



2017 Annual Marriage Day Mass

HOMILY

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Saturday 12 August, 2017

When I sat down to prepare some thoughts for today's Mass, and especially for this homily, I was fascinated by the fact that those who chose the readings for this Mass decided to use the same readings which were used for the celebration of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. It is a powerful reminder to me that in a very real sense every one of us shares the same vocation, whether we are clergy, or religious or married people or single people. Every one of us is called, in the words of the First Reading, to "let the message of Christ completely fill our lives". We are all called to "sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God". And the challenge for all of us is, as the Gospel today puts it, to "put God's work first and do what he wants".

This common vocation that we all share is referred to in the scriptures when we are told that we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God". Of course in living out this common vocation we do so in the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves, or perhaps it is better to say, into which God's providence has led us. There are many vocations in the Church and all are equally valid and precious. Each one is meant to be a gift to the person who has received it, but also a gift to the whole Church. And each vocation, in its own unique way, is meant to be a kind of sacrament, a living and powerful sign, of something without which the Church cannot be all that God has created it to be. Here in the Cathedral this morning as we celebrate one of these special vocations, the call to Christian marriage, it is important for us to ask just what it is that the sacrament of marriage, and the living sacrament of married people, is keeping alive for the good of the whole Church.

Saint Paul answers this question when he tells us that Christian marriage is a sacrament of Christ's love for his Church. Quoting from the Book of Genesis, St Paul says that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one", St Paul goes on to say, "and I am saying that it refers to Christ and his Church".

For married couples this must be both a daunting and an inspiring thought. In your lives together, with all the joys and the challenges, the achievements and the disappointments, the moments of failure and of reconciliation, the misunderstandings and the gifts of forgiveness given and received, the hopes fulfilled and the dreams not yet realised, you are, for the whole Church, a living sign of the fidelity to which we are all called and an expression of the unbreakable bond which exists between the Lord and us, between Christ and his Church. The love which you have for each other, and which has held you together sometimes for many, many decades, shares in and reveals at least to some extent, the nature of the love that Christ has for us, and the nature of the love we are being invited to offer to him.



There can hardly be a vocation in the Church of greater dignity and importance than this. Just as religious men and women who take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are living reminders that these are qualities every Christian is called to bring alive in his or her life, married people, in and through the power of their love for each other, are meant to be together, for the whole Church, living and powerful reminders of Christ's unbreakable love for and fidelity to each of us individually and to all of us together as his Church.

Of course, just as religious do not always live up to their commitments perfectly, and just as bishops and priests are often very pale reflections of the Good Shepherd whose living image they are meant to be, so married couples will sometimes stumble, and sometimes fall, as they travel the road of their married life. This is why, among the many things Jesus shared with his disciples as he formed them into the first community of Christian faith, the need to constantly seek and give generous and unreserved forgiveness to each other was constantly on his lips. In a broken world, this need for forgiveness will always be present. What Jesus himself has shown us, and what married couples are also called to bring alive in their own marriages, is the truth that the brokenness of our world can only be healed with forgiveness – and for this to happen we will need to have large and generous hearts. The fidelity of Jesus to his Church is never in doubt – notwithstanding the dreadful failure of so many members of the Church to be faithful to him. This is the daunting but inspiring ideal to which the Lord is calling us, and to which Christian marriage is called to witness.

At this time in our history, when the very foundations of our understanding of marriage are called into question by so many in our society, the witness of fidelity, of forgiveness, of commitment and re-commitment, which tells the story of the lives of all who are gathered here in the Cathedral this morning, becomes our best and most powerful answer to the challenges Christian marriage is facing. Thank you for your presence here today, thank you for your witness and your fidelity, thank you for being a living sign of the unbreakable and unswerving communion between Christ and his Church. May God bless you all.