

Easter 4-C

Second Annual Marriage Anniversary Mass

St. Paul

12 May 2019

Dear Monsignor Luterbach, Father George, Deacons Felix and Richard; but especially dear brothers and sisters who are celebrating a milestone anniversary of your married life together with your family members and friends:

Introduction

This Mass marks a great occasion in the lives of the 150 couples from 50 of our parishes gathered here to celebrate a milestone anniversary. Two couples are celebrating 70 plus years of marriage, and ten are marking 60 plus years. All total, we are giving thanks to the good Lord for thousands of years of holy Matrimony faithfully lived by you. I offer you heartfelt congratulations.

Sacramental Grace

You, dear friends, bear witness to the joyful, sacrificial, faithful love that the sacramental grace of the Sacrament has made possible. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else “to perfect the couple’s love.”¹ Simply stated, grace has made you better lovers. Your lives mirror the truth that “marriage is “a gift” from the Lord (1 Cor 7:7) raised by Jesus to reflect the love that Christ has for his

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1641.

Church (cf. Eph 5:21-32), a love which culminated in giving himself in sacrifice on the Cross.

Mirror of Christ's Love for the Church

This mission of making visible, giving concrete expression, to the love with which the Lord loves his Church must be understood as a work in progress. It is not intended to burden couples with a impossible mission, for marriage as a sign entails “a dynamic process..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God.”²

Yes, your married life has been – and still is – a process of growth. Each spouse is a means God uses of helping the other to mature and grow in holiness. Pope Francis has written that “Each marriage is a kind of salvation history,’ which from fragile beginnings – thanks to God’s gift and a creative and generous response on our part – grows over time into something precious and enduring.” He then suggests that “the greatest mission of two people in love is to help one another become, respectively, more a man and more a woman.”³ I think the Holy Father is suggesting that authentic married love has the potential of helping each spouse shape his or her own identity as a unique child of

² Francis, General Audience (2 April 2014); cited in *Amoris Laetitia*, 122.

³ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 221.

God. At every stage of life, couples are forming one another, leading the other to a closer relationship with the Lord in a life of holiness.

Lasting Love

Thank you for inspiring us by living your vocation with faith in God, in good times and in bad. Despite the challenges and tragedies that undoubtedly have come your way, you have not abandoned the vows you made on your wedding day. In a culture that idolizes the ephemeral, the pleasures of the moment, yours is an example that reminds all of us that we are made for love which is lasting.

Promising such life-long love, as you did on the day of your marriage, was possible – and remains possible today – because you were able to surrender your future entirely to the one you loved. This scares many young people today, who cannot imagine that placing that degree of trust in another person: today, yes; tomorrow, who knows?

Admittedly, dear friends, when you committed yourself exclusively and definitively to your spouse, you took a risk and made a bold gamble.⁴ It is only by God’s grace, the sacramental grace of marriage, that the gamble paid off. Be thankful!

What your anniversaries proclaim loudly and clearly is that God intends married love to be definitive. “The lasting union expressed by

⁴ Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 132.

the marriage vows is more than a formality or a traditional formula; it is rooted in the natural inclinations of the human person. For believers, it is also a covenant before God that calls for fidelity.”⁵

Dear anniversary couples: you bear witness to the good news that the definitive commitment of marriage is possible, that the permanence of marriage is not only possible, but humanly and spiritually rewarding.

Trials and Abundant Blessings

As you reflect on your years of marriage, I am sure you can also recall times of struggle and hardship, as well as peace and joy. How could there be 50 or 60 years of marriage, or even 5 or 10, without trials? Yet these trials have not broken you. You have known sorrows, you have known suffering and all of that you also bring to this celebration, leaving nothing behind. Yet through it all you have come here to give thanks and to proclaim us that beyond all the trials, the sorrows and the sufferings, the shadows of the years, your marriage has overflowed with blessings.⁶ In a word, God has been steadfast in his love for you, a love which he still continues to renew daily in your married life.

⁵ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 123.

⁶ Cf. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Homily (4 October 2014).

Mentorship

Because the Lord has been good to you, I would ask you to consider sharing the goodness of marriage, amidst all its trials and tribulations, with young married couples. Our Office of Life, Marriage and Family has begun a program of mentorship, and is looking for mentors who will accompany these young couples. You will hear more about this in the near future in your parishes. I urge you, as a small way of giving thanks for your marriage and family, to think seriously about accompanying a couple whose journey is just beginning. They could learn so much from your experience. You have a lot to give!

Gospel of the Good Shepherd

I can't let Good Shepherd Sunday pass, without at least one reflection on the Gospel.

In Jesus' hands we are secure. He never leaves us alone. He hunts us down when we go astray. And he does this individually and personally: one by one. He goes in search of us and pursues us when we seem to be escaping from the sound of his voice.

Jesus takes us upon his shoulders and carries our wounded humanity. He carries us each of us, and, Good Shepherd that he is, he has even laid down his life for us (cf. Jn 10:15), the sheep, to keep us

safe from the evil one.⁷

Shepherding, then, is about caring for those who are weak, lost and in need. That's us. All of us, from infancy to old age, need others who really care for us, who understand us and who love us.

If we ourselves are ever to guide others, whether that be our own children or others entrusted to our care, we first of all have to be good sheep. Jesus was, after all, first the "Lamb of God" – as pointed out by John the Baptist and recalled in today's second reading (cf. Rev 7:17 – before he revealed himself as the Good Shepherd of others. He listened to the Father and obeyed his will.

The same goes for us. To be good parents, don't we first have to be good sons and daughters? And to be good priests, don't we first have to be obedient sons of the Church? How can we love others if we do not know that we have been loved?⁸ We can be shepherds to others – our children, our parishioners – only if we have first listened to the Good Shepherd's voice.

Conclusion

May the Lord continue to bless all of you celebrating milestone

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome (24 April 2005).

⁸ Cf. Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 184-186.

anniversaries! May you continue to radiate to others the beauty and joy of the vocation and mission of married life! Our world needs this Good News. As we continue this Eucharist, let us pray for the Lord's continued blessings upon you and your families.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
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