

Both our first reading and the Gospel just now, made reference to marriage. That gives us an opportunity to reflect on some truths about marriage, which we don't always give thought to, but need to remember.

The first truth is that marriage is unique; secondly, that it is a vocation; and thirdly, that it is a lighthouse.

First of all the truth that marriage is a unique relationship. We are all involved in many relationships in our life; some strong, some weak, some temporary, some lasting a life-time. The Bible speaks of many relationships: of leader and people, teacher and pupil; friend and friend; king and people; landlord and tenant; commander and army; doctor and patient; lawyer and client. Yet, out of this vast array of human relationships the Book of Genesis singles out only one, and traces it back to the very start of creation – the relationship between husband and wife. It is the only relationship that Scripture teaches us was uniquely created by God. It's older than Israel and more ancient than the Church.

Marriage is not the result of some human convention, social arrangement or legislation as other relationships are. The marriage of man and woman is deeply inscribed by God in the very nature of human beings. Nothing can replace or imitate it. It is the only human relationship that is designed and intended by God as superior to all others. All other relationships come and go; - leaders come and go; friends come and go in our life; associates enter and leave it again. Some relationships happen to last, others don't.

Marriage is the only one where two people promise, in fact vow to be faithful to each other no matter what happens until death. They do this, not only to share their lives, but also to give life. At the heart of marriage is not romance, emotion or feeling, but a vow, a very powerful vow.

That vow, not its accompanying feelings, form the foundation of a relationship and a family. What makes marriage unique, far different from any other human relationship we know and have, is the vow of fidelity to one person for life, to give life.

Secondly, marriage is not only a unique relationship; in the Church it is also a vocation. So often, people tend to think of marriage as a private relationship, like young people together on a park bench, forgetful of the world around them. The Church, however, sees marriage as more than that. It is a vocation in and for the Church. That is why marriage is a very public relationship in which the Church has an interest, the State has an interest, and the respective families of the bride and groom have an interest. It is a public relationship in which two people promise to transmit the sacred gift of life, to raise children in the knowledge and love of Jesus, and to display, model, and express to each other Christ's sacrificial love.

They promise to each other the same kind of fidelity that God showed to Israel and Jesus to his Church. The Church has seen many ups and downs, and through them all, the Lord has been faithful to the Church. Christ loves his Church no matter what. He is always present in the sacraments. No matter who the priest is or the size or fervour of the congregation, Christ is there.

A married couple promise to love each other like that. They are not promising fidelity to someone who is perfect, but a fellow human being who is imperfect. The marriage vow shows its power precisely when we are faithful to a person who is flawed, limited, and vulnerable, - because that is how the Lord is faithful to us.

Finally, marriage is a lighthouse. In a world of so many broken promises, so many broken contracts, it should stand as a lighthouse showing what is possible with the grace of God.

So what about divorce? We are all touched by divorce. It is a fact of our world and of our families. We always need to show special compassion and care for those who are divorced. A broken marriage is always a sign of a wounded world. It shows how much we need the healing grace of God, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit before entering relationships, how much we need the help of others to make a marriage survive or, after the tragedy of divorce, to find repair and renewal.

But we also need to hold up the truth that fidelity is possible, that marriage as God intended can happen. In a marriage of many years not every day

may be a day of celebration, but every day can be a day of fidelity. Fidelity in marriage (like fidelity in the priesthood) doesn't just drop out of heaven. It is forged and strengthened week by week, year by year here on earth. We are all trying to live out the commitment of marriage and of priesthood not in a perfect world with ideal conditions, but now, in an unfaithful world, we are showing that the grace of God can help us do something we can't do by ourselves, - be faithful to our vocation. The grace of fidelity is an awesome grace

We should pray, therefore, for those working to remain faithful to their commitment in marriage, priesthood and religious life. They need the support of our prayer. Our world needs the witness of fidelity in vocation, whether priesthood or marriage.

Fidelity gives powerful light in an unfaithful world.

(Adapted from: Captured Fire, Sunday homilies by S. Joseph Krempa, Society of St. Paul.)