

Boy Meets Girl

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Making Friends

"Take your partners, please, for the oldest of old time dances," cries the master of ceremonies and you're off reeling and spinning round one partner and then another, twisting through a chain of dancers until you find yourself facing one in the centre of the ring with your friends clapping and cheering you. It makes little difference if you are dancing to an old-fashioned reel or to the latest jazz craze, picking your partner is what matters and your whole evening is made if you meet the right one.

What fun it is to be young and healthy with the whole of life opening up before you, with a great longing to enjoy every minute of it and the ability to do so. It is too big a joy to bottle up within yourself; you must share it with your friends. Sooner or later you must share it with friends of the other sex. A boy finds that for some extraordinary reason a girl makes quite good company; perhaps because she listens to him, a thing that has never happened before, or she talks and laughs about things from a new angle. While a girl soon discovers that she needs the companionship of a boy, to catch and hold his attention even in quite a small way, if she is to feel fully confident in herself.

There are few greater moments of joy in the whole of life than when a boy and a girl begin to realize that they are meaning something rather special to each other. There is a double satisfaction in being liked for your own sake and by someone whom you feel you could get to like very much indeed. What a marvellous thing to happen. And not the least bit less wonderful because it is happening all around you, has happened from the time of Adam and Eve and is more than likely to continue long after you. It becomes something more than marvellous, if you can think about it as all part of God's plan; that this new and intense joy you are experiencing is a gift from God to you personally, a mark of His love for you and an encouragement to persevere in His plan.

As a Catholic you will naturally want to turn to Christ to tell Him about your new, joyful discovery and to pray for guidance. Never forget that you owe not merely the bare fact of your existence to God, but all the trimmings as well, health, good looks and brains for which we are inclined to take the credit to ourselves. Cherish these gifts in His name, learn to use them as He intended you should and you will draw love and happiness to yourself from many good companions. You must hope and pray that with one of these friends you will find a mutual desire to share together all the joys of God's creation.

God's Plan for You

When boys and girls first start going about together, either in groups or in couples, the subject of marriage is not one that is openly discussed or even thought about seriously. There is usually no immediate prospect of marriage and therefore it is pointless as well as embarrassing to talk about it.

But it is something which should be kept at the back of your mind and not too far back, either. All this gay and amusing milling about of boys and girls and the sorting into couples may seem like nothing but good fun at the time. But in quite a short time they will begin to feel the need to start a life of their own away from their parents and this naturally makes marriage a more immediate prospect. "Naturally", we say, because most young people see in marriage a highly desirable way of life, with a home of their own and all that goes with it. There is also the feeling that after marriage they will be recognized as fully adult men and women.

A Catholic boy or girl has an even better way of thinking about marriage. You will have been brought up to believe that in marriage you are fulfilling God's plan for the continuation of the human race by raising a family. But there is another side of the plan and a more personal one to yourself and to your future spouse. God made man and woman as the two separate halves of a whole. He made them to need each other, to want to unite so that each could give the different kind of love, comfort and protection that the other needed.

Because a man and a woman look at things in a different way, each can help the other to a greater understanding of life, to a more generous sharing of its joys and to greater courage in facing up to its problems. Because it satisfies their needs both in body and mind, union in marriage helps each man and woman to become a complete person. A complete person may be said to be one who is fulfilling the purpose of his existence and is aware of doing it successfully. In marriage a couple rediscover themselves in their mutual love and respect and in the unselfish give-and-take of their life together each one's sense of completion is increased. And the nearer to completion a man becomes in himself, the better chance he has of coming to know God, and so to love Him and serve Him.

Making a Friend

The first step in fulfilling God's plan is to find among your companions one whom you begin to like especially and who seems to like you. Choosing friends is always a two-sided game. Husbands are not to be picked off trees and brides are no longer bartered. And yet, in some marvellously simple way boys and girls pair themselves off and, in nine cases out of ten, settle down to live happily ever after. What is the secret? Usually, it is that they have grown up with the same background, with the same outlook, needs and desires. You do not have to look very far to find someone with whom you will make a good match.

