

**The Celebration of Holy Matrimony
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The human race has always been fascinated by romance stories. Since the very first moment written language appeared on the face of the earth, writers and lovers have been telling us their stories of passion, heartache, joy, and romance. And every good story has elements of danger, suspense, fear, liberation, and romance. I have challenged myself to summarize some of the most famous love stories of Disney in 30 words or less. Let's see how I do. The first story reads like this: *Subjugated housemaid dresses to kill for a party, meets a wealthy prince with mammy issues, plays hard to get, finally marries him and lives happily ever after.* Did you guess what story I just told you? You are right, that was Cinderella. Let's see if you can recognize the second story. *Daughter of Sultan falls in love with a thief. With a genie as a wingman the thief proves himself worthy and marries the princess. And they lived happily ever after.* Now, that one was easy. Of course I am talking about Aladdin. The next may not be that easy. *Prisoner uses long hair to escape tower, falls in love with thief, fights evil prison warden, heals thief with tears, reconnects with wealthy parents, marries thief and lives happily ever after.* We could do this all day, so, let me just read one more. *Environmentally friendly maiden arouses queen's jealousy. Queen poisons maiden and she falls asleep. Seven height-challenged miners kill queen and protect maiden. Prince's kiss awakens maiden. They marry and live happily ever after.* There you have it. Just four famous Disney stories.

In many people's minds and imaginations love is a fairy tale. It is high romantic drama, endless passion, and glitter. This is the way Disney portrays love and each of these stories ends with the traditional, "And they lived happily ever after." I would love to see a Disney story that takes place 7 or 8 years after the wedding. The princess now has three children under the age of 7, has taken a job as a corporate secretary for Entergy, has to rely on childcare to care for her kids, and comes home exhausted every night after a 10 hour shift at the plant. In the mean time, the Prince now shows a pronounced beer belly, spends most Saturday afternoons watching football or tailgating, and comes home every evening at 8:00 or 9:00PM because the family needs the overtime to pay for the family's new three bedroom home on Royal street. I believe a story like that would be compelling. I would pay to read a story like that

All humor aside, let me say a few things about today's gospel. In today's gospel Jesus tells his disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." This is the mandate that frames all that we are here to do. Today we unite this man and this woman in holy matrimony because we know that they love each other. We have witnessed this love over the last year, and now, in the presence of God Almighty, we unite them in Holy Matrimony. In Biblical language to "unite in Holy Matrimony" means to become "One Flesh," to "Cleave to one another," to create something new, and to grow together in mutual love and respect.

It is God's will that a man should leave his house, his parents, his life, his friends, his personal commitments to be united in Holy matrimony to a woman. It is God's will that the woman should leave her house, her parents, and her personal commitments to marry a man. And the two shall become one flesh. One entity. One reality. They will not lose their personal identity, but that personal identity will no longer define who they are. It is the new identity of Husband and Wife that will begin to determine who they are in the eyes of God and in the eyes of the church.

Today's mandate that you love each other as Christ loves you will be extremely difficult because it will require a great deal of sacrifice and self-giving. Many of us have grown thinking about marriage in the idealistic terms of Disney Movies. But, my friends, even though marriage is the joyful union of a man and a woman, it is by no means a fairy tale. Life is very difficult and there are many cultural forces that threaten the institution of marriage today. In our culture, we want easy marriages where our needs are always met, our partner always behaves in exactly the way we want him or her to behave, our children are of above-average intelligence, we all live in Lake Woebegone, and I always come first and second and third. We want marriages that are always filled with passion, satisfaction, and joy. This is the message our culture preaches today.

Marriage is a union of two imperfect people who love each other. And because they are imperfect, this couple needs God's help in "ordering their common life." Because they are imperfect, they will need God to help them become "a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy." Every couple needs God to "knit together their wills and spirits, so that they may grow in love and peace all their days of their life together." Because they are imperfect they will need God's grace, when they "hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness." Because they are imperfect, every couple needs God's help to "overcome any estrangement", forgive the other when they offend each other, and to achieve the

type of joy that conquers all despair. Because they are imperfect, they will need God's help to prioritize each other always, and to remain deeply committed to each other in mutual affection. And it is the same for all of us. If any of us thinks that we can have a healthy marriage without God in our lives, we are lying to ourselves and we are lying to the one we are with. We cannot have a healthy marriage without God!

Over the last few months Kevin, Rebecca and I have talked about all these things I just mentioned. They know how difficult marriage can be, but I believe they are well suited for the task ahead. They know what they are doing and they know the reasons why they are doing it. Now as I finish my message I want to remind the two of you of a few of the themes we talked about: Remember that life is full of demands that are always distracting and have the potential to drive you away from each other. Make your home into a sanctuary and a refuge where you can be yourself in the presence of the one who loves you. Prioritize each other. There is no substitution for spending time with each other! At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is the quality of your relationship.

Second, learn to fight fairly, and seek to reconcile quickly. Life is too short to be angry with the one you love. Remember that no marriage can ever survive where there is no forgiveness. You will offend each other. You will act in inconsiderate ways towards each other from time to time. Learn early on to ask for forgiveness and to forgive the other. At the end of the day all that matters is the love and the compassion of your beloved and your love and compassion towards the other.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, bring God and those who love you along for the ride. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your marriage deserves every chance to survive. When things get rough, remember the people seating here today and remember this church. Help is always a telephone call away.

May God bless the two of you on this great and exciting journey and may he fill your household with happiness, peace and joy. Amen!