



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



Marriage is Like Climbing Mount Everest

by Max Crean

I'm happy to share with you that as of this past June 28th, 2020 my beautiful wife Dawn and I have been blessed to have recently celebrated one year of our marriage together! We decided to celebrate this occasion by going out camping together upstate. This was a great opportunity to be able to reflect on the past year and our relationship as a whole, comparing how we started out to where we are now. What we found is that from then until now there have of course been various challenges, but that God has blessed us with strong foundations in our early relationship, along with abundant graces, that have allowed us to enjoy a joyful start to our marriage.

When Dawn and I first started dating, one thing I knew for certain was that our relationship had to be intentionally oriented towards discerning marriage and that meant that ultimately, we had to be able to suffer together and suffer for one another, that is, to truly love one another. Our love had to be more than a feeling or infatuation if it was going to thrive over the course of a lifetime of change and hardships. We had to be able to stay on the same team and work through problems together. Very early on in our relationship, Dawn's great capacity to love in this way was apparent to me. Very often she would step outside of herself and her comforts for the sake of others. She inspired me to do the same in my own life. I noticed she was someone who would sit with somebody new at every meal and for as long as that person was talking, she was totally focused on them and truly listening to what they had to say. These were traits I knew I was lacking in and wanted to emulate from her.

Dawn's goodness inspired me to grow in patience, to wait on her and her needs. When we were at different places, we had to wait for each other and walk each other to where we needed to be. Knowing her also gave me the courage to do what was right at the right time, because I knew she deserved it. As silly as it was, just asking her out was a test of courage for myself, but what gave me the courage to do it was knowing that she deserved to know she was worth asking out by someone, even if she said no to me. This two-way street of meeting one another where we were at and taking courageous steps to do right by each other required a lot of communication. It called for a lot of time spent talking together but also a lot of time talking with the Lord. Oftentimes these conversations were difficult, but every time they led to a deeper love for one another and for our Lord.

As we grew closer together in the joys and the challenges, we found ourselves growing as people. These aspects of growth, peace, and joy in the face of difficult problems told me that our capacity to love as a couple was greater than the capacity of discord in life to tear us apart. This natural inclination of love to put the beloved before oneself was needed even more in marriage, and so even greater love was supplied through Our Lord in the Sacrament to meet the challenge. The real indicator for us of the genuine love we shared that could carry us through to marriage was the growth in love our Lord, how we could understand Him better through one another,



and felt called to emulate Him through personal sacrifice. Both of us can attest to the fact that meeting one another led to the most intensive time of prayer either of us had experienced up to that point, but in all ways, in the best way possible. We knew we had to rely on His grace to honor the person He had placed in our lives.

Even though God had blessed us with a strong start to our relationship and ample warning of impending hardship from friends, family, and wise counselors, there was no way of preparing for the challenges our life as a married couple had in store. Being told about them is very different from experiencing them. Both of us knew this going into our marriage, but we had the greater hope placed in the graces of our relationship thus far. While temporarily moving to another country, taking on masters studies, and responding to a world-wide pandemic were certainly milestone challenges, we found the biggest challenge to be the new level of vulnerability that was being asked of us throughout this first year. We quickly realized that whenever one of us failed in loving the other or being the person we were meant to be, the effects were much more immediate and visceral, since they became visible in the person right in front of us, whom we loved and spent every day with. There was no escaping our faults and shortcomings.

Despite how difficult this was, it was also a call to live up to the greatness of our vocation. This new knowledge of ourselves that we had to face also offered the opportunity to grow, just as we had done early on in our relationship, and now we had a life-long partner committed to being there for us throughout it all. It was the opportunity to give more of ourselves to God and to one another. Dr. Donald Ascii of Franciscan University offered a great talk during the period of our marriage preparation. During the talk, he summed up the struggles marriage entails in a way that neither of us had forgotten. He said, "Marriage is like climbing Mount Everest: it's hard because it's awesome, and it's awesome because it's hard." The idea here is that anything worthwhile is worth the time and difficulty it takes to achieve.



The commitment to surrender oneself completely and live for another person, even if it means exposing them to our own faults, is a tall order, perhaps tall enough to compare to Mount Everest. However, it is an endeavor that reaps greater rewards than anything the world has to offer, just as there is no comparable feeling to reaching the heights of that mountain peak. It was a call to Dawn and I to open up more to the other person, to be even more vulnerable and honest about who we are for the sake of greater union. We also had to start seeing ourselves from the Father's eyes, to really see those faults without letting them take away from the beauty of His creation. Once again, our love had to stretch beyond our own comforts, so that we could grow as individuals and as a couple. It is something we are both very glad to have had practice in while dating, so we had strong foundations to build on, but we also know that no successful part of that process from then until now was ever possible without God's merciful love to guide us and sustain us.

As time has gone on, sometimes much faster than we can believe, our love for one another has continued to grow. The seeds planted early on in our relationship have begun to bud and flower in the Sacrament of marriage. As the adage teaches us, diamonds are formed under pressure, and I am proud to say that in one another, we have found someone able to withstand that pressure, by relying on One greater than ourselves. In Dawn, I have found someone whose strength is rooted in the grace of the Spirit, who strives to love as Jesus does, and who gives of herself as does the life-giving Father. I am more thankful for her each day. By modeling our Savior as best we can and leaning on God's grace when we cannot, we have enjoyed the fruits of a beautiful first year of marriage. It has not been perfect or easy. Personally, I have made many mistakes and have a lot to learn in the school of love, but through the power of the Sacrament, we look forward to many years of further growth and acts of love that will last in Eternity. Please pray for us as we continue upward together!

