

Klarmann, A.

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Matrimonial Primer

A HANDBOOK FOR
BRIDE AND GROOM

By

REV. ANDREW KLARMANN, A.M.

Author of

"Princess of Gan-Sar," "Nizra,"
"Chapters in Christian Doctrine," Etc.

Frederick Hustet & Co.

Printers to the Holy Apostolic See and the
Sacred Congregation of Rites

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Chapters in Christian Doctrine

Reason the Witness of Faith

“Rationabile Obsequium Vestrum”

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Matrimonial Primer

I. GENERAL REFLECTIONS.

1. Those who contemplate entering upon the married state, should earnestly strive to realize its importance, its obligations, and its privileges and advantages. For Marriage is a divine institution; that is: It is one of several prominent factors in the Providence of God, by which He as the Creator carries out His designs concerning man.

2. The principal design of God concerning man is, to fit man here below for a happy eternity. We are called to rejoice in unending happiness in Heaven with God, in the company of His angels, as soon as we shall have finished our course of training and trial here below. This is so much the main purpose of our existence, that it may safely be said to be the only one, if we wish to take a large view of our destiny.

3. Everything else, besides our lot in eternity, is transient, perishable, and unreliable. Our lot in eternity is not hell, by any means, but Heaven, because by the will of God we are destined and created for Heaven, and for nothing else. If any souls are lost, they are lost because they have mistaken their calling from God, and have made a failure of their lives on earth. They have fallen short of their duties towards God in important matters, contrary to their better knowledge and the dictates of their conscience.

4. Of minor importance in our lives are all the other opportunities which God offers us for the exercise of our mental and bodily faculties. Our health, therefore, and our very life, are not to be considered as

goods of greater importance than our calling to do the will of God. Their value is not absolute, but greater or less in proportion to the measure of assistance we derive from them in striving to promote our spiritual life and health and to secure our eternal salvation. Earthly possessions, such as wealth, power, and social position, comfort and luxury, pleasures and joys, deserve so much less consideration than our lives and our health, as they are far less valuable, and often even stand in our way in working out our eternal destiny.

5. Everyone of us, therefore, is a unit, well weighted and calculated in the plan of God, for the promotion of God's work in the creation. For his conscientious co-operation in this work, each may confidently expect to receive an eternal reward.

II. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS.

6. The larger and more important factors in the Providence of God for procuring the end for which man was created, are : 1) The true Church, which is the custodian and treasurer of the Redemption for mankind; 2) just Government, by which mankind is arrayed in the proper social order for securing temporal safety and welfare; 3) Matrimony, by which the orderly propagation and education of the human race is to be secured.

7. Matrimony, therefore, occupies a place of honor among the fundamental institutions of God for the welfare of the human race, His adopted family. Matrimony shares not only the honor of God's grandest institutions, but, in justice, also the responsibilities which attach to each of them. Again, it shares also their authority, in its own sphere. The Church teaches,

guides, and corrects her members with the authority of God. The state also rules in the name of God, or, at least, has the power to do so, abuses notwithstanding. Marriage has a share in the power both of the Church and of the state. The marriage contract accords certain sacred rights which cannot be lawfully denied by either party, because they are accorded by God Himself. Certain obligations, also imposed by Marriage, are so sacred, that their violation would shake the very foundations of the Natural Law, which is the Universal Law of God for His Creation.

8. Hence, the importance of Marriage as a divine institution is evident. Moreover, it is elevated to the dignity and power of a sacrament. "Have you not read," Our Lord said, reproving the Jews for their low estimate of Matrimony, "have you not read, that he who made man from the beginning, *made them male and female? For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh.* Therefore, now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matth. 19, 4-6). And, quoting the same passage, St. Paul declares: "This is a great sacrament (*sacred thing*); but I speak in Christ and in the Church" (Ephes. 5, 32).

As a sacrament, Matrimony takes on the character of sacredness of God, that is, of inviolability upon divine sanction. All that, therefore, pertains to the nature and object of Matrimony is to be viewed from the angle of religion. Nothing of these things is left to the arbitrary disposition of the contracting parties, so long as they have decided to execute their contract.

