

Purpose of life and marriage.

Marriage is a school. Advice about marriage.

Matthias (Kevin) and Natalie King
2015-05-17

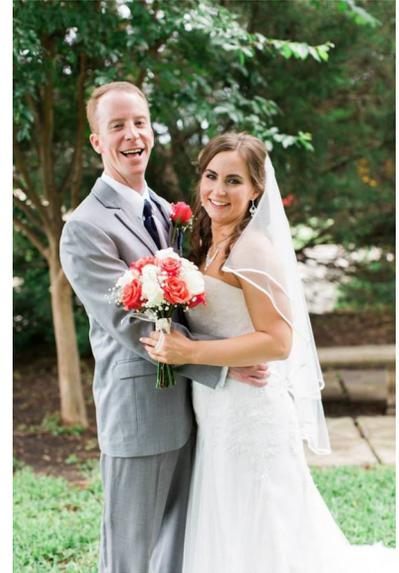
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Christ is risen!

I want to take advantage of a unique opportunity. I can speak as a father, as a priest and as a friend. I have some things I want to say; I'll do my best to say them. I might be clumsy a little bit, but my prayer is that your heart would understand my heart.

I want to say some things to Kevin -- Matthias, I want to say some things to Natalie, to all of my children, and to all of you. There are different things for each. There are some that overlap. Some things that some of you might not understand because of context.

I'm going to break a few rules because the major rule of giving a sermon is to tell people what you are going to say, and then you say it, and then you tell them what you said. But I'm going to say a lot of things, so it won't work in this case.

And this is also a sermon but also my heart to your heart. I want to tell you about Christian marriage. I want to talk to my children, and I want to have a chat with Matthias and Natalie.



This chat is kind of my card. As Natalie and my children know, I'm not very good at cards. I don't really know what to write on a card. Your mother wrote a very beautiful card, which I read; you'll see it soon. But I don't know what to write on cards. But I do know what to say from my heart. So this is my card.

I call the man that most of you call Kevin, and know as Kevin, "Matthias." Sometimes I will call him "Matthias." I try to remember to call him "Kevin." I'm under orders to do that, but I forget because his baptismal name is Matthias and because that's the most important thing that's ever happened to him, including today. I also call Natalie "Natalia" for reasons that are obscure to everyone.

I'm constrained to tell my children now, all of whom I love fiercely, things that I just want to get out. I want to tell you that I've never written a sermon, ever, in twenty years, until this one. I probably still won't follow it that well, but I've never written a sermon. I've never even practiced a sermon until this one. I'm able to speak freely today to you, Matthias and Natalie, because I'm free.

I wasn't always so free. There have been tough times in the past twenty years of my priesthood, which means also twenty years of fatherhood. It was fatherhood beforehand and then twenty years of fatherhood as a priest.

So I start a little bit with regret because I wanted to have my A game for the previous crowning ceremonies. There were two, but I wasn't as free as I am now. I didn't remember everything. I don't remember everything from those previous times. But I'll remember everything today. So, please, my children, don't take it personally. There's more me today than there's been in the past.

I used to tell Natalie that Jennie and Christina and Tim got a better deal because I was not a priest during much of their growing up years. It used to kind of make her kind of mad, I guess, but I hope you know what I mean. I'm glad I'm a priest. The priest is the most terrible and the most wonderful thing I've ever done, but it has costs, and my children have paid some of them, as a kind of collateral damage. But they also are benefitting from my priesthood because I've learned to pray. And the only thing that really matters to me is to pray for them, to pray for my flock, to bring them into my heart. And I do that everyday.

It took time to develop the skill. Anything important is hard. If it ain't hard, you ain't trying hard enough. The problem is that you could only do what you're capable of at that moment. You can't do more than you're capable of.

The mistakes you make, if you have an open and a zealous heart, will make you able to do more than you were capable of -- later. I see this principle play out every day in my life. And it's the first thing that I want to tell you.

