately pursues a woman through these four stages of courtship, God calls him to pursue a lady with virtue, especially chastity and purity. And the same for the woman: she too must seek someone who practices chastity and purity.

¹⁴ Fulton J. Sheen, “Courtship,” *The Catholic World*, June 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3QTbVxO6kA>.

positive qualities. They begin to adore one another. They begin to desire infinite happiness, but they err by “placing the infinite in the finite,” looking on each other as “gods” or “angels.”¹⁵ They are interested in the opposite sex but are chiefly concerned with their physical appearance. They become “experts” of love, and they consider their parents ignorant of it.

During courtship, Sheen mentions the notion of affinity—an interest in the opposite sex that goes beyond physical attraction. Sheen declares, “The real test is . . . if they can share not only the joys of life, but also the frustrations.”¹⁶ This is the first condition. Then comes the test of sacrifice. If the man is selfish before marriage, then he will likely continue so. That is why a woman should look for a spirit of sacrifice in her future spouse, according to Sheen. When discerning his spouse, the man should ask: “Has she femininity? . . . Every woman was made to be a mother: either physically or spiritually.”¹⁷ Sheen challenges the man to look for “depth” that transcends beauty. Is she able to pass along her virtues, her faith, and her knowledge to her children? “The more a woman is holy, the more she is a woman.”¹⁸ If the couple prays together, they will be of one heart and of one mind.

Father Chad Ripperger also defines four stages of courtship, though his stages differ somewhat from those of Bishop Sheen.¹⁹ According to Father Ripperger, the

¹⁵ Sheen, “Courtship.”

¹⁶ Sheen, “Courtship.”

¹⁷ Sheen, “Courtship.”

¹⁸ Sheen, “Courtship.”

¹⁹ Chad Ripperger, “Four Stages of Courtship,” *Sensus Fidelium*.

four stages of courtship include: friendship, courtship, betrothal/engagement, and marriage.²⁰ These stages are more widely known today in traditional circles compared to Sheen's stages. Throughout the courtship process, a father must protect his daughter's honor.²¹ He becomes the gatekeeper and watchman over his daughter's soul. And his daughter's soul is far more precious than any material possession he seeks to protect. His primary duty then is to make sure the potential suitor is "honorable."²² A father's primary question then becomes, "Will he (the potential suitor) actually help my daughter save her soul?"²³

The friendship stage of courtship lasts around three to six months, though this time can vary. No affection occurs during this stage in order to maintain the couple's "clarity of judgment."²⁴ The most important thing is whether the person has adequate virtue. One indication of virtue is if they can avoid affection during this stage and the next. Virtue will endure, not good looks, love at first sight, or even the greatest chemistry. Discovering virtue in the other person occurs in all of the stages of the courtship, because what you see now in your potential spouse is what

August 5, 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=r1V4w38v2mI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1V4w38v2mI). Note: These four stages are based on a variety of sources including Saint Thomas Aquinas's writings as well as Catholic cultures prior to the twentieth century. These four stages are also based on basic human psychology and how certain things affect people.

²⁰ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

²¹ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

²² Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

²³ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

²⁴ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

you will see later in life. Good habits and bad habits do not disappear easily.

Besides identifying virtue in the man, the woman ought to see if he can financially support her. And just because both couples have virtue does not necessarily mean that you must move to the next stage. Perhaps there is little chemistry, little attraction, or a dislike of the other's temperament. These factors must be considered along with promptings from the Holy Spirit.

Near the end of the friendship stage, the man and woman should observe the other's relationship with their family. The way a person treats his or her parents will likely be the way they treat their spouse. When you marry someone, you also marry into his or her family. The problems and generational sins of his family, but especially those he grapples with, could likely impact your marriage.²⁵ Marriage requires a great deal of virtue and supernatural grace to combat the rise of divorce and secular influences.

After the friendship stage comes courtship, initiating exclusivity.²⁶ A man ought to ask permission from the father to court his daughter. Like the friendship stage, courtship lasts around three to six months. Furthermore, the couple continues to avoid being alone together

²⁵ One must pay attention to the various impediments to marriage. Some priests have argued that if any man is struggling with pornography, he should not be courting a girl. Some will also argue that if there is significant debt, this is an impediment. These are things to discuss with a holy priest. A wounded person should seek adequate healing before pursuing someone or being pursued.

