



Marriage Day Mass 2019

Homily

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**Saturday 10 August 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Our present Holy Father, Pope Francis, unlike his predecessors, often speaks in lively images more than in precise theological formulations. A good example of this is his now famous statement that the mission of the Church today is to be a healer of people's wounds and a warmer of people's hearts. This is a beautiful and engaging vision of the Church, but its real beauty is that it points to the intimate link between Christ and his Church. We, the Holy People of God, are called to heal people's wounds and warm people's hearts because this is exactly what Jesus did, and we are his disciples, called to follow in his footsteps.

Another of Pope Francis's now famous sayings is this: *we do not live in an era of change - we live in a change of era*. There are many dimensions to this saying but one which stands out for me is the fact that the values of the society in which we live are increasingly being detached from their foundation in our Judaeo-Christian heritage. So many of the challenges we face today, especially in the area of morality, find their origins here. We might think of the present drive for the legalisation of Voluntary Assisted Dying, that is, euthanasia, for example, or of the widespread acceptance of the practice of abortion. Or again we might reflect on the number of couples who live together before marrying or who enter into marriage positively excluding any possibility of having children and creating a family. The list of challenges could go on - you are as aware of them as I am. Indeed I am sure many of you grapple with them within your own families.

How are we to make sense of this and how are we to respond? These are big questions which require patient and persistent prayer, reflection, discussion and decision.

We have gathered here in the Cathedral this morning to celebrate the gift of married life and love, and of course, within that, the gift of fidelity. We do so in the context of our faith and we do so proudly and gratefully. That we believe in God, and believe that life can be truly lived to the full only when God is acknowledged and sought as the answer to our deepest needs, is not something



to be ashamed of or hidden, even if it is fashionable today to ridicule people of faith and seek to intimidate them into silence.

This faith, to which we are called and which this morning we celebrate, certainly asks a lot of us. God asks a lot of us. God calls us to courage, to compassion, to forgiveness, to generosity, to fidelity - God calls us, in other words, as this morning's gospel reminds us, to be like the grain of wheat which falls to the ground and dies so that a rich harvest might be gained.

This falling to the ground is exactly what Jesus did. Through his unwavering gift of himself to us, which led inevitably and terribly to his violent death, he broke the chains that hold us captive in our selfishness, in our vindictiveness, in our callousness and in our pridefulness and now sets us free to be the people God created us to be: living images of himself as the Book of Genesis reminds us.

Created in the image and likeness of God: this is our glory, this is our salvation, and this is the origin of our dignity, a dignity given to us by God who is and always remains the Lord and giver of our lives and of the lives of every human being.

The God in whose image we are created, the God who is revealed to us in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, is a God who brings to life, not a God who deals in death. It should be no surprise, then, that at the heart of Christian marriage is the desire and readiness to share in the mystery of God, the life-giver, by creating a family in love, by being always lovingly open to the gift of children, should that be God's plan. Even when such an openness is difficult and challenging - even when it involves a falling to the ground so that a rich harvest might grow - it is a sharing in the work of our life-giving God.

This God of life is, of course, only fully made known in Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, made flesh and blood for us. In Jesus we see the mystery of God translated we might almost say into human language, into a human life. Jesus gives himself away to us and for us in love, because that is who Jesus is in the mystery of the Trinity. In the mystery of God, the Father in an eternal act without beginning or end, gives himself joyfully and lovingly to the Son. The Son, also in an eternal act without beginning or end, receives who he is from the Father and gives himself back to the Father in joyful and loving gratitude. And this eternal act of joyful, love-filled giving and receiving is the Holy Spirit.

This is the God in whose image we are made: a God of joyful and loving self-giving. This is the God who, in a unique and powerful way, is seen and experienced in the gift and the hope of



Christian marriage. God is perfect and we are not. God's loving is perfect and ours is not. But in the joy and struggle of married life, in its joyful welcoming of children and its creating of a home of hospitality and love, in its readiness to forgive and understand - in other words in the willingness of husbands and wives to fall to the ground and die to themselves so that a harvest of new and abundant life might begin to grow in their commitment to each other, the God of life and love is seen and experienced and the world in which we live is healed and enriched.

Thank you for the healing and hope which your marriages, through God's grace, bring to our broken and suffering world.