And yet, there is something which can be more deeply satisfying than being well-matched. And this is when you are both in whole-hearted agreement about the things that really matter in life, in understanding God's purpose in creation and the way to achieve it in your own case. A boy and a girl brought up as Catholics are already in agreement on all major issues and do not have to argue about when fun stops being fun and becomes sin. If they decide to be married, they start life together with the single-minded object of raising a family wholly united in the love of God.

The problems raised by mixed marriages are too fundamental to be discussed here. If you feel the need to study them, you should read the C.T.S. pamphlet *Mixed Marriages*. All that need be said here is that it is such an obvious advantage in every way to marry a fellow-Catholic that you should try to make a friend among your Catholic companions. They can't all be impossible. After all, you are a Catholic yourself.

What to Look For

Having decided to give Catholics the first choice on your list of possibles, what other points should you look for in a companion? Remember that you will not find an angel or even a superman, because they do not exist outside the women's magazines. In the end you will find that all your friends have their good points and their bad, just like yourself. After mixing with them freely and getting to know them better, you will find that one or two seem to be more attractive to you than the others. If you are lucky enough to feel that you are proving equally attractive to them, then the time has come to look more closely into the causes of this two-way attraction.

Now, here you will have to help yourself. It is such a personal matter that the discussion can take place only between your head and your heart. You will probably not have the opportunity to delve into the deeper qualities of your friends, simply because the occasions do not often arise. And don't bother too much about whether they can cook and sew, or are fond of children and wall-papering. The skill and the liking for such things do come to most people after marriage. What you can tell is whether they make good companions to you; good in every sense of the word, helpful and encouraging as well as being amusing and agreeable. As for their faults, remember that everyone has some faults, even yourself, and that you must learn to be as patient with them as you hope they will be with you.

Let the Church Help You

How can the Church help you in this personal matter? First of all by the sacraments of confession and communion which help you to know yourself better and give you the grace and confidence to face the world. Secondly, by friendship. Your parish clergy are there to guide you. They will put you in touch with the many Catholic societies, in whose members they take a keen personal interest.

There are many Catholic societies for young men and women, either local or national, with social activities of all kinds. The Church encourages everything that is wholesome and healthy, sports, dancing, dramatics, rambling and cycling, books and music. There is a list of Catholic societies inside the cover. Surely you will find one in which to meet companions of your own tastes.

Going Steady

So, at last you have arrived at the blissful stage of "going steady" with someone. You were there, perhaps, before you knew it or you may have achieved it by skilful manœuvring—and what harm? It is a stage somewhere between looking around for a friend and definitely becoming engaged. A vague sort of state to be in, but one that is well recognised.

On both sides, of your own free choice, you are giving and taking from each other an understanding, nothing more. An understanding that you will go out together and come home together, go for walks and to the cinema together, visit each other's homes. When going to parties, dances or rambles you two will keep together most of the time. Your families and friends will soon recognise this and will react to it in their various ways. Inevitably, you will be teased by some and advised by others. Don't begrudge them this pleasure, they do it because they want to see you really happy.

The best advice to those going steady is, "Go steady". Don't rush things, don't imagine that the whole of your life has been settled because you have held hands once or twice. Take time to have a good look at one another, get to know each other in different surroundings and in other company. At the same time you will be getting to know yourself better and, as the friendship increases, you will begin to feel more confident, more at home in each other's company.

Is This the Real Thing?

You will probably be feeling very thrilled about all this, especially if it is going well. And as you find you are becoming fonder of each other you will begin to ask yourself, "Am I in love? Is this the real thing?"

Now, let's go steady in finding the answer. First of all, there is nothing to be afraid of. Love is the greatest gift that God has given us. His Son came on earth to teach us how to love. He gave us the secret of true love, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". Therefore, there is everything right about loving someone else. And if this person seems to be the right friend for you, with a fair chance of marriage in the background, then allow yourself the God-given happiness of falling in love.

