

In Nomine Iesu

Weddings are beautiful. Everyone dresses up, men in tuxes and women in gowns. The church is decorated and the music is beautiful. Weddings are joyous and happy. Everyone is smiling, shaking hands, and remembering their own weddings. But then, uncle Frank – I hope there are no uncle Franks here – ruins it by saying to the young couple on their wedding day, “Enjoy this, it only gets worse,” as he casts a tired eye to his wife of forty years who made him put on this suit. Weddings are beautiful, and marriage is hard.

Ask anyone who has been married for over a year and they will tell you, marriage is hard. Only in fairytales and storybooks is marriage the sweet, celestial romance of happily ever after. Emotions fade, but your “till death do you part” remains even when you don’t feel good about your spouse. That is why we laugh at *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *The Simpsons*. They are comical because they exaggerate real life, but they are true to life. Husbands really do neglect wife and child, wives really do make fun of and dishonor husbands, and children really do rebel in countless ways. Marriage is hard.

But marriage is not hard because of marriage. If so, weddings should be in black with German dirges and hired mourners, lamenting the impending doom of the bridegroom and bride. But they are not. Weddings are beautiful, joyous occasions for a reason. God did not institute, create, and sanctify a difficult and painful estate in which man and woman enter. He meant for marriage to be a joyous life of peace and contentment. Marriage is hard because of us. We make it hard. We confuse issues and tell white lies and spin the truth so that we shine like the sun while our wife or husband is thrown into the shadows.

Marriage is hard because we are sinners. We are out for ourselves and will trample anyone who gets in our way. Couples do not get divorced because it just didn’t work out. Or because of money problems. Or even because of infidelity by their spouse. Marriages don’t fall apart except for one reason – things didn’t go your way.

No one ever says, “I divorced my husband because I’m horrible with money.” If they were honest they’d say, “We divorced because we each wanted it our own way, and were unwilling to submit to one another.” But getting what we want is not enough; we also have to make it look as if we deserve what we want. So, the ex-wife says that her husband was horrible with money and was the cause of their ruin. The ex-husband says his wife drove him to extra-marital affairs – other women, careers, Monday Night Football – because she neglected to engage in marital privileges. Marriage is hard because marriage requires what we cannot give – ourselves.

We cannot force ourselves to love someone and we cannot force others to love us. That is not the way love works. That is why the vows you will be speaking today say, “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer.” It does not depend upon us because we utterly fail. Even the best of husbands occasionally forgets to say, “I love you,” at the right time. Even the most devoted of wives occasionally forgets to say, “Thank you,” when her husband needs to hear it.

Marriage is difficult because we are selfish, conceded, pompous know-it-all who would rather tear apart the ones we purportedly love than to admit that we are the worse sinner who

needs forgiveness and mercy. And rather than seeking forgiveness and mercy, we lay down the excuses and actually expect to be believed. The cheating husband actually expects his wife to believe that it didn't mean it, that while in the arms of another woman all he could think of was his wife; that he still loves her. Our hollow excuses ring hollow in the ears of the one we hurt.

But I am speaking of Christ and His Church. If our self-serving excuses don't convince our hurt husbands and wives, how do we expect them to convince the all-knowing God? Trying hard does not impress Him. More money and fancier houses do not impress Him. Effort and intentions cannot appease God's anger against our sin. Pleading our case for our rebellious behavior does not remove the hurt of the one who loves us. Repent. Our sins have been thoughtless and selfish. We have hurt ourselves and those we love. We have risked everything and lived for the pleasure of the moment.

Yet our Husband, our Lord, does not demand anything of us. He does not show up with a thousand ways we can make it up to Him. He does not ask us to convince Him that we've changed. He merely and wonderfully forgives us. That is what love does. It covers wrongs and heals broken hearts. And God's love, displayed in the death of His Son, Jesus, saves us from our sins. He loves us even though we have sinned, and He will continue to love us even though we will sin again. That love is the standard for all marriages, indeed, for all relationships.

It is true that marriage is built on love. But that love is not the sentimental love of Hallmark, or even the tough love of Dr. Phil. It is the love of the Father. That even though we were His enemies and did not deserve His love or attention, He sent His only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sins and be our Savior. His love covers our sins with the blood of His Son.

This is why St. Paul uses marriage as a picture of Jesus' love for us. Marriage, more than any other relationship, shows us how God loves us, as flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. He sacrifices Himself for us, not counting our wrongs or harboring grudges. He merely and wonderfully says, "I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you." Such love knows no wrong. Such love creates reciprocal love.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for her.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