

Homily for 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 6-7th 2018

Guard Jealously

There is a tradition at Jewish weddings where a glass is broken as part of the symbolism of the ceremony. A rabbi explained why they do this:

'We hold aloft a glass, let it fall and be shattered to atoms, and then, pointing to its fragments, we exhort the young people to guard jealously the sacred relationship into which they have entered since, once it is fractured, it can never be restored.'"

Jesus understood how easily marriage can be fractured and therefore referred to the Mosaic allowance for divorce. But notice please that Jesus said it was because of the peoples' hardness of heart that allowed for this provision thereby admitting, that yes, marriages can be shattered. Then he looks behind the Mosaic provision to Creation and referring to Genesis 1 states:

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."¹

In these famous words Jesus is planting the sacramental seed by helping us to see that marriage is not primarily a human institution but a relationship originating in the heart and mind of God. So today I want to talk with you about the sacrament of marriage.

So, what do I mean by a sacrament? Here is a very simple definition:

A Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.

Grace is a wonderful word that in Greek is the word "charis". From it are derived the English words charisma, charismatic and Eucharist. Someone with charisma has the kind of personality that attracts others. The Eucharist is the meal in which we receive the real presence of Jesus, body, blood, soul and divinity, and thereby are attracted to Him in a unique way and so receive His grace. Grace could be translated by the English word "gift". Again, when we think of someone with charisma, they have the gift of drawing people to themselves.

The Eucharist is the physical and outward sign that literally draws people to Jesus.

Now let me articulate this idea in what I am calling the Sacramental Principle:

What is always and everywhere true must be noticed, accepted and celebrated somewhere, sometime.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 10:6–9). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Consider this in relation to Jesus' love and His grace. It is always and everywhere true. But because this is the case it too can be easily ignored. So, Jesus gives us sacraments, like marriage where:

What is always and everywhere true must be noticed, accepted and celebrated somewhere, sometime.

Let me speak now to all of you who are married. Your marriage is a Sacrament whereby the love that exists between Jesus and each soul, which is everywhere true, is in your relationship being noticed, accepted and celebrated everyday of your life together.

In the Sacrament of Marriage, we have the closest image in this world of the kind of union that will exist between each person and Christ in the life that is to come. This is made clear in Revelation 19. In the last book of the Bible, in its fourth to last chapter we hear read:

***Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;⁸***

Heaven will be the ultimate marriage union in which each believer will relate to Jesus as the bride in relation to her husband. Therefore, marriage now is the image of this perfect union that will be fully realized in heaven.

Now notice the connection. What we read about this perfect union finding expression at the end of the Bible also is expressed in that passage that comes at the Bible's beginning:

"This is at last bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, the one to whom I will cling!

The Bible begins in both with the Sacramental Principle Genesis 1 states that which is everywhere and always true. That God made man and woman to reflect his image. Then in Genesis two that which is always and everywhere true is now noticed, accepted and celebrated. This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh... Talk about celebration!

Jesus wants marriages to be a foretaste of this ultimate wedding celebration that will resound throughout heaven. In heaven we will all give ourselves totally to Jesus as we see him for who he fully is in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. While on earth, we do not have the capacity to give ourselves to Jesus like this. However, we do have the capacity to learn to give ourselves to one other person in a union of life long, conjugal love. The Catholic philosopher Dietrich Hildebrand said of the marital bond:

They become conscious of one another, and making the other the object of his or her contemplation and responses, each can spiritually immerse himself in the other.

This is the Catholic Sacramental understanding of marriage where the husband is to make his wife the object of contemplation and the wife is to make her husband object of her contemplation. We call such contemplation “adoration”.

To adore God will be the ecstasy of heaven and will be always and everywhere, noticed, accepted and celebrated. While here on earth we can imperfectly adore God in anticipation of the adoration of heaven. One of the ways this happens is through the sacrament of marriage.

The word *adore* comes from to Latin words: “Ad” which means “to” and “orare”, which means “speak”. In marriage there is a language shared between the husband and wife that is to have the quality of intimacy that is spoken to no one else. The word also means mouth to mouth. Adoring speech is the language of true complimentary and equality, imaged in Genesis with the woman having been taken from Adam’s side. They are to walk together side by side and look at each other face to face as they discover what is expressed poetically in the Psalm:

***You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.²***

What is at the heart of marital labour? It is the work of truly knowing the other so that within the family there can be true meaning and value, where in community you discover ever deeper unity.

What is always and everywhere true? The perfect unity that exists between the community of Jesus and the Father emanating forth in the presence of the Blessed Holy Spirit. But in a world like this we can so easily ignore the perfect unity expressed in community between the Father and the Son sending forth the loving Holy Spirit. Therefore He created a sacrament, called marriage which is to be an outward sign – however imperfect, reflecting the perfect Trinitarian love.

Such unity when lived daily in marriage will then find a deep expression in the marital embrace, where together husband and wife discover that the fruit of their physical union leads to be open to the gift of life expressed eloquently in the Psalm this way:

***Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
⁴ Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.³***

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 128:2). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 128:3–4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Such unity can be the lived experience of those called to the vocation of marriage by taking to heart the sacramental principle and so choose to live out what is always and everywhere true: God is Trinitarian love where community finds expression in unity.

Such love when noticed, accepted and celebrated every day and everywhere in marriage will allow husbands and wives to guard jealously the sacred relationship that is Marriage and thus be a Sacrament of Jesus' love, until that day, when together we will share in the Marriage of the Lamb.