

Ascension Sunday

First Annual Marriage Anniversary Mass

St. Matthew

13 May 2018

Dear Father Tran, Father Nixon, Father Rodney, and Deacon Greg, but especially dear brothers and sisters who are celebrating a milestone anniversary of your married life together; dear family members and friends in the Lord Jesus:

Introduction

This Anniversary Mass is, I daresay, the centre of your celebration of 60-plus or 5 years of married life together. Undoubtedly it is not the only celebration you will enjoy as you mark your date but it is the centre from which all else radiates. In this Eucharist, which means “thanksgiving,” we thank the good Lord not only for the gift of his Son who came to save us and give us “life to the full” (Jn 10:10), but also for your lives which have been a gift to each other, to your children and grandchildren, to your parish, to the Church and the wider community. Because of the sacramental graces you have received throughout your marriage, your life has been a small “c” eucharist, a “real presence” to others for which we must give humble thanks and praise. That’s really why this afternoon is such a joyful occasion.

You, dear friends, are a shining example of the power of faith and of the willing acceptance to embrace Jesus’ example of selfless, sacrificial love for each other. You are here this afternoon because of

sacrifice, selflessness, love and faith. Thank you for bearing witness to the rest of us of the beauty and joy of the vocation to marriage which you have been living.

Keeping One's Word

Couples grounded in a lively faith are able to see in the difficult and even tragic moments of their life together the faithful presence of God, the One who never leaves us, and the One who keeps his word – as is evident in today's feast of the Ascension. Jesus was "lifted up" from us (cf. Acts 1:9) so that, from Heaven, he could forever be with us (cf. Mk 16:19). There is nothing to compare with having someone keep their word to us. Jesus has done this – and so have you kept your word to each other through thick and thin. In a world of broken promises, what a wonderful example of steadfastness!

Fidelity Is Possible

You are living signs, dear friends, that despite the frailty of the human condition, fidelity to the vocation of marriage is not only possible, but it is worth the effort. It is possible for a husband and wife to live the vow to love one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, forever, until death do them part. Thank you for your witness to the faithfulness of God's love. The marriage of each couple, each one in a unique way, is a living icon of God's love for us. You mirror that love of his which is faithful, fruitful and forever.

A great problem widely discussed these days, and confirmed by recent survey data which appeared in the *National Post*, is the precipitous decline in the number of marriages and of those who are convinced of its importance to their own lives and to society. Many young people are opting to cohabitate without marriage. They question if it is possible to make the definitive decision to marry, to love one person forever. They seem to be afraid of making a definitive choice, a life decision, of handing over, in trust, their future to another person.

We live in a culture of the temporary, of the provisional. As Christians, however, we seek something permanent and lasting. And we find that in doing the will of God in all things, including marriage and family life. And we know the Lord's will about marriage because he is its author. As recorded in the Book of Genesis, he established it to be permanent and life-giving, to be the fundamental cell of society. Dear anniversary couples: you bear witness to the good news that the definitive commitment of marriage is possible; moreover not only is that permanence possible; it is beautiful.

Challenges under the Cross

There are crosses in every vocation. But the Lord is always there to help us carry that cross and move forward on our path. The good news is that the Cross triumphs. The love of Christ is victorious, and within that victory is found the true happiness of marriage, which is "the

sacrament – the living sign – of the love of Christ and the Church, a love which finds its proof and guarantee in the Cross.”¹

You walk together as spouses in the often difficult journey of life, hand in hand helping each other to grow, with trust in God’s faithful love. While there might well have been times when the challenges seemed overwhelming, you didn’t run away from your commitment, but put your trust in the truth of God’s word that what he has joined together, we must not separate (cf. Mk 10:9).

For us as Christians, marriage is based on the love that Jesus has for the Church – the people of God – you and me. That love entailed Jesus’ giving of himself completely, bringing him to the Cross on which he gave away his life for the sake of those he loved, that they in turn might find the fullness of life – a life of meaning, purpose, peace and ultimately, eternal life.

As you reflect on your years of marriage, be they many or few, the stories and events that are likely racing through your minds and hearts probably do not reflect a naïve or fairy-tale notion of your relationship. Quite the contrary. Your stories and lives reflect hard work, struggle and pain, suffering and joy, and a selflessness that has sought the well being of your spouse and your family. Your marriage has endured because you

¹ Francis, Homily (14 September 2014).

can see it as part of something much bigger than yourselves. You have come to see your marriage as something of a mystery – the mystery of God’s love woven into creation – embraced in your lives and lived in your relationship with each other.

In speaking to newlyweds, but I think this applies to even our longest-married couples present here, Pope Francis, said this about the continual help the Lord offers you:

The love of Christ, which has blessed and sanctified the union of husband and wife, is able to sustain their love and to renew it when, humanly speaking, it becomes lost, wounded or worn out. The love of Christ can restore to spouses the joy of journeying together. This is what marriage is all about: man and woman walking together, wherein the husband helps his wife to become ever more a woman, and wherein the woman has the task of helping her husband to become ever more a man. This is the task that you both share.²

Conclusion

May the Lord continue to bless all of you with His love! With your lives, may you continue to radiate to others the beauty and joy of your married life! Our world needs this Good News. This is the Good News

² Francis, Homily at Rite of Marriage (14 September 2014).

we celebrate today. Dear anniversary couples, may Mary and Joseph, who teach us the splendour and sacrifice of married love, accompany you on your journey together and intercede for you always!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver