

Homily  
27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
October 6, 2024

When my wife and I were married, I told her I wanted fourteen children. I don't know where that number came from, but I knew I wanted a lot of kids. She had one simple request; she wanted to know these women I was having these kids by. We ended up with two beautiful, wonderful boys, now grown men with their own families. We did want more, but God had different plans for us.

With current technology, the earth can support up to 54 billion people. If every man woman and child were to stand inside the state of Texas, there would be just over 54 people per acre. The world is big enough to support growth. Infant mortality rates have improved 20-fold in the last century. Yet our birth rate continues to plummet, barely keeping up with our own need for survival. If we continue on this path, the world population will peak before the end of this century and start to drop off. We need more babies; we need larger families. Yes, we need to take care of the environment because that is what God calls us to do, to be stewards of this world, so let's do that, nurture our resources and grow God's family. All life is sacred because life is from God and God made all things good; therefore, all things from God are sacred.

In the first reading, we hear God establishing man and woman together as one flesh. In the following verses, *"Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish ... the birds ... the animals, and all the creatures ... on the earth."* Gen 1:26

In a perfect world, man and woman come together in love. And through that love comes life. And through that life comes more love and more life. In this imperfect world, man and woman come together and struggle, because we are all imperfect. Husbands, your wife is not perfect. She tries and often succeeds, but sometimes fails. And we love her anyway, in spite of these imperfections, just as God loves us as we are, with all our imperfections. Wives, your husband is not perfect. He tries and often succeeds, but sometimes fails. And we love him anyway, in spite of these imperfections, just as God loves us as we are, with all our imperfections.

When a man and a woman come together, God ordains that union, raising marriage to a Sacrament. And in this Sacrament, we are blessed with certain graces. The Sacrament of Matrimony is a visible sign between the husband and wife, of the invisible reality of the love that Jesus has for the Church. These graces are:

- Love: The grace to love each other with a tender, fruitful, and supernatural love
- Patience: The grace to have patience with each other when things get tense
- Fidelity: The grace to avoid temptations and remain faithful
- Holiness: The grace to attain godliness in their married life and finally achieve heaven
- Responsibility: The grace to devotedly accept the gift of children and provide for their health, safety and education

And when we fail in spite of these graces, we seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and we seek forgiveness from our spouse. And we forgive our spouse, no matter what, no matter how hard that may be, no matter what the offense. That is what love is: unconditional, forgiving, nurturing supporting, caring selflessly.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." CCC 1601 The Catechism continues for an additional sixty-five paragraphs detailing God's salvific plan for man and woman, from creation to revelation, including the role of evil in the world, within ourselves and between couples.

Yet, when we take our eyes off God and look around us, it's no wonder that divorce is so prevalent. Evil exists and is active in the world. Divorce among Catholics varies, from 28% to 49%. When we keep our eyes on God, when we see each other as God sees us, we know God's love and mercy. When we embrace the grace God provides us in our need, we are strengthened to persevere. When we make use of the Sacraments Jesus established for us, we know forgiveness through Reconciliation and we become one with each other through the Eucharist.

But what about when times are really tough? What about those times when circumstances beyond our control kick us, knock us down? Life is unfair at times. And sometimes we are unfair with each other. Yes, we pray, and yes, we come to Mass, but we also have other resources. We have each other, husband and wife, our best friend and defender. What about those times when we feel alone? We have our priests and deacons who can offer a compassionate ear and a helpful word. We also have professional services, counselors or therapists. But most importantly, we have the Holy Spirit. Don't forget to make use of both temporal and spiritual guidance.

There is no 50/50 relationship in marriage; there is only a 100% effort on your part. If you only meet each other halfway, there will always be a gap between you. We must go all the way, giving all of ourselves, fully, completely and unreservedly.

Pope Francis reminds us the best words we can share with our spouse are, "can I," thank you," and "forgive me;" these are critical to healthy communication. I would also suggest, "help me," "talk to me," "I'm listening." There are also words of support, "I'm proud of you," "I appreciate you," and "I love you." I firmly believe that all problems a couple may encounter in their marriage are rooted in a lack of communication. Jesus calls us to pray unceasingly. A husband and wife are called to communicate unceasingly. That communication will vary with circumstances, with length of marriage, with personality styles, but all communication requires engaging one another with love and a sincere commitment and effort to listening and understanding. Many times, that communication will be without words. Maybe it's an encouraging glance or a gentle touch. It's not easy, but with the grace of the Sacraments and perseverance, a couple truly can become one flesh, one body. And as God made us one, let no one separate.