

# 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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“From the beginning of Creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. So, then, what God has united, man must not divide.” By these words Our Lord encourages his listeners to recover God’s true intention for marriage. The beautiful image in Genesis of Eve’s creation from the side of Adam is not about subordination but rather a strong statement that of all creation only Eve is Adam’s equal and that they need each other’s love. Marriage is an image used by the prophets to describe how God loves his Chosen People. In the Letter to the Ephesians St Paul takes this same image and applies it to the relationship between Christ and the Church – a great mystery, translated into Latin as ‘sacramentum’. The Church teaches us that for this reason a marriage between two baptised Christians – even if they are not Catholics and perhaps do not accept this understanding – is a sacrament. It is a sign of God’s presence and love. Moreover the couple’s mutual commitment expressed in the marriage vows and lived out day by day unites the couple with God’s love and their lives are touched by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In his beautiful reflection on marriage *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis offers us the following thoughts:

The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since “their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church.”

“Mutual self-giving in the sacrament of matrimony is grounded in the grace of baptism, which establishes the foundational covenant of every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other, and with Christ’s grace, the engaged couple promise each other total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life.”

“Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses. By becoming one flesh, they embody the espousal of our human nature by the Son of God. That is why “in the joys of their love and family life, he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb”.<sup>67</sup> Even though the analogy between the human couple of husband and wife, and that of Christ and his Church, is “imperfect”,<sup>68</sup> it inspires us to beg the Lord to bestow on every married couple an outpouring of his divine love.”

We are all aware of human weakness and failings and both the Bishops at the Synod in 2015 and Pope Francis are well aware of the challenges that go with marriage and the reality and heartbreak of marriage breakdown. Much of his Exhortation is devoted to these problems. Jesus was fully aware of the same problem in his own day when many rabbis allowed divorce – at least to the man – for very simple failings and divorce was very common among the Romans. Human beings may fail but God always honours his promise to be with us. Even for a couple married for many years marriage is always work in progress - a shared journey.

Pope Francis concludes with these words: “As this Exhortation has often noted, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven. Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain also allows us to see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come. It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty. All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.”