



June 25, 2025 - SPECIAL EDITION: Love and Marriage



“Love and Marriage”

A Conversation Between Aurore Leigh Barrett and David St. John

Today, June 25, 2025 is our 47th wedding anniversary, so we thought it would be appropriate to put out a special edition of “Solleone” with the overall theme of “Love and Marriage”.

We met 50 years ago. David owned and operated a book store in Kirkland, Washington. Aurore, having fallen in love with Kirkland and its English village

ambiance, had just moved there. Being an avid bibliophile, one of the first things on Aurore’s “To Do” list was to find a good bookstore in the area. Well, she found it. And she found David, too! Now, 50 years later, they have a marriage that is strong and resilient, and a marriage that keeps getting better every day, week, month, and year. We begin with a conversation between the two of us on the subject of marriage:

Aurore: Can you believe it, David, we've known each other for 50 years, and have been married for 47 of them.

David: Yes. And each year gets better than the one before.

Aurore: I believe one of the cardinal rules for a good marriage is to remember that it really involves three people: The husband, the wife, and God!

David: As you know, I have officiated hundreds of Catholic and Christian weddings, and whether it was a Nuptial Mass at St. Jude's or a simpler ceremony at the Bellagio, I always emphasized the fact that God has to be the central figure in their marriage. That's why so many couples chose for one of their readings these verses from Ecclesiastes:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

And in speaking with the couples, I always wanted to be sure they understood that as the officiant, I am only there to witness their vows. They are actually the ones who are performing the sacrament of marriage. The two of them, before God.

Aurore: Here's another important rule for a good marriage: It's extremely important that you not only love one another - you have to like each other as well.

As you know, one of my favorite examples of this is found in the 1965 movie "Shenandoah". There is a scene which has always resonated with me ever since I first saw the movie, long before we met. It takes place during the American Civil War. Jimmy Stewart plays Charlie Anderson, a widower with six sons and one daughter. In one scene, Charlie is sitting on his front porch preparing to smoke a cigar when his daughter's suitor, Lieutenant Sam (played by Doug McClure) approaches and asks for his daughter's hand in marriage. Charlie responds by asking "Why? Why do you want to marry her?" Sam responds, "Well, I love her". Charlie tells him "That's not good enough. Do you like her?" Sam starts to say "I just said I..." only to be interrupted by Charlie who tells him "No, no. You just said you loved her. There's some difference between lovin' and likin'. When I married Jennie's mother, I didn't love her - I liked her... I liked her a lot. I liked Martha for at least three years after we were married and then one day it just dawned on me, I loved her. I still do... still do. You see, Sam, when you love a woman without likin' her, the night can be long and cold, and contempt comes up with the sun."

David: And that's a good lead in to another of your favorite rules for a good marriage: Never go to bed angry.

Aurore: Absolutely! Before your heads hit the pillow at night you better have talked over any issues lingering from that day. Discuss them, and get back on the right track.

David: You'll both sleep much better, too. That makes me think about an old quote I've seen stitched on an old sampler. It says: "To her virtues be very kind. To her faults be a little blind." That's addressed to the man, but I think it's good advice for both husband and wife.

Aurore: Another good rule is that it helps immensely if you both have the same interests; and that you are both compatible, with the same desires and plans.

David: Yes. Like books.

Aurore: Absolutely.

David: Sometimes I think that's why you married me - for my books.

Aurore: That's not why, but it sure was a great benefit.

David: Here's another important rule: Each of you has to be willing to give 100% to the marriage and to work hard at it. This is no 50-50 proposition. It's 100-100!

Aurore: I agree with you 200%.

David: Earlier we had been talking about this and you made one point that I think was important. This may not apply to all couples, but for those to whom it does

apply it deserves a lot of thought. And for those to whom it doesn't directly apply, I think it has some value.

Aurore: Yes. About being in business together.

If a husband and wife are going into business together, such as we did, and many couples we know did, they must define their individual roles. Who's going to do what?

David: Those are some very good rules for a happy marriage, and well deserving of a couple's attention. I think one final rule to remember is that no matter what you do in your lives, professionally, socially, etc. Remember that: Marriage is your #1 ministry.

Aurore: I know it's our #1 ministry. That fact, along with all those other Rules For A Happy Marriage, is why we have lasted so beautifully for all these years.

David: You're right, dear (three more magic words, by the way!) And all those books we each brought to the bargain didn't hurt! ♦



Aurore and David on their wedding day.

Art Safari

“The Betrothed” (Marie François Firmin-Girard, 1874)

by Fr. David St. John

Marie François Firmin-Girard (1838-1921) is not well known today, even though, in his lifetime he was extremely popular in France, England, and the United States. Having devoted his entire life to painting, and active until his last dying breath, he produced more than six

hundred paintings. To this day, they are still to be found in many museums around the world and in countless private collections.



Early in his career, he was accepted for membership by the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts. His most celebrated body of work encompasses all the glittering splendor of the Belle Époque from his scenes of elegant Parisians taking their daily promenades around the French capital to his romantic depictions of flower merchants and lush flower markets. However, his repertoire was not only confined to Paris. Firmin-Girard traveled extensively within France, and a great portion of his works draw direct inspiration from the countryside around Fontainebleau and other regions in Northern France.

Firmin-Girard's use of 18th Century costumes was not uncommon for his time. Many 19th Century artists, including one of my favorites, James Tissot, were attracted not only to the ostentatious dress of the period but the underlying social customs, social structure, and courtship rituals of the era.

A good example of this is today's featured painting: “The Betrothed” (in French, “Les Fiancés”) which he painted in 1874. Firmin-Girard shows us a bride and groom, along with family and friends, leaving the church following their wedding. His meticulous rendering of the sunlight filtering through the trees, the bride's soft expression, and the couple's gentle, quiet closeness captures the tenderness of a new beginning.

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Firmin-Girard was known for his technical mastery of producing academic art, a style of painting produced under the influence of European academies of art that emphasized the emulation of established masters and classical traditions over any particular individual style. Perhaps that is one reason he is not so well known today. He didn't break any new ground in the art world. He just did a wonderful job of carrying on such a great tradition of previous eras. ♦

The Privilege of Aging

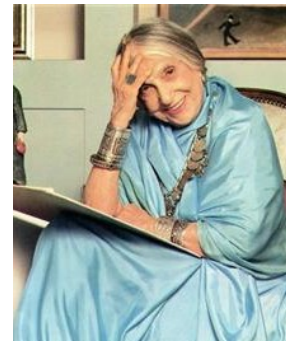
by Abbess Aurore Barrett

Aging is a privilege that not everyone has. So if you have reached your retirement age and no longer have to go to work everyday, you have earned the Privilege of Aging.

Today it is said that 70 is the new 50 and 80 is the new 60. Wonderful if you feel that you are in good health. But too many of us believe that with age comes a lot of doom and gloom, especially in the area of our health. And for too many that is the truth, we are plagued with osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, hearing loss, cataracts, and more. But it really doesn't have to be this way. While it is true we can't all be healthy, we can all be happy and full of joy.

In my Inspirational Journal I have pasted photos of those who have lived way beyond my years, who inspire me and are still going strong. To name just a few:

Beatrice Wood (March 3, 1893 – March 12, 1998) was an American artist and studio potter involved in the Dada movement in the United States. When asked what was her secret for living so long her answer was: "young men and chocolate." She lived to be 105.



Iris Apfel (August 29, 1921 – March 1, 2024) was an American businesswoman, interior designer, and fashion designer, known for her flamboyant style, outspoken personality and oversized eyeglasses. Her "Rara Avis Collection of Costume Jewelry" debuted on HSN when she was 90 years old. I own and cherish several of her necklaces and bracelets. She lived to be 102.

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Betty White (January 17, 1922 – December 31, 2021), was an American actress and comedian. A pioneer of early television with a career spanning almost seven decades, she was noted for her vast number of television appearances, acting in sitcoms, sketch comedy, and game shows. I first met Betty White when I was about 12 years old when she made a personal appearance near my home in Los Angeles. The one thing I remember was that she was wearing a beautiful yellow dress and was very kind to a scared little girl. The second time I met her was in 2000 when my husband and I were writing an article on her for “Las Vegas Parent and Child”. She gave us an interview, and personally showed us around the Los Angeles Zoo both in the public areas and behind the scenes. She missed her 100th birthday by only 17 days.



These are only three of the many women I could name who inspire me to look at aging as a privilege and to find happiness and joy in my life, no matter what my age.



Finally, I cannot end this without mentioning my ultimate favorite - Dame Judi Dench. This year, in December she will turn 91 years old. In early 2012, Dench spoke of her macular degeneration for which she was being treated. At that time she said that she needed someone to read scripts to her so she could memorize her lines. She also underwent knee surgery in 2013, but recovered from the procedure well and stated that her knee was no longer an issue. In 2024, it was reported that Dench's eyesight had deteriorated to the point where she may have to retire from acting. Her last movie was in 2022. Some of her famous statements regarding aging are:

"Don't prioritise your looks my friend, as they won't last the journey. Your sense of humour though, will only get better with age. Your intuition will grow and expand like a majestic cloak of wisdom. Your ability to choose your battles, will be fine-tuned to perfection. Your capacity for stillness, for living in the moment, will blossom. Your desire to live each and every moment will transcend all other wants. Your instinct for knowing what (and who) is worth your time, will grow and flourish like ivy on a castle wall. These are the things which will only get better."

And finally, I can't forget the men who have been such in inspiration to so many, including to my husband:

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William Shatner, now 94 and still making personal appearances. He ventured into outer space on Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin space shuttle on Oct. 13, 2021. Then 90 years old, Shatner became the oldest living person to travel into space,



Clint Eastwood, now 95. His most recent movie project is "Juror #2" a 2024 American legal thriller film co-produced and directed by him.

Dick Van Dyke, current age 99 - Birthdate December, 1925. In December, 2024, Van Dyke starred in the music video for the Coldplay song "All My Love". He produced the video with his wife, actress Arlene Silver.



Michael Caine, " Born March 14, 1933 he is now 92 years old. He has openly discussed the challenges of aging, including a spine problem that affects his legs and makes walking difficult. He's even been seen using a walker and cane for stability. He's stated that he has had a back operation to address spinal stenosis. Despite his physical limitations, he maintains a positive outlook

on life and retirement, acknowledging the natural progression towards death at his age while expressing gratitude for having lived to over 90. He also spoken about how his personal life, particularly his marriage to Shakira, provides him with great joy and support. He credits her as a key reason for his continued health and longevity.

In conclusion, it is important to learn new things whatever age you are. This keeps you youthful in mind, spirit, and heart. It keeps you growing and striving to reach new and exciting levels of knowledge. These days Father David and I are learning different languages. He is renewing his acquaintance with the French language, which he first learned at the Alliance Francaise in Paris when he was in his early 20's. I am trying once again to study French, a difficult language for me to learn. He is learning Latin, and I am renewing my acquaintance with German, first studied in college. We are both learning to play chess and doing an online study of the novel "Dune" led by a Professor of Philosophy. Daily reading and writing keep us busy, interested, and full of life.

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Learning, studying, expanding knowledge and trying new things will keep you young, no matter what your age. As Jerry Lewis often said, “Whatever my chronological age is, I will always be that 9 year old little boy inside.” ♦



Some Thoughts on Love and Marriage

by Fr. David St. John

Dorothy Parker, the American writer and satirist, once said, “Marriage is like a deck of cards: In the beginning

all you need is two hearts and a diamond. In the end, you wish you had a club and a spade.” That is very funny. But, obviously, not the right way to look at a lifetime commitment.

A wedding lasts only one day, but marriage for the rest of your life. When a couple gets married, it has been said both go back to school again. They begin to learn again. They learn to love each other in a deeper way. They join themselves to each other to become one. But becoming one doesn't happen overnight. It is something that is learned and it is something the couple becomes better at as they share their married life together. Becoming one means loving each other, sharing their lives with each other, and taking each other into consideration always. Becoming one means getting rid of all selfishness because there is no room for selfishness in marriage.

When two people get married, they bring to their marriage normal human weaknesses and discover weaknesses in the other which previously they did not know. This is an opportunity to love the other, heal the other, and forgive the other. There are times when, like at the wedding at Cana, it will seem as if the wine really has run out, times when they must forgive each other and make a fresh start.

A marriage is an occasion of celebration, a time for giving thanks and rejoicing in God's goodness. But there will be no rejoicing in the wedding or in the home that results from it unless God is present and also provides his blessing. We have seen the sad result when one or both parties in a marriage exclude the Lord and His counsel. They insist that it is their marriage, their life, their happiness, and their right to seek it however and wherever it may be found. Rather than turning to the Lord for help that all of us need, they rely on themselves, and inevitably, they run out of wine. The joy is gone and so too are the means of rejoicing.

"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it".

This is one of my favorite Bible verses. It's from Psalm 127. And it is very true. If you build a marriage on anything other than God, if you decide that you are able to create and sustain it on your own by your own strength and wisdom, then you will inevitably fail. Eventually, you will run out of wine. Over time, unless they are nurtured and nourished, love and desires change, satisfaction and shared interests deteriorate, the things that were once cute and attractive are now aggravating and repulsive, and no one is having any fun anymore.

Here, I believe, are three conditions which, if you fulfill them, will contribute greatly to make your marriage happy:

Prayer: The first condition is that you pray a lot. "The family that prays together, stays together". Not only do you want your marriage to be happy, but God wants it to be happy. If you learn to look to Him and pray to Him, your marriage will indeed be blessed.

Unconditional Love: The second condition is that you try to love each other as God loves you. Only God can give without limit, and only God can satisfy unlimited expectations. When your partner fails to give what you expected, forgive. And when you fail to give what you thought you would always give, ask for forgiveness.

Fidelity: The third condition is that you always try to live your marriage in accordance with God's will. Marriage is a covenant. By fidelity, I mean not only to each other, but to God as well. The promises you make to each other are not of your making, though you have freely chosen to make them. They are of God's making, for

they express the nature of the marriage bond as He has made it. It is important to remember that marriage was God's idea before it was ever man's idea. The nature of marriage is given by God, just as the promise of happiness in marriage has been placed there by God. That is why the final condition for achieving that promised happiness is to live your marriage according to its God-given nature.

The question is asked, "Is there anything more beautiful in life than a boy and a girl clasping clean hands and pure hearts in the path of marriage?" And the answer is given. "Yes there is a more beautiful thing. It is an old man and an old woman finishing their life's journey together on that path. Their hands are gnarled, but still clasped; their faces are wrinkled but still radiant; their hearts are physically bowed and tired, but still strong with love and devotion for one another."

Pray together. Love each other as Christ loves us. And always make God the foundation, the rock, the basis upon which your marriage is built. ♦

Poetry Corner:

Selected by Aurore Leigh Barrett

Let me not to the marriage of true minds (Sonnet 116)

William Shakespeare 1564 – 1616

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

This poem is in the public domain.

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1806 – 1861

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

This poem is in the public domain.