



Preaching on Marital Love and
Accompanying Couples Toward the
Full Embrace of the Church's Teaching

Fr. Roger J. Landry • Diocese of Gary Clergy Convocation • October 20, 2020



Priests and Marriage Preparation

- In the July/August 2018 edition of *Intercom Magazine*, published by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect for the Vatican's Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life, which is in charge of the Church's universal care for the family, declared:
 - "Priests are not the best people to train others for marriage. They have no credibility. They have never lived the experience. They may know moral theology, dogmatic theology in theory, but to go from there to putting it into practice every day, ... they don't have the experience."
- This was not the first time he has alleged universal priestly ineptitude with regard to marriage preparation. The previous September, at a conference in Belfast, he emphasized that priests have "no credibility in this area" because they have "no credibility when it comes to living the reality of marriage." What is needed, he said, is accompaniment by other married couples "who have walked in [married couples'] shoes."
- He implied that his comprehensive assertions might be partly autobiographical extrapolations because, he said, he didn't "have a clue" when his own nieces and nephews asked him some questions about marital difficulties. "I have no experience of that and the majority of priests don't have that experience," he said.



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- But in the *Intercom* interview he also contended that priests' lack of competence and credibility is matched by a lack of commitment.
- Basing himself on his previous experience as Bishop of Dallas, he said, priests, with all of their duties, "are not going to be interested in organizing marriage meetings."
- Priests who are in fact interested in organizing meetings with couples to help them get ready for the Sacrament of Marriage found his comments disheartening and disturbing. Many married couples likewise found them bewildering.
- It's one thing to make the obvious point that effective marriage preparation involves not just parish priests but well-trained married couples, something that happens in most parish, diocesan and online marriage preparation courses in the United States.
- Cardinal Farrell's regrettable emphasis, however, was not to encourage greater lay participation but to undermine priests' involvement and credibility – as if, because they've never been married, priests have nothing to contribute.
- This led Providence Bishop Thomas Tobin humorously to tweet, "It seems fair to ask, then, if a celibate cleric has sufficient 'credibility' to lead a dicastery devoted to laity, family and life."



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- Cardinal Farrell's comments made me wonder how familiar he is with St. John Paul II's works on marriage, which consider his objections and persuasively refute them.
 - The future St. John Paul II in his introduction to *Love and Responsibility*, wrote, "A lack of their own personal experience does not hinder them since they possess a very rich indirect experience proceeding from pastoral work ... [where] they encounter precisely these problems so often and in such a variety of ways and situations that another experience is created, experience that is undoubtedly more indirect and 'foreign,' but at the same time much more extensive."
- They also make me wonder how well he knows what Pope Francis has said encouraging priestly work in this area.
 - Speaking to parish priests on February 25, 2017, Pope Francis commented, "In most cases you are the first people to be approached by young people desiring to form a new family and marry in the Sacrament of Matrimony. And it is again you to whom married couples turn in crisis as a result of serious relationship problems, with a need to rekindle their faith and rediscover the grace of the Sacrament. ... *No one better than you knows and is in touch with the reality of the social fabric of the territory, and experiences the various complexities: unions celebrated in Christ, de facto unions, civil unions, failed unions, happy and unhappy families and young people.*"



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- Pope Francis continued, by describing how important the role of priests is:
 - “With each person and in each situation,” the Pope continued, “you are called to be travelling companions who can offer *witness* and *support*. May your primary concern be to *bear witness* to the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the primordial good of the family, vital cell of the Church and of Society, by announcing that marriage between a man and a woman is a symbol of the spousal union between Christ and the Church. Such witness is put into practice concretely when you prepare engaged couples for marriage, making them aware of the profound meaning of the step which they are about to take, and when you journey with young couples with attentiveness, helping them experience the divine strength and the beauty of their marriage through light and shadow, through joyful and difficult times.”
- He went on to say that he wanted marriage preparation be a “true catechumenate” that could accompany engaged couples similar to the way the Church for months accompanies adults preparing for the Sacrament of Baptism. And he stressed, “This catechumenate is principally entrusted to you, parish priests.... I encourage you to implement it despite any difficulties you may encounter.”



