

PRAY Loving God, you make us in your image, you who live three in one love. You call us to find and fulfill ourselves through loving one another. Bless us as we make, break, and keep friendships. Amen.

Check five reasons why you think young people your age avoid dealing with problems in their relationships.

☐ Don't want to risk security.

Fear of getting hurt. ☐

☐ Fear of losing a relationship.

Fear of hurting the other person. ☐

☐ Don't want to risk being unpopular.

Too emotionally attached. ☐

☐ Insecure about making new relationships.

Don't want to fail at a relationship. ☐

☐ Don't want to be alone.

Don't know how to break up. ☐

☐ Don't know who they are apart from a relationship.

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SPIRIT



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by Jennifer Lesser

I walk into school, and I'm beyond invisible. It is as if my former friends are making a conscious effort not to see me, as if I'm in direct sunlight, or someone handing out brochures no one wants at the mall.

I walk nervously by their territory, their lockers near the art room. They are in a circle, overstuffed backpacks facing out menacingly, like fists, or shields, or bodyguards with zippered faces.

They seem to be laughing louder than they usually do. Tommy has made a joke, no doubt. They all gather around him, basking in the aura of his popularity. As I walk by, I look for

Tommy. We find each other instantly. For less than a second his black-brown eyes stand out in the circle of wolves. He sees me, the girl he has trashed and burned. He turns away too quickly and laughs unnaturally.

It has been 38 hours since Tommy broke up with me. I knew from the moment we drove away in our separate cars that coming back to school would be the hardest part.

I walk into school alone with no group of friends, no one to be seen with.

I have become one of the spectral masses that only attend school in order to be the person who sits behind you in math class, the extras in the film.

I don't know what to do. I have 10 minutes before biology. I am suffocating

beneath the feeling that nobody knows me, the feeling that I don't exist without my other half.

I decide to walk to the library and back to my locker again. Maybe if someone sees me they will think I have forgotten something and not that I have no friends.

Biology begins. Tommy is on the other side of the room now. It is as if he never knew me. I imagine that Saturday didn't happen. I imagine that I was out of town. Then he would be sitting next to me, gnawing on my pen because he knows it bothers me.

The teacher asks him a question. He gets it wrong. I cheer.

Saturday was too warm for fall. I remember that as I got out of my car to meet Tommy, the glare off the



pavement made me lose my balance. The world felt uneven, unnatural, even then.

We learned about foreshadowing in English class, about the rain before the car crash, the thunder before the unwanted guest's arrival. I should have known when the glare blinded me not to come and meet Tommy. I

knew what he was going to do, yet I still blow dried and straightened my hair. I still put on my make-up to get ready.

Tommy walked through the Starbucks door at 5:34, late, in his typical fashion. I had so many questions I wanted to ask. "What does your text message

mean? What happened at Angelo's party? Why didn't you even speak to me yesterday?" But I just sat there, watching as he ordered some sugary, frozen drink.

"Hi," I said in a voice too quiet and low-pitched to be my own.

He nodded and didn't look up.

BREAKING up as friends

In one religion class the teacher has students practice breaking up and leaving the other person feeling okay. Here is some advice from these students.

Talk to the person first before telling your whole class.

Never have someone else tell.



Talk about breaking up more than once.

One person may have been thinking about breaking up for two months and not get why the news is a big deal to the other, for whom it is a total surprise. Don't expect a response right away; give the other person time to think.

Tell what is going on in the relationship simply and gently. For example, "Things aren't clicking." Or, "We're going different directions." Or, "It seems like we both are wanting to be with other people."

Affirm the positive personality traits one likes about the other instead of just the negative.

Talk it out. Be honest. You have to communicate.

Practice breaking up. Have pairs role play break-ups and the rest of the group listen and give feedback. Share what you think is valuable about each role play.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Marriage is lasting love.

NARRATOR: As Jesus was teaching a crowd, Pharisees came and asked him a question to test him.

PHARISEE 1: Tell us, does the Law allow a husband to divorce his wife?

JESUS: What did Moses command you?

PHARISEE 2: Moses allowed a husband to write a divorce notice and send his wife away.

JESUS: Because of your hardness of heart, Moses wrote this law for you. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. They are no longer two but one. Let no one separate what God has joined."

NARRATOR: Back in the house later, Jesus' disciples asked him about this matter.

JESUS: A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife. In the same way, a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery.

Mark 10.2-12

I watched as his finger lightly touched and then violently squashed a water droplet. "How are you?" I asked in the same lifeless voice as before.

"Fine." He didn't look up at me.

"I should probably..." he started to say, his finger now dragging the droplet across the table. "I should probably...probably..."

I stared at him dully, as if he had already finished his words.

"I should probably go," he said with a look too quick, too unnatural—a guilty glance.

I read his face with skepticism and questioning. I didn't want to make this easy.

"Look," he said, "the thing is, I don't really want a girlfriend right now."

I kept staring at his forehead. His eyes concentrated on his thick fingers and the droplet of water spread thin across the table. It was as if he were not speaking to me but telling me the story of what happened to another couple, as if he were telling me how Angelo dumped some girl.

