

Panel discussion: Newness of Christian life experienced in marriage: fruitful love!

XAVIER AND DESTER (The Philippines)

Xavier: We have been married for almost four years this September. We will give you a brief background on how different we are and how we are working through this in our marriage. Although I do not look it, I am thirty-four years old. I come from a Catholic, traditional and pro-life family. My Dad has ten siblings, and with those ten siblings I have about sixty cousins that I meet almost every month. On my mother's side there are fourteen siblings, and they are also a very close-knit family and we often go to their houses and share food. As many of you who have Filipino friends will know, we are always eating. In my own family there are five of us. I am the second of five children. My youngest brother is adopted. My parents have been active in a Catholic charismatic community, and they speak about loving those who need to be loved and deserve love, so we put those words into action and adopted my youngest brother Joshua ten years ago. He is ten years old. My parents are often taken to be his grandparents. With this pro-life and Catholic traditional upbringing, I would like to be the same for my family. Of course my parents argue and we see it, but we know that at the end of the day they will make up and everything will be as good as new. I want the same for my own family. I would like a big family, maybe fourteen kids – if Dester can take it. I want to have a close-knit family, and a prayerful family.

Dester: I, on the other hand, come from a dysfunctional family. We were my father's second family. My parents separated before my father's death a few years ago. I have three younger brothers all of whom got their girlfriends pregnant. Since they were still students at that time, it fell on my mother's shoulders to provide for our expanding family. These experiences were very challenging, but it did not keep me from wanting and hoping for a family life for myself. In my last semester at college I joined a Renewal community and then went on to work full time for youth ministry. I was blessed to serve in different parts of our country. I also spent one year in Zimbabwe as a missionary. It was in this community that I met my husband. We were engaged for one year and got married three-and-a-half years ago.

Xavier: As you can see, we are very different. I am one who is very organised and my wife is very carefree. You can go to our room and see how my side is very neat and her side is very carefree.

Dester: It is also neat, but his is neater.

Xavier: It's my turn. I am always on time and she takes time. I am very shy and she is very outgoing. We are opposites, and this leads to a lot of realities in our marriage. We have a few arguments now and then, and some of these are about finances. I like buying what I want and so I spend money on things that will make me happy, and Dester likes saving money and does not like buying things. I always say that she does not want to be happy. Over the years we have learned to discuss and compromise with regard to finances. Money does not buy our happiness, and we learn that there are better ways to be happy than through material things.

Dester: As he said, our relationship is not free from misunderstandings and arguments. When we were newly married, I used to walk out on him during arguments. I knew this frustrated him. Sometimes I would be quiet for long periods of time. That was how I handled stress. I am not the type who talks when upset. I have since learned that keeping quiet and walking out does not work. My husband cannot read my mind, so it does not matter how long I keep quiet, he still will not know what is wrong or what is bothering me. I realise that we will not be able to resolve our issues if I do not talk. So I have since learned to talk about my concerns. We now have two daughters. Our eldest is two years and eight months old. Her name is Sabine. Our youngest, also a girl, will be turning one two weeks from now. We want them to have a good family life as well. We are blessed to be part of a Renewal community that brings husbands and wives together to a deep personal relationship with God where both serve together and bring their families as well. Thus through the example of these couples we are able to live a Christ-centred life. We make it a point to bring our daughters to our community activities because we want them to experience community life even though they are still young. In both my husband's life and my own, it was love and community that made God's love real. God allowed me to see that the brokenness in my family does not have to be repeated in my family now. God also showed me that He, our loving Father, can really transform lives. I thank God for giving me a husband that always makes sure that God comes first in our lives. He reminds me always to pray and to teach my daughters to pray.

Xavier: Thank you, dear wife. In my line of work I get to go to different places in the

Philippines and in other countries as well. I get to see a lot of problems among the youth. I see that problems with youth almost always stem from problems within their families. So, I made a commitment to Dester and to my kids to have a better family life and to be focussed on love and focussed on God. Of course, I am not perfect. I get angry and I get frustrated. I pretend that I do not hear her when she starts nagging me. I know that these are small things that I can overcome because of the love in our marriage. We work at our marriage every single day. Every single day is a decision to love. We have been married for almost four years, and we know that this marriage will last forever. I invite all of you, forty-six years from now, to come to our golden wedding anniversary in the Philippines. Thank you.