

ENCOURAGEMENT

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THE HOST APOSTOLATE

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Fulfilling God's call in the ordinary...

Two events coincided in January that brought together the importance of the sacrament of Marriage. The readings for the second week of ordinary time reminded us of the Wedding at Cana that started Jesus' public life and service and the importance of Mary His mother.

Obedience and love were manifest here, two critical virtues and so essential to witness to in our world today. The two events were the preparation of children for their First reception of the Body of Jesus and the second the preaching on marriage by our Parish Priest. These may seem unrelated but as the theme for the session was 'Listening to and living the Gospel' and the reading fitted the bill very well.

The children loved the story of Cana. Eyes opened wide as the story developed and they realised what had happened. They realised too it was the prompting of Jesus' mother that made the event possible. Here we have the roles of male and female, mothers and wives, fathers and husband, sons and daughters made manifest, and a miracle, the first of those which Jesus did to show us who He was, and how to live, saved the blushes of the bride and groom and gave in superabundance, water transformed into wine. Was this not also a sign of what was yet to come; wine into His Body and Blood.

It is in the entirely ordinary events of life that Jesus chose to start His public ministry. He humbled himself first and let St. John baptise Him. The Trinity was made manifest. Then he attends a wedding with great rejoicing.

Surely this is a very important statement for all time. There will have been children there of course, as they are very much part of the Jewish custom of wedding ceremony. There would have been men and women reminded

of their own weddings and much happiness... and dancing. This was the time to rejoice over the love of the couple for each other and those around them bound by human and social bonds.

Children are an outpouring of grace to a family and a gift which can increase their love for each other and multiply their roles. The couple wonder if they will be blessed with such and how many. All these things will have gone through the mind of the couple at Cana as it has done for centuries since and continues to do so today.



But why marriage or indeed why the Sacrament of Marriage? Most of our young people want to form a relationship that brings them Joy. It is not a passing whim or to be treated lightly. It is the most basic and fundamental union for man and woman which can lead to great holiness of life and even a heroic one. Yet how debased has even the term become, for as a culture we are transforming the meaning into something which completely distorts its original purpose which is the formation of Union with God as the Third. Yet truly the couple who marry make a bond of love between themselves, with God as the pinnacle and link between them and Himself. They are the procreators of children, a sign of the

"God created marriage. No government subcommittee envisioned it. No social organization developed it. Marriage was conceived and born in the mind of God." ~ Max Lucado

continuation of the love they have for each other, and that God has for the human race. He wants, and oh how much, the world to continue. He wants Humanity to come to Him and be with Him for the end of time. They make their promises and vows to each other before a priest and witnesses to sign that they agree to this and that they will accept the responsibility for the process of developing love and commitment to each other and then outward to the community in which they live, through work, service, rearing of children and bringing others to realise who God is. The love of the couple is a sign of God's presence with His people. This relationship is no mere passing fancy or fad, or something to be distorted according to human whim and notion. It is a fundamental sign of God's plan for the human race. It is the basic and primary means of holiness for vast numbers of people. A God who loves would not have made something that is counter to His purposes. He would not have made it impossible for people to gain entry into eternal life, or so difficult that only a few could attain it.

He chose Marriage as a sacred and ordinary way of Holiness.

However, it is consummated by very ordinary men and women and of course they bring with them their own struggles, difficulties, desires, hopes and dreams. Sometimes they fail to live out this sacredness and we must bear with them in the trials and hardships. But even a breakdown in of the relationship does not by definition demean the Sacrament. Indeed sometimes it can lead to great sacrifices being made or it becomes a growth point for someone. Charity has to be most obviously made manifest where there is failure and disillusionment. We must all bear with each other's faults and failings.

But the sacrament so beautifully exemplified by Jesus' presence at Cana cannot be distorted by any other interpretation that destroys the fundamental concept of a Union of a man and a woman in love and harmony for their betterment and the procreation of offspring, flesh of their flesh.

Now you may wonder why in this month we should ponder Marriage and why indeed by the middle of this month we start Lent. It is precisely because it is LENT AND WE MUST PONDER AND PRAY ABOUT MANY THINGS. Lent is a time of reflection and deliberation about our way forward and well as our role in our Society. What we must be is

witnesses and in this Year of Faith this is our special calling. Besides this the feast of St. Valentine is at the start of Lent, a Bishop who certainly encouraged couples!

There is no doubt that the redefining of marriage as a mere relationship between anybody and with anybody is at a crucial stage in our and other societies. Clearly there are many forms of relationship: some good, some not so. It is the distinctive nature of Marriage that makes it so blessed.

We can give many different names to these partnerships and indeed there are many non-sexual ones which bring great blessings. Have we forgotten that many Christian communities are single sex and thrive and do wonderful work for others. Have we forgotten that many single people live out their lives by forming a variety of friendships which sustain them in their journeys? Marriage however is a unique way of being at one with God and each other. Curiously it is when a loss has occurred by death of one of the partners that we see the deep fissure that results from the breaking of this union, and surely this must be so, for the broken link has been sealed by the Eternal. The ring, blessed first, is a symbol of this.

We often worry today that we do not have enough priests, or there is a wane in faith. In part let us first secure our marriages and make them a blessing, for priests come from these, certainly in the most part (though there are exceptions). Indeed marriage is a good breeding ground for many types of service much needed in our society, service especially with love and devotion. If we learn how to love we will also learn how to serve.

This Lent, therefore, let us reflect on the Holiness of the union between a man and a woman.

Let us see where we can improve our relationships. Let us pray for our and other marriages, especially those to be undertaken in the coming year or years. But especially let us not be deflected in defining Marriage as anything else and let us be bold enough to witness to the truth. Courage, yes, we may need it, so let us pray for this also, so that one day we might celebrate the wonderful Eternal Banquet of the Lord and the marriage of Jesus with His Church which is indissoluble. H.H.



Prayer Intentions: Migrant families; especially mothers may be supported and accompanied in their difficulties. Pope Benedict. Remember also couples preparing for Marriage.