

The Exclamation:
**The Wise Choice of a Spouse for Catholic
Marriage**

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I consider it an honor to have written a book for the Catholic men and women everywhere who are earnestly looking for the spouse that God has prepared for you. I pray for you in your journey as you seek the person of your dreams and your heart's desire. Rest assured that the Lord knows exactly what He is doing: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Patricia A. Wrona
July 2004

Introduction:
What This Book Is, What It Is Not, and Whom It Might Help

This book was born out of the frustration of many single, devout, seeking Catholics whom I have run into along my own path to the discernment of the vocation of marriage. Over and over again, I hear single Catholics express their dismay about how little guidance is available on making the most important decision you will ever be called upon to make. If you are called to the married state of life, the selection of your spouse is the greatest choice you are given by the Lord. It is the ultimate exercise of the gift of free will, which God has placed in you. Given the gravity of such a decision, and the dire consequences when a person gets it wrong, one would think that there would be abundant assistance and help available in Catholic literature. Despite this great need, my experience, and that of many other single Catholics, has been that there is really very little in the way of help books to guide us on this important journey.

If you go to any Catholic bookstore, you will find books and manuals intended for engaged couples, newly married couples, or couples experiencing difficulties at the various stages of marriage. There are also books on planning your Catholic wedding, covering topics such as what hymns to use or Scripture readings to select. There are books on divorce, remarriage and annulment, and how to navigate through those difficult waters. Lacking, however, is a guide for the single Catholic who has not yet come to the decision to become engaged but who is truly seeking to know God's will for his or her life concerning the vocation of marriage and the proper discernment of the people they are dating.

Of course, there are many, many secular books and magazine articles about the oftentimes frustrating search to find a good man or

woman to marry. The secular bookstores are full of titles on how to find the “love of your life,” how to meet the man of your dreams in thirty days or less, or how to make someone fall in love with you. Such secular books may have a place in your Catholic marital journey. There is wisdom to be found in the secular world about finding a person who is compatible with you, with whom you might have a better chance of marital success “in the world,” perhaps. God has given us the social sciences, like psychology, and those disciplines can enlighten us in some aspects of choosing a spouse, whatever our religious faith.

While there are many books that might guide you on how the world would think you should select your mate, what has been lacking is a book to help a person of faith, and in particular, the Catholic faith, decide whom to marry. As you select the people you allow into your life, as you get more serious with someone, but are not yet at the point of a marriage proposal, that is where the guidance is sparse and the need is great.

Why is help so necessary at these earlier stages? Can't you just wait and figure out if someone is God's chosen spouse for you after you get engaged? Isn't that what engagement is for? Yes, to some extent, and a broken engagement is better than a divorce later on, to be sure. But why let it come to that? Discernment of whether someone is God's chosen spouse for you can come much earlier, and frankly should, to spare the hearts, feelings, and time of everyone involved. The reason we need help in this process early on is that it is in the early stages of dating that you might pass up someone who really is the right person for you. It is in dating that you might waste a great deal of time and energy and squander opportunities by dating someone who is never going to be the right person for you, who never was God's chosen one for you. Even worse, you might end up engaged and then married to someone who is not right for you, who is not the right helpmate that God had in mind, because you let it go too far when you could have discerned better early on. It is so easy to make a mistake in this critical period. There needs to be more guidance in discerning a Catholic spouse, and it is hoped this book can provide some of that help.

In an ideal world, you would be surrounded by devout Catholic family members, with successful marriages of their own, to whom you could go for advice and counsel, and who would have all the time in the world to sit with you and discuss your love life. Or that there would be a priest available for every one of us to talk to, who had sufficient time to advise each of us on the ups and downs with our latest boyfriend or girlfriend, and what it all means to our call to the vocation of marriage. But this is often just not the case in most families and parishes. While you would hope for more assistance

from your faith community, you might well find yourself on your own on this journey, for the most part.