As a sacrament, Matrimony also confers the neces-

sary particular graces for the faithful discharge of the duties of the married state. And as a sacrament of the living, it increases sanctifying grace.

9. But Marriage presents itself as a most important institution of God also from the viewpoint of its object. It is not only vested with the dignity of a sacrament, but it is endowed with especial virtue and power as the only legitimate source of human propagation. It is the pivot of human history, the cradle of the world, the school of order and integrity. Without the institution of lawful wedlock the human race would have been given over to the ravages of unbridled passion, and of blood-reeking contention, either of which means destruction. For the faithful observance of the obligations of married life, this sacred institution has ever been for individuals as well as for whole nations, the chief source of progress, contentment, happiness, and of both spiritual and temporal blessings without number. Nations that violate the sacred marriage contract are thereby driving the most effective wedge of disintegration into their power, health, strength, and culture.

Hence, Marriage is inded a *sacred thing* both from the viewpoint of the Church and from that of the state, or of the human race at large.

III. THE OBLIGATIONS OF MARRIAGE.

10. For the reason that Marriage is an institution of the utmost importance both for the Kingdom of God here and hereafter and for the existence of nations as units of development in their moral and temporal welfare, it is evident that none should enter it without due consideration and preparation. To rush

into marriage headlong, without having weighed the chances for happiness and unhappiness, would be imprudent; in some cases, disastrous. To enter into it, even if leisurely, but without a thought of commending so serious a step to God, the author and defender of marriage, would be wicked.

11. The obligations of the married state are manifold, hard, and often most tedious and burdensome.

The primary duty of the married couple is, to raise children, provided they decide to carry their contract into practice. The substance of this contract is, to give to each party the power of the lawful use of the body of the other.

The second duty of the married couple is, willingly to assist each other in allaying and relieving the impulses of the flesh.

12. From these duties, however, flow additional obligations: as the bringing up and education of the children born of the marriage, the preparation and guidance of the children for their future place in the community, the care for the children in danger, trouble, and sickness. In one word: a participation in the Fatherhood and Providence of God. It is for this reason that God jealously protects the honor of parenthood by the Fourth Commandment and by many other injunctions in the Old as well as in the New Testament, and promises an immediate reward for the pious observance of these injunctions.

The most important prerogative of parenthood is its authority. This jeweled wand, parents must never yield to their children under pain of failure of all their parental cares and efforts.

13. The foregoing obligations are the ramifications, in a manner, of the primary obligation of marriage, that of making the use of marriage serve the propagation of the human race. The following instances represent some of the deductions from the second marital obligation, that of mutual assistance in bearing the burden and the heat of the flesh: a) Disregard of personal comfort for the love of the partner; b) at times also sacrifices of well-being, unless the partner can be persuaded to be contented, without danger to his virtue; c) denial of one's moods and unseasonable dispositions; d) sometimes even direct efforts of attracting the renitent partner.

14. The most salient feature of married life is unselfishness. When both partners learn each his own disposition, weaknesses, and tendencies, and at the same time strive to make due allowance for common faults and to make room for the fostering of the good traits in each other, then there is placed a foundation for lasting peace, happiness, and vigor—and not otherwise.

Hence, it is necessary that candidates for marriage should study each other's points of attraction, and not neglect to take notice also of each other's shortcomings and less agreeable peculiarities. Love and affection must not be allowed, before marriage, to blind the candidates to all blemishes of character and disposition. For this indulgence, many occasions will be offered after marriage.

15. In the last place, husband and wife are obliged to be a means of edification and sanctification for each other. The self-control and self-discipline of the married, on this account, is as imperative for the peace of the home, as is the obedience of the religious for the

peace of their community, and is of greater consequence in that it affects the training of the children.

16. Hence, the great requisite in family life is prayer; common prayer. In this exercise of religion, the hearts of husband and wife are closely brought together in God: wounds and bruises are healed, scars are removed, tears are dried, burdens are lightened, and in trials and straits love is fanned to intenser flame, and purified by a new infusion of the love of God. Prayer, common prayer, family prayer—behold the sanctuary lamp before the shrine of Matrimony!

