

FRIENDSHIP IN MARRIAGE

Adapted from a chapter in Before Marriage and After Marriage by Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss



The Garment and Face of Love

[W]ith those...in love truly conjugal [true marriage love], conjunction of minds and therewith friendship increases.... [T]his conjunction increases as friendship conjoins itself to love...because friendship is as the face of that love and also as its garment...(Conjugal Love 214).

There are very deep loves in marriage, and incredible joys. There is also the warmth and the good feelings of friendship. *Love* itself exists in the spiritual person, while *friendship* exists in the natural person. So friendship is like the body or covering of love. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church talks about the importance of friendship in marriage in passages such as the one above.

A garment or clothing is something that you change. Here it seems to represent the things that are joined to love—the things you do together. In marriage people work together, play together, raise a family together. This kind of sharing makes them feel close, and it causes them to have many things in common. However, the things you do are not always the same. You might not both play tennis or ballet, and it is silly to try to force agreement on this lower plane of friendship. Sometimes the form your friendship takes is to be interested in your partner's interests. Support him or her, rather than sneering at their hobbies. Enter into the enjoyment, even if you can't share it. As time goes by you will tend to do things you can share, things you both like. Old pursuits sort of drop off, like a once pleasing piece of clothing is discarded when it has lost its usefulness. New "garments" are worn, which are more pleasing to the other partner.

Now, the face doesn't get changed. It is enduring. The "face of love" refers to a couple sharing their feelings and thoughts about this world. The love itself is sharing spiritual feelings and thoughts, while friendship is sharing natural ones, such as what we think and how we feel about life, other people, our jobs, our children, political matters, *etc.* This sharing is a very precious thing. It is deeper in marriage than in any other relationship. But we have to learn this kind of friendship! Sometimes people think that love is all there on the wedding day. Then they get disillusioned when it isn't always perfect. But we all know that we have to work on friendship. As time goes on we can learn how to touch that other mind—what words or expressions best convey what is in our hearts, what kind of silence communicates sympathy and understanding. We also need to learn when not to read meanings into things, when not to feel hurt, when not to stand back with injured pride, when to ask for help, when to admit we were wrong, when to accept an apology gracefully, when not to make excuses. Then, over the years comes an awareness of how the other will react in a situation. We gain the ability to look across the room and know how she or he feels. This is the face of love.

The Use of Friendship

The love preceding friendship is similar to love of the sex, and after the vows this love grows feeble; but when conjoined with friendship, the love remains after the vows and is also made stable. Moreover it enters more deeply (Conjugal Love 214).

The honeymoon state is a state of high love. But it is more of the body than of the spirit. It is very passionate and thrilling, but it is also only partially tender and unselfish. A couple at first is so excited with how happy *they* are. That first love will burn down. As a couple gets used to living together, it isn't a complete thrill just to come home at night anymore. Then it seems as if there is a gap in their marriage love. You see, at this early stage, they are not yet ready for the pure, holy love called "conjugal love." They are still rather earthbound people. But they *are* ready for friendship!

Friendship is the *bridge* between the first, thrilling love of the honeymoon and the everlasting, deep current of love that will gradually build up within them. The most special use of friendship in marriage is that it tides us over the quiet times in our love. When love burns low, friendship remains. A couple continues to do things together—raise a family, build a home, struggle to balance the budget, go on vacations, *etc.* They have the garments of love. They also share the problems of living. They succeed and share the satisfaction. They fail and share that too. They cling to each other through sad times, and rejoice together in good times. They have the face of love. These aren't the everlasting, deep joys of love. But they are orderly, good, contented states in this world. More than anything else, they allow us to show kindness to our partners. Only then can conjugal love be born.

Friendship and Confidence

Love which belongs to the spirit and from the spirit to the body is insinuated into the souls and minds of married partners together with friendship and confidence. When these two [that is, friendship and confidence] conjoin themselves with the first love of marriage, that love becomes conjugal (Conjugal Love 162).

This passage tells us that true conjugal love is introduced by friendship and trust. A similar teaching says, "Friendship introduces [love] and makes it truly conjugal..." (*Conjugal Love* 130). Friendship and trust or confidence are tied together, we are told: "The states of [conjugal] love are innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, full confidence, and the mutual desire of heart and mind to do the other every good" (*Conjugal Love* 180).

Now, you have to earn confidence. When you get married, you are showing great trust in that person, yet for a long time you will hide some things from him or her. Without a real knowledge of that other person, without that person's having learned to treat your feelings with respect, you would be foolish to tell him or her some things. He or she might be insensitive, and trample on some deeper fears or feelings. Marriage partners must continue to learn how to understand each other and show gentleness with each other so their confidence and friendship can grow and introduce true conjugal love.

Since love truly conjugal conjoins the souls and hearts of two, therefore it is united with friendship and thereby with confidence, and makes both conjugal. Such friendship and confidence are superior to every other friendship and confidence. As conjugal love is the love of loves, so that friendship is the friendship of friendships, and likewise that confidence (Conjugal Love 334).