

October 6, 2019 3:00 p.m. St. Joseph Parish, Kalamazoo

**Diocesan Golden Wedding Anniversary Mass/27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*Special Readings: Gen.2:18-24; Phil.2:1-11; John 15:12-17*

As I said at the beginning of Mass, I'm so very happy to welcome all of you here to St. Joseph Parish. This is one of the events that I look forward to celebrating so much every year----it's a great, happy event, and it's one that brings people together for such an important reason---to put into the "spotlight", or a special place of honor, the most basic and essential aspect of human life, and our faith life: to celebrate Marriage and Family Life. In addition to the 75 couples here with us who are celebrating 50 years of married life, there are 6 couples beyond 50 years: 1, 51 years; 1, 54 years; 2, 60 years; and 2, 65 years. And there is one couple here who are celebrating 70 years!!! And so, during this Mass, we ask God's blessings upon all the Jubilarian couples who are here, as well as those Jubilarians who were NOT able, for one reason or another, to be with us today.

So, as I like to do each year, at this point, I'd like to ask all those who are here for this Mass who are not celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, or beyond---NOT celebrating---- would you please stand. I ask the Jubilarians to remain seated. Dear Jubilarians, we, your children, grandchildren, relatives and brothers and sisters in the Family of Faith, take this occasion to give you a standing ovation in recognition of all that you have accomplished throughout your 50 years of Marriage. Please join me in applause.... That "ovation", my dear Jubilarians, obviously comes from our hearts and expresses our deep admiration, our sincere appreciation, and our genuine affection in a way that words might fail us. Congratulations! Thank you! And God Bless you!

I assume that some of you have already celebrated your 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary earlier this year??? How many???? And, of course, there are many who are still looking forward to that actual anniversary day in the months to come---How many of you???? On that momentous anniversary day, you probably already had, or are planning to have, a big Family celebration. With those celebrations, involving your family and those closest to you in your lives, I'm sure there is a lot of time to reminisce and look through the Wedding Album, or watch the video---right? You naturally think back to that special day 50 years ago, in 1969 when the world was far different than it is in 2019.

1969 was the year of Woodstock---perhaps some of you were among the 350,000 rock-n-rollers who were present??? It was also the year of the Apollo 11 mission to the Moon, and the successful landing of two men to walk on the surface of the Moon: Astronaut Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, who uttered those incredible words: “*One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind!*”

I attended a conference for Bishops a couple weeks ago on the topic of the New Evangelization, and during that conference the presenter was talking about how the world needs people who are, what he called, “Transformational Leaders” , who have, again what he called, “BHAG” s. A BHAG stands for “Big Hairy Awesome Goal” ! And as an example of a BHAG, he used President Kennedy who, as he began his Presidency in the early 1960’ s, set as a Goal for the U.S. that before the end of the decade, we would land a man on the moon. That was a big, hairy, awesome goal, that might have seemed unattainable in the early 60’ s, but with his inspiration, and a lot of hard work, it became a reality.

Dear Friends, your life-long marriage is your “BHAG” . There were those in 1969 who might have told you that life-long, faithful marriage is too hard to attain; there are certainly those today who see faithful marriage as impossible. And yet, with your mutual love, being each other’ s inspiration, a lot of “blood, sweat and tears” , and your Faith in God, you’ re making it a reality---you’ re accomplishing that big, hairy, awesome Goal!

In a recent talk to married couples, Pope Francis said: *“50 years of marriage is an amazing witness to all that is True and Good and Beautiful. Even in the troubled times of marriage, the fact that you loved through the struggles of life, through the heartaches that sometimes accompany marriage, signals that Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and Love wins the day. Continue to be that witness to future generations that struggle to see the lifelong witness of marriage.”* He went on to give this good advice: *“Remember always the joy of your first encounter with your loved one, but also the joy of the first encounter with Jesus Christ. Continue to live these Joys in the everyday life of your marriages. Through your witness you preach more boldly, with more voice, and with greater power than any preacher on a Sunday.”*

