

Most people know there are two creation stories at the beginning of our Bible. While traditionally they were ascribed to Moses, most modern scholars say that they were written by two different authors, in different settings, at different times. Either way, it doesn't diminish the profound truths they reveal, nor that they were written by authors who were guided by God's spirit.

The first creation story, occurs over six days, with a seventh day for rest. The account seems to be told—zoomed-out, if you will—as though we can see the entirety of the universe. From out of the chaos, God, as though from a distance, spoke the elements of creation into existence and order. It's a very systematic account of creation, beautifully and harmoniously ordered. The last thing created before He rested was human beings, male and female, made in His image. He blessed them and issued His first command: "*Be fertile and multiply...*" (Gen 1:26-28).

Then the second creation story zooms-in to specific coordinates, a location called Eden, where God seems to roll up His sleeves and put His hand in the soil, crafting the first being. This account is less systematized. God seems to adapt and adapt again, until he got it right: the man and the woman, of one flesh, at last, each completing the other. The Bible begins with creation and marriage is shown to be an integral part of it.

It probably comes as no surprise to anyone here that fewer couples get married today. Among the various explanations, one reason, I believe, is just simply a loss of faith, or at least a failure to see how marriage is connected to one's faith. Because if we give credence to what the Scriptures say, it's clear that God had something important in mind when we created the union of man and woman. But if the Scriptures aren't normative for our lives, and if God's will for our lives isn't either, then should we expect a person to regard marriage as sacred?

*So, what do we believe God intended for marriage?* We regard marriage as a sacrament, meaning that God takes some sort of created matter and changes it or sanctifies it in some way. Just as bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus, or a child that is baptized becomes marked on his/her soul, when a couple pledges themselves in marriage, God is doing something in them. The way today's readings say it, is that He makes the two into one flesh. *What does that mean exactly?*

It's similar to the words of consecration prayed over the bread and wine. As the Holy Spirit descends upon those elements to change them from within into the Jesus' Body and Blood, so when the couple declare their words of consent to each other, God is reaching down into them. I think of it as though God is pouring Himself over the man and the woman and forging them into one in His love.

It's a transcendent act, God working in us from beyond, and its purpose conversely, is to move us toward transcendence: to move beyond ourselves, heavenward. Thus, marriage serves to get the spouses, as well as whatever children God blesses them with, to heaven. The couple is to be a living sign for the world of God's love.

Most anything I've learned about marriage comes from experience of working with couples: those who thrive, those who merely endure, and those who don't endure. I see it: too many couples get stuck in the here and now, stuck in the mud, and lose sight of the transcendent nature of matrimony. It gets reduced to merely an earthly experience. Perhaps, they cease to remember—if they ever considered it at all—what God had done in them on their wedding day, what God intended and hoped for them, and what they had so beautifully pledged for each other. When they lose sight of it, they begin having different criteria for what makes for a good marriage and happiness.

The image of the crucified Jesus says a lot about what marital love should look like, in the sense that it's about giving everything for the other, with no regard for what is gained for one's self. Enough couples tell me that marriage is hard and takes so much work. But when couples can find a way to live like that, that's when marriage becomes transcendent, a building block for the Kingdom of God. That's when it leads to real and enduring happiness.

If you're stuck and merely enduring, let's talk about how it can change, realizing that change from you may not be easy either. If we want that happiness and meaning for our children, I believe we need to rediscover marriage—how it *was* an integral part of creation, how it *is* an integral part of ongoing creation, how it *is* so deeply associated with our faith—to rediscover it and demonstrate it. To show the world what God's love looks like.