

Marriage is Just a Piece of Paper?

by Sebastian R Fama

I have heard it said that: "Marriage is just a piece of paper." And: "If two people really love each other, there is nothing wrong with them living together." I suppose that might sound reasonable to some, but is it? Is marriage really just a piece of paper? That would depend on the couple. A marriage license can be likened to a bank statement. If you are committed to saving money, your bank statement represents something of great value. Likewise, when you are committed to your marriage, your marriage license represents something of great value. But if you don't care, then yes, your marriage license is just a piece of paper.

But can't someone be committed to a relationship without that "piece of paper?" Yes, it is possible. But it is less likely. A survey of 15,000 people over 17 years in Australia found that people who are married are happier. They discovered that there is a greater level of commitment between married couples (Survey by Bruno Frey).

Elected officials take an oath of office. Upon receiving their degrees, doctors recite the Hippocratic oath. Members of our military also take an oath. An oath is the proud acknowledgment of a solemn trust. A promise to be faithful to the role one freely and enthusiastically accepts. You would think that two people entering into the most intimate of relationships would be just as proud and eager to proclaim their devotion to one another publicly.

As for the second part of the above statement, it is actually true, if you really love someone it is okay to live together. But we need to define what it means to really love someone. First, love is not a feeling. It is an act of your will. It is a decision that you make. Good feelings can and should come with it. But the feelings themselves are not love. So, how does true love manifest itself?

Imagine a man meets and begins dating a woman. Whenever they go out, he takes her to a distant city to spend the night with her. He says he loves her, but he also tells her not to tell anyone about their relationship. I think we can all agree that he doesn't love her. He is just using her.

So, what would the opposite of that be? How about a man who loves a woman so much that he is eager to proclaim it publicly. What's more, he is willing to commit his life to her. Imagine she feels the same way? Who could deny that these two people really love each other? And by the way, that is what we call marriage. And for Catholics, there is an additional advantage. When they marry in the Church, they receive sacramental grace which aids them in their married life.

Marriage is the sincerest expression of love between a man and a woman. But marriage is more than a relationship. It is a covenant. And in a marriage covenant, a man and a woman give themselves to each other. Just as Jesus came to serve us (Mark 10:45) so too spouses are called to serve one another. True love is about giving, not taking. And it most certainly is not about two people sharing a bed and expenses until something better comes along.