My dear Jubilarians, I pray that our Holy Father's words resonate in your hearts. I would highlight 2 points Pope Francis made. 1) It's important to remember the joy of when you first met your future spouse----what that was like---how you fell in love---how you moved toward the decision to enter into marriage. I wish I could hear each and every one of your stories about how that happened, because each one is unique, and I'm sure, very interesting. But remember what else Pope Francis said; that meeting one another and realizing the life-changing impact that had on each of your lives is very much like when you first "encountered" Jesus Christ. Now that might seem like a bold statement, but when you enter into a Sacramental Marriage----Marriage in the Church---it is through your love for one another---and through all the generous and faithful choices that you make every day of your married lives---that you are able to see and love Jesus Himself. Our Lord Jesus lives in your marriage; and your faithful, generous love for one another helps to reveal Jesus to the world. 2) The second point Pope Francis made that I think is so important is when he asks you to *continue to be a witness to the beauty, truth, goodness and love of marriage to those who struggle to see the value of marriage.* Your very lives---your Marriage--is a Witness to the world. As the Holy Father further pointed out: what you "say", not through words but through the Witness of your marriage, is more important, more inspiring, and a more profound "sermon" to the world than *any* Deacon, Priest, Bishop or Pope could preach at Mass! That's quite a statement---and we all know it's so true!

Today's Scripture Readings which we heard just a few moments ago are so beautiful for today's celebration. Our First Reading took us back to the Book of Genesis---to the very beginning of the history of the human world----to the highpoint of God's Creation---the human person. But, as great as the human person was, made in the image and likeness of God, there was something missing--something was incomplete. After every installment of creation, after creating the sun/moon/stars, the heavens and the earth, all the plants and animals---God would say every time, "*It is very good!*" But after creating Adam, God didn't say that; in fact, He said: "*It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a suitable partner for him.*" Once Eve was created and she was given to Adam, then Adam himself summed up the completion of human creation: "*This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh....That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one flesh.*"

When God created humanity, He did so with the original “BHAG”! His Plan was HUGE!, and it had 3-parts: 1) that husband and wife would “cling” to one another in Love, which is another way of saying to “hold on tight---sometimes for dear life” as you go through the roller-coasters of life in this imperfect world; 2) that through the results of that same love, a husband and wife would establish their Family, teach their children God’s ways, and raise them to live together in Love; and the third part of that Plan is the most ambitious: that, “two by two”, “family by family”, all of Humankind would then live together in Peace.

To one degree or another, that is what each of you has done. You found each other, you fell in love, and you made a home/a life with the person about whom you exclaimed when you first met: *at last---this is the one who completes me---I will leave my father and mother and “cling” to this person, and establish our life together based completely on Love and Trust.* And throughout your married life, those day-in and day-out signs of your love for one another, which provide the glue which keeps your love together---those are what have been most important.

And that leads to today’s Gospel. Jesus, as the greatest “Transformational Leader” of all time, put His Father’s “BHAG” into action when Jesus gave us the GREAT Commandment, and that is why we heard Jesus say today: *“This is my commandment: love one another AS I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”*

In just a minute, I will invite you to renew the Vows you made 50 years (or more) ago on your wedding day. When you first said: “I Do”, you had no idea what would come your way, yet, you STILL said “I Do”. While you professed your marriage vows 50 (or more) years ago, it’s important to realize that you have said “I Do” again and again and again over these 50 years as you have been faithful to each other when it was easy, and even more importantly when it was not. Over those 50 years, you have loved each other, for better and for worse, for 600 months; over those 50 years, you have supported each other for richer and for poorer for 2,600 weeks; Over these 50 years, you have been there for each other in sickness and in health, for 18,250 days. We could go on, adding up the hours, minutes and seconds. But the point is, no matter how we count it up, from the first “I Do” 50 years ago, until the “I Do” you will say on the last day when one of you leaves this world, you are doing what Jesus told us to do in today’s Gospel when He called us to love one another just like He loves us. And why did He call

us to love AS He loves? *“So that My joy may be in you, and your Joy may be complete.”*

My dear Jubilarians, in the name of the Church, I thank you for your lifetime of Love. And I thank you for the powerful “Sermon” you have preached and continue to preach to the world. As you reminisce about all that has been, as you take comfort in the love you have for one another, and as you help one another to also find comfort in your love for Jesus, may God give you the grace and the strength to keep “clinging” to one another even as you love one another with the same, sacrificial and generous love of Jesus for us and all the world.

God bless you, now and always!