Perhaps this is just the way it should be. As you are discerning the movements of God's will upon your heart concerning marriage, you and only you can decide what you are called to do. Spiritual advisors, devout friends, and loving family can give their input, but the selection of your spouse is absolutely up to you. No one can decide this for you. As this decision is highly personal and subjective, in making such a decision you might feel very alone. This book is meant to be a trustworthy companion on what might seem like an uncertain, at times even lonely path.

You need to arm yourself with as much help as you can get, because discernment of your spouse is the most important thing you will do in your call to the vocation of marriage. Get that part of the decision right—get the “who” right—and you will have a much better chance of happiness and true fulfillment in your calling.

This book is not meant to displace the work that an engaged couple will do through an “Engaged Encounter” weekend or Pre-Cana class. Those parish- or diocesan-sponsored (and often required) exercises are efficacious and very enlightening to any couple that goes through them with open hearts, open eyes, and open ears. This book might still be helpful to a couple who is already engaged, as a reality check that they have really done everything they can to make the right and proper decision about their call to the vocation together.

While the materials and exercises that an “Engaged Encounter” or Pre-Cana class uses might also be helpful to the searching Catholic single who is not yet engaged, this book is particularly directed to someone looking for or in a “pre-engagement” relationship, in which the parties are seeking, trying, and actively discerning whether they are right for each other. While discernment continues even in the engagement period (Now that we have made our intentions public, are we really doing the right thing? Are we really called together?), right up to the “I dos,” engagement is largely a period of confirmation, to see if your discernment was in fact correct, that this person to whom you are now engaged really is meant to be your spouse. This book is addressed most directly to the Catholic single who is trying to find the answer to that question in the first instance.

This book is not about how to find a man or a woman with whom to have a romantic relationship. How to pick up a date at a bar, or in class, or at the supermarket are all topics treated in depth in the secular media. This book presupposes that you know how to find viable candidates for consideration as your Catholic spouse. (Here are two clues: at church or through other Catholics.) This book might give you more ideas on just who actually *is* a viable candidate to be your spouse, and by that, it might inspire you to identify new places or ways to look for him or her that you might not have thought of

before. But this is not a “how-to” book on how to snag a boyfriend or girlfriend. It’s assumed you already have one (or a few) in mind.

This book is also not a treatise on divorce, second marriages, or annulment. The most basic premise of this work is that the person you are discerning about, that you have in mind to possibly marry, is a person free to marry in the Catholic Church. If the person you are dating and wondering if they are your spouse sent from God, is *not* free to marry you in the Catholic Church, it could not be more clear: *at present, he or she is not the one for you.* If the impediment to marrying him or her is something that can be cleared up by an annulment, then it is possible that you might be able to discern that they are your heaven-sent spouse at some time in the future, but they are not now that person. God would not send you someone whom you cannot marry in the Church, in the faith that you hold so dear. The Catechism’s teaching on marriage and annulment is clear that each party must be available for a sacramental marriage. And that is what you are really seeking: a holy, sacramental marriage.

Who is this book for, then? It is for Catholics who are devout and serious about their faith, particularly as it concerns marriage, children, family, chastity, and morality. If you are a “cafeteria Catholic” who picks and chooses what they want to believe, this is probably not the book for you. This writing presupposes that the reader embraces all the teachings of the Catholic Church and wants a spouse who believes the same things and who has already appreciated the great value of a deeply held, shared faith. This book is for the person who feels that the way the world tells him to look for a spouse is not the way God would have him look. This book is for the person who knows that God’s ways are not the world’s ways, and that the secular method of selecting a spouse is not going to work for him.

Primarily, this book is written for Catholic singles who are in the various stages of romantic relationships, just meeting each other, starting to date, dating, even seriously dating, in long-term relationships, but are short of actually being engaged. It is for anyone who is trying to make their way through the exhilarating, yet daunting, evaluation of what God wants for their life, and whom He wants in their life, as far as marriage is concerned.

This book is also for young people, just starting out in their dating life, who are firm in their faith and want to make sure that they don’t make any serious mistakes in their dating, or waste their college days or early adulthood (probably some of the best times in life to find a spouse) by being involved with someone, or a long string of someones, who are not what God has in mind.

This book is for people who find themselves in the midst of a difficult relationship, struggling to figure out what the problem is, why you have feelings for but can’t seem to get to marriage with the person. This book might give you a reality check on the kind of

relationship and spouse God has in mind for you, against which you can measure your current relationship.

This book is for people who have suffered the loss of a relationship, through a break-up, a broken engagement, even divorce. By reading this book, you might come to realize where you mis-discerned in that relationship, how you got it wrong that time around, so that you can move forward, armed with a new set of directions and ideals that will help you discern correctly what God's true will for your life is next time around.

This book is also for those who are not even sure they are called to the married vocation. If in reading about this process the depth of self-revelation, brutal honesty, and intimacy that is required in discerning the person with whom you could enter into a sacramental marriage is not a process that excites you, invigorates you, and makes you feel hopeful, then perhaps you are not called to the married vocation at all, but rather are called to another vocation: consecrated religious life, priesthood (if male), or the celibate single life. That is very valuable information for you to know, and know now.

This book can also be an aid to parents of adult children who feel ill-prepared to guide their sons and daughters through this most important decision of their lives. Sometimes it seems that life was simpler in Mom and Dad's era, that it was not so likely you would make a grave mistake in dating or marriage. Many parents are very concerned that their children need sound advice and direction in this area but don't know how to give it or what to suggest, but pray they will be spared a lifetime of heartache. This book might give you some ideas to share with your adult children about how to go about looking for true love in the right way.

Similarly, this book is for priests and spiritual advisors, who are called upon to guide Catholic singles through the difficulties of love relationships and the call to marriage.

If you are in any of these groups, it is hoped that this book will be a valuable tool to you. Love is the only true adventure in life, they say. You are embarking on the thrill-ride of a lifetime, so let's get started discerning the person with whom God wants you to serve Him in the vocation of marriage.

Chapter 1

The Exclamation

People might debate whether God has picked out one special person to be your husband or wife, or if there are lots of people to whom you could be happily married. If you took a survey, you would find the

idea that there is a “one and only” love out there for everyone is a pretty widely held ideal. It’s such a romantic notion, isn’t it, that somewhere out there is a Prince or Princess Charming who is longing and pining away for you, just as you are for them. The movies, love songs, romance novels, and television soap operas all reinforce this idea. But is there a religious basis for this belief, particularly in the Catholic faith?

Marriage is a Catholic sacrament that involves not just you but another person. As a Catholic, you can be baptized, confirmed, partake of Holy Eucharist, and receive the anointing of the sick and the sacrament of reconciliation without anyone else’s permission. It’s between you and the Church.

But the final two sacraments, marriage and holy orders, are different. They are the two “service” sacraments, and you can’t just decide for yourself that you are going to participate in them. To be a priest, the Church has to accept that indeed a man has the calling to the sacrament of holy orders. To be married, a man and a woman agree they are called to each other, and enter into the sacrament of marriage together.

While he might be called to the vocation of the priesthood, every priest comes to the sacrament by a particular path, either a diocesan seminary or through a priestly order. So just as a man is called to a particular order of the priesthood, say the diocesan priesthood, the Franciscans, or the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, as the place where he will best serve God in his priestly vocation, men and women are called to marriage with a particular person that will allow them to give their best service to God. This is what a “helpmate” is, in the truest sense.

There is biblical evidence for God as matchmaker, and a very exacting matchmaker at that. The Lord God Himself fashioned a particular woman for a particular man: Adam and Eve. By examining that divine “fix-up” between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we can learn a great deal about what God will do to help you identify your “one and only” love—your spouse—too.

The biblical inspiration for this book, and for encouraging you to seek God’s perfect will in the discernment of your husband or wife in marriage, can be found in the scriptural recounting of the creation of the first woman, Eve. Let’s start by reading God’s Word about when He “fixed up” Adam with his wife, found in Genesis 2:18–25:

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the

air, and to every beast of the field; but *for the man* there was not found a helper *fit for him*. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman *and brought her to the man*. Then the man said, “*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become *one flesh*. And the man and his wife were *both naked*, and were *not ashamed*.
(emphasis added)

There’s a lot going on in that verse of Scripture, and we need to unpack it to understand how it is that Adam knew that this new creature was *his* woman, *his* wife, and the partner that God wanted for him.

First, God started out observing that it was not good that Adam would be alone. Does that mean that everyone is called to marriage? No, not necessarily. Adam was the first man, and at that point, God had made only creatures that were not like Adam in any way. Adam truly was alone in a way that no other person has ever been alone. Of course, it was not good for him to be so alone. We are not in the same situation as Adam. In our day and age, there is plenty of companionship, family and friends, that Adam didn’t have at that point in human history. But this is a good reminder that God has called each of us to fellowship and communion with others, and for many of us, that means the communion of marriage.

In trying to alleviate Adam’s loneliness, it’s interesting that the Lord first brought a whole parade of animals and creatures to Adam to see what he would call them, to see whether he would recognize them as anything special in relationship to himself. It was almost like a test—God testing Adam to see how good he was at this naming game. God brought birds, reptiles, furry animals, and all manner of creatures to Adam, but Adam saw that they were all different from him in some essential way. Adam gave them names that had no relation to himself because he was able to see that they were not like him in kind. Adam recognized they were not something similar to him in nature.

Adam was looking for something or someone who was *like* himself. The test that God set up for Adam was seeing if he could pick out that which was like himself, that he recognized as like himself. And God prepared Adam for that first by presenting many creatures that were not like Adam.

We find that Adam went through all the animals, and he knew that none of them was like him, and none of them was the helper that God had in mind for him. God already had stated the kind of helper or

partner He had in mind for Adam: one “fit for him.” That’s pretty specific, isn’t it? Not just any helper, but one fit, or suitable, and not just suitable in general, but suitable for *him*, this particular man, Adam.

God has that in mind for you, too—someone who will be a helper to you, in your particular life, time, and circumstances, and who will be suitable, not just in general, but suitable for you in particular.

You can almost feel Adam’s frustration during this long parade of beasts and birds, yet nothing touched him in the core of who he *was*, as being like him, and suitable. You can almost feel the Lord’s compassion for him, too. When the Scripture says, “God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,” it’s almost as if God felt sorry for Adam—the poor guy was so exhausted and frustrated from not finding any creature who was like him, like what he was seeking in the core of his being.

Does that sound familiar? Don’t you feel that way sometimes? That you are going through a parade of inappropriate dates or suitors, and they might as well be from another animal kingdom because they are so unsuitable for you? Adam experienced that kind of frustration, and God knows your frustration too. He worked it out for Adam, and He can work it out for you, too.

So what did God do for Adam? He actually formed a creature out of Adam himself such that Adam would be able to recognize it as like him, similar to him, suitable for him.

Now, God won’t form your spouse out of any physical part of you. But God formed our spirits and he formed our physical bodies, and if He formed the first woman from Adam with it specifically in mind that she would be *his* partner, then He certainly is capable of creating, and is likely to have created, a person appropriate for each of us that He calls to the married vocation.

Once His forming and creation of this helper was completed, what did God do? He *brought* the creature to Adam. God brought Eve. It’s as if He were off in a workshop somewhere, working on Eve. But that is what the Scripture says, that He brought her to the man. He didn’t set her down in the Garden somewhere and just wait for Adam to stumble onto her. No, He Himself brought her to Adam and placed her before him to see what he would do.

