

## **Explaining Marriage** *By Deacon Tim Sullivan*

Every sacrament has a unique sign of a sacred reality. For Baptism, the sign is the water. For Holy Communion, the sign is the bread and the wine.

In the sacrament of marriage, the sign is the couple, the husband and wife. The sacred reality is a new, holy, permanent union of a man and woman with each other and with God.

The marriage of a man and woman models the way God relates to humanity. So marriage is permanent in the same way that God's love for humanity is permanent. God will never abandon us, and in the same way the husband and wife promise never to abandon each other.

As God is faithful, the husband and wife are faithful to one another. As God is fruitful, in the sense that He created the world and all of humanity out of love, He shares His creative power with husbands and wives. The physical expression of love and unity between the husband and wife is designed by God to lead to the birth of children. Infertile couples are encouraged to pursue adoption.

Husbands and wives are challenged to sacrifice themselves for each other and for their children. The grace of marriage helps them overcome the temptation to be selfish and put the needs of other family members ahead of their own needs.

The goal of marriage is the salvation of the spouses and their children. Accordingly, the home should be a holy place, where the ways of God are learned and lived. Then the Christian love and faith that flourish in the family are shared with the community.

The Christian family plays a fundamental role in building up the Body of Christ on earth. As St. John Paul II used to say: "The future of humanity passes through the family."

*"We have heard God's teachings, we know them... We do not keep them from our children; we recite them to the next generation." Psalm 78:3-4*