



Annual Marriage Day Mass

Homily

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Saturday, 27 October, 2018

On a recent parish visitation, I had a chance meeting with a remarkable man. I had just celebrated Mass for the residents of a home for the aged and I was calling in on those who could not join the others.

I came upon a man sitting in the sun, who greeted me with, "Buon giorno". We began to chat. I was surprised that he was so eager to tell me about his life.

His name is Filippo. He came to Australia when he was a young teenager. His family had sent him out from Italy to live with an uncle and work on the farm. He had to work very hard, a lesson he learnt well, for he would work hard for the rest of his life.

Filipo eventually set out on his own and acquired a dairy farm in the southwest. He worked hard to make it provide for his family. He worked and worked, and achieved his goal of giving his children the education that he had never had himself.

Then he said a wonderful thing. "You know, I worked very hard. I did many things. I am proud of what I achieved. But what was the greatest thing, was that God gave me the best thing: God blessed me with my wife. She was the greatest blessing in my life. And more than that, he gave me my children. I am so proud of them. They came as the blessing of God. My wife and my children have been great gifts to me".

Filipo sat there in the sun, contented and deeply happy for the life he has lived. He fully recognises the goodness of God who he considers his friend. He would have been happy with receiving only half of the blessings, but he can see that God has been extravagant with him.

I left this conversation with Filippo thinking on how he might have nurtured his marriage. How did he know what he should do to build the close, loving relationship with his wife?

Of course, he had had the experience of living with his own parents, then coming to this country, he lived with another family, with his uncle and aunt. He learnt much from these experiences. He had heard the gospel preached which encouraged him to become mature in his own faith. This helped him form a very positive adult relationship with God. He learnt how to see God in the great number of events in his life. Filippo learnt to trust the goodness and mercy of God, especially in the tough times.



St Paul speaks about each of us having been given our own share of grace. This is to help us succeed as humans, as Christians, in our vocations of marriage, holy orders, religious life and the dedicated service some offer as singles. He names a hierarchy of service that these gifts of grace create: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. He discerned that this hierarchy of services are meant to secure unity and build up the People of God. He could see that the grace that each receives is given for the good of all, as we grow to maturity. Then we find ourselves being more conformed to Christ.

The couples with us this morning have received the grace to succeed. We honour them today for their years of committed love. Those closest to them will be able to recognise their growth due to their support for one another and the challenge they give to one another. They might also have seen faith and trust deepen within them.

These couples have reached milestones in their journey through life together. Their experiences can be of great assistance to the young couples beginning their married life, as well as those who are well into their journey.

I am grateful for the ways that Derek Boylen and the staff of the Marriage Education office provide preparation to couples as they begin their marriages, and for their seeking of new ways to support married couples as they move through the various stages of their lives together. This work could be enhanced by the involvement of some of you who celebrate the milestones of your marriage with us today. Your experiences and encouragement could bring reassurance and confidence to many others.

Let me return to Filippo sitting in the sun, contented, deeply grateful to his loving God. In truth, he is approaching the end of his life but he is joyful, trusting and deeply grateful for his life and the faithfulness of God. It is wonderful to have reached this point in his life. This would be the blessing that each of us seeks having walked with God, hand in hand with our spouse. May this be our prayer today.