

Homily 27th Sunday of the Year – 3rd October 2021

I feel a bit anxious about talking to you today about marriage and divorce. It is ordinarily a sensitive subject but with the contemporary challenges on the Church's moral authority to teach about marriage, the secular challenges on the traditional family and the current sensitivity to gender issues, it is all a bit of a minefield.

As a parish priest I come across many married couples who, in their own way they try to make married life a vocation that is fruitful and special; I also encounter couples and others who are hesitant to commit to marriage and others who are living in the divorced, separated and for some the re-married state.

As a celibate Diocesan Priest I realise that I am speaking about a state of existence that I have never had the privilege to embrace sacramentally. I have though had the privilege of seeing my dear parents reach 60 years marital union – how beautiful that was; and to be the fruit of their love.

In the Gospel today Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees on the subject of divorce. He knows they are testing him and to see if he is keeping to the Rabbinic law that permits divorce in cases of adultery. However, Jesus refuses to be trapped by their sinister intrigue. Instead, he promotes the moral principle that marriage is for life – it is indissoluble – once it has truly been made it can't be undone. It is not merely a lifestyle choice. It is a solemn oath or promise before God.

Jesus is encouraging the people of God to strive to make marriage a beautiful sacramental bond of mutual and lasting love for each other.

One of the lovely memories of my parents in the last months of their 60 years marriage was my dear father helping mum to come down the stairs safely, holding her gently but firmly and guiding her slowly, step by step, while reciting the rosary together. The same hands that had clutched each other when coming out of St Mary's, Aberdeen on their wedding day in 1958.

The common mistake that many young couples make in marriage, and Jesus alludes to this, is that they do not know how to love according to the way of God. – why? Because they love without God, or at least one of them is not giving themselves totally to the other, in a Godly way, then problems are likely to arise. Truth and love must go hand in hand. I'm not saying a mixed marriage

can't work, of course they can, and in many cases, like my own parents, they turn out to be the best of marriages. It is not the nominal religion of the bride or groom that really matters, it is their Christian values, their virtues and their spirituality that is the measure of the person. Like Sarah and Tobias in the Bible, do they pray together before going to bed together? Do they ask for God's help when facing difficult decisions? I'm saddened by how few newly married couples; confess they never pray together. I remember my mum and dad, from when we were small children, you can hear them at night in their room together discussing and arguing about all the issues in the family at that time, but they would always finish with a prayerful 'Good night love, God Bless you Darling'. – so beautiful, tender and true.

Our society today is all over the place with marriage, gender and legal parental rights after separation. If only we could focus on the love of Christ Jesus and the desire to grow in that chaste unselfish love for our spouse, through prayer and reflection, the world would be a better place. Help us, as the living Church of today to defend and uphold the beauty and strength of family life as laid down by God, to always seek that chaste unspoilt love in our lives. Jesus never speaks or dictates about gender issues; he only teaches the world according to natural law and encourages us before during and after the marriage covenant to treat each other as made in the image and likeness of God.

(God Bless you all.)

Quote from Emeritus Pope Benedict – Sacramentum Caritas's

'The indissoluble, exclusive and faithful bond uniting Christ and the Church, which finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist corresponds to the basic anthropological fact that man is meant to be definitely united to one woman and vice versa.'