You are both capable of much good, but not everything that's good -- when things are hard, do the best you can. With faith and humility and fire in your belly, and you always get better. It's really important to have *fire in your belly*.

One of the hardest things I've done in recent memory is to pick out music to dance the father-daughter dance with. I've been in maximum-security cell blocks where I had to wear a vest that would keep me safe if I was stabbed. This picking out of music¹ was harder. And in doing it, I came across an old standard that is really good for dancing -- but not for me -- to dance with. But perhaps it'll be one of the selections. And in that song it says, "I love you more today than yesterday and not as much as tomorrow."

Now, you've already experienced that. You love each other more than when you first knew each other. And you feel your love growing every day. You have no idea -- I'm telling you -- how much you will love each other. You haven't imagined it yet. And you also have no idea how much you will love God and how He will abide in your heart as your love for each other grows and makes you a union. You're starting a great adventure.



¹ It had to be Neal Young! Of course. I settled on "Here for you", which I interpreted the way I wanted to. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/neilyoung/hereforyou.html> <https://youtu.be/PtzKliO3cQg>

This leads me to the purpose of marriage. I'll tell you first the things that are tangential to this purpose. They're nice to have, they're beautiful to have -- But they are not the purpose. Romantic love, compatibility, a person's interests, a desire for children, having children, sexual attraction, making a life together -- All of these things are tangential to the purpose of marriage.

The purpose of marriage is plainly this: *It is to fulfill your purpose in life. That is, union with God. It is to learn to love as God loves and to become as God is*, so far as it is possible for the created to be like the Creator. This purpose is the same purpose as for monasticism. If you're living a chaste, single life, it's the same purpose. But for you, your path is an honorable marriage and a bed undefiled.

Salvation is properly called many things: Union with God, stillness, perfection, purity of the soul, to know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent², to be a human being according to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ³.

I want to tell you how this monumental achievement is attained, particularly in context of marriage for you two. Let's talk about the most important verse in Scripture, the beginning of it all, appropriately in the beginning: Genesis. It tells us why we were made, Who made us, how we were made and our destiny. That is, our purpose. All in one verse.

"And God said, Let us make man in Our own image and after Our own likeness."⁴

God speaks of Himself in the plural. This is an explicit reference -- the first one in the Scriptures -- to God being a Trinity of persons.

Let's try to speak of God as much as the deaf and dumb clay can speak about the potter. All we know about God, He has revealed to us. We're intellectual and material beings; we're also spiritual beings, but our intellectual abilities can confuse us. We feel too confident that we can figure things out because of our intelligence. This is not possible with God. He alone has chosen to reveal Himself to us. Without His desire to share of Himself with us, we would know nothing about Him, like an ant on a log would know nothing about what's above him.

So our first principle is that **God is totally transcendent and unknowable, and yet we can know Him because He chooses to reveal Himself to us.**

We know only a little bit about Him, but we definitely know the path to learn of Him and achieve union with Him. In the Orthodox Christian Church we call this theosis.

Here is what we know. God is a Trinity of persons united in essence. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons or hypostases of God. We know very little about how they differ. We

² John 17:3. If any of my parishioners do not know this oft quoted verse, they have not been listening all these years!

³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: (Eph 4:13)

⁴ And God said, Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of heaven, and over the cattle and all the earth, and over all the reptiles that creep on the earth. 27. And God made man, according to the image of God he made him, male and female he made them. (Gen 1:26-27)

know more about how they are the same.

The Father is holy and completely God. The Son is holy and completely God. The Spirit is holy and completely God. These persons or hypostases of God are one in essence and indivisible. And all we know that is different about them is this: The Father is the eternal source of the Son, Who is begotten of the Father before all ages and is Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, one in essence with the Father. And the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and is God in all respects that the Father is God and the Son is God.

Now, why am I saying these things during a wedding? Most people or a lot of people will have their eyes roll back to the back of their heads when this kind of thing is talked about; it doesn't seem relevant. They are mistaken. This is very relevant. **The unknowable God created us in order to make Himself known to us.**

The only important question in the universe is: Who is God? (Be patient; I'm coming to the punch line.) That is the purpose of your marriage. It takes time to say anything that is important, and effort in listening to understand it.