Try to realise that this "falling in love" is something you are doing of your own accord. You are allowing yourself to become especially fond of your friend. Therefore, you can keep it in control and you must do so. Take it steady. There will be plenty of time for real joy when you are more sure of yourselves.

If you happen to be the sort of person who finds it thrilling, lucky you—for the moment. But don't fool yourself that it is anything more than a glorious feeling of self-congratulation at present. The higher the thrill, the bigger the bump when the feeling passes off. Then, you may begin to imagine that you are "falling out of love". Here again, go steady. Beware the false sentiments of the cinema, otherwise a temporary set-back will bring out the worst in you and quite ordinary devilments, like jealousy or vanity, will be worked up into the grand passion of an abandoned lover.

Equally lucky you if you are not the sort of person who gets easily thrilled or depressed about this special friendship. In any case, try to relate the thrill to what it is all about. It is about an actual fact, "boy meets girl", a real boy and a real girl have met and are becoming fond of each other. A very wonderful thing and you have every right to feel thrilled about it, so long as you remember that the feeling is a feeling and not magic or destiny.

To Love is to Share

To be at its most enjoyable, this understanding between you should be entirely voluntary. But it also implies a certain amount of give and take on each side. You should want to give and want to accept gladly what is freely given to you. This give and take will develop in time into that sharing of everything which is the secret of a happy marriage, so it is important to start well. Let's see how it might work out in practice at this stage.

One of the first things you can start giving is—your friend. At dances, for instance, where you are probably in a party with friends, dance together as often as you both wish, but don't mind if your friend likes an occasional dance with old friends. This is a generous thing and can do nothing but good to both of you. So, learn to give each other up now and then, gracefully and cheerfully.

You will both have separate interests to begin with, in sports, evening classes and entertainments. It would be foolish to give them up and probably wrong for you to ask your friend to give more attention to you. The right way is to try to share each other's interests wherever possible. Go to watch him play football, take her to the theatre, listen to him talking about aeroplane engines and try to take some interest in the dress she is making. If your friend makes fun of you, take it in good spirit and laugh back. The ability to laugh at yourselves is a sign of confidence in yourselves as a couple.

Another generous and most important thing to do is to visit each other's parents and families. This is a great opportunity to get to know one another "inside-out", because after the first few visits you will each relax your party manners in your homes and will be able to see and understand how the other talks and behaves in the family. You can't help sizing up your friend in this new, homely background, but let it be a generous judgment such as you hope will be given to you and to your family. If you can make real friends with each other's families right from the start, it will go a long way towards avoiding in-law trouble later on.

At the same time, it is a good thing to ask the advice of your own parents at this stage and to show them that you are considering their advice with love and respect. They can look at your friendship in a level-headed way and talk about where it may be leading you, while bringing your hopes and fears gently down to earth. It will please your respective parents enormously to be allowed to share your friendship and will incline them to look more favourably upon it. Better still, you are showing each other that home and family mean a lot to you; not so exciting as dances and outings, but more deeply satisfying.

Drink

Talking of parties leads on to the thought of drinking. Alcohol is one of the never-fail jokes of the music hall. And quite right, too, because when they have taken too much to drink people can easily make fools of themselves. Beer, wine and spirits are all good things in themselves if taken in moderation. Older people have generally learnt by experience when to draw their own line, to have enough for pleasure but to stop long before they begin to feel foolish. Motorists know that alcohol makes one over-confident in taking risks and at the same time fogs one's judgment and slows down the reactions. But this applies to everyone who drinks alcohol and the more taken, the greater the effect.

Now, there is no doubt that alcoholic drinks make a party go with a swing. And here lies a possible source of danger to you. The first drink or two will make you feel gay and confident, slightly above yourself, saying and doing things which you would not do normally. Any more to drink will make you foolishly overconfident and you may say and do things which you will regret afterwards. One especial risk is that drink makes men and women take liberties with each other in kissing and embracing. Such liberties can be and frequently are sinful, and the dangerous occasions of sin must be firmly avoided.

