



Marriage Day Mass

Homily

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

**St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Saturday 19 August 2023**

Each year as we were growing up in my family, we would take almost like a pilgrimage journey back down to the southwest corner of the state, to Karridale, where my father's family came when they first arrived in Australia to establish a dairy farm.

We would take a caravan and park in the caravan park at Augusta and use that as a base for going to places that were very significant to my father, when he was a boy. Every now and then, in the caravan park, though, there'd be a loud crashing sound as one of the big branches of the Kari trees where our site was located, would fall.

Dad would say to me, how that reminded him of how when he was little, they used to refer to those trees and the branches that would occasionally drop unexpectedly from them – as widow makers.

Some of you might have previously heard that expression of certain eucalyptus trees that self-prune. I won't go into all the science about that. But that unexpected fall of a huge branch from a tree almost silently, was a continuing danger. And it seemed to us very strange that you'd put a caravan park in the middle of a forest like that.

The image that we have just heard before the gospel that we've heard this morning, the image that Jesus puts to the first disciples was that he is the trunk of a vine. And we are meant to be the branches. He then goes on to apply that image to the words of the gospel that we have just heard proclaimed, that it is that love of Christ for His father, the father for his son Christ that creates that unity among them and enables them, then to offer that same bond with us. So that image is a beautiful image of that connection between each of us. And I would extend that obviously to married couples. That image of being connected so intimately and so closely to God. That we are like the branches of a vine that is connected to the trunk from which we get the strength. We receive the graces, and we receive those gifts that we need in order to be firstly, disciples of Christ. And then through marriage, to be witnesses of that love of God at work between us. That



love of God is comprehensive. It is part of our lives. It is part of every moment of our lives. It is that love that brings about the possibility of unity despite all those things in our lives and even in our society, that are attempting to pull people apart. I would say that Christian marriage are one of those wonderful things that we're able to offer to the world as an example of the power that Jesus Christ has, the power the spirit has to bring about unity. Perhaps the only principle that will bring unity among us. It really is is a comprehensive power, this love of God.

When we grow up in a family, we experience the love of God, we experienced that love, in what we see happening in the lives of our parents. We see that love expressed in their union, and in their struggles. Of course, we are all imperfect people and therefore, the love that we experience in our families, is as good as it can be. And we will always be imperfect. Even that desire in our hearts, through our marriages, to be examples, living examples of the love of God, you could say is experienced in an imperfect way, because of who we are. And the need that we have to remain connected to Christ, to maintain that bond with Christ, who is the source of love, who is the source of us growing in love. I don't think there is a greater sign than that which we cherish in our Christian faith, of the cross, a sign of forgiveness, a sign of that possibility that we can be healed, of that possibility that we can be more than we might have been before. It's a continuing sign and reassurance to us, that there is the possibility of healing and of being released from those things that impede our ability to love. It is a sign that it is possible for us to ask forgiveness, to say sorry, and is on the other side, a possibility that we can be able to forgive. So, the cross, in that sense remains a very powerful image and a very important promise given to us by the Lord, that we will be able to take that risk to ask forgiveness and take that risk, to offer forgiveness in our marriages, because this is really the very core of love.

Today, we are celebrating these many, many years of marriage. Some here are celebrating anniversaries, which might be five or 10 years, perhaps, 20 years, some 50 years, there might even be some even more than that. In a previous year, I think we even had a couple celebrating 70 years of marriage.

It is wonderful that we're able to gather and for the church to recognise the journey that each and every one of you is on. To recognise the aspirations that you expressed on that day of your marriage, when you said "I make this promise to you to love you all the days of my life, to love you in the good times and in the times of challenge and struggle." When you said "I will love you and I will express that love when I am able to ask forgiveness, and when I am able to forgive."

It takes time to heal, of course, and many of the hurts that we have had, will take time. But we're committed to using time, in order to enable that grace of God, to bring about a healing within us. To make us aware and alert to the negative power of bitterness, and resentment, which can take hold of us. That bitterness is like a cancer - it fuels itself, and it will eventually destroy the person who holds this bitterness in their heart. Let's always be reminded of those words of St Paul, do



not let the sun go down on your anger. Let that be in a sense, that principle that we will use each day. So that forgiveness can be given, that forgiveness can be a blessing at the end of each day, so that we can begin afresh on that next day. Bearing in mind, of that cross that is in our life, that cross of redemption, that cross of possibility, that we can be people of faith, of trust, and people who are able to offer forgiveness to one another. So, we thank God for this opportunity for us to celebrate today. And again, to come to the Lord, to recognise that it is the Holy Spirit that has called us, the Holy Spirit that will sustain us and give us that possibility of living, truly loving lives. And lives that will grow and love that will grow because of that presence of Christ among us. So, we thank God for you and we encourage you to continue to be a sign of the presence of that powerful spirit in our world today. That brings unity, when everything, many things perhaps, are opposed to unity. We pray that Your witness, your love, will be an encouragement to others.