"Why?" I heard myself ask. I looked down at my hand and realized it was sweating from being clenched for so long.

He mumbled something about homework, school.

I felt my throat close up. "You don't do your homework," I said matter of factly. "You sit next to me in biology class. I know you don't do your homework."

He looked up again quickly.

"It's about Angelo's party, isn't it?" I asked, more gently than I intended. I wanted to be angry, to be connected with what my body was doing. I wanted to feel passion. Instead I felt as if I were watching television. He was just some guy, and I was just some girl. Soon the wacky friend would come in and everything would be all right. I wanted a laugh track to go off, anything to disrupt the silence at our table.

"You like that pretty girl you were talking to, don't you?" I asked, again too kindly.

"It's been 10 months," he said, finally looking me in the eye. "I guess...I don't know. You know what I

mean..." He was looking down at the table again.

"Yes, I know what you mean," I said. "You just don't want me anymore." I sounded so pathetic that I started to cry. It was embarrassing for both of us.

"Look, don't cry. I mean, I don't know...it has been a long time and like, you know, maybe we could, I don't know, maybe take a break."

He had said it. There was a heavy pause. The only thing moving was his wet finger on the tabletop. We both watched as he continued to spread the broken droplet, forcing it to dry up.

I hiccupped loudly. I always hiccup when I cry.

"I guess I'll see you at school," he said.

He left me facing his empty seat.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why can't the author feel anything?
- 2 What does the image of the water droplet symbolize?
- 3 Why is going to school so hard for the author?
- 4 What makes people visible and invisible? Who are we apart from relationships?
- 5 How good a job does Tommy do of breaking up?
- 6 What would you say to the author if she were your friend?
- 7 What is Jesus' ideal for marriage?
- 8 How do friendships and dating help prepare for marriage?

We are made in God's image: able to love.

Jesus teaches us about ourselves in Sunday's gospel. He tells us that our capacity to love is one way in which we reflect God's image and likeness. We can only fully become the person God creates us to be through loving one another. When another teacher asks about divorce, Jesus quotes the first book of the bible. God made us male and female to form lasting relationships of love in marriage.

In working through friendships and dating relationships, teens learn to love and communicate through practice. If teens don't break up and mend relationships, never communicate feelings, or never struggle to keep their own identity while caring about another, they may later drift into marriage with little ability to be intimate with another person.

Two selves do not become one self in marriage. Rather two separate people promise to work faithfully at loving each other throughout their lives, no matter what their lives bring. Each promises to open his or her deepest self to the other. Each gives to the other without giving his or herself totally away. They live and love in the mystery of being persons who never fully understand themselves, let alone another.

To be able to love is a capacity we learn from those who love us. First, parents and family. If parents or caregivers feed and rock a new baby, change diapers and soothe the child to sleep, the baby thrives. Neglect and abuse threaten babies' lives.

Second, friends. In elementary school friends share activities, do projects, and play together. In the early teen years bodies mature physically. We feel attractions to others. Our brains develop new circuits that give us the ability to see ourselves as others see us. Friends



begin to influence us and help us discover who we are and want to be. These relationships are fun, confusing, exciting, and often painful.

If one risks sharing a little bit of one's soul only to have the supposed friend blab this confidence all over school, it's painful. Temptation: Never trust anyone again. Solution: Risk finding a more trustworthy friend.

Marriage relationships depend on two people's willingness and capacity to share their deepest selves. Teen friendships give us practice in communicating, sharing, listening, and risking affection.

In the sacrament of marriage a man and woman each promise love and fidelity to the other. In marriage, a woman and man share their lives, their money, many hours of their days, their meals. They have children together whom their love nurtures through childhood and into full adulthood. They become one family. Self-giving love like this takes practice. Marriage is a sacrament of service to one another.

What is ANNULMENT?

Annulment is a process in which the Catholic Church discerns whether the sacrament of marriage ever took place between a man and woman. Every diocese has a marriage tribunal through which canon lawyers examine the grounds for annulment in cases where marriages fail. Canon law is the name for church law. A canon lawyer is an expert in Church law.

Annulment is not divorce. A divorce ends a marriage. An annulment states that one or both partners in a marriage was unable or unwilling at the time the couple married to make the commitment marriage vows express. An annulment declares sacramental marriage never took place.

The Catholic Church teaches that sacramental marriage cannot be undone. The Church recognizes such grounds for annulment as unwillingness to have children, force, fear, no intention originally of making a life-long commitment, abuse, and fraud (marrying just to gain citizenship or not revealing a previous marriage). Often the grounds are immaturity, the inability to enter into a lifelong commitment.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 What will you look for in a marriage partner to assure yourself that the other person is capable of lasting love?
- 2 What kind of program would you develop to help couples get to know each other, recognize differences in what they like and expect, and develop skills for making a marriage last?
- 3 Talk with parents about dating when they were teens.
- 4 Invite a married couple to your class to talk about what they have had to learn to make their marriage last.