



Homily – Marriage Day Mass

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"There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited."

I wonder how many of you, married couples some of whom have been together for a long time, have ever stopped to think that with a small change to the location mentioned in the gospel story this very same set of words could be said about your own wedding day. *"There was a wedding at Subiaco, or Mirrabooka, or Yangebup or Kalgoorlie. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited."*

This might seem an unusual idea with which to begin a homily but at a time when the whole meaning of marriage seems to be under question by so many in our society it is important for us as Christians, and in a particularly way for us who are Catholics, to remind ourselves that for us marriage is a deeply religious, deeply spiritual and profoundly sacramental reality. It is in fact, according to the Book of Genesis, at the very heart of God's creative intention for humanity. In chapter two of Genesis we find God, after having created the first human being, saying *"it is not good that the man should be alone ... I will make him a helpmate"*. In the beautiful language of Genesis God then creates the woman, Eve, from the side of the man, Adam, and entrusts them to each other. *"This is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh,"* says Adam in response. And then Bible, the inspired Word of God, announces: *"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and the two become one body."* And as we know it is this profound and intimate communion between the man and the woman which makes new life possible - and the creation of that new life, or at least the deeply grounded openness to it, fulfils God's intention that humanity should be made in his image, the image of the life-giving God.

Marriage then, as you all know so well, is about a man and a woman committing themselves to each other in total self-giving, in fidelity, in courageous trust and hope, and in openness to being co-creators with God in the bringing of new life into the world.



In our Catholic tradition of course, there is a depth to this that even we often fail to grasp. Our tradition has always seen the story of the creation of Eve from the side of Adam as a pointer to the creation of the Church from the side of Christ. As the soldier's spear opened the side of the dead Christ, blood and water flowed out, symbols of the Eucharist and of baptism, the two sacraments on which the Church is founded. And of course that blood and water flowed down over Mary the mother of Jesus and John, his most faithful disciple, as they stood at the foot of the cross, representing the Church. Our tradition teaches us, then, that the Church is as profoundly united to Christ as a husband and wife are united to each other - or rather a husband and wife are as profoundly united to each other as the Church is to Christ. This is why St Paul can say that in speaking of the union between a husband and wife he is speaking of a great mystery which first and foremost applies to Christ and his Church.

It is this great mystery which can help us understand just why a married couple can say of their wedding day that *"the mother of Jesus was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited"*. The commitment of a man and a woman to each other is a sharing in the commitment of the Lord to his Church - a commitment which is generous, self-sacrificing, total and irrevocable.

This of course is the ideal and as Christians we know that we are called to high ideals. This is nowhere clearer than in the gospels where Jesus says to us, *"You must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). The opening paragraph of tonight's first reading expresses this ideal in other words. *"You should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience"*. These are the qualities of Jesus and we are called to make his qualities our own. But while the ideals set before us are very high, and it can never be the Church's role to betray these ideals, we all know, married people as much as anyone else, that we constantly fail to live up to the ideals of the gospel. This is why the opening paragraph of the first reading immediately goes on to say, *"Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same."* This too of course is an ideal and we often fail in this as well. We are not always as forgiving as we could be. We do not always find it easy to bear with one another. In this sense, it seems to me, a marriage, as well as involving a lot of living, also involves a lot of dying. Husbands and wives must be ready to die to self-preoccupation, to self-centredness, to a "what about me" mentality and instead model themselves on the Lord Jesus who "loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her".

For this reason I want to say to all the married couples here this evening, and to those who are contemplating marriage in the future, that the mother of Jesus, together with Jesus and his disciples, were not or will not only be present on your wedding day. They have been and will be, present as you live out the reality of your marriage, with all its moments of joy and its moments of sadness and difficulty. And if at times you feel as if the wine of joy has run out in your marriage, then allow the Lord to transform the tasteless water of the marriage into the new wine of joy, of hope and of deep serenity which is the promise of Christian marriage.



And if, through death, separation or abandonment, you find yourself alone, remember that while members of the Church might be unfaithful to the Lord, the Lord will never be unfaithful to the Church. Those who have suffered through the death of their spouse, or even more painfully through betrayal or infidelity, or even the inexplicable collapse of their relationship, will never be abandoned by the Lord. In the most violent storms of our lives, he comes to us through the turmoil and says to us, *"Have courage, do not be afraid, for I am with you"*.

Perhaps we should allow St Paul to have the last word this evening. As he says in tonight's reading, *"May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts ... Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you ... And never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus"*.