²⁶ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

and shows no affection, a counter-cultural witness that seems extreme in our time. However, Father Ripperger reminds us that affection creates bonding and, therefore, terminating a relationship after sharing physical affection would result in hurt and regret—a sin of injustice. That is why bonding is meant for the permanence found only in marriage.²⁷ So much emotional damage could be avoided if affection were saved for the betrothal and marriage stages.

Herein lies the wisdom of courtship over dating. Avoiding affection before its proper time will cultivate and defend virtue at all costs, or, as Saint Thomas Aquinas declared, “For a person is properly called our friend when we want some good thing for him.”²⁸ To love someone is to will the best for him or her. But to will the best for them, to truly love them, means that person will be better off by not showing affection before betrothal in case the relationship should unexpectedly end. Yes, there might be some level of disappointment, but you have made each other holier, for love triumphed over lust.

In the courtship stage, the man must look primarily to see if the woman will “submit to his lead” while the woman looks to see if the man will deny himself and sacrifice for her.²⁹ Self-denial is at the heart of this stage.³⁰ And if this virtue is evident, then the couple ought to proceed to the next stage.

²⁷ Ripperger, “Four Stages of Courtship.”

²⁸ ST I-II 26, 4 ad 1.

²⁹ Ripperger, “Four Stages of Courtship.”

³⁰ Ripperger, “Four Stages of Courtship.”

Following courtship comes the betrothal/engagement stage when the man asks the father for permission to marry his daughter. Keep in mind that the father has the authority to end the courtship at any time or refuse his daughter's hand in marriage, though most men today likely wouldn't submit to this.³¹ If the father agrees to the proposal and his daughter says "yes," the couple still cannot show any affection until the formal betrothal, the mutual promise of marriage.

There is a liturgical Rite of Betrothal³² that takes place at a church along with a priest and two witnesses, accompanied by beautiful prayers and blessings. The Rite of Betrothal has been passed down to us by our Jewish elders. In this rite, the couple promises in the name of the Lord to take their future spouse in holy Matrimony. The priest also takes the two ends of his stole and, in the form of a cross, places them over the couple's hands, witnessing their "formal" proposal to marry. The man will then place the engagement ring on his fiancée's finger and the priest will bless it.

After the betrothal, the couple can engage in some levels of affection.³³ By the formal betrothal, a couple is now bound to marry except for serious reasons. To prevent scandal, the engaged/betrothed couple should not be alone together. A man must protect other people's

³¹ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

³² For more information on this topic see Gregory DiPippo's article, "A Liturgical Rite of Betrothal," New Liturgical Movement, www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2019/10/a-liturgical-rite-of-betrothal.html#.Xbhzf0ZKi70.

³³ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

views of his future spouse.³⁴ The woman begins to follow the man's lead. Hence the betrothal period is a time for a couple to intensify their prayer life as they prepare for marriage.

Like the friendship and courtship stages, the betrothal/engagement stage lasts between three to six months depending on the diocese.³⁵ The principal action is for the couple to grow in the virtue of moderation.³⁶ The couple spends more time together than in the previous stages, in order to develop their virtues together. The couple must work to avoid anything that could violate the sixth and ninth commandments.³⁷

Marriage is the final stage of courtship. God does not want you to have a good marriage. No, God wants you to have a holy and blessed marriage! God wants you to experience heaven now through your vows, though at times you may experience suffering to further detach you from this life. Above all, God wants you to marry the person who will help you carry your cross joyfully. Men, God wants you to be Saint Joseph for your spouse. And women, God wants you to be Mary for your husband.

³⁴ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

³⁵ Father Ripperger argues that the length of the courtship process (from the first meeting to the wedding day) should be between nine months and eighteen months. Others like Father T. G. Morrow contend that courtship should be at least eighteen months, ideally two years. This is based on a Kansas City study that Father Morrow suggested.