So we've said a little bit about God, Who He is. Let's learn three more things: **Why** He created us, **how** He created us -- that's the attributes that He gave us -- and **how we will learn more** about Him, the things that He wants us to know.

The answer most people would give for why they got married is that they love each other. This is also the reason why God created us, because of love. So let's talk about love. Love is a verb. That means it has an action, and it has an object. I don't want to talk about the demented way the world loves; that's not the love of God. It's conditional; it's imperfect; it's selfish.

The Scripture tell us that God is love⁵. That means that this action love is eternal since God is eternal. This action of love is perfect because God is perfect. God loves, and He has loved from the beginning. Whom did he love? Himself. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit eternally. The Son loves the Father and the Spirit eternally. The Spirit loves the Father and the Son eternally. **Therefore, love is a primary attribute of God, and it is eternal.**

What is love? It is complete cooperation and freely giving of oneself to another. This pretty much describes how to have a successful marriage; doesn't it? Love is participating in the inner working of the unknowable God Whom we know through love.

Love is the only way to know God. There is no other way; there is no work or achievement or belief that will help us to know God. Only love will achieve this because, by grace, as we learn to love as God loves, not as the world loves, we become like God. And in becoming like Him, we know Him and achieve union with Him.

Therefore, another way to state the purpose of life is to: *"love as God loves"*. This is exciting stuff. It's all I ever really want to talk about. It's all that matters.

We were made in the image of God. Since the Scripture tells us that through Jesus Christ we have the

⁵ 1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

capacity to become sons of God⁶, it stands to reason that as sons and daughters we will have some of the attributes of God. Since we pass on our attributes to our offspring, so also God would pass on His attributes to His offspring. This capacity to become like God is because we were fearfully and wonderfully made⁷ in the image of God.

The attainment of these attributes of God, such as love, stillness, wisdom, complete freedom from compulsion of any kind -- that is -- perfect free will, is to have the image of God mature into the likeness of God.

Remember what the Scripture said, "Let Us make man in Our image and after Our likeness." We all have the image of God within us. It remains to be seen which of us will attain to the likeness of God. We were born with the capacity for these things because the Son of God became man and strengthened human nature. So we can completely attain them. Our life in Christ is the path to this attainment.

Let's recapitulate. I'm really saying important things here. They're complicated.

God is totally transcendent and unknowable. We can only know Him because He's chosen to reveal Himself to us.

God is love, and He loves perfectly and eternally. The way God loves Himself is by all three hypostases giving of Themselves perfectly with One Another and having a perfect united will.

He created us because of love, and since Love always wants to give the best to its beloved, God created us to give us Himself. We attain all the attributes God wants us to enjoy by learning to love as He loves.

Now, if you have some gift that you give to someone and they're not mature enough for that gift, they will not understand it or appreciate it. So it is with the gift of God which is Himself. We can't understand Him and accept His gift until we become like Him and love as He loves. This makes us competent, able to know Him and have union with Him. Of course, we can't do this; we don't have the strength. But God can. But He will not accomplish this work in us by His grace unless He sees our effort.

So let's bring this conversation back to marriage since that is what we celebrate today. Marriage is about -- it's not partially about -- it's **all about** learning to love as God loves.

Let's discuss the primordial words God gave to Adam -- inspired Adam to say at the creation of Eve. By the way, when Adam spoke these words, the sacrament of marriage was indicated. That's the first sacrament mentioned in the Bible, before baptism, before the Eucharist, before the Incarnation is mentioned, so it must be very important.

⁶ John 1:12-13 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: (13) Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

⁷ The Septuagint has: Psalm 138:14 I will confess Thee, for awesomely art Thou wondrous, marvelous are Thy works, and my soul knoweth it right well. the Hebrew has: Psalm 139:14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvelous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well.