Nature Takes a Hand

Sooner or later, a boy and a girl who are becoming very fond of each other are bound to want to hold hands and to kiss. This is Nature taking a hand in the affair and it would be most unusual if it did not happen. As this aspect of a friendship carries certain risks with it and as these risks are

always greater where there is ignorance, let's take a close look at it. First of all, let's call it by its proper name, sex.

Sex is God's chosen method of persuading the human race to reproduce itself. Part of the plan is to make mating attractive, otherwise the human race might gladly have given up the struggle ages ago. Just as God gave us appetites for food and drink, He gave us the pleasurable instincts of sex to draw men and women together to mate and to conceive. Sex also has the effect of making a man and a woman fonder of each other, makes them want to live together permanently. But the main purpose of sex is to conceive and the sexual instincts are designed by God for that purpose.

Common sense tells us that things which are intended for one purpose must not be used for another. That is to abuse things and by abusing them we render them useless. If we misuse our bodies we harm them and may even destroy them. If you can understand the purpose of sex, then you will realise why you must keep your sexual instincts in control until they can lawfully be put to their full use and for their natural purpose.

It is these healthy instincts that make a boy and a girl want to come close together, to hug and to kiss. All very right and proper, so far. But they should understand that these hugs and kisses are the first steps in preparing the body for the complete act of love-making. They start the process of rousing the sexual instincts and of making the response of one body to the other more passionate.

A Double Responsibility

Just as in drinking the pleasant effect of one drink makes us want another, so does kissing—only doubly so. Not only is your body being roused but you are also rousing the body of your friend at the same time. Each of you has a double responsibility to keep the embraces well under control. It is really not so difficult if you both approach it in the right frame of mind. You are true friends, attracted to each other in mind and body, sharing a deep respect for each other's person and personality, because you are God's creatures who hope with His grace to be united in the full happiness of marriage.

The girl has a particular responsibility in this matter, because a man is more easily and quickly aroused by kissing, while a girl can continue for some time without feeling over-excited herself. It is up to her to make the kisses short and sweet. If the man is going to be a friend worth having he will understand.

Now, what does all this mean in practice? It is like an athlete in training or a girl slimming having a little of what they like, a glass of beer or the odd cream cake, but disciplining themselves to say "No" firmly when tempted to have more. It soon becomes a good habit and then it is easy.

So, a boy and a girl who are going steady and wish to show their affection for each other should keep to holding hands with an occasional kiss. The kisses should not be more than signs of affection. Make a habit of this from the start of your friendship and, with God's help, you will find it easy to keep yourselves free from the temptation to more passionate embraces.

Talk Seriously Now and Then

There are plenty of other things to occupy your minds and hearts. As you get to know each other better you will want to talk about plans and ambitions for the future. Try to talk about these matters seriously and with full sympathy for each other's point of view. The boy may have a choice of

careers in front of him and possibly the right one may be the more difficult to choose, such as a long and comparatively poorly paid apprenticeship before qualifying for a good position. If the girl whom he thinks he may marry should make some flippant remark about his choice, it might easily influence him to take the wrong decision.

The boy should talk sensibly about what he can do and what he proposes to do about his work and a career without boasting. His girl friend should encourage him to make the right decision and once he has started keep him at it, even though they might both find it hard and unrewarding at first. This is beginning to go deeper than the ordinary give and take of courting. Mutual trust of this kind is the surest foundation for a happily married life.

Brush Up Your Religion

In all these matters, as Catholics you have a sure friend and guide in Christ and His Church. Start by going to Mass and the Sacraments together, praying for one another and putting yourselves in God's hands pray for His guidance in planning your lives. In the naturally thrilling atmosphere of a happy courtship it is so easy to forget that you are happy because you are taking part in God's plan. The Church has so much to teach you about life in general and about family life in particular, that it is worth trying to find out a good bit more about your religion than you knew when you left school.

