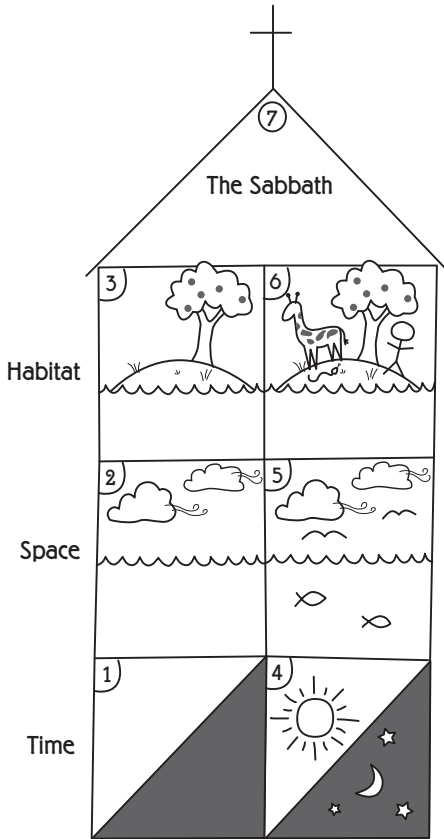


One

Adam and Eve

According to the Bible, God created the world for marriage. I know that sounds bold, but hang with me and I'll show you what I mean.

We are all familiar with the story of the six days of creation. In the beginning, when God first called the world into existence, it was “without form and void” (Gn 1:2). In three days, God formed the world, establishing time on the first day, space on the second, and a livable habitat on the third. Then he filled the world he had formed. He filled time with the sun, moon, and stars. He filled the great spaces with birds and fish. Finally, he filled the habitat with animals and man. I've shown in my book *Bible Basics for Catholics* that God was building creation as a great temple like the one shown here, with humanity—the man and woman—as royal priests to rule it.



The Hebrew word for “mankind” or “humanity” is *adam*, which is also the personal name of the first man, Adam. When we get to the creation of *adam*, the Bible says something curious about God. Up to this point, God has just been speaking things into existence. He says “Let there be,” things appear, and then he sees that they are good. But with man, God says: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion

over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth” (Gn 1:26, emphasis added).

What does God mean, “Let *us* make man in *our* image”? Before this, God has just been a single person, but now it sounds like there are more than one of him. So it seems that God is both one and more than one. Funny thing, the same turns out to be true of the man that God makes in his image: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*” (Gn 1:27, emphasis added). Like God, man is both “him” and “them,” both one and more than one, both singular and plural. This is part of the mystery of being in God’s image and likeness.

After God makes *adam*, both *adam*-male and *adam*-female, he is very pleased with them, and gives them a blessing and command: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:28). Now, in order to carry out most of this command—the “be fruitful,” “multiply,” and “fill” parts—the two forms of *adam* are going to have to get together. They are going to have to unite in marriage. So we see that marriage is central to God’s intention for humanity. Human beings cannot do what God commanded them to do unless they join in marriage.

The second chapter of Genesis expands on this theme. Beginning at Genesis 2:4, we get a more detailed account of how *adam* came to be. God molded his body from the dust of the earth, breathed into his nostrils the “breath of life,” and placed him in a garden to tend and care for it. So far, so good. In fact, everything has been good so far: the light, the earth, the seas, the plants, the birds and fish . . . all “very good” (Gn 1:31). But now, for the first time,

something in creation is “not good”: “It is not good that the man should be alone,” God says. “I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gn 2:18, RSV).

The Hebrew words for “helper fit for him” deserve attention. The word for “helper,” or simply “help,” is *ezer* (AY-zer). It is a common word in the Bible, but one that almost always refers to help sent by God or by a king, never to the help that servants or workers provide. Also, the word translated “fit for him” is *k’negdô* (kuh-NEG-doe), a rare term meaning literally “like and facing him,” the way a pair of matching bookends are similar but face each other. We could also translate it as “complementary” or “corresponding to him.”

So God brings all the animals he has made to the man to see what he will name them. This is a big deal, since God has done all the naming up to this point. Now God is letting Adam do something Godlike: give a name to something. Adam names all the animals, but none of them are a “helper fit for him.” None of them are “like and facing him.”

Didn’t God know none of the animals would work? Of course he did, but this whole process is for Adam’s benefit. As he looks through all the animals for a suitable helper, he discovers something about himself and what he truly needs. Moreover, anticipation builds within him for the final revealing of the “helper fit for him” because we appreciate things more when we’ve had to work and wait for them.

But Adam will have to do more than just work for this helper; he will need to sacrifice and give of himself. God puts Adam into a deep sleep—which for Adam must have felt like dying—and then performs surgery. He opens

Adam’s flesh to remove a rib (Gn 2:21–22). Interestingly, the word for “rib” here (Hebrew *tzēla’* [tsay-LAH]) is never used for a part of the body elsewhere in the Bible but almost always for the “ribs”—that is, the supports or beams—that held up the tabernacle or the Temple. This suggests that Adam’s body is also a temple. From the rib, God literally “builds” (Hebrew *banah* [bah-NAH]) a woman (2:22, Douay-Rheims). He builds her because she, too, is a temple. We will see this theme of body-as-temple in many other important places in the Bible.

Now God brings Eve to Adam. Before this, Adam has been hanging around with the apes, tossing bananas and showing off his opposable thumb. But once he sees the woman, Adam pulls himself together. This is what he has been waiting for! To find this one, he had to

- search through an endless lineup of animals,
- fall into deathlike sleep,
- let his body be cut open like a sacrifice, and
- make a permanent gift of himself.

Now she appears. Inspired by her loveliness, Adam becomes a poet! Beautiful lyric verse peels off his tongue:

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. (Gn 2:23)

This is the high point of the whole story of creation in Genesis. The appearance of the “helper fit for him” is marked not only by the first lyric poetry in the Bible but also by covenant-making language (see 2 Samuel 5:1–3). A

covenant is a family formed by an oath. Adam is not just recognizing that Eve has his rib; no, he is *declaring* her to be his flesh-and-bone in a legal sense. He is taking her as family, as spouse.

When families add members through childbirth, each new member gets a name. Likewise, when families are formed by covenant, the new members often get new names (see Genesis 17:5). This is why a bride often takes her husband's name at a wedding. So it is here. Adam forms a new family with this "helper fit for him" and gives her a new name: "woman." Just as in English, so in Hebrew the words for "man" (*ish* [eesh]) and "woman" (*ishah* [eesh-AH]) look and sound similar.

This is the first marriage ever, and it has huge implications for the rest of human history. So much so that the sacred author explains: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gn 2:24, RSV). This verse describes marriage, a permanent union between one man and one woman. Permanence is indicated by the man "cleaving" to his wife (Hebrew *dabaq* [dah-BACK]), a word that means stuck or glued to something and not able to be removed (cf. 2 Samuel 23:10, RSV). That marriage is between one man and one woman (monogamy) is indicated by the man leaving "his father and mother" (not "fathers and mothers") in order to cleave to "his wife" (not "wives"), and that they become "one flesh" (not "several fleshes"). Indeed, we could translate this as "they become a single flesh," just one thing. This takes place in two ways. First, when they join together in the act of marriage, their bodies become a single unit designed to bring forth new life. Second, that new life itself comes equally from each of

them—their bodies are literally joined together to make a single new body: a baby, a child. Surprisingly, by becoming *one*, they will become *many*. By joining as one flesh, they will be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” as God commanded (Gn 1:28).

The story of the creation of man and woman (Gn 2:4–25) fits into the larger story of creation in seven days (Gn 1:1–2:3). All the events of Genesis 2 fit into the sixth and seventh day of Genesis 1. The creation of man and the animals (Gn 2:5–20) takes place on the sixth day. Adam falling into a deep sleep after a long day of naming animals (Gn 2:20) occurs on the night of the sixth day. When Adam awakes to behold Eve for the first time, that would be the morning of the seventh day. So the whole story of creation (Gn 1:1–2:25) climaxes with the revealing of the bride and Adam pronouncing the first-ever marriage vows (Gn 2:22–23). St. Thomas Aquinas points out that what is last in execution is first in intention.¹ In other words, the final step of a process is what you were hoping to achieve the whole time. For example, receiving your diploma on stage might be the last action of your high school career, but it was your goal from the beginning. So the marriage of Adam and Eve was the goal of all creation, even though it was the last action. And that marriage takes place on the seventh day, the Sabbath.

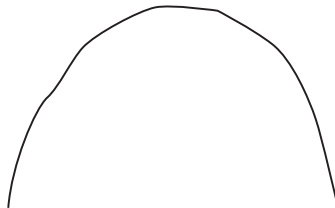
On the Sabbath day, God rested, and all creation rested with him. On the Sabbath day, everyone stops doing in order just to *be*. Specifically, to *be with* each other. God didn't create creatures for what they could do for him but to enjoy them and be with them, especially his highest creatures, human beings. We have a special term for *being with* another person: *communion*. God created humanity

so that we could *commune* with him. So the Sabbath was the high point of the creation week, when God and humanity could commune with each other, enjoying each other's presence.

