

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If you've ever been to a wedding before, you may have heard one or more of today's Scripture readings read during the ceremony. In fact, our first reading and our Gospel speak about a man leaving his father and his mother to cling to his wife in order that they might together become one flesh! Now I realize that maybe sometimes the thought of you and your spouse being one flesh might seem a little too close for comfort, especially if the other just had a cup of coffee or a piece of garlic bread for breakfast! But these words are a description of exactly what marriage brings about – a covenant that unites two individuals as though they were one.

But what's so special about *Christian* marriage? I mean, marriage has been an institution that existed long before Jesus walked the earth. So, what is so unique about marriage between His followers?

Well, in the Incarnation, God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. And as a human being, Jesus lived in a family and observed many married couples in His 33 years on earth. Holy Mary and St. Joseph, by cooperating with God's grace, were able to live out God's ideal for marriage. But, Jesus also had plenty of other experience with those who didn't. And so, when He elevated marriage to a sacrament, Our Lord infused the marital bond with grace so that **all** married couples could better attain to God's ideal.

But you know, it goes even deeper than that. The sacrament of marriage is not *just* about God helping husbands and wives to live happy, healthy, and holy lives. Even more, God intended the covenant of marriage to be a witness and even an image of His very nature – in the family and in the world. What do I mean? Well, we know that our one God is a Trinity – He’s a community of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Scriptures also tell us that God is perfect love. Therefore, we can rightly understand God, in His essence, as a community of love.

But have you ever tried to love before – I mean just love. Not love someone or something – but just love? No, it’s impossible! We can’t just love in the abstract. Rather we have to love someone. And so it makes sense that the God, who existed from all eternity, has loved within His Godhead, within the Trinity. The Father and the Son have loved one another perfectly forever. And that love is so real – is so life-giving – that the Holy Spirit, the very bond of their love, proceeds forth.

All this means that God’s love, by its very nature, must be shared. In other words, divine love must be given away – it can’t be stored away, locked in the deep recesses of the Holy Trinity. And so God created all of creation, above all, human beings, to share His love with.

We, for our part, as children of God, and disciples of Jesus Christ, who have received the life of the Holy Spirit within us, are created in the image and likeness of God. This means that we not only receive the love He shares with us, but we are also able to witness to it and even share it in the world we live in. Think about it this way: When a husband and wife join together in the covenant of marriage, they become one. And even though they're still two individuals, that bond of love between them is so strong and so real, that their new identity is as one – a married couple. And even more, that love, which seeks to give and share itself, and which cannot be trapped in the recesses of their marriage, is able to be so fruitful that it can bring about new life. Now there are three. And although they're still three individuals, that deepening bond of love between them is so strong and so real, that their identity remains as one – a family. My brothers and sisters, Christian marriage is not the same as any other type of marriage – it goes so much deeper. And because it reflects God's very love, and recreates His covenant in every family, it's something that must be protected and honored as sacred.

Pope Francis himself during his apostolic visit to Philadelphia at the Festival of Families on Saturday night said it this way in his homily: “A young person once asked me – you know how young people ask hard questions! – “Father, what did God do before he created the world?” Believe me, I had a hard time answering that one. I told him what I am going to tell you now. Before he created the world, God was in love, because God is love. The love he had within himself, the love between the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit, was so great, so overflowing...that love was so great that God could not be selfish. He had to go out from himself, in order to have someone to love outside of himself. So God created the world. God made this wonderful world in which we live and which, since we are not too smart, we are now in the process of destroying. But the most beautiful thing God made – so the Bible tells us – was the family. He created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: “Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow”. All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family...”

And so, as we celebrate this Respect Life Sunday this weekend, we thank God for the gift of married life and for family life. Being a pro-life people begins in the family – with its openness to life; and family begins with marriage – with the love of one man and one woman as a partnership for the whole of life. I ask God to bless all the families and members of our parish, and that He share His abundant love with them, so that they can share His love with one another. God bless you.