

Homily – 21st Sunday of Year B – Choosing the fullness of life

Three times during my life as a priest I have lived in townships where a daily local paper was produced. In Halifax *The Courier*, in Skipton *The Craven Herald*, in Dewsbury *The Reporter*.

Each at the time featured in their weekend issue the photographs of newly married couples at their recent wedding. Alongside there were pictures of married people who in the same week had celebrated their silver or golden – sometimes even their diamond anniversaries. A mixture of feelings might well up inside those who regarded their smiling faces.

Looking at the photos of the young couples we might share a little of their happiness, be glad that they have found each other. They are with someone they love, who promises them the joy and strength of companionship in life, someone with whom they feel safe; someone who loves them. We can become, for a moment or two, part of their dream *to have and to hold from this day forward until death do us part*. Indeed a wedding day is a lovely day, full of promise.

But also in our hearts, especially in the hearts of parents and married friends, there will be a certain anxiety. Such a commitment as matrimony is costly, it will make demands; being faithful is hard. *For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better for worse*. Who knows what the future holds, what unexpected challenges will come? Will their marriage work out well? Will their love be strong enough to stand the test of life? To choose someone to love and serve every day, day in day out, is to take a risk, to step out in faith, to entrust oneself to another's promise, to another's enduring goodwill.

To look at the Golden Wedding anniversary pictures can be more reassuring. There we can see a love that has been tested and proved true; a love that has borne fruit; a love that has brought two people into a union, the depth and intimacy of which only they can truly appreciate. It has been through their sufferings and trials as much as their shared moments of delight that their bonding has been achieved – and they would assert their willingness to go through it all again to be where they are now in their matured love for each other.

As St Paul declares in today's second reading, a faithful Christian marriage is an image of the relationship between Christ and ourselves – a union of love, full of promise, demanding and costly, yet rich in its rewards for those who stay true to their commitment. Jesus loves us to death itself, and beyond. He sacrifices Himself for us to make us holy, to make us whole persons.

Every Mass reminds us of the extent of his love, of His self-sacrifice, of his death for our sakes. The fruit of that union, the outcome of our commitment to Jesus is the fullness of life. At every Mass we renew our choice, our commitment to be his friend and follower. We know what He promises and what He delivers:

Is it not He who brings us out of slavery, who works wonders before our eyes, who keeps us safe all along the journey? In these words the people of the Old Testament speak of the freedom and security that is to be found in faithful commitment to the Lord.

And Simon Peter said: *Lord, to whom shall we go, we know you are the Holy One of God; we believe you have the message of eternal life'.*

At every Mass by our presence, by our words and by our actions, we are renewing our dedication to Him, declaring over and again:

Lord I trust you, I believe in your promise. I know our relationship will make its demands, that it will be costly, that there will be times of trial and suffering, of doubt and darkness, but through remaining faithful in my love for you I will enter into greater freedom and a deeper joy. I will be strengthened, and I will be lifted up into a new experience of life - even in this world - through the power of your love at work in me.

The psalmist reminds us today: *Many are the trials of the just man - but, from them all, the Lord will rescue him.*

Now, in this moment, Jesus is asking each of us: *Will you also go away?*

Lord, you see my hesitation, and the wavering in my heart. You see my anxieties and my uncertainties. You see how I doubt the reality of your love, the truth of your promises. You see how I fear the demands of your love. You hear me questioning in my heart of hearts: Who shall I choose to serve: my Lord, or those other gods that men worship? Shall I put my faith in the promises of Mammon?

And you remind me:

It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are Life.

Help me say with Peter:

Lord, you are the Holy One of God, you have the message of eternal life.