

October 1, 2017

2:00 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Diocesan Golden Wedding Anniversary Mass

Gen.2:18-24; Phil.2:1-11 (Reading for 26th Sunday); 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. Augustine Cathedral. 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 celebrate the most basic and essential aspect of human life, and our faith life: to celebrate marriage and family life.

In addition to the 94 couples we know are the Jubilarians known to us throughout the Diocese who are celebrating 50 years of married life, there are five couples beyond 50 years: two celebrating 55; two celebrating 60, and one celebrating 70 years of Marriage! During this Mass, we ask God's blessings upon all the Jubilarian couples who are here, as well as those celebrating this special milestone but who were unable for one reason or another to be with us today. May God bless you all.

At this point, I'd like to ask all those who are here for this Mass who are not celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, or beyond, to please stand, and to 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 50th anniversary earlier this year, and that some of you may still be looking forward to that actual anniversary day in the months to come. And 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 lots of time to reminisce and look through the Wedding Album, right? You naturally think back to that special day 50 years ago, in 1967 (when the world was far different that it is in 2017), and perhaps re-live the moments of your wedding day--your honeymoon---those early days, months and first years of establishing a new home and beginning to raise a family. And I'm sure that you also reminisce about all that has taken place over those years. No doubt there were moments when you wondered how life could get any better? And then there were more than likely those times when you wondered how you could move on.

As we all know, life is made up of good times and bad times; joys and sorrows; successes and moments of temporary defeats---but through it all over these 50 years, you've celebrated and endured those highs and lows together.

Pope Francis in a recent talk to married couples (during his visit to Philadelphia in 2015), said this---he was talking to each of you: "*The witness of 50 years of marriage is an amazing witness to all that is true and good and beautiful. It is beautiful to see such great love, such great beauty, such great goodness, such great truth witnessed here. Even in the troubled times*

of marriage, the fact that you loved through those struggles, through the heartaches that sometimes accompany marriage signals that Truth, beauty, goodness, 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 two points Pope Francis made.

1) Remember the joy of your first encounter----both 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; he equates when you first met one another being as important as the first time you met, or “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. And just listen to what Pope Francis went on to say. He said that 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, God would say every time, “*It is very good!*”; but this time God 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, his exclamation perfectly sums 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.*”

God created humanity with a three-part plan: 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, they would establish their Family, teach them God’s ways, and raise them to

live together in love; and 3) “two by two”, “family by family”, the final part of the plan is that the entire family 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, what has been most important are those day-in and day-out signs of your love for one another, which provide the glue which keeps your love together.

And that leads to today’s Gospel. Jesus said something very similar and much more profound: *“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 first 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 said “I Do”. While you professed your marriage vows 50 (or more) years ago, and we will formally renew them here together, 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. For 600 months, you have loved each other for better and for worse; for 2,600 weeks, you have supported each other for richer and for poorer; for 18,250 days, you have been there for each other in sickness and in health. And without counting the hours, minutes and seconds, no matter how we count it up, from the first “I Do” 50 years ago, until the “I Do” you will say on your final day in this world, you are doing what Jesus told us in today’s Gospel is why He called us to love one another just like He loves us: *“so that My joy may be in you, and your Joy may be complete.”*

Or as St. Paul told us so beautifully in today’s Second Reading, *“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is ...in Christ Jesus.”* Just as Jesus emptied Himself completely for our sakes, laying down His life for the salvation of the world, so that’s what you are doing for one another: you are laying down your life for your friend/for your beloved spouse.

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!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley