

I usually don't wear my cell phone at mass, but about two months ago I forgot one Sunday morning. While I was preaching, my phone went off. Now, I keep it on vibrate, so I was the only one who knew; it's not one of those phones that vibrates the person who's wearing it. Still, for the rest of mass I was distracted. Everybody knows I work on Sunday morning; no one phones me Sunday morning unless it is really important. I feared my house was on fire, a family member had gone to the hospital, or someone had died. I just knew it was bad news. After mass, when I got a moment to be alone, I saw that the call had come in from my brother Mike. I braced myself, pushed the button and heard this message: "Paul, I just wanted you to know that Nate Bukaty and Kelly Howell have their engagement picture in the morning paper." Mike's son Bryan was in school with Nate at a certain university west of the state line, so this wedding has been a conversation piece in our family. The nicest gift Nate gave me this year was the chance to meet Kelly, and to experience their love.

Many people mistake love for romance. It begins with romance, like the two lovers in the Song of Songs. You can hear their desire in words like, "Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm." Wear me like a locket or a tattoo. This reading compares love to fire and death; love takes total possession of you; it demands more than romance.

"Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous, pompous, inflated or rude," St. Paul writes to the Corinthians. This is the bible reading you hear most often at weddings, but very few couples get it. They think Paul was talking about their romance; he wasn't. Paul was talking about how every Christian should treat every other Christian. "Love does not seek its own interests; it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth." It's not enough to treat your partner that way. Christians should treat everyone that way.

Nate and Kelly, God has given you a lot: families who love you, friends who admire you, respectable jobs, strong faith, good health and good reputations. And God has given you the gift of love. God gives gifts not for you to keep, but for you to share. Marriage will especially challenge you to find meaningful ways to give back. This wedding takes place during a month of violence and racism in schools and on airwaves, when people are asking how to let our country's true values shine. Good values begin in good homes. The world should rejoice that here is a new home with more than romance, a home where the poor in spirit will be blessed, where the meek will find shelter, where those who thirst for righteousness will be satisfied, and where the clean of heart will see God. A better society begins with better homes.

Every engagement picture looks alike, but not every marriage is alike. Some couples get it; they get why they have the gift of love. This couple does; they are my picks to click. But we all need this reminder: to build a world of peace and understanding, we have to give others what God has given us, the total gift of love.