IV. PRIVILEGES OF MARRIAGE.

17. The noblest privilege which Marriage accords a Christian couple is the communication of two souls in mutual understanding and affection. Ordinary respect for our neighbor and every-day charity are intensified by the fire of love, and ennobled by unobstructed inspection of each other's soul and heart, in conjugal life. It is the accomplishment of the tenderest and strongest friendship. In union with the practice of prudent and loving restraint, it forms an ideal, such as the Author and Source of all love alone could conceive and establish on earth. Its permanency and exclusiveness are but its natural condition and consequence. The thought of disruption is foreign to so intimate, delicate, and grateful a union. It is bound to lure to light that which is the very best and the most beautiful in the soul, and to put a check upon all that is gross and indelicate.

18. A less ethereal and idealistic, but none the less precious privilege of Marriage is the mutual communication of those powers and pleasures which God

has designed for the propagation of the human race. For the all-wise Creator has surrounded the office of parenthood with an inexplicable charm. The atmosphere of the conjugal chamber, as produced by Nature, is a seduction of the sober senses and a fascination of the fancy; a rosy-lined deception.

This is neither chance, nor mere passion, nor sin. It is a necessity. It is the white bloom of the fruit trees of spring. It is a fragrant veil spread over the door of Nature's workshop. It is the balm that soothes the pangs of childbirth, the music that stills the cries of the nursery. How else could the Creator win over an obstreperous race, cursed with self-will and love of ease, to assume their necessary part in the plan of His Providence, except by taking captive altogether their senses, their sentiments, and their minds? He made unyielding Nature the mistress of propagation, subjecting her only to Himself, and, indeed, directly to Himself.

19. But right here are encountered the reefs of conjugal life. Nature is not only insistent in her cravings, but is unreasonable in asking satisfaction. She visits terrible retribution upon those who disregard her ultimate purpose, it is true. But she keeps on wielding the rod over her servitors.

“But if thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned: nevertheless such shall have tribulation of the flesh” (I Cor. 7, 28).

Hence, Nature must not be allowed to enthrone herself in Marriage as the supreme arbiter of the conduct of husband and wife. Strong as may be the bonds which concupiscence winds about sense and

fancy, the intellect and the will can keep themselves free from the trammels and shackles of passion; especially in view of the fact that passion is blind, and, therefore, is designed to be guided by reason. It is subject to the leadership of our nobler faculties. Hence, it would be acting in an unmanly manner, would one resign oneself to natural impulses without judgment, and without reasonable restraint.

20. Yet, we are not greater and stronger than ourselves, that is, we have, by nature, no power to overcome ourselves when our whole being is in sympathy with an impulse or a commotion rising up against reason and law. But God has provided assistance by grace for occasions when our moral strength is evenly matched by the strength of passion, and when, in addition, we are urged to make common cause with our assailant for our own defeat. And this assistance of God can always be secured by humble and devout prayer; not perhaps by oral prayer alone, but by a fervent petition from the depth of an anguished heart.

21. There are frequently suggested in married life such considerations as endanger the integrity of conjugal life. Often it is the consideration of the health of the mother which seems to make a deflection from the rule of marital habits not only reasonable, but imperative. To continue in the regular practice of wedded life would be tantamount to the sentence of death pronounced on a faithful mother. "One more birth," the physician will decree, "and this life of yours will be wrecked forever, or, will be snuffed out." Therefore, a convenient way is to be sought out of the difficulty.

A "convenient way," of course, because it is the easiest way. Whether or not it is the correct, that is,

the virtuous and natural way, it is not considered worth while discussing.

22. If the danger is as grave as the physician announces, and, therefore, a change in conjugal habits is demanded, the *only natural, correct, and virtuous* way is either to face the danger squarely, or to abstain from the use of conjugal privileges. The former is the less virtuous, in itself, in the face of the demands of charity. The latter, in many instances, will be found to be the only virtuous way.

23. But in not a few cases the physician, for professional reasons, exaggerates the danger. He knows that an early repetition of the labor and hardships—in a particular case—of child-bearing, will aggravate a certain neurotic or other pathological condition in his patient, and, therefore, in order to make sure that his professional services for that particular ailment may not be expended in vain, he threatens the direst ills upon her as a deterrent from interfering with his treatment.

