

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Oct. 6-7, 2018)
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

Getting married is easy. *Being* married takes work.

Getting into the car and driving home from the hospital with your newborn child is easy. *Being* a parent takes work.

Getting baptized is easy. *Being* a Christian takes work.

Since June 1st, it has been my privilege to preside at 11 different weddings.

Weddings are beautiful here at Saint Mary's. The bride and groom sit right over there. They're nervous and excited. They can't believe that the person sitting next to them loves them this much.

They are surrounded by family and friends. There is beautiful music, and, of course, outstanding preaching...

They stand before the altar, and they speak the life-changing vows.

Then we have the rings, the kissing, the applause. And off they go to the reception.

It is easy to say 'yes' when you are surrounded by beauty, laughter, music and people who want nothing but the best for you.

It's easy to get married. But... *being* married... *that takes work*.

Saying 'yes' at the altar is easy... then you realize that your 'yes' will cost you something. It will cost you *everything*.

Once you're married, every decision you make is no longer about *me*, it is about *we*. You can no longer ask: Is this good for *me*? You have to ask: is it good for *us*?

Being married requires talking through the hard stuff, putting the other first, stripping away selfishness. Being married requires the hard work of communication, and adapting to differences. Being married requires forgiveness, and patience, then more forgiveness, then more patience...

And then the children come, and you realize that, when it comes to forgiveness and patience, you

ain't seen nothing yet!

Being married is hard work! Some days you may ask, 'why are we still trying?' But then you meet a couple who've been doing the hard work of marriage for 40, 50, 60 years. And you look at them and say, "that is beautiful. They are beautiful. Their marriage is beautiful."

I hope that we all know at least a few couples who inspire us. The couples who have paid the price, who have carried the cross, who have learned the hard lessons... and there they are, still married. Not just getting by, but *thriving*.

In their love, you catch a glimpse of God's love. In their forgiveness, you catch a glimpse of God's forgiveness. In their patience and faithfulness, God is showing you something that cannot be learned anywhere else.

Thank God for the couples who *say* 'yes,' and then *live* their 'yes.' Thank God for the ones who understand that love isn't easy, but love is the one thing that makes life worth living.

Their example inspires us. It inspires me.

When the Pharisees approached Jesus in today's Gospel with their question about marriage and divorce, they were not seeking to inspire anyone. They were trying to trap Jesus. They want him to say the wrong thing so that they can accuse him.

They ask – "is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" They already know that the Book of Deuteronomy permitted divorce. They're trying to trap Jesus.

But Jesus will not be drawn into their destructive game. Instead, He reminds his listeners – then and now – about God's original intentions for marriage. He speaks of God's beautiful plan for married love, what a gift this love can be, if we are willing to work at it.

It's what we heard in the first reading. God makes us male and female. And when we meet the one whom God intends for us, we experience joy in their presence. In the passion we experience for each other, in the love that makes our hearts burst, we are experiencing God's care for us.

Then one day, you're sitting across from the one you love. You look at them and realize, "This person knows me better than anyone else, yet they love me in a way I don't deserve." And you cannot imagine your future without them in it.

And in that moment you understand what Genesis says: God has made the two of you *one*. So you decide to say 'yes' to God's plan.

God takes *marriage* seriously, because God takes *us* seriously. For so many of us, our deepest fulfillment is found when we stand before the altar, and say ‘yes’ to each other, and ‘yes’ to God.

Jesus reminds his listeners that this is God’s plan. Jesus wants us to remember the couples whose marriages have inspired us. He reminds us of this, because it is so easy for us to take each other for granted. When we take each other for granted, we withdraw, we hold grudges, we keep score, we stop communicating, our hearts head in different directions.

I don’t think that any man or woman who has stood before an altar ever plans to get a divorce. I don’t think that men and women enter into marriage thinking that they will be the ones who are left behind, or that they will be the ones who will walk away. And yet, divorce happens in every family. It’s happened in my own.

Jesus’s language about divorce sounds harsh to modern ears. But please remember: as Jesus confronts his tempters in today’s Gospel, his first instinct is to *inspire* us by reminding us of God’s dream for every marriage. Hold on to the dream that you had on the day of your wedding. Treasure the example of the men and women whose marriage inspires you. In the busyness of life, it is easy to forget why we said ‘yes’ in the first place.

The ‘two become one.’ This is God’s plan – and it is beautiful when we see it lived well.

Still, why does Jesus use such harsh language? He says that those who divorce and remarry commit *adultery*. “Adultery.” Ouch.

In some ways, this hard language is Jesus’s way of telling us that God takes marriage seriously, and God takes divorce seriously. I think Jesus is inviting us to do whatever is humanly possible to stay faithful to our vows.

Still, if this were the only time Jesus ever spoke about ‘adultery,’ you might be justified in thinking that he sounds pretty harsh.

But let’s not forget that in the 8th chapter of John’s Gospel, the religious leaders drag a woman before Jesus. And what has she done? She committed *adultery*!

The religious leaders all have rocks in their hands. The law said that a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death.

What does Jesus do? He says, “Let the one without sin cast the first stone.” Rather quickly, every rock is dropped, and every accuser disappears.

What does Jesus say to the woman who committed adultery? He says, “Woman, I do not condemn you. You’re forgiven. Now go, and don’t sin anymore.”

Do you hear that? This woman was caught in adultery, but Jesus’ response is not condemnation – it is mercy, forgiveness, and the desire to help her move forward with strength, and hope, and integrity.

Jesus takes *marriage* seriously. And he takes *people* seriously. And he seriously loves us.

That is why Jesus takes seriously the children who are being baptized this weekend. Jesus knows that it is easy to *get baptized*. Lots of people get baptized. But it takes work, and focus, and strength, to live the Christian life.

Today is the easy part for these children. But as they grow up, they will see that *living* the Gospel of Jesus is not easy. Yet, Jesus doesn’t ask us to do it on our own. So he gives us our families, our friends, and our church communities - and in those relationships, we encounter other people who can teach us how to follow Jesus. We meet people who inspire us, because they have made the commitment, and they have done the hard work, of being a disciple of Christ.

When we meet someone who is living their baptism, when we meet someone who is faithful to Jesus, we take one look at their lives, and we see that it is beautiful.