That should give tremendous confidence to each of us who are called to the vocation of marriage—that we don’t have to worry about simply stumbling onto the right person for us. God is going to bring them to us. We need to work with the grace and follow His prompting, but if this Genesis verse is any indication, God is going to see to it that the partner He has fashioned for each of us is brought to us somehow. What we do with that opportunity might not be so assured, but we can rest on this verse that God is going to bring the person somehow.

Once God brought the creature to Adam, what happened? You see no hesitation in what Adam did. The verse quoted above uses the words “the man said...” But there are other translations that say, “Adam exclaimed...” A little different, but the context shows that what Adam said, he said emphatically. Without hesitation, he cried out about what he saw before him.

Think about it. After this menagerie of beasts and birds, Adam saw before him a creature that he recognized, so he couldn’t help but “exclaim” what he was seeing and feeling and experiencing about her.

What does that word mean, anyway, to “exclaim”? The dictionary definition is “to utter loudly and vehemently, to declare suddenly, a loud remark or cry, expressing joy or surprise.” From the Latin roots, *ex* means “out” and *clamare* means “to call,” so to exclaim means “to call out.” Adam exclaimed, called out with joy, when he saw Eve.

Adam couldn’t even contain himself, because he saw something in Eve that caused such a strong reaction in him that was joyful, excited, and couldn’t be contained in some way, that the word used in some translations is that he “exclaimed.”

And what did he say in that exclamation? “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” He recognized *himself* in the woman. Finally he had an experience of recognition of who *he* was, and who *she* was in relation to him. And you can tell from his words “at last” that he was frustrated by the parade that came before, and that he was overjoyed with what finally he saw before him.

Even the first man, Adam, had to wait for his wife to come along from God. Kind of makes the wait you have had so far for your spouse seem a little more bearable, doesn’t it?

This is the first moment that Adam recognized his own personhood, because truly he saw himself now in relation to something else. Maybe that is an experience you will have—that you will see the reality of who you are, good or bad, when your spouse is presented to you. It will certainly be an eye-opening experience for you as it was for Adam.

The first reference to marriage in the Bible is right here, so because of its primacy in the Scripture, we had better really look at it, since it is marriage that has drawn us into this exploration. Man is called to “cling to his wife.” The reference is to a specific wife, *his* wife. Not a wife, or his woman, but “his wife.” Sounds like a “one and only,” doesn’t it? And the reference to the “one flesh” union certainly suggests that this is something you get only one chance to get right.

You could stop examining the verse with that “one flesh” line, but we really shouldn’t because the next line gives a great deal of context to the verses that came before: “the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” Neither one was hiding anything from the other.

After the temptation by Satan and the fall from grace, Adam and Eve clothed themselves, so we know that at this earlier point they were both naked when they were introduced to one another by God. That is both literal (they were wearing no clothing) and figurative (they had nothing to hide from each other, were open and honest with one another).

Part of how Adam recognized Eve as being like him, and from him, was in her physical body. Anyone who says that sexuality has nothing to do with selecting a godly mate is ignoring this reality of how Adam, the first man, recognized his wife. In her body, Adam saw that she was like him physically. Compared to cows or goats, that would not be so hard to see. But in her skin, her face, features, arms and legs, feet and hands, and everything in between, he saw something pretty much like himself—a few differences, to be sure, but yes, this one looks a lot like me, Adam must have thought.

Yet Adam also knew that she was not exactly like him—notice he didn't name her "Man." He knew that was who *he* was, and this was not another man—he knew at least that. Adam could figure that out by looking down at his own body and comparing himself to her. Adam recognized that Eve was like him, and yet not like him, and that was precisely what he had been looking and waiting for. Adam saw that Eve complemented him.

The fact that they were "not ashamed" in their nakedness is important. So often relationships between men and women get so complicated because people are ashamed of being who they really are, or ashamed that who they really are will be discovered by the other, and then it won't work out. Starting out with honesty (a form of nakedness of the soul) and truthfulness about who you are, as Adam and Eve did, is a good way to begin.