24. This is good policy, medically speaking. It is the reverse, from the moral standpoint. It is an untruth, and an incentive for weak and passionate mortals to the forming of criminal habits. For the usual course pursued under such circumstances is not the practice of charitable abstention, but the practice of sinful indulgence, the direct prevention of conception in some way or other.

Yet this remedy does not cure. Nor does the doctor intend to persuade the parties under consideration to make wrong use of their rights. Only his declaration produces this consequence, because both or either of these parties find it hard to control their im-

pulses. The physician knows better than anyone else that whatever practice runs counter to the order of nature, runs counter also to whatever course of cure he may have instituted for his patient. The last things of such patients are invariably worse than the first.

25. For mothers who are brought face to face with a proposition of this sort it is well to consider 1) That the Keeper of our lives and health is, in the first place, God, and not the doctor. 2) That the state of pregnancy is as natural a state, that is, so much in accordance with the office of motherhood, as the maturing of fruit on trees. It is more likely to produce a good effect on the condition of a woman than a bad one. 3) That the physician would naturally advise his patient to spare herself, if possible, the inconveniences of motherhood for a while so as to enable him to pursue his treatment without interruption and interference. 4) That God Himself, as the Author of motherhood, will take care of dutiful and self-sacrificing mothers. 5) That most of the inconveniences encountered during pregnancy may be relieved or removed by seasonable medical treatment so as not to grow large enough to become actually a danger to life.

26. In some cases, serious injury in the organs of gestation and delivery suggests the declining of motherhood.

Here the mother is obliged to seek relief at the hands of a skilful surgeon, or if this be not thought necessary, at the hands of a skilful obstetrician, either of whom can work all but miracles in procuring relief, and immunity from extraordinary danger. Generally speaking, every young married woman should

immediately consult an experienced physician upon noticing that her pregnancy is not proceeding normally. None should take undue risks where the normal course can be so easily re-established as is done in innumerable cases of child-bearing. Many a life would thus be saved, many a break-down prevented.

27. The most abundant source, however, of criminal habits in Marriage, in our days, is the unwillingness of parents to bear and rear more children than one or two. In some families nothing but the trouble coincident with motherhood and fatherhood, that is, the annoyance of repeated confinements and the subsequent restraint of the mother, and the prospect of the care and solicitude becoming necessary later on in raising an increasing number of children, induce young parents to violate their sacred contract.

28. Let parents ponder this observation: Although Marriage was instituted by God for the express purpose of securing the propagation of the human race in the only safe and becoming manner, yet no definite number of children is prescribed as a product of this or that marriage. Hence, looking at it from an economic standpoint, parents may limit the number of their descendants at will. Neither God nor the Church commands that each married couple must have more children than they want or than they can care for. But if this end is procured by abuse of the privileges of the married state, then it is criminal, and neither God, nor the Church, nor any physician can condone this crime. Nature also will revenge herself as the agent of the Creator.

29. Others are found who say that they must restrict the number of their offspring on account of

poverty. Now, poverty may be absolute or relative, that is, generally speaking, real or imaginary. Limited means are not in themselves a sign of poverty. A little retrenching here and there in expenses for luxuries, or for dispensable comforts, would often furnish a new cradle in the home. Absolute poverty, that is, dire hunger and nakedness, if it were enduring for any length of time, would indeed be a strange apparition in our state of civilization.

30. The genuine spirit of Christian self-denial, a generous spirit of sacrifice for the love of God in view of the eternal reward He has promised His faithful servants, will overcome most, if not all, of the difficulties of married life.

31. A WARNING. There is a widespread belief—if an unfounded opinion can be called such—among certain classes of men and women who are still professing to be Christians, that whatever may be going on between husband and wife is nobody else's concern. That is, in plain language, "it is nobody's business what we are doing." And in the class of the nobodies is found none but the confessor. The doctor is not excluded. He is consulted on ways and means of procedure, and of cure, when sinful practices—as they invariably will—cause trouble.

