What’s the Difference?

by Stephanie Cherpak Clary

“Do you feel any different?”

In the weeks following my wedding, I was confronted with this question by family, friends, and even acquaintances in all walks of life. As they awaited my response with wide, curious eyes and anxious smiles, I would try to think of what I could possibly say that was short enough to be socially acceptable and polite, yet long enough to satisfactorily explain how I was feeling. It is now one month later and I still have not come up with an adequate answer.

Typically, I end up responding with a generic, “Things aren’t really that different, but we’re happy and enjoying married life!” While not untrue, this response leaves both the questioner and myself dissatisfied. As far as daily life is concerned, things are not really that different. Our routine was wonderfully disrupted for a few weeks as we traveled to Indiana for the wedding, Hawaii for the honeymoon, and then as we spent several days in the Midwest celebrating the holidays with each of our families before road-tripping back to our home in Vermont. But, now that we are back home in Vermont, schedules have returned to normal. Even psychologically, things are pretty much the same. Participating in the appropriate marriage preparation workshops led us to consider and discuss important aspects of married life before entering into this lifestyle. We consciously decided that this was the life we wanted and that we wanted it with each other. The idea of lifelong commitment and love was present before the wedding vows were spoken. With the exception of now being able to refer to Matt as my husband (which, admittedly, is pretty cool), things are not really that different. So that’s what I tell people.

The dissatisfaction in this response suggests that there is more to the story. There is more that I want to say. There is more that they want to hear. Something is different. How could it not be? We have just entered into what Richard Gaillardetz refers to as “a most perilous undertaking...a journey fraught with risk. Marriage offers the daring proposition that two people might unconditionally bind themselves together for life without destroying each other, their offspring, or both in the process. To promise oneself to another before God,” says Gaillardetz, “is one of the most radical things we do as Christians.” While perilous, risky, and radical are not typically the words that come to mind when discussing marriage, I assume that deep down, maybe even at a subconscious level, we know the reality of the marital commitment described as such to be true. Perhaps this is why we expect things to be so different after someone decides to do the monumental thing of committing themselves to and in marriage! In addition to binding ourselves together with the hope of avoiding destruction of each other and any future children, Gaillardetz goes on to explain that “when marriage is lived out faithfully, it ought to offer the church a public witness to the life of discipleship to which Christians are called....To marry, at

---

1 Stephanie Cherpak Clary is one of three founding editors of Theophilus and currently serves as an editorial board member. Stephanie has a B.A. in Religious Studies and Communication Studies from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana and is a candidate for a Research M.A. in Systematic Theology from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. Stephanie and her husband Matt were married on December 13, 2014 and live in Vermont.

2 Richard Gaillardetz, A Daring Promise (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2007), ix.
least from a Christian perspective, is to make our marital relationship the concern of the church and a gift to the world. We commit ourselves to be a visible sign of what it means to live in communion with God and neighbor.”

Beyond maintaining our biological family, Matt and I, as a married couple, are expected to set a very specific example of God’s love for the church and the world, for the family of God. This is no small responsibility! Yet, it is the vocation to which we feel called and it is the vocation that we feel allows us to live out our Christianity, and furthermore, our humanity, to its fullest potential.

By responding to the “Do you feel any different?” inquiry with nonchalance and casualness I am downplaying the hugely significant feelings of wonder and awe that accompany the transition from one who is discerning a vocation to married life to one who has entered into and is now actively living out that vocation. I am no longer called to be an example of the loving face of God as an individual only, but additionally, my husband and I are called to be an example of God’s loving communion together. The very way in which I live out my Christianity has changed—and that feels wondrous and awesome and humbling and exciting! My daily life and weekly routines may not have changed, but the way in which I exist in the world has. Indeed, I do feel different.

3 Gaillardetz, x-xi.