Talk these things over together and you will come to look at the problems of the world and of your own neighbourhood with the age-old wisdom of the Church. Learn to counter the views of people who accuse the Church of being old-fashioned and out of tune with science and the modern way of life. The Catholic Church has never rushed to adopt passing fashions in thought or social habits, least of all where marriage and the family are concerned. In the long run, many of the popular views such as free love and easy divorce have already been discredited, while the Church is held in higher esteem for the firm stand it has taken for the necessity of chastity before marriage and of the unbreakable nature of the marriage vows.

Let's Get Married

"I'm engaged. Look at my lovely ring." What a happy expression and who would not share in the joy of it? It must be very tempting to some girls to come out with such an expression without thinking any further. But it is worth considering whether it reflects a whole-hearted approach to what is the most important step in your life. Both a whole heart and a whole mind are needed if you and your friend are going to discuss the possibility of becoming engaged.

First of all, you will not just be engaged. You will engage to marry. A very different thing. A lot of young people are inclined to regard an engagement as another stage in life, like leaving school or having a twenty-first birthday party; as if it were a step up to a superior and more privileged position in society, with a special ring as a badge of office. Of course, no one will admit that, but there is a danger there which should be guarded against.

A Mutual Promise and a Pledge

And another thing—you will not be engaged just by yourself. The two of you will engage to marry each other. To say, "Let's become engaged", is meaningless. It has about as much significance as kissing under the mistletoe. An engagement is a formal agreement between a man and a woman to

marry each other. It is a sensible and wholly admirable convention, recognised by the Church and by the civil law, imposing mutual obligations on each of the two engaged persons. The reason for it is that it will give each of you the opportunity to make preparations for the wedding and for life together. The giving and the accepting of an engagement ring is generally understood as the pledge or outward sign of this contract to marry.

The ring is a pledge that marks a promise. It would be dishonest to promise to do something if you did not intend seriously to do it or if you thought it might not be possible in the foreseeable future. So, it would be dishonest either to make or to accept a proposal of marriage, that is, to become engaged to marry, if either or both of you felt that it was not really possible within a reasonable period.

Is Marriage Possible in the Next Year or Two?

A man should ask a girl to become his wife only when he is confident that he can support her and a first baby in reasonable comfort. "Reasonable" is a word that can be stretched a good deal in all directions to cover the needs and desires of most young couples. In the prosperous world we live in today many things, such as motor cars and television sets, which our parents would have regarded as luxuries, have become necessities to large numbers of people. Hire purchase has made it possible for expensive furniture and household gadgets to be brought within the range of income, especially when it is a joint income, of most newly-married couples. And most of them fall for it, up to the neck. Squeezing the most out of life for oneself, that is the pagan view of marriage and the test of whether one can afford it. To people who take that view a baby is a luxury and can be put off until the necessities have been paid for in instalments in two or more years.

By what principle should a Catholic be guided when asking if it is possible for him to marry in the near future? It is by the principle which is the whole object of matrimony—the family. By marrying you will be fulfilling God's purpose of raising a family, nothing else counts. Therefore, the only real question you need ask yourselves is, "Will the husband be able to afford to support his wife and first baby during the next two years?" Only the two of you can answer that question for yourselves, because of your own circumstances. But, by putting the question in that way you can be sure that you are approaching it in the right spirit and that God will be beside you with all the grace that you require to come to a right decision.

"Popping the Question"

Most young people today would laugh at the old-fashioned notion of "popping the question", picturing an ardent swain on his knee to a blushing maiden who has been taken quite by surprise. But, in whatever way you may choose to set about it, the question has to be put and answered. Let us assume that you have both made up your minds that you get on very well together and that starting a home and a family are both desirable and practicable. Perhaps, the best way of dealing with a proposal is to reach a point in your discussions when you both exclaim, "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get married."

