



Have you ever watched closely the faces of a bride and groom on their wedding day? They are full of wonder and hope, envisioning a lifetime of joy and love ahead. Exactly as they should be! What about the faces of a husband and wife who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary? The look they share is a knowing one, rich with shared memories, past hurts, unexpected joys, and the great gift of being known and loved deeply. To get from the first glance to the latter requires a commitment that is not a fleeting fancy or a shifting emotion. Jesus taught us to reconcile with those we have offended (Mt 5:24) and always forgive those who have offended us (Lk 6:37). Asking for forgiveness regularly actually deepens one's love.

Love—true love—is a verb! Love is a decision made every single day, sometimes every single minute, to actively place the needs of the beloved ahead of one's own. This is not easy, nor popular today in an age of personal empowerment. Nevertheless, as Christians we find our inspiration for marital love in Scripture. The love between husband and wife points to the love between Jesus and his Church (the People of God). Jesus lays down his life for each of us, and his last words on the cross were to ask forgiveness for those who put him to death.

Most of us will never be asked to actually lay our lives down for our spouses. But in our difficult moments, it sometimes feels like it! Small slights and unspoken pain can yield resentment, and we may find ourselves wondering what we ever found so lovable about our spouses in the first place! Today's Psalm 126 holds the key. The Israelites cry out, "The Lord has done great things for us!" even though they had just spent decades in exile, away from their promised land. If you ever feel abandoned, lonely, or unseen in marriage, return to Scripture to reassure yourself of God's constant love. Then take a deep breath and go say you're sorry. Even if you think you don't need to. The result will have you both seeing the great new things the Lord can do for you as He makes a way in the wilderness (Is 43:19).

"To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life."

– Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 236

Saint Agnes Lê Thị Thành

Agnes Lê Thị Thành was born into a devout Catholic family in 18th century Vietnam. She married and raised six children in the faith during religious persecution, and she sheltered priests in her home to offer the sacraments in secret. Eventually, St. Agnes was caught and arrested at age 60. She was beaten, tortured, and even had snakes put in her clothes. Yet she courageously witnessed to her children, urging them to keep the faith, and told her husband, "I entrust the children to you, trust in God. As for me, I will trust and follow Jesus to the end." She died as a martyr.

Reflection question for couples: What kinds of habits of faith does our family practice (prayer, service, reading scripture, forgiveness, talking about God, etc.)? How can we strengthen our faith together to be like St. Agnes?

Reflection question for families: What does it mean for us that love is a verb? How can we put our love for each member of our family into action?

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