



Do you love me?

Frequently, this question is followed, either immediately or shortly thereafter, by the words, “Will you marry me?”

June has long been considered the month for weddings, possibly because it is named for the goddess, Juno, protector of women - particularly in marriage and childbearing.

For our Jewish brothers and sisters this is also the time of year when they celebrate God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses (May 19-21, 2018 and June 8-10, 2019); every year on the holiday of Shavuot Jews renew their acceptance of God’s gift, and God “re-gives” the Torah – in other words, they renew the covenant made over 3,300 years ago.

Marriage in turn is one of the most basic of covenants, a commitment between two people to enter into a life-long relationship, “forsaking all others, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, until death do us part”. As Catholics, we view marriage as a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us by God. It is often seen as being exemplified by the love of God for the Jewish people, the love of Christ for the Church. The exchange of marriage vows between the couple in the presence of God and witnessed by the community is generally seen as something not to be taken casually, a commitment which we hope will last for the entire lifetime of the partners.

Ours is a faith of covenants, following a journey through history from Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the Ten Commandments towards Jesus. So, when Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” and asks him to “feed my lambs”, it is with the understanding that this isn’t just a request, it is a covenant, a covenant of love.

Unlike a contract out of which one can negotiate, the covenant we have with God, beginning at our baptism, calls us to participate in that commitment of sharing God’s love for us and in us with others for our whole lives. It is difficult for us to understand totally unconditional love as our human weakness makes it hard for us to accept that we are loved exactly as we are and not as we think we ought to be. That said, we are being challenged constantly to be more like Jesus in responding to his question, “Do you love me?” and putting our answer into practice.

Maybe the words of the song from *Godspell* which is often used as a prelude to weddings say it best:

“To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly
Day by day.”

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