So after God had created Eve, Adam was overwhelmed, and a kind of ecstasy came over him. And understanding the significance of this, he said, "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh."⁸

Paul quoted these words, and then he said, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."⁹ This is why I tell you, **the purpose of marriage is the mutual salvation of your souls.** Marriage is a way of imitating God. It's a school to teach you how to love.

Now, God has one will perfectly united, shared by the three Persons. But in marriage there are two discrete wills that learn to become one will. This process teaches us, by experience, the inner mystical working of the Holy Trinity. This is the fulfillment of the high priestly prayer of Jesus. "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou has sent."¹⁰

By becoming flesh, that is, by giving the fullness of your hearts to one another and being united and achieving a purpose, you, Natalie and Matthias, will become like God and therefore know Him. It is impossible to truly know someone unless you become like them. A man who's not humble cannot understand a humble person. A man who's not chaste, cannot understand a chaste person. Someone who's not compassionate doesn't understand compassion. Someone who doesn't understand the love of God -- and the only way to understand it is to participate in it -- cannot understand God.

This, by the way, is why God has given us Commandments. They're not arbitrary, externally imposed rules. They reflect Who God is and the things that we must do to learn of Him. They are really an insight into His inner nature, His unknowable nature which He chooses for us to be able to know.

I finished actually now two parts of my objective. Now comes the part I most look forward to. I want to tell you two some things from my heart. I'll try my best. It will be mixed together as a natural father and a priest because I can never stop thinking like a priest; it's 24/7.

I'm very happy today. You two are a good match. Everybody knows that, anybody with half a brain can see that. They see how compatible you are. They see how much you love each other. They see how much you each give way to one another.

Natalie, I'm very proud of you. You have a lot more patience at your age than I had. You believed in Matthias. You recognized his virtue. You prayed for him, and you didn't push too much.

Matthias, I'm very proud of you. You have a father in Heaven. You have a natural father; but now I, without trying to usurp the rights and privileges of your two fathers, am privileged to have you as a son. You were open to something that was very different. You pursued an answer to your questions

⁸ Genesis 2:21-24 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; (22) And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (23) And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (24) **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.**

⁹ Ephesians 5:30-32 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

¹⁰ John 17:3!

with seriousness and integrity.

I'm privileged to have five sons. Or perhaps one would want to be called a pre-son¹¹, but I will dispense with that formality. All are good men. I'm proud of all of them.

Tim, you'll help anybody; you'll help anybody do anything. The harder it is, the more willing you are to do it. You're patient and forgiving and kind.

Daniel, you have a good moral compass and courage.

Father Nicholas, what I admire most about you was that you recognized that you are a sinful man, and you struggled against your passions with zeal and with fire in your belly. And also, you've taught me, an old man, things about being a father because I admire how engaged you are with your children even though you are so ridiculously busy.

And "pre-"Tim, you make Christina happy, and I see your kindness, and I see the mutual changes that you and she make, the adjustments that you make as you speak and talk to each other and share. That's a rare thing, my friend, my son.

I want to remind you to live always according to your high purpose. Only one thing matters in this life, and that's who you become. **Who you are determines what you do. It determines if what you do last into eternity or just swept away into the sea.**

Kevin -- Matthias -- Natalie, I congratulate both of you on a wonderful achievement, remaining chaste until your marriage. This is a big deal precisely because in our fallen world it's not a big deal. I commend you both for this momentous event that you both participated in, in or before your second date, I believe, if I remember what Natalie told me correctly or whether I was told what she said. I want to say it out loud because it's important because it's a great example. Natalie told you, Kevin, early on, she wouldn't sleep with you unless you got married. Isn't that true? And you responded by saying, "I'm very relieved because that's exactly how I feel".

I say again, this is a big deal. Your marriage is built upon a rock, on mutual love, a shared ultimate purpose and chastity. You will succeed. I say you'll succeed, but that does not mean you will also not fail. You can't help but fail because the purpose of your union together is to achieve perfection. And the journey to perfection is one of many imperfect steps. So *ultimately* you'll succeed.

