

Homily - Year 27 B - October 3, 2021

The scripture readings this weekend, especially with their heavy emphasis on divorce make any pastor wish that he were on vacation and did not have to preach about the topic.

A fundamental principle of life tells us that we are created with a desire to love and be loved. In fact, the more we love, the more we become like God because, as John articulates, God is love. There are many ways to love. Marriage and family, consecrated celibacy, chaste single living are the three principal ways to exercise the vocation of love. All three vocations are pathways to holiness, but all three vocations have their difficulties, challenges, and their pitfalls.

Our task today is to speak about marriage and specifically the relationship between husband and wife.

Let's start with this principle: A wedding is an event; marriage is an achievement. Let that sink in. A wedding is an event; a marriage is an achievement. Is that statement still vibrant today in our current understanding and practice of marriage?

We often hear about a marriage contract or a pre-nuptial agreement or contract. But marriage is not a contract. It is rather a covenant founded in love between a man and a woman. For that covenant to be complete, a third component is needed - God. A contract protects the parties in advance. It spells out the expectations for each person. On the other hand, a covenant proclaims an unconditional mutual pledge between the man and the woman to love and serve one another forever; for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in good times and bad until death separates them from life. This commitment also extends to their children whom they promise to raise as Catholics. Of course, for this covenant to flourish the couple must allow God's presence to permeate their lives.

A contract requires a person to be smart; a covenant requires a person to be dedicated. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that a covenant requires maturity and should never be entered upon lightly. As a church, we take very seriously marriage commitment.

However, we also recognize that conflict is part of the human condition. In fact, conflict can be part of most people's lives. The individual has a conflict, but that conflict often takes place in the context of a relationship with another, especially the marriage relationship. The

management of the conflicts in marriage will be the barometer to measure the extent of one's commitment and one's maturity.

The painful reality in life tells us that some marriage relationships, despite all prayer and all human intervention, fall apart. The causes of the deterioration are as varied as the number of people involved. The victims of divorce must pick themselves up, re-commit to their fundamental vocation to love, and get on with their lives that will be different after a separation or divorce.

Part of that new life must continue to be God and his Church. I know that there are lots of stories out there about the Church and its position in relation to divorce and remarriage. In a few minutes of a homily, I am not able to provide complete details about our Church's procedures. The most important fact is to maintain a relationship with Christ and his Church no matter what expression that relationship must take.

We often hear a quote from Paul read at weddings, words often spoken, but words that come to life only with direct human intervention with God's help. Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but happy with the truth. Love never gives up. . . . Love is eternal. We said at the beginning that marriage is an achievement. With God's help, we pray that we may see this achievement grow and flourish.