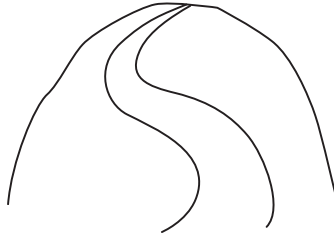
Many years ago, I was watching a TV comedy set in an American high school. A young man had a crush on a young woman, and every time she showed up, he engaged in silly antics to get her attention. Finally, she became annoyed and asked, "Why do you always act so crazy when I'm around?" He paused and dropped his guard, replying, "I just want to be with you." I was struck by that simple expression of communion—being with another person for their sake, to enjoy their presence, not for some other reason. At the heart of communion is love.

The Catholic faith teaches that God is a communion of three persons. The bond of love between the first two persons is so strong that it becomes the third person. Marriage is like that. The love of two persons becomes embodied in a third, the child. In this way, marriage becomes an image, an icon, of God. Love always wants to share itself. God creates other persons so that they can share his love and model his love. God created the world for loving communion, and the image of that communion is marriage. God created the world for marriage.

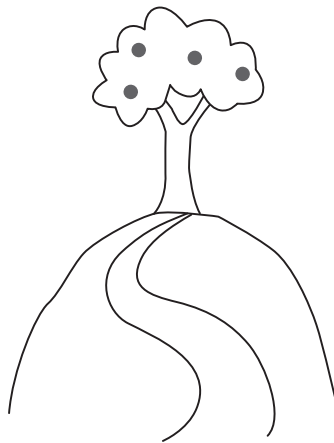
We can't go until we have drawn this stage of salvation history. Let's draw Mt. Eden first.



And add the River of Life.

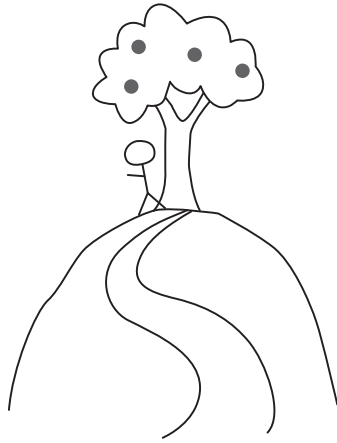


And the Tree of Life, with its four apples!

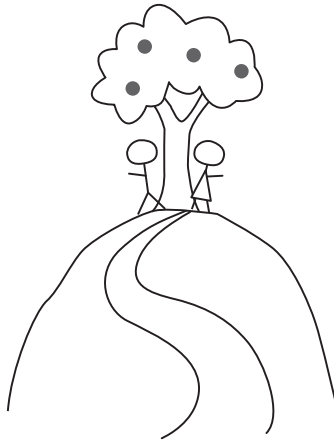


We know that the Tree of Life is a type of the Cross, and its fruit a type of the Eucharist. Likewise, the River of Life is a type of Baptism. We often talk about how these two life-giving sacraments were typified already in the garden, but we forget about a third life-giving sacrament that is also already there.

So let's begin to sketch in Adam. (You'll see why I'm waiting on his left arm in a minute.)

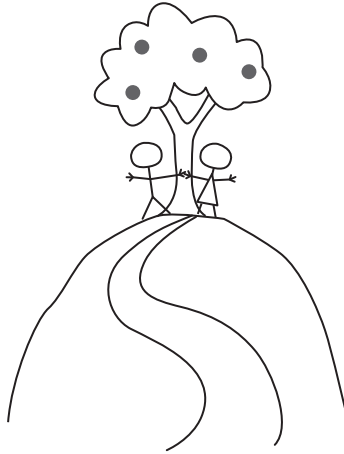


And now our lovely mother Eve! (Yes, I know she wasn't really wearing a dress, but just work with me here . . .)

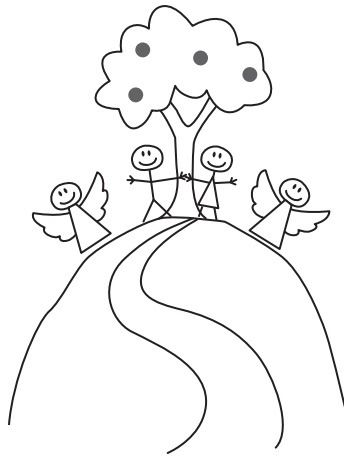


And finally let's join their hands. This is the first marriage in history. We have the life-giving river, the life-giving tree, and the life-giving union of man and woman. The tree and

river provided food and drink that could support eternal life. And the union of Adam and Eve produced persons in the image of the eternal God.



Let's make Adam and Eve smiling, as I'm sure they were very happy with each other and the garden before sin came in.



So here we have images of three life-giving sacraments. Sometimes we forget that marriage is meant to be life-giving, and we close it off to life. By doing so, we miss out on eternal joy that God intends for us.

There was no one else to serve as bridesmaids or groomsmen, so let's give them some angelic wedding attendants. Now our little picture is complete. This was how marriage should be: the happiness of communion, open to new life!