I'm going to give you some advice. It's the best I have to give you. You've probably heard it before, and I'm not going to apologize about that. I'm really a bit of a one-trick pony; I only know and care about one thing; I can only talk about one thing. You two are well matched. You fit together. You'll have a happy life in all the usual things a usual person thinks concerning marriage. I'm happy for that. But Christianity is not the usual thing, lived by usual people. It's the narrow way, a way that is foolish to the world.

I pray for you both every day, and that prayer is simple because God is simple, and I don't presume to know more about what you need than He knows. But today I'm going to tell you what my heart feels when I pray and has felt for a long, long time.

¹¹ One of my daughters was engaged at the time of the homily

I want you to have a transcendent union where:
everything you do,
every shared goal,
every disagreement,
every moment of loving one another,
every time when you mutually cede your individual wills to the other
teaches you to love God perfectly.

I want you to:
live every day,
do everything,
give way to one another,
ask forgiveness,
plan together,
live in each other's hearts for one reason only:
To love God above all and to be saved together along with your children if God grants them.

Do something I did not do well when I was young. Nobody told me this, so I learned it the hard way. I hope I can spare you. Pray a lot in your closet, not just in church together, not just the morning and evening prayers together, but also and especially: pray when physically alone, with sighing in ways that cannot be described by human language¹². Use your prayer rope. Say the Prayer of Jesus. Consider this task to be as important and as indispensable as a morning kiss or even as breathing. Be aggressive about finding time to do this. It'll often be very hard, especially if you have children.

You're going to have to work at it to find time alone to pray. But I tell you, if you do this regularly, your time praying when apart from each other will be more intimate than any embrace. You will be actualizing the prophecy of Adam because you will be becoming one flesh. Each will live in the other's heart.

Those are my two biggest pieces of advice. **Live according to your purpose and pray.**

There are other things peripheral to it.

Consider a day that you have chosen without a compelling reason -- there are not that many -- to not come to the temple for a scheduled service to be a tragedy. The choice of choosing something dead instead of alive. This might seem extreme, but life is extreme, and the Kingdom of Heaven is being won by violence¹³.

Read the Gospels regularly. Of course, you already do that. I am very pleased about that, but it's going to be tough to keep that tradition when you have so many things going on and if you happen to have a son that's anything like me.

I will not dare to give you advice about being a parent or you, Matthias, about being a husband.

¹² Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

¹³ Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

Everything I've already told you, combined with your mutual integrity and your bountiful love for one another, will make your marital union fertile ground to teach you all things needful.

I love you both very much. I love all my children very much. May God help you in all things. God bless you.

Priest Seraphim Holland 2015

This and other Orthodox materials are available in from:
[St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](#)

- **Mailing Address:** Box 37, McKinney, TX 75070
- **Email:** seraphim@orthodox.net
- **Web Page:** <http://www.orthodox.net>

This homily is at:

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/crowning_2015-05-17+matthias-and-natalie-king.doc

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/crowning_2015-05-17+matthias-and-natalie-king.pdf

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/crowning_2015-05-17+matthias-and-natalie-king.html

AUDIO: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/crowning_2015-05-17+matthias-and-natalie-king.mp3

Archive of **homilies:** <http://www.orthodox.net/sermons>

To receive regular mailings of sermons, and scriptural and services commentary and other things throughout the church year, read our blog "Redeeming the Time" (<http://www.orthodox.net/redeemingthetime>). You may also subscribe to the [RSS Feed](#) or receive its postings by [email](#).

Our parish Email list (<http://groups.google.com/group/saint-nicholas-orthodox-church>) also has all the latest postings from our [website](#) and [blog](#); everyone is welcome to join.

All rights reserved. Please use this material in any edifying reason. We ask that you contact St. Nicholas if you wish to distribute it in any way. We grant permission to post this text, if completely intact only, including this paragraph and the URL of the text, to any electronic mailing list, church bulletin, web page or blog.