

27th SUNDAY OF MARRIAGE, THE MASS AND THE EUCHARIST

Before I start on my homily topic for today – I want to say a few words about this past Saturday on the Church's calendar – it is a day set aside in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary. Many people have gotten away from the practice of the Rosary – and I want to remind of the beauty and closeness to Mary that accrues to those who remain in the practice of saying the Rosary. And closeness to Mary brings with it a drawing ever nearer to her Son. This honoring of Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary is in keeping with our beautiful stained glass window – and so many other holy pictures that associate the Blessed Virgin with this prayer.

The purpose of the rosary is to help us meditate on the great mysteries of our salvation. Pius XII called it a compendium of the gospel. The main focus is on Jesus—his birth, life, death and resurrection. The recently added Mysteries of Light, said on Thursdays lead us to a fifth mystery – the establishment of the Eucharist... we are gathered to participate in it today. That part of one of mysteries of the Rosary is an awesome way to say 'thank you Jesus.... Thank you Lord for the gift of this holiest of meals.' Please pray about – consider restarting the Rosary in your prayer life... it is said here every morning after daily Mass. And there is a growing group that meets on the first Thursday evening of every month to say the Luminous Mysteries in the home. Would you consider starting with just the one decade about the Gift of the Eucharist – just say it on Thursdays and Sundays?

And now on to the 'topic' for today.

Let me start off with a question... if I asked you what was the greatest gift you have ever received – the one gift that sticks in your mind – what would you say? If we had an extra four or five minutes – I'd really like to invite a 3 or 4 year old... a teenager.... A twenty-something – and a sixty or seventy something person to speak up and answer the question... what gift have you received that really, really is memorable to you?

Certainly, at different times of my life – my answers would be different. Perhaps for you as well. Today – I would have to answer that there are two gifts that are most important – most memorable... and both gifts are life-giving to me. The first gift is the gift of the Eucharist... the second is the gift of my marriage.

Marriage is the heart of the family and of all civilization. And the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. Today – in a very limited amount of time – I'd like to speak of both of these sacraments – and help us look at them in ways that may be helpful to revitalizing our participation in them.

In our RCIA (Adult Faith) Classes – we're just leaving the study of who God is – how do we speak of God – and about creation. You have heard it said that we are made in the image and likeness of God. You've probably heard sermons and teachings that lead us to consider how it is that we are in the Image of God. Since God is fully spirit – it is reasonable to question how we can be in His image?

Well – we know God is love... and over the years – you probably have come to know that the Trinity can be understood by way of analogy. One analogy is to speak of the love between the God the Father and Jesus. From all eternity – that love has begotten the Holy Spirit. That love of the Trinity is then said to be life giving. So, the first thing I would say as a point for today is that your marriage... my marriage is to be an icon of the inner life of the Trinity. That is what God intends for our marriages: to be life giving – and completely self-giving. In fact – Jesus and the Church teach us – that the total gift of self (our bodies, our personhood) – this gift can only be given properly in marriage. I don't need to tell you how much marriage has been under assault by every area of the media... in our society.

I am working with three couples preparing for marriage. And at some point in talking with them – we come to what is asked of them by the priest or deacon on their wedding day. Have you come here FREELY? Have you come here to give yourself TOTALLY to each other? Will you be FAITHFUL till death? And will you be OPEN to the gift of children if given by God? If their answers to those questions are a sincere YES – they are truly prepared to enter into a relationship that is an icon of Father God, Jesus His Son and the Holy Spirit. And the reason is because the union of the couple will be freely given, totally surrendered, one-to-another, permanent in origination and open to life. Dr. Ruth doesn't describe it this way... and society doesn't promote this understanding... but this is what marriage is meant to be.

Now here's the struggle: To love a spouse as God loves us is, for mere human beings – impossible. But if we really – REALLY invite Christ into our marriage – then Christ becomes a partner to each and every action and interaction that we do as husband and wife.... Even the marital embrace. The other person becomes seen as a heavenly gift – a part of God's plan for us. And here is what is even more beautiful if we are open to see it... to invite Jesus into the relationship means that we recognize God's presence in our spouse... and our marriage becomes Eucharistic... we have the life of Christ in us as husband and wife. Let me share a story that demonstrates this reality.

In 2001, when we deacon candidates and wives were on a retreat. A good friend... now known as Deacon Joe Gerber from Arvada, CO – Joe was assigned to do a homily on these readings.... I wish you knew Joe. He's a general contractor – a very nice, busy young husband and father... but he did something so profound that it remains with me... He created his sermon about Christ being a partner in our marriages – and Christ being present in our marriage partners --- Somewhat as I am trying to do here today. Joe surprised his wife Julie by calling her up to stand in front of him – and you know what Joe did? He said Julie – I now see Christ in you – and I honor you as a tabernacle for him... and Joe genuflected to his wife. GOSH – did he get it... he was so far ahead of most of us when he did that. How about you – would you genuflect to your wife? Or your husband? Is Christ that present in your marriage? Okay – here's a new and perhaps final point.

We Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is wrapped in a mystery of faith, under the appearance of bread and wine. Through this Eucharistic union we can dimly see a foretaste of eternity. And so too – our marriages are but a foretaste of eternity – the total and complete happiness of being with God. We said that our earthly marriages can't be perfect. They can be Eucharistic. And if so recognized and practiced, our marriages can become holier and happier and ever more satisfying.

Unfortunately, for some folks – there has been or is a cross – the reality of living the single life. Some become widows or widowers. Some experience a painful ending of a marriage. For some it means separation or civil divorce. Gosh do we ever need to pray for them – for healing and for strength to continue as authentic Christian disciples on their way to eternity. For those who seek such a solution, the Church will prayerfully evaluate whether an original marriage was flawed in origination – and the applicant may be granted what is called an annulment. Whatever the outcome, this process can bring healing and closure. We had a guest speaker at RCIA the other evening – she spoke of having been involved in a run-away, teenaged marriage that lasted six months. That girl wasn't even a Catholic then – she became one subsequently. She testified to the healing and reconciliation of mind and spirit that came about from the annulment process. Let us pray for those seeking annulment... and for those who cannot be granted one.

Speaking of prayer, when Holy Communion – the Eucharist is properly received, it is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father. You may not have thought of it this way – two people make the prayer: Jesus is one – and you are the other. So too is marriage a prayer of two people. It is your prayer to the Father – and the prayer of Jesus in your spouse.

Jesus has said, “Abide in my love... love one another as I have loved you.” Is that love of Jesus a part of your life? Your marriage? If it isn’t – I am here to tell you that it can be.... Marriages can be repaired... restored... made more vibrant... I am here to testify to the power of Christ as an agent of transformation for marriages... not perfection mind you – but life-giving transformation. As said in the publication *Magnificat* – The (true) Sacrament of Marriage is Christ’s answer to hell... the hell of never being satisfied... the hell of loneliness in existing marriages... the hell of sin brought into marriages. God teaches that it is not good for man to be alone. And when we have sincerely accepted the gift of Christ in our spouse – then the two will really become one flesh.

Soon my brothers and sisters – you will receive Jesus in the Eucharist --- and the two of you will become one flesh. And just as happens in life-giving marriages – you and I can become pregnant with the Life of God in us – that same life of God which took shape in the womb of Mary – Mary who is Our Lady of the Rosary.