

**The Celebration and Blessing of Holy Matrimony
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Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
St. Francisville, LA
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Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33

Welcome to this beautiful and holy event in the lives of Hunter and Whitney. I am glad that you are here, not just because you were promised free alcohol, but because you love this beautiful couple and you want to be with them as they make the single, most important decision of their lives. Now, as most of you know about me, I try to pepper most of my wedding sermons with a little humor, but these precious people have taken their marriage preparation so seriously, so responsibly, and in such an adult way (always early for sessions, always responsive, always willing to do whatever I asked of them), that to use humor during this sermon would almost cheapen the experience for them. So, I will be very serious during this sermon. Do not be surprised if I refer to the Council of Trent or to the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Go ahead, Google those terms up. I'll wait.

In the beautiful passage from Ephesians today, Paul makes a few wonderful comments about life in community. I believe these comments apply beautifully to a marriage. First he says, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Right here, from the start, we see what marriage is all about: Love. Marriage is about love. It is not a political treaty between two clans, a business deal between two corporations, or a license before God to do things you shouldn't have been doing before you got married. You know what I am talking about! (Looking at a child or young person, "I'll tell you later what I am talking about"). Marriage is the union between two people who love each other. And, since we know that God is love, anyone who truly loves another person is an imitator of God. When we live in love and devotion to the other, we honor God and we live as beloved children of God. Of course, we know that we are human and that we don't love 100% as God loves us. We know that we are not yet the people God created us to be. We are still under construction, and sometimes our love becomes selfish or self-serving. What we do know, however, is that we are not alone in the task of loving. God's ultimate gift of love towards humanity, his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, walks among us, showing us exactly what love looks like. The more we love another person, the way Jesus loved us, the more we understand the very heart of God.

Paul continues in his passage, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Here is where some of you tune off. If we were in a train, this is where many of you would get out. After all, we live in the 21st. century. What is this "be subject to one another business"? That is such an old way of thinking. "Wives be subject to your husbands, husbands be subject and be willing to die for your wives". This is not the way we think anymore. To be subject means to be obedient, to honor

the other person, to be loyal to the point that out of love and respect for that person we are faithful, we are committed, we are all in. I love that expression, "To be all in." Of course, I would love the expression more if I hadn't lost two homes and a washing machine playing poker! But, what can you do? To be all in means to submit to the other without reservations, to give it all up for that person, to make that person our complete focus and vocation. To be subject to another is to think of the other first, without resentment or bitterness, not out of a sense of hopeless obligation, but out of complete devotion and love. It means to do all in our power to help the other become the person God created them to be. Paul gives us a few examples of what this devotion looks like in First Century Palestine and often he is accused of being anti-women because of these examples. But the central message here is to be "subject to one another." However this complete devotion looks like today in our own context and in our own world.

This complete devotion is hard today. We live in a "me" generation where the "I" comes first, second, and third. Thinking of another person first, in good times and bad times, in sickness and in health, at times of success and at times of crisis... is very hard. We live in a culture of runners. At the first sight of trouble many of us are conditioned to run, to find greener pastures, to care for number one, to do what brings the most personal satisfaction and pleasure to the mighty "I". Yet, complete devotion demands that we stay and deal, that we stay in find solutions together, that we become a shelter for our spouse, that we become a source of comfort at times of joy and at times of adversity. Complete devotion means that you stay in and fight for your marriage against any enemies that may come from inside or from outside of the marriage. And, trust me, there will be many threats!

I have a friend who has become an expert at this complete devotion thing, including the fighting part. He and his wife have been fighting for over 30 years, and they continue to fight even now. I remember one day I came to visit them and he was busy burying a framed photo of his wife upside down in the garden. He had wanted to do this for awhile but never could. On this day, his wife was away visiting the "Dragon in Law", as he called his wife's mother. So, today was the day to do the burial. He had read somewhere that if you bury a picture of your wife upside down in a sweet spot, like a garden, the person becomes sweeter, kinder, somehow nicer. So, for the sake of the marriage he was willing to do whatever he could. Of course it didn't work, she came back from her mother's just as mean as ever. But, I am happy to report that the exercise wasn't in vain. My friend did find his lost keys. (For those of you who are not Catholics, see me after class!)

Ok, back to serious. Paul continues, "He who loves his wife loves himself... 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'" I absolutely love this expression, which we also see in the Gospel of Mark today. Out of love, we are mandated to leave our parent's home to be joined to a wife or a husband, and to become one

flesh with them. This may be the train stop for some of you! This is not how we think of marriage anymore. In today's age marriages are temporary institutions, not meant to last. We speak about being "between marriages", we speak about "starter marriages" like we used to talk about "starter homes", we are quickly losing the concept that marriage is meant to be forever. Now, I don't mean to judge those who for some reason have divorced. I know that we live in a broken world and that sometimes life becomes overly messy and complicated. What I am doing is reminding these two beautiful people that marriage is the union of two souls, and you can not separate this union anymore than you can separate the water from the cool-aid after you have mixed them. You are now one substance, one reality, one body, and one flesh. You don't lose your individual identity, but that individual identity becomes perfected today, made whole, as you become one with the other. This is such a beautiful and powerful image that Paul uses it to talk about the union between Christ and his Church. We are one flesh, we are one body.

We are almost at the train stop. I promise! I just want to say a couple of things about what it means to leave home and to cleave or be joined to another. It means to leave home physically, relationally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. We get a new address. We create our own space, we stop mooching off our parents, we grow up and become responsible adults. Of course, this means that our parents have to let us grow up and leave the nest. No longer cutting our stake in small pieces and feeding us. No longer doing our laundry and ironing our undergarments, as a friend of mine used to do because she didn't like the way the new wife did her son's laundry. To leave means that we create something that is uniquely our own, completely new. It means that our relationships become re-oriented and now our spouse becomes our primary relationship and source of comfort. We share good or bad news with them first. We consult them first about important decisions, they become our financial partners and together we build a home on a solid financial foundation, and, ideally, we share our faith or create the space necessary for our spouse to develop a mature faith. To leave means to grow-up and become our own selves. It means to take ownership for our own piece of the world and to do our part to advance the life we have been given us.

These are weighty responsibilities, but, have faith. You have an army of supporters sitting on these pews here today. Look at these people here today. They are here for one reason and one reason only: there is no LSU football game tonight! I mean, they are here because they love you and because they were promised free alcohol! But, mainly, because they love you. Don't be afraid of reaching out for help. Marriage is so important that you need the support of those who love you to make it strong. Lastly, don't forget to bring God along for the journey. With God in your corner, your marriage will be beautiful and it will last forever. May God continue to bless you. Amen!