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- In this talk, I'd like to discuss two things at a very practical level:
 - Priests and Marriage Preparation
 - Preaching about marriage.
- Before we get there, however, it's good for us to note what the challenges are. Off the top of my head I could list dozens:
 - A failure on the part of many to believe in the indissolubility of marriage.
 - Growing rates of marital breakdown and divorce and the consequences this has on women, men and children. Broken families are becoming the norm in some places and many children say they feel that they're orphans of living parents. Declining marriage rates and the increase of cohabitation as a long-term substitute.
 - The explosion of pornography and the denigration of women, sex, and love. This has led to generations of objectified women and girls and a generation of men wounded in their capacity for sacrificial love.
 - The prevalence of a hook-up or Tinder culture instead of a dating culture. Many don't know how to date any longer, as the recent movie *The Dating Project* highlights.



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- Challenges (continued)
 - The difficulty for many, especially young women, to find eligible men.
 - The move to redefine marriage from the union of one man and one woman, faithfully committed to each other for life and open to children, to a union of any two adults for as long as they want.
 - A culture –television, public education – that doesn't support raising a family.
 - Gender confusion and gender ideology, undermining respect for both women and men.
 - The ongoing scourge of domestic violence
 - Drug use, alcoholism, gambling and other addictions – like to traditional or social media.
 - A crisis of trust and infidelity, some coming from family of origin issues, some coming the much higher rates of adultery being facilitated by various social media apps.
 - A much greater difficulty in forgiving as a result due to breakdown of trust and fear of infidelity



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- Challenges (continued)
 - An extreme individualism that weakens family bonds.
 - A hedonism or pleasure-seeking that leads spouses to think that, when one or both no longer feels fulfilled, sufficient reason exists to end the marriage.
 - A narcissism, or extreme self-centeredness, that makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs.
 - A growing materialism that leads us to treat others and relationships the way we treat things, as disposable things that we can just discard.
 - A culture of the ephemeral and fears about permanent commitments.
 - The technological revolution in the field of human procreation, which has dramatically impacted conjugal relations, both in terms of contraception on the one hand – separating love-making from life-making – and *in vitro* fertilization on the other, which separates life-making from love-making.
 - There's the confusion and abuse of surrogacy that has flowed from these immoral reproductive technologies.



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- Challenges (continued)
 - There's a crisis with regard to hope in the future shown in decreasing total fertility rates. The total fertility rate in the US is now 1.76 births per woman, down from 2.08 a decade ago.
 - There's the scourge of present and past abortions.
 - There's a confusion of genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and as if everything were possible and permissible. This can lead to a rejection of moral norms, of chastity, and of real meaning to love.
 - There's greater immaturity, with kids remaining kids long into adulthood
 - The social engineering of adoption agencies and insufficient foster care.
 - The exorbitant cost of weddings.
 - Lots of larger issues, from endemic poverty, to lack of dignified and affordable homes, to the difficulties women and families have mixing work and family life, to the mobile aspect of culture, not to mention the millions of families on the move as refugees and forced and economic migrants.



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- To summarize this section, we could turn to St. John Paul II, who wrote in his 1994 Letter to Families:
 - “Modern rationalism ‘does not tolerate mystery.’ It does not accept the mystery of man as male and female, nor is it willing to admit that the full truth about man has been revealed in Jesus Christ. In particular, it does not accept the ‘great mystery’ proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians, but radically opposes it
 - “For rationalism it is unthinkable that God should be the Redeemer, much less that he should be ‘the Bridegroom,’ the primordial and unique source of the human love between spouses. Rationalism provides a radically different way of looking at creation and the meaning of human existence. But once man begins to lose sight of a God who loves him, a God who calls man through Christ to live in him and with him, and once the family no longer has the possibility of sharing in the ‘great mystery,’ what is left except the mere ‘temporal dimension of life?’ Earthly life becomes nothing more than the scenario of a battle for existence, of a desperate search for gain, and financial gain before all else. ...
 - “This kind of critical reflection should lead our society, which certainly contains many positive aspects on the material and cultural level, to realize that, from various points of view, it is a “*society that is sick*” and is creating profound distortions in man.



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- St. John Paul II, 1994 Letter to Families (*continued*):
 - “The reason is that our society has broken away from the full truth about man, from the truth about what man and woman really are as persons. Thus it cannot adequately comprehend the real meaning of the gift of persons in marriage, responsible love at the service of fatherhood and motherhood, and the true grandeur of procreation and education. ...
 - “This is the real drama: the modern means of social communication are tempted to manipulate the message, ‘thereby falsifying the truth about man.’ [This is real fake news!] Human beings are not the same thing as the images proposed in advertising and shown by the modern mass media. They are much more, in their physical and psychic unity, as composites of soul and body, as persons.
 - “They are much more because of their vocation to love, which introduces them as male and female into the realm of the ‘great mystery.’”
- The Church must be aware of this rationalism, this lack of mystery, this fake news, and respond in an adequate way.



