

## **Easter 6 - B**

### **Fourth Annual Marriage Anniversary Mass**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

9 May 2021

Dear Father Stan, Father Nick, Father Pablo, Deacons Richard and Mike; but today especially dear couples who are celebrating a milestone anniversary of your marriage. Before me I see two couples, but actually I see before several hundred other couples who are here, probably via livestreaming, and whose pictures are pasted on the pews – a wonderful sight. It makes me look forward to when people will be in these pews.

#### ***Introduction***

Because of the necessary restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, this afternoon most of you are gathered in the domestic church of your home. Your ability to celebrate with many family members and friends and with the festivity that befits your milestone anniversary has been curtailed. Nonetheless, I do hope that when the date approaches, or if it is already passed, that you do celebrate, because you are marking a great blessing in your married life this year, and I offer you my heartfelt and prayerful congratulations, as well as my admiration.

You heard Glen mention that there are over 350 couples, from 60 parishes, with over 11,000 years of married life. That's the number that registered. We know that there are many more celebrating similar anniversaries.

Dear jubilarians – that's who you are: you deserve the honour of

the special congratulations not only from your families but from all of us in the Archdiocese. With you, we rejoice in the goodness of the Lord who has granted you such blessings and, through your witness, bestowed on all of us so many graces.

### ***Memories and Milestone Anniversaries***

This Mass, then, is an opportunity for you to reflect on your marriage and to rekindle the joys of your wedding day and life together, as well as to recall the challenges you have faced, and how you have overcome them.

No doubt many of you, if not most of you, will recall nights when you stayed up with a sick child or perhaps spent in consoling an aging parent. You have coped with ill-health, financial concerns, but I daresay, above all, with worry about the material and spiritual welfare of your children and grandchildren.

As you look back on your marriage, you know that it wasn't all sweetness and harmony. There were crises that you had to learn to live through. At the beginning it was just getting used to each other – to your differences, to the otherness of the other. That didn't just happen without some sort of struggle, without some sacrifice, without learning to accept each other, and each one's quirks and even idiosyncrasies. Yet, in overcoming moments of crisis, new dimensions of love opened the door

to new dimensions of life.<sup>1</sup>

As you reflect on your years of marriage, whether it be five or seventy – two couples are registered with 70 years and one with 74 years – I’m sure that your story inevitably falls short of an impossible fairytale or storybook ideal. On the contrary, your stories reflect hard work, struggle, pain, suffering and joy, and a selflessness that seeks the well-being of the other.

Disappointment and perhaps even disillusionment have come your way, as they do in every person’s life. Yet, through your faith in God and “abiding” in his love (cf. Jn 15:10), as we heard in the Gospel, you have maintained a spirit of gratitude and an inner joy (cf. Jn 15:11) through it all.<sup>2</sup>

Your marriage has endured because it is something larger, broader, bigger than yourselves. Even if you did not – at least not very often – avert to it, what has been happening in your marriage is God’s love at work. Your daily lives for all these years have been lived with the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, the Sacrament instituted by the Lord himself. What you – and we – are celebrating today is that marriage, while it is demanding, sacrificial and leads to selflessness, is ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Homily, Miami (16 February 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Archbishop Michael Neary, Tuam, Homily (17 December 2020).

filled with the good Lord's blessings of joy and peace.<sup>3</sup>

Every anniversary, but I think especially one marking a milestone, inspires us to be grateful for God's gift of sacramental marriage and the families that flow from that grace. You, dear friends, bear witness to the faithful, joyful yet sacrificial love that the sacramental grace of Matrimony has made possible for you to offer.

From the outset, Jesus Christ has been engaged, involved, tied up, mixed up with your marriage, in your relationship as husband and wife. He has been, and is, really present as the Risen Lord, who is as real to you as he was to his disciples in his appearances after his Resurrection. You know better than I do that there are three parties who "abide" or remain in a Christian marriage: the wife, the husband, and the Lord – and it's not a crowd.

Dear friends: thank you for your witness as couples still in love, who are striving together to overcome the trials that accompany every life, and that you're doing so with a willingness to forgive, a willingness to let go of resentments and with kindness and patience. You are proclaiming to all of us – certainly to me and my brother priests – "the beauty of God's plan for humanity"<sup>4</sup> and the necessity of married life

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bishop Joseph C. Brambera, Homily, Scranton (10 June 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Francis, Morning Meditation (25 May 2018).

and family for the welfare of society and the good of the Church.

***Sacrificial Love: “as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12)***

***Christ’s Love***

In today’s Gospel, Jesus commands us to “love one another as he has loved us”; “as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12), he said. Though this is the Gospel proclaimed everywhere in the Church today, it could hardly be more appropriate for our celebration of these milestone anniversaries.

So, how did Jesus love? He loved until it cost him. He loved by persevering all the way to his death for us on the Cross. Love, then, in the sense that Jesus means, is loving when it means undergoing suffering for the sake of the other. In his case, it was for us. That is real love, loving for the good of the other. That is precisely how Jesus explains his love: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:13-14).

These words, spoken by the Lord at the Last Supper, summarize his message. Actually they summarize all that he did. Jesus gave his life for his friends – us. Friends who did not understand him at the beginning; in fact, they abandoned, betrayed and denied him at the crucial moment. But what happened? This tells us that he loves us, even

though we don't deserve to be loved.<sup>5</sup> "Peace be with you," he said to the Apostles who had scattered. He said that on Easter evening.

### ***Married Love***

Perhaps, jubilarians, perhaps even more than you realize, your married love is called to reflect, to mirror – and indeed it does mirror – Jesus' selfless, sacrificial love for us, his people. In the words of St. John Paul II, "Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross."<sup>6</sup>

What we are celebrating today in your five to seventy plus years of marriage is not merely endurance and determination – white knuckling – but the mystery of the Lord's sacrificial love and how you reveal, how you show that love to us.

By living Christian married love, dear jubilarians, for all these years, despite your limitations, your human weaknesses, and even your sins, the mystery of God's love, of Christ's sacrificial love for the Church, has become present in the world through you. This is all part of God's plan of salvation.<sup>7</sup> You tell us of his love.

On your wedding day, you boldly pledged at the altar to try to

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Francis, *Regina Caeli* (10 May 2015).

<sup>6</sup> St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cardinal Justin Rigali, Homily, Philadelphia (2 May 2004).

imitate the love of Christ himself, to lay down your life in love on a daily basis for the other; to put the good of your spouse ahead of your own wants and desires; to serve their good, their happiness. That became priority of your life. What an imitation of Christ!

Through your experience over the years, you now recognize, I'm sure, that married love, like all authentic love, is tough love. Like life itself, it makes heavy demands. In fact, the authentic love between a husband and wife cannot be had without sacrifices and real self-denial.

Today, in you, we recognize, and recognize gratefully, the beauty of marriage, the depth of love that is brought to ever greater maturity: your love tried and purified in the crucible of suffering and sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> That's real love: loving for the good of the other.<sup>9</sup> Your imitation of Christ.

### ***Three Actions to Take to Mark Your Milestone***

Now, dear jubilarians, I want to ask you to think about three things to mark your milestone anniversary: how you mirror God's love; how you can foster marriage as a great vocation for young people to embrace; and how you understand the evangelizing purpose of your marriage.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Homily, Miami (16 February 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Bishop Ronald W. Gainer, Homily (5 August 2019).

## ***1. Mirroring God's Love***

“Our Church is so bold that we say to the world: Do you want to know what God’s love is like? Then look at the faithful love of husband and wife.”<sup>10</sup>

Marriage is a sacrament. That means it’s a visible reality, and as such, it attracts attention. Marriage can enable you to live your whole life “in love,” when it is done with Christ. Let people see this. Don’t hide the goodness of your marriage under a bushel basket. It’s inspiring, it’s encouraging to others. You might not even recognize that, but it is so inspiring.

Your fidelity over so many years mirrors, of course, the Lord’s fidelity to his Church and is a sign desperately needed in our society: the truth that marriage, despite its challenges, can last, and last joyfully. Fidelity is a good news item that needs to be publicized, even bragged about.<sup>11</sup>

## ***2. Encourage Marriage among the Young***

Secondly, besides being aware of the important role played by your faithfulness to each other, be joyful in your witness to the wonder of marriage. This joy will enable you to be credible in this your second

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<sup>10</sup> Francis, Morning Meditation (25 May 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Francis, Morning Meditation (2 June 2014).

mission of encouraging young people to embrace marriage as a vocation. You do it by living it but you also have to tell them that marriage is a privileged way of life, a way to be disciples and to build up the human family and the Kingdom of God.

### ***3. Realize Your Evangelizing Mission***

Thirdly and lastly, remember that you are playing a vital role, most often quietly but always effectively, in the new evangelization. Your marriage and family life are at the heart of the Church's mission. Your everyday and – perhaps to you, at least – seemingly unspectacular witness tells the world that no ideology, however daunting, can extinguish the plan for marriage and family that God himself has given to us. Your marriage wordlessly bears witness to the Christian understanding of the human person. It tells us what society is – a community of families built upon marriage, and it tells us that is not by self-serving, sentimental love that will conquer all, but by self-giving and redemptive love.<sup>12</sup>

Dear friends: this kind witness to Christian marriage that you have been giving without fanfare or pretension is, I believe, the most effective form of evangelization in the Church today. We need your witness. We need to learn that it is beautiful to mature spiritually through self-giving

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Archbishop Anthony Fisher, Homily, Sydney (12 July 2015).

and sacrificial love.

That's why marriage is a sacrament not just for the couple; it's a sacrament for others, for all of us. Marriage is a sacrament for the salvation and the holiness of the spouses, but also for the family, the wider family of the community and of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Now, before I conclude this rather lengthy homily, I'm going to ask you to do me one little favour. Most of you are in front of the computer, indeed, I think nearly all of you. So – this might sound a little gooey – look into each other's eyes, just for a moment. Recall, in silence or perhaps in words, how sacred your relationship is.

For all that you have been through, acknowledge how blessed you are to have each other. For as familiar as those eyes of the other are, see through them to discover the face of the Lord abiding in the heart of the one you love. Above all, today be thankful.<sup>14</sup>

And now, imploring the intercession on this Mother's Day of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, and of her husband Blessed Joseph, we now proceed to the great Act of Thanksgiving, that Act in which you place yourselves and offer yourselves once again to the Father. It's a

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Homily, Miami (16 February 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bishop Joseph C. Brambera, Homily, Scranton (10 June 2018).

wonderful opportunity to renew your love for one another before the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in union with Christ our Priest. Once again today, in the silence of your heart, consecrate yourselves and your love to God himself, that he may continue, as Jesus says and wants, to “abide” in you and in your marriage, “so that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). Amen.

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