32. Now, no confessor is anxious, to say the least, to meddle with those who in a cowardly way desecrate their conjugal couch. But as the methods employed in these cases are sinful, they must be submitted for judgment either in the sacred tribunal of penance, or at the tribunal of God in the end.

33. Or, for what conceivable reason should one of the most detestable crimes escape the obligation of

confession? For that which is "nobody's business" is generally the unnatural crime of onanism, or some other vicious practice that shuns judgment and dreads detection.

34. It is in vain that confirmed desecrators of conjugal chastity essay to mask their sin and its consequences either before God or before man. Their expression of face is marked by the meanness and beastliness of their criminal abuse, and their conduct betrays the audacity and the impertinence of their practices. Shrewdness of observation and experience are not required to note and single out such individuals. The atmosphere in which they move is their traitor. They suffer from the dissatisfaction of their entire nature, but strive to conceal their injury of body and mind under the mask of a brusque presence, thus creating a pitiable picture of degraded humanity. They instinctively feel and act as the grave-diggers of the human race. They cannot conceal their profession. They are to be classed with famine, war, and pestilence, the scourges which God and nature inflict upon mankind as chastisements for inveterate habits of universal wickedness: an unenviable position indeed for the cowardly onanist!

V. THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF MATRIMONY.

35. In the New Testament, which concerns all Christians, Matrimony is graced with an added distinction. Under the Old Dispensation, Matrimony was a natural contract, instituted by God and established on the basis of the natural law which is nothing but the will and design of God in His creation.

In the Christian era, Matrimony is raised to the dignity of a sacred contract, that is, of a contract sanctified or endowed with a special blessing by the Redeemer. Thus it is become a religious institution.

36. In addition, however, to this endowment, it has received, at the hands of the Savior of mankind, the virtue of signifying the union of Christ with His Church, and of producing grace necessary to preserve this significance by preserving the union of the parties to this contract. In this way, Matrimony is elevated to the dignity and power of a sacrament—a sacred and efficacious symbol of grace.

37. As a sacrament, then, Matrimony stands aloof, together with Baptism and the rest of the sacraments, from mere civil and legal ceremonies. It is spiritual in nature and character. It is holy. It participates in a most especial and intimate manner in the graces wrought by the Passion and Death of Our Savior, no less, in its own way, than, for example, the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders. For as Confirmation symbolizes the strength of the grace of the Holy Ghost and makes us fighters for Christ, and Holy Orders symbolizes the service of the altar and creates leaders for the cause of Christ, so Matrimony symbolizes most effectually the love of Christ for His Church and supplies the means for the material continuance of the Church. It is made the blessed Garden of God whence He draws the means of sustaining the earthly existence and external ornament of His heavenly Kingdom.

38. There are three elements—a threefold virtue—which constitute the sanctity of the Sacrament of Matrimony in such a way as to form the ground for the special sacramental grace and blessing of this sa-

cred contract. First, the *bonum sacramenti*, "the good of the sacrament." This consists in the dignity of the marriage contract as an institution sanctified by the grace of the Redemption. Hence, whatever is incompatible with the dignity of an institution especially ordained by God for signifying a particular divine favor, or a particular operation of divine grace, as is found in the sacraments, that is also incompatible with the dignity of Matrimony. Now, by the will of Our Savior, as St. Paul loudly testifies, Matrimony was elevated to the dignity and efficacy of a sacrament for the express purpose of symbolizing and signifying *practically* the union of divine love between Christ and the Church. This union is never to be interrupted or terminated. It is to endure to the end of the world. It is not to be disfigured or disgraced by contentions and enmities. It is ever to operate for the increase of sanctity and grace. Therefore, Matrimony must be an enduring bond of love between husband and wife; inseparable on this side of the grave; a bond that can endure the strain of human perverseness to the end by ever opening a recourse to the original source of grace, the sacrament once received and ever appealed to by prayer in the days of stress and straining. In other words: Matrimony is indissoluble, except by death. And there is no conceivable reason why it should not be strong enough, in view of the graces God holds out to the married, to withstand such onslaughts of passion and other temptations as are sure to be encountered also in every other of the thousand occasions of contact between human beings. Matrimony always furnishes to the well-disposed sufficient grace to make a virtue of necessity, whereas divorce is commonly a concession made to haste and impulse, or, in extreme cases, to unbridled lust of the

flesh. Matrimony has its own rewards. But the best of them, as the enduring blessings of a hard journey patiently completed, must not be expected here below. Matrimony is a divine institution, entitled to a divine reward. And God gives best when He defers. It is the privilege of faithful fathers and mothers to be the favored creditors of an exceedingly generous Debtor, the Almighty God.