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- Three stages of marriage preparation (*Familiaris Consortio* 66) :
 - **Remote** – Begins in early childhood, discovered personality strengths and weaknesses, authentic human values, character, mastery and use of inclinations, interactions with people of opposite sex, spiritual and catechetical formation of marriage as true vocation and mission.
 - **Proximate** – Deeper catechesis on the sacraments, particularly marriage, with an examination of the medical, biological, spiritual and interpersonal dimensions of marital sexuality and responsible parenthood, as well as an awareness of best methods to raise children, order family life, get a job, cook and clean, etc.
 - **Immediate** – This takes place in the months and weeks preceding the wedding so as to give a new meaning, content and form to the so-called premarital inquiry required by canon law. Not only is this always necessary, but even more so for engaged couples that still manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice. Along this catechumenal journey, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the church, grace and the responsibility of Christian marriage, and preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy.
- Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (1996).



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- Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* (207-211)
 - “There are a number of legitimate ways to structure programs of marriage preparation.”
 - “Quality is more important than quantity, and priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma – to an attractive and helpful presentation that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together with great courage and generosity.”
 - “Marriage preparation should be a kind of ‘initiation’ to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.”
 - “Some individual meetings remain essential. ... Learning to love someone does not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage.”
 - “The timely preparation of engaged couples by the parish community should also assist them to recognize eventual problems and risks, ... to realize the wisdom of breaking off a relationship whose failure and painful aftermath can be foreseen.”



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- Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* (207-211)
 - “Sadly, many couples marry without really knowing one another. They have enjoyed each other’s company and done things together, but without facing the challenge of revealing themselves and coming to know who the other person truly is.
 - “Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a *lifelong calling* based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together.
 - “The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties.
 - “All this calls for a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping them to grow interiorly.
 - “Marriage preparation should also provide couples with the names of places, people and services to which they can turn for help when problems arise.
 - It is also important to remind them of the availability of the sacrament of Reconciliation...”



Priests and Marriage Preparation

Some Practical Tips

- Premarital Investigation Statements of Intention
 - “Are you freely and without reservation intent upon giving yourself to your intended spouse in marriage?”
 - Talk about freedom, explicit reservations, the gift of self, and the meaning of the self-giving in marriage.
 - “Will you love and honor each other as husband and wife for the rest of your life?”
 - Opportunity to speak about love and its opposites, what honor means, the nature and importance of original differentiation and the indissolubility of marriage, not for as long as both shall “love” but “live.”
 - FOCCUS question 142: “If my future spouse is ever unfaithful to me, under no circumstances would I reconcile.”
 - “Will you receive children lovingly from God and raise them according to the law of Christ and the Church?”
 - This is an opportunity to focus on openness to children, how children remain gifts that help us to love, the commitment to raise them through word and example to love God with all they are and have and love their neighbor as God has loved them first.



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Some Practical Tips

- Essays I give to get to know the couple better in their own words.
 - This helps me to see better what they know and don't know, so that I can meet them where they're at and take them to where the Church wants them to be on their wedding day.
 - It also helps me much later in preparing aspects of their wedding homily, to focus on how God has been involved in their life.
- Twelve questions
 1. Please briefly tell me about yourself. What is your family like? What do you do for a living? What are your major interests, hobbies, activities or involvements?
 2. How did you meet each other? When did you start to date? How did you know the other was the "right one"? When and how did the proposal happen?
 3. What does marriage mean to you?
 - *Do they acknowledge God? Bond? Male/female? Fidelity, Indissolubility, Fruitfulness?*
 4. Why do you think Christian marriage is a *sacrament*? What is the purpose of a sacrament?
 - *Bring us into God's life which is eternal, therefore heaven? What are the means to help sanctify the other? Prayer? Mass? Morality? Bible? Catechism?*