So there is a lot going on in this familiar Bible verse, one which we may have heard many times but never really analyzed. Having now examined it, what conclusions can we draw from what happened that day when God "fixed up" Adam with his spouse—his wife—Eve?

1. God brought Eve to Adam. And God is going to bring the right spouse to each person that He calls to serve Him in the vocation of marriage. God brought Eve to Adam, and He will bring your wife or husband to you too, if marriage is His will for your life. He didn't leave it up to chance for Adam, and just hope that he would stumble upon Eve around some flowering bush in the Garden of Eden. No, He brought her directly to Adam.

That's pretty encouraging, isn't it? God will see to it that the person who is the fulfillment of your vocation comes into your life as well. God will bring the person in. He will give you the opportunity to meet the person that He thinks will best serve you, and you can best serve, and you two will in turn best serve Him, in the sacrament of

marriage. But you must choose what you will do once that person comes into your life. Just as Adam gave his consent to the incredible gift that God brought to him—this woman, his wife, his spouse, who was just right for him—you too will have the responsibility of actually choosing your spouse.

Adam might have had it a little easier than the rest of us. After all, there was only one woman around in Paradise; he didn't have to choose from among several women. Also, at this point Adam was not tainted yet by original sin, so he probably had a clearer head and more open heart than we might have now, given our sinful nature and fallen state. But Adam got to choose his wife when God offered Eve to him, and you too will have the chance to choose your spouse when God brings him or her into your life.

2. **Adam was frustrated by his wait** for a spouse and the loneliness of the process was wearing on him. Adam was so frustrated and exhausted from all that came before that moment, all the naming of the beasts and animals, that he had to be put to sleep for God to do His work. Let's hope it's not as bad as all that for you, but realize that God is at work, and just as with Adam, He is doing something here that makes sense to Him, so who are you to argue? Sit back, relax as Adam did, and let God do His work. He might have work to do on you first. Maybe there are things he needs to take out of you, maybe nothing quite as extreme as a rib, but maybe a bad habit, an attitude, some hurt or pain from a past relationship that needs to be healed in you. Maybe you even know what that is right now. Let God do His work on you.

Or maybe God has some fashioning that He needs to do with your spouse while you wait. Can you even imagine the whittling and molding and shaping that it takes to make a whole woman from a man's rib? While that might be a bit figurative, there could be growing or pruning that your spouse needs to undergo that you don't even know about yet. You will know some day, when you hear her story, what she was going through, how God worked on her and her heart to prepare her for you, but right now, you don't get to know. So trust in Him and let God do His work and when you and your spouse are both ready, He will bring her to you as He brought Eve to Adam, in His perfect time.

3. **Adam recognized Eve** as like himself. Adam had to go through a lot of creatures first who were not right for him, not fit to be his helpmate. So might you before you recognize a person who is like you. You might go through a long life of dating, full of frustration, as Adam was frustrated and exhausted by the parade of creatures that God presented to him. But as with Adam, God might be testing you to see if you first know yourself so that you can pick out the helper, the mate, that is right for you. Adam was primed to pick out Eve, to get the right answer, because of all that he saw that went before her. So

don't despair if it seems there is a long line of all the "wrong" people coming into your life. It all may just be priming for you to be able to recognize the "real deal" when God brings that person to you.

4. **Eve was like Adam** in many essential ways. The male and female bodies, which were what Adam was using as his basis of comparison, are more alike than unlike, and he recognized that in Eve. So too, similarities are going to be the first point of connection for you with your spouse. What those similarities should be for a Catholic marriage to be most successful will be discussed in Chapter 4, but rest assured, they are similarities upon which a solid Catholic marriage is based, and that is definitely something you are going to have to look for when discerning the vocation of marriage. You will be looking for a person who is similar to you, especially in the beliefs and practice of your Catholic faith.

5. **Eve complemented Adam** in the ways in which they were different. We don't know anything about their personalities, but we know that Adam knew Eve in her nakedness, and that her physiology, while the same as his in many ways, was also different in some respects. What he saw too was that she was a complement to his own body.

