The Christian Vision of Marriage

Feast of the Most Holy Trinity
Sunday June 16, 2019

Today I’m preaching all the Masses about marriage. Before I even begin, I want to acknowledge there are a lot of single people here including myself. There are people here who’ve never been married, people divorced, people who have lost their spouse. Each person here is an important part of the church. And we can learn from each other. I can learn something about love from married couples and married couples can learn something about love from celibates or single people. When Pope John Paul visited the United States in 1998, he said, “As the family goes, so goes the nation.” And the foundation of the family is marriage. So, all of us, no matter what our state in life have a vested interest in marriage.

Now, you may be thinking – this is Trinity Sunday, why talk about marriage? Actually, the most visible sign of who God is, the most visible sign of the Trinity is marriage and family life!

In God’s inner life, the Father gives himself totally in love for the Son. The Son in turn gives himself totally in love to the Father and the love between the Father and the Son is a person: The Holy Spirit. Now, where do we see that the love between two people is so powerful it can become a person? - In marriage and family. The husband gives himself totally in love to his wife, the wife in turn gives herself in love for her husband and their love is so powerful it has the potential of becoming a new person. So, you have three: the husband, the wife, and children and yet one family - an image of the Trinity!

If marriage is the most visible image of who God is then you can be assured that the devil is going to want to destroy marriage. The latest statistics are alarming: Catholic marriages over the last 50 years are down 73%. Fewer and fewer people are getting married in the church. “A recent survey by Nielson Research of millennials revealed that “getting married” and “having children” were their least desirable goals in life.” (Paradisus Dei data) Ironically, those who are in committed marital relationships live longer, report lower rates of depression, exhibit fewer risk-taking behaviors, and report an overall higher general well-being. (Happiness, Health, and Marriage by Elizabeth VanDenBerher)

Sadly, many people are simply choosing to cohabitate - live together outside of marriage or they are choosing to get married on a beach rather than in church. As Catholics we are obligated to get married in the Church by a priest or deacon unless we have a dispensation to get married in a non-Catholic Church. Why? Because we want God to be at center of marriage. We want to build marriage on the foundation of faith. Humanly speaking, marriage is difficult, but with God all things are possible.
Besides destination weddings, another fad is couples wanting to make up their own vows. While this may sound romantic, as Catholics we don’t make up our vows because we are consenting to God’s vision of marriage. We don’t invent marriage. We can’t define marriage to be what we want. God created marriage to be between a man and a woman and we are giving our consent to God’s vision of marriage.

If you want to learn about God’s vision of marriage, it’s in the bible: Ephesians Chapter 5. St. Paul says marriage is a sacred mystery, a sacrament, a visible sign of Christ’s love for his bride the church. So, if you want to understand what marriage is all about, interesting you have to study the life of a celibate man: Jesus!

The love of Jesus for his bride the church can be summed up in four words: free, total, faithful and fruitful. First, free! Jesus said I have come to lay down my life freely – no one takes it from me. Love is a free gift, an act of the will. When a couple comes to the church to get married the first thing the priest asks is: Have you come here freely without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage. It’s our free will that enables us to love.

2nd – Jesus’ love for us is total. He held nothing back. He was willing to lay down his life for his bride. I give a crucifix to each couple that I marry, and I tell them – this is the blueprint of your love. There is an important reason we celebrate weddings in the context of Mass – every time we gather for the Eucharist, we celebrate God’s love that he broke his body and shed his blood for us. And it is this mystery made present on the altar that a married couple is supposed to live. Husbands you say to your wives: take me, this is my body and my blood given up and poured out for you. Wives you are to say to your husbands – take me, this is my body – my whole life given up and poured out for you.

Love is about losing yourself for the good of the other. Love doesn’t keep track of who’s turn it is to do the laundry or wash the dishes. Love doesn’t constantly ask, “What am I getting out of this relationship?” It asks, “What am I willing to give?”

Love is faithful. God is faithful to us even when we turn away from him. He seeks us out. He offers us forgiveness. In marriage a couple promises to be faithful to each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health until death do they part.

Finally, God’s love is fruitful. His sacrifice on the cross brought eternal life to the world. On their wedding day the priest asks the couple, “Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to law of Christ and his Church.” Marital love is fruitful through an openness to procreation. You know what the opposite of fruitfulness is? To render something sterile – this is why the church says sterilization is a sin. It’s a mutilation of our gift of fertility and the opposite of fruitfulness. Another way we oppose fruitfulness or life is to be counter-life or to contracept.

I know this is a challenging teaching of the church, but we’ve all been affected by the fall out of the sexual revolution. There are a lot of people hurt and wounded because we haven’t been living out God’s design for the sacredness and beauty of our sexuality.
As I’ve pondered the issue of why so many contracept, I think it comes down to faith and trust. When we are afraid or doubt, our tendency is to want to seize control. Read the story of salvation history. We constantly see how God’s people lack faith and trust. Think about the story of Abraham. God promised his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky. But Abraham starts thinking my wife is old, how is this going to happen? He doubts and decides if this is going to happen, I’m going to have to take matters in my own hands and so he has relations with his maidservant Hagar and breaks his covenant with God.

When we are afraid our tendency is to want to seize control rather than trusting in God. In the issue of family planning fears so easily come up: will we be good parents, can we afford another child, will Natural Family Planning really work? And so, what do we do? Rather than trust God’s plan, our tendency is to want to seize control of our fertility and people choose contraception.

If we are going to grow in our spiritual lives, we have to conform our lives to God’s plan, to God’s designs. The gospel should challenge all of us! If we aren’t fully conforming our life to the gospel, we will simply remain stagnant in our faith! There is information this week in the bulletin about how to learn more about Natural Family Planning.

I want to close with this: God is a Trinity of persons, a community of love. We are made for relationships. You know what’s happened over the past 70 years? The average size of the family home has gone from 983 sq. ft. in 1950 to just about 2500 sq. ft. today. But, the number of children people have has decreased. We’re living in bigger homes but having smaller families. We have bought into the belief that our happiness will come from things instead of relationships.

God always wills our good. The path to happiness and joy is to follow Jesus’ way of love, which is free, total, faithful and fruitful.