Priests and Marriage Preparation

Some Practical Tips

5. What role does God have in your life today and in your relationship?
6. How would you define or describe love? How is marital love different from other types of love?
 - *Is it a feeling or a willing? Is it self-sacrificial? How does eros build on philia and agape?*
Exclusivity, priority, and physicality
7. What do you love about the other?
 - *Do they really love the other or just being loved by the other?*
8. In what ways has the other shown you how special you are to him/her?
9. How has the other inspired and helped you to change for the better?
10. What positive lessons about love and marriage did you learn from your family growing up? Were there any negative experiences (like a death in the family, or a separation or divorce, or fighting or other family problems) that you had to endure and learn from?
11. What is your relationship like with the other's family and friends? What have you learned about him/her through them?
 - *"To learn who someone is, get to know his friends." Do they have mutual friends who support their marriage?*
12. Do you love children? Are you planning to try to start a family right away after you're married?
 - *Opportunity to address openness, generosity, timing, NFP, contraception, IVF, adoption*



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Some Practical Tips

- Other Tips
 - Give them the readings to go over and ask them to write out why they're choosing the OT, the Psalm, the NT and the Gospel.
 - You get to know them as well as have some possible thoughts for the homily.
 - Prepare them for Confession and ask them to invite other members of their party to come to confession after they go at the end of the rehearsal.
 - Take advantage of the many great new resources available in terms of books, online programs and more, especially:
 - Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, *Habits for a Healthy Marriage*
 - Augustine Institute, *Beloved*
 - Dynamic Catholic, *Better Together*
 - Ascension Press, *Joy-filled Marriage*
 - Alpha, *The Marriage Course*
 - Many other excellent resources by John Paul II, Dietrich and Alice von Hildebrand, Fulton J. Sheen and more.



Preaching about Marriage

- So much of the remote and proximate preparation for marriage can take place in the ordinary work of a priest's preaching if he gives due emphasis to the Sacrament of Marriage at this time of crisis.
- Many times to preach:
 - Feast of the Holy Family
 - World Marriage Day (2nd Sunday of February)
 - Weddings – we should take them seriously as big evangelical moments!
 - Anniversaries celebrated during Sunday liturgies (both for individuals who request as well as a parish ceremony for all married couples or jubiliarians)
 - The following times when readings explicitly on marriage or some aspect of love arise:
 - Year A
 - Christmas Vigil – God's marrying the human race (Is 62:5)
 - Holy Family A – Love of Husbands and Wives (Col 3:14-19)
 - 6A – Lust and Divorce (Mt 5:27-32)
 - 3A Lent – Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1-42)
 - Easter Vigil – Marriage in the Beginning (Gen 1:27-28)
 - 22A – Offer bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2)
 - 23A – The love we owe each other (Rom 13:8-10)



Preaching about Marriage

- Year A
 - 27A– Two-fold Commandment to love (Mt 22:35-40)
 - 32 A– Wise Bridesmaids (Mt 25:1-13)
 - 33A – Qualities of a Good Wife (Prov 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31)
- Year B
 - Christmas Vigil – God’s marrying the human race (Is 62:5)
 - 2B – Glorify God in your Body (1 Cor 6:17-20)
 - 4B – To be anxious about the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35)
 - 8B – God betroths us forever (Hos 2:16-21)
 - Easter Vigil– Marriage in the Beginning (Gen 1:27-28)
 - 6B Easter – Let us love one another because love is of God (1 Jn 4:7)
 - 6B Easter – Love one another; Remain in my love (Jn 15:9-17)
 - 21B – Modeled on Christ’s Marriage to Church (Eph 5:22-33)
 - 27B – Adam and Eve (Gen 2:18-24)
 - 27B– Divorce and Marriage (Mk 10:6-12)
- Year C
 - Christmas Vigil – God’s marrying the human race (Is 62:5)
 - 2C – Cana (Jn 2:1-11)
 - 4C – The qualities of love (1 Cor 12:31-13:13)
 - Easter Vigil– Marriage in the Beginning (Gen 1:27-28)
 - 7C Easter – Marriage of the Lamb (Rev 22:12-20)
 - 25C– Divorce and Marriage (Lk 16:8)



Preaching about Marriage

- Preaching Marriage is part of the kerygma.
 - Marriage is at the heart of the Gospel
 - The *imago Dei* involves the *communio personarum*.
 - God prophesied the redemption in a spousal key in Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel
 - Christ himself came identifying himself as the Bridegroom
 - St. Paul made that connection between Christ's marriage to the Church and Sacramental Matrimony even clearer in Eph 5:22-33.
 - To preach Christ crucified is to help husbands learn how to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and laid down his life to make her holy.
- Among the Themes
 - Marriage, love, sex, family, chastity, purity of heart, perseverance, faithfulness, etc.
- It's key to link Church teaching to Christ's own words.
 - It's not adequate to speak about the "natural law" at a time in which many philosophically have questions.
 - We should tie things explicitly to Jesus, and bring Jesus' love for marriage alive.