39. The second element or virtue of the sacramental sanctity of the marriage contract is the *bonum fidei*, "the good of faith (fidelity)." This consists in the unity (oneness, or exclusiveness) of Matrimony. By virtue of its unity, marriage excludes the participation of outsiders both in the contract and in the use of its rights. Hence, this sacred unity is violated (1) by admitting anyone else but the wedded partner to the privileges of marital intercourse (adultery), and (2) by the attempt of admitting an outsider to the contract (bigamy and polygamy).

40. Divided conjugal attentions on the part of either husband or wife are infringements on the vested rights of the other. By Matrimony, the contracting parties make mutual cession of the use of their bodies for the purposes of married life. Now the principal purpose of Matrimony, the propagation of the human race within the security of the family, is frustrated if the family circle is opened to a trespasser, and the rights both of the partner and of the children to be raised are trodden under foot. To the cession of rights, moreover, an acquisition of rights must correspond in a bilateral contract. Hence, divided attentions in married persons constitute a grave injustice. Add to this the divine decrees that "they two shall be in one flesh," and "let no man put asunder what God has

joined together,” and it is evident that the exclusiveness, the essential unity and incommunicability of Matrimony is established both by Nature and by God.

41. The Church goes so far even as to frown upon a second successive marriage. Although there is neither sin nor shame attaching to a new marriage after widowhood, and there may be grave reasons why a second marriage should be sought, yet the praise of the Church and of the Word of God is accorded virtuous widowhood rather than happy repetition of nuptials, as is apparent from the encomium pronounced on the long and venerable widowhood of Anna, and from the caution of the Church against the selection of men in second marriage for the episcopal office. The reason is not far to seek. Next to virginity, continence is the most arduous virtue to practice—and the Church weighs values and merits in accordance with the weight of sacrifices assumed and of grace needed.

Therefore, we may safely make this deduction in the sense of the Church: The voluntary practice of reasonable continence in married life acts as a safeguard against impulse and passion, and thus increases the security and sanctity of matrimonial fidelity, and reduces the dangers of sin, calamity, and divorces.

42. The third element or virtue of the sacramental sanctity of the marriage contract is the *bonum prolis*, “the good of the child” (the right of propagation).

This does not mean that marriage is essentially sanctified by the actual bearing and rearing of children. No. Marriage is holy in itself as a divine institution and as a sacrament. Marriage is instituted directly for the purpose of sanctifying the propagation of the human race. If, then, marriage candidates, or

even married couples, agree to forego this privilege of theirs, they commit no sin, precisely by so agreeing. But if they so agree without at the same time agreeing that they will not execute in practice their sacred contract, they are sullyng by brutal selfishness the covenant upon which they entered with God. The mutual surrender and acceptance of the marital use of the body is made solely upon condition of use for the purposes of marriage. But it is not the purpose of marriage to issue a license for prostitution, or to legalize the abuse of faculties granted primarily for one only purpose, that of peopling the Church of God here below with new children, and the realms of Heaven with citizens to be made the brethren of the angels.

43. This last element or virtue, then, consists in this: that it not only renders honorable the bearing and rearing of children, but even renders sacred the act of procreation (or cohabitation) in view of the end intended. It is the practical application of the divine command to "increase and multiply and to fill the earth." It gives children the right to appear on earth as progeny blest of God. It is the only avenue by which man is admitted to co-operate with God in the work of the creation: a privilege sacred indeed, but also onerous and arduous in its full scope, that of not only assisting in starting new life in the world but also of co-operating unceasingly in preparing this new life for its final destiny in Heaven: a task to which all that are averse to self-sacrifice and self-denial should hesitate to consecrate themselves unless they are willing to learn and to profit by the opportunities which married life offers in abundance.

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