³⁶ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

³⁷ Ripperger, "Four Stages of Courtship."

Four Stages of Courtship
According to Father Chad Ripperger

Stages	Definition	Length	Goal
Friendship	A period of getting to know someone with no physical affection; this occurs in a group setting.	3 to 6 months	To determine the other person's virtue
Courtship	Man asks father's permission to court his daughter. A period of exclusivity with no physical affection; this occurs in a group setting.	3 to 6 months	To grow in self-denial
Betrothal/ Engagement	Man asks father's permission to marry his daughter. Small signs of affection, such as holding hands and quick pecks on the cheek and even lips. Couple spends more time together in a group setting.	3 to 6 months	To grow in moderation together
Marriage	The final stage of courtship where physical affection including conjugal rights is permitted.	Lifetime	To become saints together and to get to heaven

There are many important virtues to look for in your spouse, but they do not make up the heart of this book. Virtues top the checklist when sizing up a potential spouse during the courtship process. They become a “sort of

examination of your future spouse.” Although this book is about the stories of saints and how they met, it would be an oversight not to touch briefly on the virtues that one ought to look for in a spouse. First is the virtue of charity. A man or woman who does not love God cannot love his neighbor, and whoever does not love their neighbor cannot love God (see 1 Jn. 4:20). A man who loves his spouse more than God does not truly love her. He must love God more than her.

Chastity, the perfect integration of body and soul, is nonnegotiable when finding a spouse. Those who are addicted to pornography without fighting this evil can never genuinely love, because their heart is divided. Pornography is one of the greatest threats to marriages today. At the same time, couples’ actions need to be pure toward one another.

The virtue of humility means having an accurate picture of oneself and how one stands in relation to God. It is the opposite of pride. A proud spouse will make for a hellish marriage. He or she will rarely admit they are wrong. They resemble Satan who came not to serve but to be served.

Possession of the virtue of patience, an exercise of the cardinal virtue of fortitude, is a strong indicator of whether you and your spouse will have a blessed marriage. Specifically, how well does your future spouse suffer patiently? Marriage is the school of suffering. From potential child loss to job loss, not to mention being purified daily by your spouse’s weaknesses and flaws, you will be tested like never before. Find someone who does not flee from the cross but, rather, embraces it.

It is worth mentioning the importance of temperaments in relationships. Temperaments refer to our natural tendencies and reactions to situations. The notion of temperaments existed long before Christ, going as far back as Hippocrates (c. 460–377 BC), who is often credited with helping to define them. Although we are born with temperaments (there are four of them: choleric, melancholic, sanguine, and phlegmatic), they can change over time. Knowing your temperament and your spouse’s temperament can lead to a more tranquil marriage, especially when it comes to communication.

In the book *The Temperament God Gave You*, Art and Laraine Bennett remind us that, “Temperament differences are not *in themselves* enough to make or break a relationship.”³⁸ The authors further declare, “Many people marry someone of the opposite temperament, and do manage to build happy, long-lasting marital relationships. That’s because what is most important is that your spouse’s *values and beliefs*—not his temperament—are the same as yours. Yet complementarity in temperament is generally a boon to relationships, provided the partners develop mutual respect for their different styles. A family is enriched by having varied approaches and perspectives on a situation.”³⁹ Temperaments are not deal breakers, but they should be given greater importance than a person’s physical features. At the same time, temperaments should be subordinate to virtue. But in the end, “grace builds

³⁸ Bennett and Bennett, *The Temperament God Gave You*, 79.

³⁹ Bennett, 80.

upon nature”⁴⁰ as Saint Thomas Aquinas said. If a couple is willing to grow in holiness and love, God can work miracles no matter their differences.

Although not exactly mirroring the four stages of courtship, the following stories from Scripture, the saints, and those on their path to saintliness, provide a unique glimpse into how some of the saints (and those who raised saints) met their spouses. Experiencing a sacrificial and holy marriage until death is only possible with God’s grace. And these saints reveal firsthand that “with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). For those called to marriage, God expects nothing less than a saintly marriage, which begins by studying some of the greatest courtships and marriages in the history of the Church.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Bennett, 3.