

How my October began with an unusual wedding



As a young adult, I've fully entered into the season of life where my calendar is quickly filling up with weddings – and praise God for that! On top of that, I've been blessed to know many seminarians over the years, so attending ordinations or first Masses for new priests also make an appearance every year. And since moving to Fort Wayne, Indiana, three years ago, I've even attended a few professions of vows for the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in Mishawaka, Indiana. So basically, I love attending Catholic weddings – both ordinary and of those consecrating themselves to Christ and the Church in some way.

Earlier this year, I had added another ceremony to my Catholic bucket list, and at the beginning of October, I attended an unusual wedding. On Oct. 3, my friend Anne Therese Stephens walked down the aisle at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne. She wore the traditional wedding dress, had flowers in her hair, was attended by a couple friends, and was beaming with joy. So what was unusual? The bride was there, but the groom was a bit more hidden. Her groom was Jesus. Anne Therese was there to offer her life to God as a consecrated virgin.

I've known Anne Therese since the day after I moved to Fort Wayne. She's been a steadfast friend who has blessed the young adult community in the area by starting our group, Cor Jesu (which means "Heart of Jesus"), at St. John the Baptist Parish, where we participate in Mass, adoration and fellowship. In many ways, many of my relationships are because of her and her love for Christ.

It seems only right that this woman would find Christ to be the spouse she so desired, that Jesus was calling her into a deeper relationship with him in this way. As the Code of Canon Law explains, a consecrated virgin is “mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, and [is] dedicated to the service of the Church.” This means that while she is consecrated to Christ in a way similar to women religious, she does not live in a religious community; rather, she serves the Church in her local diocese.

Knowing that most people in attendance had never been to a Mass where a woman was consecrated as a virgin, Anne Therese added a couple pages of explanation to her Mass program. In addition to the music and the words she would say as the bishop consecrated her, she shared the details of the Mass – such as that she was wearing a traditional white wedding dress because of her marriage to the King of Kings, and that she would be given a veil and a ring by the bishop as a sign that she belongs solely to God.

But it was her final section that had me and others thinking for days. She wrote: “One final word on the complementary nature of consecrated life with married life. A man and woman called to married life image in a physical and palpable way the love that God has for us. Anecdotally, I can share the value I have obtained from the love between my married friends. When I see a husband caress his wife, or buy her gifts, or any way he demonstrates love, it has been a physical reminder for me of how much love God has for me.

“Complementing that vocation, those in consecrated life are a reminder that our eternal goal is heaven – we are all called to the Supper of the Lamb. Those in consecrated life remind us that our lives should not and cannot be summed up merely in the romantic relationships we possess (although if lived well, these can be fulfilling). Life has its primary meaning in the eternal life which we each seek – we each are called to be mystically betrothed to Christ! I had a friend tell me that in

another life, she too would like to enter this vocation. Well, yes, in another life, she will – in heaven for all eternity, we will all be mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God!”

If only we recognized that this is what God wants for each and every one of us, no matter which vocation he calls us to in this life. If we lived with that truth in mind on this side of heaven, just imagine how our lives would change.

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