You are looking for someone who complements you in important ways. You are not looking for someone who is exactly like you in every respect but rather different in some ways, and those differences will complement you, balance you out and complete you somehow, as Eve did for Adam.

6. **Adam recognized Eve as his wife in part by her sexuality.** While the verse does not come out and say it, we can infer that Adam was thrilled with Eve, so much so that he exclaimed over her and expressed that "at last" she was with him. He didn't say, "Oh, yes, ahem, this one seems pretty good." He exclaimed when he saw her. Sounds like a pretty strong reaction. As we will see in Chapter 9, the Church teaches, and you need to embrace, that your sexuality and your sexual attraction to your spouse are God-given, holy, and some of God's greatest gifts to our human existence *if* viewed and used in the context in which God meant for them to be expressed; that is, in the covenant, the sacrament, of marriage. There is one person you *should* be sexually attracted to, and that is your spouse. So part of the discernment of your spouse will be in your physical attraction to him or her. That was part of how Adam recognized Eve, and will be for you too, when you discern your spouse.

7. **Adam and Eve were totally open with each other, "naked"** before each other, when they met, and had no shame about it. There was really nothing to hide; neither one had a past, neither one had other loves or partners before. Maybe it was easier for Adam and Eve than for us, but the lesson is that they were able to see what they needed to in each other, to recognize each other, because of their

nakedness, their complete honesty in revealing who and what they were. If you want to properly discern whether someone is your spouse, you will have to approach yourself and that person with the same honesty as Adam and Eve did.

8. **Adam had a sense of knowing Eve**, really from the first he saw her. He laid eyes on her and he recognized her, he was drawn to her, he felt she was like him, she seemed compatible to him, she comforted him in their likeness, and she complemented him with her differences; he had a physical response to her (“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”). For Adam, that knowing happened right away. You too will have this knowing sense that a person is the spouse God has selected for you. It can happen for you right away, as Adam knew instantly. It might be that lightning-bolt sense, like Cupid’s arrow in your heart. Or your sense of knowledge may grow slowly and take hold of you over time (remember, we don’t have it quite as easy as Adam in the Garden of Eden when it comes to figuring these things out). The thing to remember is that you don’t get to decide the timing of how God will unveil the gift of your spouse to you. But at some point you will indeed know, just as Adam knew Eve was the suitable helpmate for him.

So just what is it that we seeking Catholics who feel called to the vocation of marriage—to serve each other and, in turn, serve God as husband and wife in marriage—are really looking for?

“The exclamation.”

You are looking for the exclamation—that same exclamation that Adam uttered, that recognition, that joyful knowingness that you have found the person who is to be the spouse that God has fashioned for you and brought to you.

Does “the exclamation” mean you will fall in love at first sight, as it seems Adam did? No, but it might include an experience like that. For someone to be your “exclamation,” you will certainly be in love with them, but it does not necessarily include that “love at first sight” experience. Does “the exclamation” mean you will have a sign, a lightning bolt from heaven, when you are with the person? No, it doesn’t necessarily include that, though it could. Even if you did think you felt “the exclamation” at first sight, you would need to test it in this process of discernment as you date the person.

What “the exclamation” really means is that at some point you will know, just as Adam knew. The exclamation was not necessarily just a reaction; it was a conclusion that Adam reached. He reached it based on data and evidence, but once he gathered the evidence and processed it, he *knew*.

It is hoped that this book will help you find and understand your exclamation when you experience it, and from it recognize the person who is to be your spouse, in that same profound and undeniable way Adam did.

The exclamation was not just for Adam. He was the prototypical human, but that experience of knowing that someone is the helpmate, the partner, that God has fashioned and brought to you, can be known by you today just as it was known by Adam in the Garden. God wants nothing less for you and will see to it, but you have do your part, just as Adam did. Like Adam, you are called to discernment of the vocation of marriage. So let's begin the journey to your exclamation, and discerning your holy spouse.