

## **27th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Recently, I attended a meeting about Catholic marriage that began by noting that over the last seven years there has been a significant decline in Catholic marriages, almost by 25%. Since the Catholic population keeps growing, it is obvious that either many people are not aware of the obligation to get married in the Catholic Church or the concept of a Catholic marriage does not carry significant meaning in their lives. With the continual attack on marriage and the family by our society, and in light of the readings for this Sunday, I thought that this would be a good time to consider this sacrament.

Why should people get married in the Catholic Church? This is certainly not just a nice thing to do. And if people only want to get married to use the Church as a backdrop for pictures, then they really don't understand marriage as a sacrament any more than the people who bring their children to First Holy Communion but then don't return with them until Christmas understand what the Eucharist is all about.

Why should people get married in the Church? Why did so many of you make this decision? Most probably because you realized that marriage was the most important decision of your lives. And you wanted Jesus to be present in the way of a sacrament not just at your wedding, but as you celebrate your marriage throughout your lives. The sacrament of marriage is not just a prayer during the wedding, it is not just a blessing of a union, it is far more than this. The sacrament of matrimony is the union of God with people establishing a new unit of his Church; the domestic church which is the family. The sacrament of matrimony establishes the Christian home with Christ at the center. That is why people get married in the Church.

And that is the ideal. However, we live in a world that has often given up on its ideals. We live in a world where good people suffer as the result of sin.

"But there is disorder," the Pharisees say to Jesus in the Gospel reading. The Law of Moses, after all, permitted a bill of divorce. "This was not the Father's intention from the beginning," Jesus replies. Disharmony

in homes, among people, good people and bad people, is a suffering that results from sin.

We have so many wonderful people in our parish whose marriages have suffered. It may not be their fault; it may not even be their former spouse's fault. Just as children suffer sickness and death due to the effects of sin in the world; so many good people suffer the destruction of their marriage or the inability to form a sacred lasting union due to the effects of sin in the world. Therefore, we need to have a special place in our hearts and in our charity for those who have suffered the loss of their marriages. They have been pulled away from the intention of the Creator by the forces of the world. They need our support and our love.

It was never in God's plan for evil to enter the world. This resulted from mankind's decision to push God, the Lord of Life, aside and to, therefore, choose death. God never meant for people to be widowed, divorced or single. In God's original plan there was no need for celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom because all would enjoy the Kingdom to its fullest in marriage. In God's original plan there would be no need for people to work so hard to establish and preserve their marriages.

It is sadly amazing how evil is able to distort something that is so good. The divinely created attraction of men and women to image God has been deformed into a drive to selfish gratification. Sex is portrayed by the media as having little to do with love and is mostly concerned immediate self-gratification.

But people know better. People have an innate knowledge that tells them that a person cannot love and be selfish and self-centered at the same time. People know that the ideal of marriage exists. But people need more than the ideal.

People need witness, your witness. They need the witness of your marriages as a union with God, imaging the Creator's Love for the Word, making real the mystery of the singular in the plural and the plural in the singular: The life of the Trinity.

They need the witness of your marriage, your sacrament. Your marriages are infinitely more than natural unions. You are not animals who mate for

life. You are human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, who are called to make God real to the world by reflecting His Love in your love for each other.

The world needs the Sacrament of Matrimony. It needs you to be married in the Church and it needs you to live this sacrament.

How important you are to us all! We the single, we the celibate, we the separated, we the divorced, we the widowed, need you the married to embrace and to live the ideal of marriage. We ask God's blessing today upon all in our parish who celebrate the sacrament of matrimony.

May you have the courage and strength to give witness to the presence of God in the union of husband and wife.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella