

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A – OLPH - 2014

(Isaiah 58:6-10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16)

MARRIAGE SUNDAY

I'll start with a **little story**. The bishop had arrived in the parish for confirmation and everybody knows that before the sacrament is administered, the bishop likes to question the candidates. So he asked: "What is **matrimony**?" A nervous little girl raised her hand. "Yes" the bishop said, "Matrimony is a place where souls suffer for a time on account of their sins." Aghast, the parish priest jumped in: "No, no" he said, "That's purgatory." "Leave her alone" interjected the bishop. "She may be right. What do you and I, celibate bachelors, know about marriage?"

And that brings me to the subject of my sermon today. Cardinal Collins has designated this Sunday as **MARRIAGE SUNDAY**. So, what does it take to be a good disciple of Christ within the holy vocation of **matrimony**?

Pope John Paul II, soon-to-be Saint John Paul, in his Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, wrote: "The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture. Many families are living this situation in fidelity to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life. Finally, there are others who are hindered by various situations of injustice in the realization of their fundamental rights".

Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.

In a particular way the Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life."

This introduction to the Pope's apostolic exhortation emphasizes and extols the fundamental importance of marriage – marriage, the committed union between a man and a woman. The loving bond between husband and wife, between parents and their children, is deep and lasting, even when troubles

enter the marriage. It carries obligations and responsibilities, obligations that ought to be accepted with joy and care for each other, responsibilities that may very well require a great deal of courage and self-sacrificing endurance. Believers see in marriage the manifestation of God's creation "in his own image; male and female he created them." The natural and complimentary difference of man and woman allows marriage to create a new unity in which the fullness of the image of God can be seen through the creative aspect of wedded love. Scripture tells us that such love is from above, is from God. But that love that comes from God and from above, must be lived here below. As the Fathers of the second Vatican Council phrased it: "An Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church. Thus this love can lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and can aid and strengthen them, in the sublime office of being a father or a mother."

Unfortunately, for many married people, their union of love and commitment does not generate children, but nevertheless, the protection and recognition given to marriage benefits them as well. Parents bring forth, care for and educate the next generation of citizens in every country of the world. Upon these children born today, will one day, rest the obligation to provide necessities of life for all of us.

There are of course **other bonds of love**, of commitment and mutual responsibility which are supported by society. They may be good, they may be recognized in law, but they are not marriage. That does not belittle such unions, it does not mean that they are nothing, it simply means that they are something else. For example, the bond of parent and child is profound and exists to last a lifetime. It too carries mutual responsibilities, rights and obligations. But it is not marriage. True friends may be deeply committed and may care for each other over many years. Friendship also carries with it responsibilities and obligations. But it is not marriage. The point I am trying to make is that there are many kinds of relationship of mutual commitment. All are valued and may receive the protection of society, but only marriage, the union of a man and a woman with its capacity for bringing forth life is essential to society and of benefit to all. Other relationships are recognized in different ways. They are good, but they are not the same.

Marriage deserves the protection, affirmation and respect of the state, of society, and of the Church. Its distinct and essential nature does not change with culture or with passage of time. It must be protected; its unique reality must continue to be recognized and supported in custom and law. On it depends the welfare of us all. Pope John Paul II spoke the simple truth when he said: "the future of humanity passes by way of the family."

This Sunday afternoon, Cardinal Collins invites married couples who are celebrating a significant anniversary to join him at 4 o'clock at St. Paul's Basilica for a special Mass of Thanksgiving and reception honouring them and their faithful commitment to each other and the family they represent.

BLESSING OF MARRIED COUPLES PRESENT