Most importantly, don’t expect to walk into the “perfect marriage” or “happily ever after”. There’s no such thing. A perfect marriage is not even the goal—in fact, marriage is a new path to the destination you and your spouse were made for: Heaven! You’re now together on that journey toward the fullness of joy.

Marriage marks the beginning of this journey, but your marriage is always in formation. The early years of marriage are marked by adjustment, so it’s okay if it takes a while to settle in or if difficulties arise.

Expect the unexpected—God has great plans for your marriage: to bring you to Him, and to teach you to love to prepare you for that experience. That journey will surprise you as you continually grow in understanding how God draws you to Him through your marriage.

“Love should be seen as something which in a sense never ‘is’ but is always only ‘becoming’, and what it becomes depends upon the contribution of both persons and the depth of their commitment.”
— St. John Paul II

Congratulations on starting your married life together!

As your marriage gradually teaches you how to love, be encouraged that there are many seasons to this journey. Even as these change, remember that God is at the center of your commitment to each other, since you have chosen to have a sacramental marriage. A sacramental marriage means that you demonstrate to each other and to the world a love like God’s! For a human being, this takes continual development and commitment in every aspect of life. But it also leads to joy. Having a marriage that is sacramental isn’t a nice sentiment or a pious thought, but a reality that concretely shapes your love into something bigger than just the relationship you had before marriage.

With that in mind, here are some tips to help you start off your journey of sacramental love together.
**Beginning Strong Habits**

**Start setting sustainable habits and goals as a couple.** It is important to set up healthy lifestyle choices from the beginning. Make small, sustainable adjustments together toward a more balanced and intentional life. Some examples are sleep and meal schedule, division of labor, budgeting, and scheduling time for each other. Included in these habits should be daily or weekly rituals that connect you together and strengthen your marriage. Habits guard your priorities from being eroded by day-to-day distractions; now is a great time to start these habits.

**Find good couple friends to be a safety net of accountability.** These families around you can give you advice, support you, and notice when you need help or encouragement. You also become like the people you surround yourself with...so surround yourself with strong marriages.

**Have specific time set aside for a couple meeting (not a date night).** This meeting’s purpose is to handle details of your practical life together, like financial decisions, how the laundry is done, and what commitments to take on. Rather than dealing with these topics in a hot moment, or allowing them to steal time from dates, schedule the conversations.

**Never stop dreaming and planning the future.** Dream together of the future and then make plans, and most of all, ask God what His dreams are for you! Dreaming and planning are awesome antidotes to mediocrity, even if they are small. These plans can be fun, but make sure that personal growth is not forgotten in your dreams.

**Get used to the words “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you”**. Go to Confession quickly and apologize frequently, even for things that seem “small”. This practice is preventative care for your love.  

**Fostering Couple Unity**

**Practice the “we” mindset.** Be open about your needs and preferences, but be willing to give your spouse’s way of doing things a try. Put your spouse above your family of origin, friendships, and old habits, because you are now a “we”. Change your vocabulary accordingly.

**Remember that you and your spouse are both broken—but differently.** The goal is not to make your spouse more like you. Rather, the goal of marriage is to become more like Christ. Recall often your spouse’s strengths, aloud or on paper, and give your spouse a chance to “shine” in those ways. However, appreciate that your spouse is still “unfinished” and limited. By recognizing this, you avoid placing expectations on him or her that only God can fulfill.

**Expect to be stretched.** Do not be surprised when doubts arise, like, “Should I have married her?” or “How do I put up with his habits?” Do not be surprised by these normal thoughts and feelings. Use the opportunity to choose love in a more radical way. This is when marriage starts having its intended effect on you; it expands your soul for greater gift.

**Be wise about who you confide in about your marriage, and how you talk about your spouse.** Whether talking to or about your spouse, remember that this is the person to whom you owe the most kindness. Never complain about this most important in your life.

**Calling upon God’s Grace**

**Keep up with your individual prayer life.** You’re now one, but you still need to be growing in love with God as an individual.

**Pray for your spouse.** When you are driving, recovering from a fight, waking up at night, buying groceries, replacing the toilet paper, helping your spouse wash the dishes...basically, whenever possible! Your call is to help your spouse reach Heaven. Also, when you pray for your spouse, it becomes evident in your actions.

**Bring your intimacy with your spouse to prayer.** This can look like praying before intimacy, which helps you see your sexuality as gift to your spouse rather than as a mere means to pleasure. It can also look like bringing to God the obstacles you face in loving your spouse. God loves your spouse perfectly, so turn to Him to help you love.