

Homily for May 25th 2018

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.'"

The Church believes the best way we guard this sacred relationship is by understanding that marriage is one of the Seven Sacraments Jesus instituted when here in the flesh 2000 years ago.

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.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church which helps us to interpret and apply the teaching of the Bible explains how Christ gives grace this way:

Seated at the right hand of the Father and pouring out the Holy Spirit on his Body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate his grace.¹

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 draws people to Jesus. Marriage is the physical and outward sign that draws one man and one woman to each other.

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.

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.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 282). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

It is because of this sacramental principle Jesus is so clear in today's Gospel about the permanence of marriage. It is also clear that when we think about marriage sacramentally the Church's understanding of marriage is very different from that of the world, as is her teaching on divorce.

The Catholic Philosopher Peter Kreeft explains it this way:

“Divorce is the prime example of promise-breaking, as marriage is the prime example of promise-keeping and the primary human image of God’s covenant with us. We are the people of a faithful God, not one who breaks faith.”²

Let me now quote another Catholic Philosopher, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, who described the Sacrament of marriage this way:

Marriage has been chosen as the image of the perfect union between the soul and Christ because in marriage, likewise, the center and core is love. No other earthly community is constituted so exclusively in its very substance by mutual love.

Marriage is to image the perfect union of the soul with Christ. What is the nature of that union? Our Psalm for today expresses it this way:

***Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,***

All that is within us is to bless him. We are to give ourselves totally to Jesus just as husband and wives are to give themselves to each other totally in marriage. That is why Jesus is so clear on the seriousness of divorce and why marriage is so highly elevated in the Church. When a couple are deepening in their love for each other and in their discipleship to Jesus there will be a convergence of these loves. Much as we see in this triangle where, as the two side axis rise to the apex they find union. This is why sacramental marriage is not just about the couple. Rather it is about the couple and Jesus. When intentionally, a couple love each other over a life time such sacramental love creates a beautiful virtue, what James in today's 1st reading calls steadfastness. Steadfast is an adjective that qualifies nouns like marriage. What is a steadfast marriage: Secure in position, secure, firm in its place. A relationship where husband and wife are true to their word or as James said:

² Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (p. 252). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

*let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation.*³

Such marriages are then able to live out the sacramental principle: What is always and everywhere true must be noticed, accepted and celebrated somewhere, sometime so husbands and wives can thereby guard jealously the sacred relationship into which they have entered since, once it is fractured, it can never be restored.

³ [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Jas 5:12). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.