The next important thing to do is to fix the date. This is not just a detail which can be put off. You have engaged to marry only because it is possible, therefore you can and should fix the date, even approximately. Setting a target is always a great help in carrying out plans and you will find that fixing this target by naming the date of your wedding well in advance will be a great encouragement to you. And when you are announcing your engagement, let everyone know at the

same time the date you have in mind. This will emphasise to yourselves and to the whole world that you are not merely engaged, but engaged to be married.

What will Marriage Mean to You?

We have said that one of the sensible things about a formal engagement is that it gives you both time to prepare for setting up a home together. Now, don't let yourselves become so occupied with insurance forms, paint brushes and the bottom drawer that you forget to prepare for the more important side of marriage, living together. This is worth plenty of time for thinking and talking about together, for prayer and for advice from those best able to give it to you. You would do the same thing before taking any other major step in life, choosing a career, taking up a technical training or emigrating to a new world. Marriage is all three in one and a good deal more besides, with the added complication of tackling the problems no longer on your own as individuals, but as a couple. Get ready now.

Read the publications on marriage shown on the cover of this pamphlet. They will start you thinking and talking seriously of what marriage is going to mean to the two of you. They will help to put you in the frame of mind in which you will look beyond the immediate joys and mishaps of coming to live together to the overwhelming and lasting happiness of uniting as husband and wife under God's protection.

Courses for Engaged Couples

In many of the cities of England and Wales there are held every year special courses for engaged couples. Notices of these appear in advance in the Catholic press and in the Church porches. They are well worth attending and you should try to arrange to attend a full course together. Priests, doctors and married people will talk to you on the whole range of subjects dealing with marriage. You will hear discussed the present-day difficulties facing a newly-married couple and the practical ways of dealing with them, housing, hire purchase, joint incomes, in-laws and the rest. It will also be a great help to meet other engaged couples, to learn from each other's experiences and to laugh at your own problems with their sympathy and encouragement.

Sex is dealt with very thoroughly and sensibly. It is obviously important for your mutual happiness that neither of you should be ignorant of the physical side of marriage. It is still more important that you should each understand the other's needs and desires and learn that to combine them will be the secret of mutual joy. These talks are given separately to men and women by doctors, who are Catholics with families themselves and who are the better able to help you to see the physical side in its proper proportion to the whole of married life.

Perhaps the greatest benefit you will get from such a course is that you will be able to hear and to discuss in friendly and informal meetings God's teaching on the purpose of marriage and the means of fulfilling it. The non-Catholic world is losing sight of that purpose and is consequently making a mockery of marriage. Birth-control and divorce are taken for granted as quite ordinary means of overcoming difficulties. So much so that every Catholic needs to be continually strengthened in his understanding that these difficulties are not problems at all in the light of God's teaching. Here is the opportunity to get rid of any cobwebs you may have picked up from the Press or from your non-Catholic friends. Don't be afraid to bring up the hard-luck stories that seem to make the Catholic life so difficult. That's the way to get the answer.

To ensure that you do not miss hearing of one of these valuable courses in your area, you should write to the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, 15 Lansdowne Road, Kensington, London, W.11, who will gladly give you information about these courses and will advise you on all matters concerned with marriage.

Talk to Your Parish Priest

First and last, turn to the Church which has fought so hard to preserve the sanctity of marriage and is still fighting to maintain the tradition of the family above all other worldly matters. Go to Mass and the Sacraments together as often as you can. Learn to offer yourselves most humbly to God by saying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...", agreeing gladly to work with God in whatever He has in store for you and putting your complete trust in Him to help you carry out His will.

Both of you should let your respective Parish Priests know that you are engaged to be married, as apart from their personal and spiritual interest in you, they will have to know for the sake of the record. The priest of the parish in which the bride-to-be lives must in particular be told well in advance, so that he can make all his arrangements for the wedding ceremony. Others may want to be married at the same time and place as you, so see the priest as early as you can. He will be able to help you in more ways than you can think. And don't forget to ask for his blessing on the two of you.
