

“Let marriage be honored among all and the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the immoral” (Heb 13:4). The church has always looked to the gift of marriage as a path to holiness. “Every marriage is meant to be a little icon of the love of Christ and his bride, the Church. The love shared between a man and a woman in holy matrimony points us to the self-emptying, self-sacrificing love God has for each one of us”ⁱ We observe February 7th-14th as National Marriage Week and Sunday the 14th as the World Day of Marriage.

“To Have, To Hold, To Honor” is the theme for this year’s celebration of National Marriage Week. A bride and groom make promises to each other on their wedding day. This exchange of consent may be spoken once at a wedding, but the vows are lived out on a daily basis amidst the joys and struggles of life. God wants to be a part of every marriage and promises to strengthen the bonds of matrimony for those who unite their love to God’s in a sacramental marriage. “National Marriage Week is an opportunity for married couples to reflect on how they have grown together since their wedding day and to ponder how they can continue to grow in loving and honoring their spouse.”ⁱⁱ

Not everyone chooses to marry. Some choose a spiritual espousal to Christ and the life of a virgin. Today is the Memorial of Saint Agatha. According to legend, Agatha came from a prominent family in Sicily. Her parents viewed her conception as a true gift from God and asked for her to be consecrated to God in infancy. “In the midst of dangers and temptations Agatha served Christian purity of body and soul, and she died for the love of chastity.”ⁱⁱⁱ

At a young age, she wanted to dedicate her life to God and shewed away any suitors. The Governor of Sicily was named Quintanus. Attracted to her wealth and beauty, he summoned her to Catania. The Roman Emperor Decius had issued an edict requiring everyone to pledge and oath of loyalty to the new emperor. This was problematic for Agatha and for any faithful Christian who was asked to pledge allegiance to a false god.

As she set out on her journey, Agatha anticipated trouble. She prayed, “O Jesus Christ! All that I am is yours; preserve me against the tyrant.”^{iv} The Governor who was interested in lustful conquest had Agatha arrested and brought before the judge -- himself. Under the threat of torture and death, he thought she would cave into his sinful desires. She responded with a deep faith for her true love Christ. She prayed: “Jesus Christ, Lord of all, you see my heart, you know my desires. Possess all that I am. I am your sheep: make me worthy to overcome the devil.”^v

The heartless governor tortured her, but she refused to betray her love for Christ. Saint Peter came to her in a vision to strengthen her resolve. True to God until death, her final prayer was yet another testament to her trust in God: “Lord, my Creator, you have always protected me from the cradle; you have taken me from the love of the world and given me patience to suffer. Receive my soul.”^{vi} Agatha died a martyr for the faith and left God to be the judge of the governor’s immoral actions.

Whether you are married or single like Saint Agatha, you can always call on our Lord for help. As we are taught in the letter to the Hebrews: “we may say with confidence: The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”

ⁱ usccb.org/resources/NMW/2021/Preaching_Resource

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibreviary, introduction to memorial of Saint Agatha

^{iv} Ibid

^v catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-agatha-138

^{vi} Ibid