FR. ROBERT BARRON:
The great Greek philosopher Aristotle spoke of the transcendent third. Here’s what he meant: A friendship will endure only in the measure that the two friends fall in love, not so much with each other but together with a transcendent third, with some good that lies beyond the two of them.
Think of two friends who together love their country, the truth, beauty and maybe its films or books or whatever it
is. They move out of simply a shared egotism because Aristotle said that’s what a friendship will devolve into unless some transcendent good pulls the friends outside of themselves. The irony or paradox is, that transcendent third kind of friendship that will actually last. If two friends or lovers simply fall in love with each other, that relationship will devolve in time. I think that’s one of the keenest insights in the history of philosophy when it comes to friendship and to relationship. Can I suggest that the Catholic liturgy senses much the same thing when it has us pray “Glory to God in the highest and peace to its people on Earth?”
That’s a formula for joy, for peace and for success. When God is given glory in the highest, then peace obtains among us. When together we fall in love with a transcendent good, namely the good of God, then we tend to have peaceful relationships. The trouble again is if we’re simply trying to establish relationships among ourselves, they will tend to devolve into bickering and ultimately into division and warfare. “Glory to God in the highest,” then peace will break out among us. I want to bring us down to earth a bit now from Aristotle and the liturgy to something very pragmatic. Years ago when I was doing full-time parish work, I’d work with engaged couples. Young people
would come to the parish who are preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church.
I get to know them, we’d chat and then we’d move into more serious conversation. I would eventually ask them some version of, “Why do you two want to get married in Church? You can get married in the justice of the peace, you can get married in a civil context, but why you do want specifically to be married in the Catholic Church?” They would kind of hem and haw and give different answers but usually they’d come up with some version of, “Well, because we love each other.” I would smile, typically, and I would say, “Well that’s great! I’m delighted you love each
other but that’s not a good reason to get married in the Catholic Church. I mean if you love each other you could announce that before the judge or you could celebrate that out in the forest. I mean that’s a good thing but it’s not a good enough reason to be married in the Catholic Church.”

They turn and look at me puzzled, and I would invoke this very principle: To get married in the Catholic Church, what you’re saying is, “we’ve discerned that together we are in love with God and we’ve discerned that God, for his purposes, has drawn us together. It’s not just the two of us met, the two of us like each other, the two of us fell in love; no, it’s something stranger, more
mysterious than that. It’s that God has, for his purposes, drawn us together so that we might find our salvation in each other’s presence and that together we might fulfill a common mission.” When you have discerned that, I would say then, “you’re ready to stand at the altar before God and his people and say, ‘Lord we’re being married in your presence.’” That’s falling in love with a transcendent third now in the fullest sense. This is why Fulton J Sheen many years ago wrote a book called Three to Get Married with the same idea. He knew Aristotle too. It’s not just about the two people, because that’s not enough. It’s not just about a husband and wife who love each
other because there has to be a third involved, namely God. Together we fall in love with God. Together we’ve surrendered to God’s purposes and now we’re ready for a Christian marriage. Just broaden that out and all the ways that we seek a relationship, we seek friendship. Always keep this Aristotelian principle in mind and I think you’ll walk a much happier path. If we’re simply looking for love period, that won’t be enough. You’ll be looking for love in all the wrong places. We should be looking for is God’s will and God’s purpose and then find somebody who is as in love with that purpose as you are. Now you found someone to love.
What is marriage? Consider two competing views: Conjugal View: Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.\[1\] Revisionists today miss this central question what is marriage? most obviously when they equate traditional marriage laws with laws banning interracial marriage. What Is Marriage? Marriage exists to bring a man and a woman together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces. At its most basic level, marriage is about attaching a man and a woman to each other as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their sexual union produces. When a baby is born, there is always a mother nearby: That is a fact of reproductive biology. The question is whether a father will be involved in the life of that child and, if so, for how long. Polygamy is a marriage which includes more than two partners.[19] When a man is married to more than one wife at a time, the relationship is called polygyny, and there is no marriage bond between the wives; and when a woman is married to more than one husband at a time, it is called polyandry, and there is no marriage bond between. Marriage is defined differently, and by different entities, based on cultural, religious, and personal factors. A commonly accepted and encompassing definition of marriage is the following: a formal union and social and legal contract between two individuals that unites their lives legally, economically, and emotionally. The contractual marriage agreement usually implies that the couple has legal obligations to each other throughout their lives or until they decide to divorce. Being married also