

## **Celebration of Marriage**

Our Lady of Good Counsel

25 August 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons, but especially dear brothers and sisters who are about to enter into the sacred covenant of Holy Matrimony in the presence of witnesses and of your families and friends:

### ***Introduction***

Today is truly a blessed and beautiful day for you, dear couples, as well as for all of us, because we are coming together for this Mass during which you will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. It is a very special occasion for you, dear friends, especially for those who have waited a long time, even many years, for this day.

With this celebration you will once again be able to share fully in the Church's sacramental life, above all by receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion. Moreover, the life that you have already begun to live together will now be blessed with the sacramental graces of the Sacrament of Marriage.

I want to thank everyone who has accompanied you on your journey, giving you their dedicated support. I am thinking of Deacon Greg Barcelon, the Director of Filipino Ministry for the Archdiocese, the priests of the 13 parishes represented here this afternoon, the staff of our Life, Marriage and Family Office at the Pastoral Centre, and the many volunteers who have worked so energetically so that we could all be together for this celebration. Above all, of course, I wish to thank the

families of the couples for the support they have given you when you decided to take this step.

Our gratitude to the good Lord is endless for the stream of blessings we are witnessing here today.

### ***Sacramental Grace***

Dear couples: because you have all been baptized, your marriage, when it is celebrated today in the Sacrament of Matrimony, becomes a supernatural reality; that is, God enters into your married life with his grace in a special way.

We recognize that, from the very beginning, God intended that a man and woman be united in the “one flesh” of marriage so as to establish family life. Nevertheless, with the coming of Jesus Christ such natural marriage was raised up to a new level, a truly supernatural one. Recall that Jesus performed his very first miracle at a wedding in Cana. His presence brought joy and blessing to that couple – as it does for every couple present here today some 2000 years later.

For followers of Jesus, marriage is more than an institution found in all societies. It is also, and even more importantly, a sign of Christ’s love for his Church (cf. Mt 19:1-12; Mk 10:1-12; Eph 5:21-32). It tells us something about God’s love for all of us.

When Christians marry they can now reflect how much Jesus loved us, his Church. What is this love like? It is faithful, lasting and fruitful.

In married love sanctified by the Sacrament of Marriage we can see and experience God's love for us. Moreover, he promises to be with you in such a way that you can live out this calling, be this mirror of divine love.

The Sacrament of Matrimony “is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses.”<sup>1</sup> In a word, the covenant of marriage is your path to holiness, your road to heaven, as well as the way to happiness on earth. It is your primary vocation and calling in life.

Through this Sacrament, which you are about to celebrate, God makes a promise to you – just as you will to each other – that he will be with you, accompany you in your marriage. And what does his presence promise, indeed guarantee, if you are receptive? He promises to make your love for each grow down through the years, making it stronger and enduring.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 72.

Just as you will soon pledge faithfulness to each other, so too, the good Lord promises to you that he will be with you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, all the days of your life, so that that you will always be complete strangers to adultery and divorce.<sup>2</sup> He will give you the strength to take up the inevitable crosses that accompany every family life, to forgive one another time and again, and to bear one another's burdens.<sup>3</sup>

United now by Holy Matrimony, your life together as husband and wife“will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the Sacrament.”<sup>4</sup>

Now let's take a brief look at the Readings chosen for the Liturgy to see what light they shed on living Christian marriage.

### ***From Tobit***

In our First Reading from the Book of Tobit, Tobias and his wife Sarah pray together on their wedding night that the Lord will grant them “mercy and safety” (Tob 8:5). Two simple lessons for your married life can be drawn from this passage.

First, take to heart the example of Tobias and Sarah. Like them,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1642.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 74.

make sure that you pray daily together as husband and wife. It doesn't have to be long or complicated. It could be by reading a short passage from Scripture, a decade of the Rosary, or your favourite prayers. And, if you have children at home (and not just young children), pray with them together as a family.

Second, this Scripture does not shy away from recounting the wedding night of the newlyweds. This tells us that for Tobias and Sarah, as for each couple here, “the divine hovers over all that is human, the unseen God is intimate to every facet of His creation”<sup>5</sup> – including every dimension of marriage. So, dear friends, do not exclude the good Lord from anything in your lives: not from your trials, your troubles, your temptations, your sufferings, or your joys. Remember always: the Lord is with you; he never hides his face from you.

### ***Gospel***

When we turn to today's Gospel, Jesus brings us back to what God willed “at the beginning” (cf. Mt 19:4). He was responding to the Pharisees who were questioning him about the lawfulness of divorce. Jesus' answer is clear: “what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mt 19:6; cf. Mk 10:5-9; Lk 16:18). If divorce had once been permitted in certain cases by the Law given to Moses, it was only

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<sup>5</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, *Grace on Crutches* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 171.

because of the people's "hardness of heart" (Mt 19:8). But Jesus restored marriage and the family to their original form (cf. Mt 10:1-12), to what God intended when he created man and woman.

What Jesus is saying here, therefore, is straightforward. The bond that will join you together as spouses when you give your consent will have God himself as its witness. You will be making a covenant, a promise before him and the Church's witnesses. Breaking that covenant is therefore not at your disposal.

I cannot promise that because you will be a sacramentally married couple that all your difficulties will all disappear. But Pope Francis, in speaking to newlyweds did say that the Church can promise this:

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.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, Homily at Rite of Marriage (14 September 2014).

## ***Conclusion***

Let us now proceed to the Rite of Marriage, invoking God's blessing upon the 30 couples present this afternoon. Grant, O Lord, that their families may always be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and domestic churches.

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