

## TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

October 3, 2021

Genesis 2:18–24 • Hebrews 2:9–11 • Mark 10:2–16

### I.

It was a wedding I won't soon forget.

The marriage took place here, as scheduled,  
when everything shut down at the beginning of the pandemic:  
Saturday, March 21, 2020.

According to the restrictions at place at the time,  
only 10 people total could be in the church.

For the wedding, that meant a skeleton crew:  
the bride and groom (2),  
both sets of parents (4), two witnesses (2), the priest (1), and the organist (1).

I remember how joyful and grateful the bride and groom were  
given the circumstances.

Of course,  
this wasn't the wedding they had planned,  
but they wanted to begin their married life with God's blessing.

I was struck by the lack of the commotion that usually encompasses a wedding.

The occasion certainly wasn't somber,  
but the normal social pressures were gone that day.

The focus was squarely on God,  
and the meaning of being married in his presence.

### II.

The pictures that were taken that day—  
of just 10 people occupying this vast cathedral church—  
conveyed, in a stark way,  
the essence and beauty of marriage.

That amid the vastness of the universe,  
 God joins together one specific man and one specific woman,  
 to help each of them.

There is something special, unique, and even improbable about that union;  
 it's possible only because God wills it,  
 and because husband and wife respond to God's call:

“This one, at last, is bone of my bones  
 and flesh of my flesh;  
 this one shall be called ‘woman,’  
 for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.”

Marriage, by God's design and will, is permanent,  
 as Christ declares in the Gospel.

Although Moses had permitted divorce as a concession to human sinfulness,  
 Christ reaffirms God's intention for marriage:

“Because of the hardness of your hearts  
 [Moses] wrote you this commandment.  
 But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.  
*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother  
 and be joined to his wife,  
 and the two shall become one flesh.*  
 So they are no longer two but one flesh.  
 Therefore what God has joined together,  
 no human being must separate.”

Marriage that lasts a lifetime is beautiful.

It's also difficult for two people to join their lives  
 and live in harmony for 40, 50, or even 60 years.

Sometimes marriages, including Church one, fail.

The break-up of a marriage does not necessarily mean personal failure.

Regardless, separation and divorce are painful for all involved,  
 yet God can provide healing.

What's the key for a marriage to last a lifetime?

This is a question I ask of couples when they request a blessing for their 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, or other wedding anniversaries.

The answers they give are similar:

“Father, it's not always easy.”

“There are ups and downs.”

“You have to work at it.”

“We never gave up trying.”

I try to pass along this wisdom to the couples I prepare for marriage.

At weddings,  
I often talk about how, in the Nuptial Blessing,  
the Church looks forward, beyond the wedding day,  
to the couple's silver and golden anniversaries.

In that regard,  
there's a section of the Nuptial Blessing that stands out to me:

“May they be blessed with children,  
and prove themselves virtuous parents,  
who live to see their children's children.  
And grant that,  
reaching at last together the fullness of years  
for which they hope,  
they may come to the life of the blessed  
in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The wisdom of couples who have been married for a long time  
echo the vows they pronounced on their wedding day.

That there will be difficulties,  
and that it will be necessary to struggle at times.

Often, people have unrealistic expectations about marriage.

That it's all about personal chemistry and compatibility—  
but that is not enough.

That difficulties in the relationship automatically signal an inevitable  
break-up—that's not necessarily true.

That one's spouse must be one's soulmate  
and source of emotional satisfaction—  
that is untrue, and is terribly unfair to one's spouse.

Only God can provide supreme happiness, in heaven,  
and nothing can replace God.

The wedding vows presume that there will be difficulties in a marriage,  
not that there won't be:

“For better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health.”

#### **IV.**

Marriage is part of God's design for the universe.

And Christian marriage is even more exalted  
because it reflects God's work of salvation in Christ.

In the sacrament of Holy Matrimony,  
spouses become a living sign of Christ's love for the Church.

Christ loved us to the point of giving his life for us.

According to the Second Reading,  
from the Letter to the Hebrews,

“He ‘for a little while’ was made ‘lower than the angels,’  
that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

That is the power at work in when two people,  
come before God's altar and pledge, by God, to live together.

“What God has joined together,  
no human being must separate.”