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The Shelter of Sanctity

By Stephanie B. Servoss

The sanctuary of marriage can be many places, to many people. For some couples it is a room, for others a favorite spot in the forest; for some it is a boat on the water and for others a desert hide away. Wherever the place, it must have two common elements. First, it must be a shelter from any storm, physical or emotional. Second, it must be sanctified by the love of an honorable man, a virtuous woman and by God. The presence of these two elements determines whether the union of the man and woman will be more than a change in residence and name.

In Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katarina is loved by her father only under strict conditions of obedience. Being obstinate in nature, she disobeys her father and calls down his anger upon her. Enter Petruchio. He sees through her brash behavior to the gentle woman underneath. He marries her and even before their wedding celebration has begun, he carries her away to his home, far from all she knows. With love and devotion, he sets

about to change her perceptions of herself. He causes her to look into her heart and see that which she would not see; that she was not the shrew, only misunderstood. She truly becomes his wife, his companion and helpmeet. As he guides her and counsels her, she begins to love him and devote herself to him. When Katarina consents to call the sun the moon simply because Petruchio wishes it to be so, she gives a small glimpse into her soul as she begins to love her husband.

In Wister's *The Virginian*, Molly Wood is the model of a spinster school marm. She escapes from her life of duty and wealth in Vermont to the rugged Wyoming prairie, where she meets the Virginian. From the moment they meet, she fights against the natural affection which she feels for him. Then comes the day she finds him wounded and dying. In the ensuing weeks, her heart is lost to him. When the Virginian shoots Trampas the night before his wedding to Molly, she discovers that she might have something to learn from this cattle man she has engaged herself to. Suddenly, all her proper ideas of right and wrong are called into question. She has to choose between tradition and love. She chooses to trust the man she loves and follow him.

The centuries between these two stories seem to magnify their similarities. Regardless of the time in which they were set, each of the men in them understood the nature of love. The Virginian is a cowboy, riding the Wyoming hills. Petruchio plays the part of a wandering mad man. What do these two men, who are so different in their temperament and nature, know that makes the difference in their marriages?

Petrucio whisked Katarina away to the peaceful rest of his home. The Virginian carried Molly to a utopian island in a river. What each

of these men understood was the necessity of solitude to nurture and grow their union. Each of their honeymoons was the beginning of their marital sanctuary. They both knew that in order to unite as a husband and wife, their hearts and minds must commune. The word sanctuary originates from the Latin word *sanctuarium*, from *sanctus*, meaning sacred. Each of these young men introduced their new bride to a place that few if any had ever gained admittance to. By doing so, they were each declaring their eternal love and commitment to her.

Originally the word honeymoon meant sweet month; a time for the new couple to learn to cling to one another, to depend on each other, to become one flesh. This month provided the foundation for the sanctuary they would build together. Why is this significant? I believe its significance lies in the course that it sets for the new family being built. When a man and woman unite in the sacred marriage rites, their minds, hearts, souls and bodies become one. The old-fashioned honeymoon was a support to this unification of all they held dear. Together, they began to form the relationship that would become the inner sanctum of their family circle. Within that inner sanctum, they would begin to exercise their power to create, nurture and sustain life. With the strength of character they would begin to see in each other, they would learn to cleave unto one another always. This honeymoon was a prerequisite for the life they would have together.

I firmly believe that today's families are being sabotaged before they begin. Before that sacred shelter can begin to form, men and women are bombarded by the media with lies about the nature of their union. They are told that money is the goal, the more they acquire the better off they will be; they are told that

children are a hindrance to education, they should finish their education before beginning their family; they are told that our resources are rapidly dwindling, they should have only a small family so as not to overburden the planet. In so many ways, they are discouraged from ever building their sanctuary. Yet without it, the union will never survive. It is the shelter of their inner sanctum that will provide a refuge in the storms that will come. Within that sanctum the man and woman will shelter and strengthen each other through the pure love of God. As children begin to come, it becomes increasingly important to have a sanctuary for the continuation and renewal of their love.

I believe it is time to reeducate young men and women about the sacred nature of life and love. It is critical that they begin to learn the truth. The truth is that marriage and family are the point of this life. The truth is that education, money, resources, etc. are tools to be utilized in fulfilling the original purpose of this life which is to create, nurture and sustain life through the grace and power of God.

It has taken my husband and me almost thirteen years of marriage to begin to understand this truth. I wish I had known it sooner, but I am grateful I am learning it now. I am alarmed by the number of seemingly stable families that I know who call it quits and walk away. As I see the fallout all around me of countless families torn apart by the storms of life, I begin to realize how little the truth is heard on this subject. I want that to change! I want young people to know and understand that their purpose is far greater than they have ever imagined. I want them to know that every aspect of married life is a tremendous gift from God. That each time we perform a small act for the one we love, we are renewing our commitment and devotion to them.

As I have toiled over this article, I have

begun to feel a strong sense of urgency in this area of my life. I have awakened to a sense of my personal mission. I know that the area of my mission will be in family forms. I know this because my entire life has prepared me for this. I have experienced the anguish that comes when there is nothing sacred in life to live for. I know that if we do not begin to remember the sacred nature of our marriages, the consequences will be disastrous. The sanctum of marriage is the beginning; from it everything else receives its start. If there is nothing of the sacred in each of our marriages, there will soon be very little of the sacred outside of them.

In each of these stories, both William Shakespeare and Owen Wister seem to have a grasp on the importance of the sacred in all of our lives. I suggest that we do what they did; start where we are, in our homes and communities. I hope that each of us will strive to teach the young men and women in our lives about the sanctity of home and marriage. I hope that we can lead by example and show them what a sanctified marriage can be. If we do, we can help restore a little bit of the sacred to the world, because home is where the world begins.

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