Preaching about Marriage

- One example would be Mt 19 in the context of the attempts to redefine what marriage is.
 - *Matthew 19:3-11: “Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” ...*
- We see here:
 - In the beginning God made them male and female. Original differentiation is part of God’s plan.
 - “For this reason a man shall leave” not his two dads or two moms but “his father and mother and cling” not to whomever he is sexually attracted but “to his wife” (a member of the opposite sex to whom he has made a life-time commitment).
 - “The two shall become one flesh” – This refers not principally to the ephemeral physical contact involved in sexual relations but to the one-flesh fusion of their gametes in a child, which is only possible for those of opposite sexes.
 - “What God has joined, no human being must separate” – This refers not only to *this* man and *this* woman, but to “man” and “woman.”



Other Means of Preaching about Marriage

- The bulletin – For articles, columns, praise of marriage, quotations from papal documents or the Catechism or the US Bishops, or Pastoral Letters
- Parish Websites and Social Media – Can feature good marriage articles, resources, etc.
- Show new videos on marital themes
- Marriage retreats in the parish
- Prayers of the Faithful
 - Among possible themes would be the vocation to Marriage; those struggling to find spouses; troubled marriages and broken families; those that have been divorced or separated; growth in chastity; for those struggling to conceive; for a greater culture of adoption; help for those struggling against porn; help for those confused about the meaning of marriage; for greater respect and defense of marriage; for the family; for generous families; for more people to come to know, appreciate, use and love natural family planning; for the conversion of those dependent on contraception; for those in difficult pregnancies; for those who have suffered abortions; for forgiveness in the family
 - It would be good to have one of these a week.
- Let married couples preach by asking them to have their major anniversaries celebrated, to show the young that marriages can last and be faithful, after 25 or 35 or 50, 60, 75 years or more.



Prayer of St. John Paul II to Mary, Mother of the Domestic Church

*May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church,
be also mother of the domestic church.*

*Through her maternal help, may every Christian family truly become
a little church that reflects and relives the mystery of the Church of Christ.*

*May you who are the servant of the Lord, be our example of a
humble and generous welcome of the will of God!*

*You who are the mother of sorrows at the foot of the cross,
be there to lighten our loads, and wipe away the tears
of those afflicted by family difficulties.*

*May Christ the Lord, King of the Universe, King of families,
be present, as at Cana, in every Christian home,
to communicate his light, joy, serenity, and strength.*

May every family generously add its share to the coming of his kingdom on earth.

To Christ and to you, Mary, we entrust our families. Amen.

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Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read.
Teach what you believe.
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry

Most Recent Homilies

- Bearing Fruit Attached to the Vine, 12th Wednesday (II), June 27, 2018
- Following the Lead of the Precursor, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018
- Placing Our Heart and Treasure in God, 11th Friday (II), June 22, 2018
- Longing to See God's Face in Prayer and in Others, 10th Friday (II), June 15, 2018
- The Surpassing Righteousness of Christ-like Merciful Love, 10th Thursday (II), June 14, 2018
- Greatest in the Kingdom, 10th Wednesday (II), June 13, 2018

Most Recent Articles

- The Secular Push to Get Priests to Break the Seal, The Anchor, June 29, 2018
- Approaching the Suicide Surge with Honesty and Resolve, The Anchor, June 15, 2018
- The Abortion Exception to the Practice of Discrimination, The Anchor, June 1, 2018
- The Contemporary Attack on Motherhood, The Anchor, May 18, 2018
- The Euthanasia of Alfie Evans, The Anchor, May 4, 2018
- "Do Not Be Afraid of Holiness," The Anchor, April 20, 2018

Most Recent Talks

- The Church and International Diplomacy, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Entrepreneurial Vocation, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Social Teaching of Pope St. John Paul II, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Necessity and Art of Trinitarian Prayer, Catholic Medical Association Boot Camp, June 18, 2018
- Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex, Love,



Questions and Comments

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