Ritual: Marriage (no text)

**CATHOLIC MARRIAGE**

 Marriage is at the very heart of our faith community. The faith communion of husband and wife is a wonderful sign of the communion of the Christian community. It is truly a sign of the love that exists between Christ and his Church. We must work seriously to ensure that the Catholic family can continue to exist and to proclaim the Christian message.

We live in a society where the family is under attack. Many people want to redefine it, include all sorts of relationships within it, and propose values and practices that will undermine it. The power of society is such that it often has more influence on Catholic people than the Church does, and it is easy for people to slip into attitudes and practices without realizing that these undermine our Catholic understanding of family life.

In such a situation it is important that we continue to proclaim our Catholic teaching both in word and in the lived experience of the Catholic family. As a sacrament, marriage draws the married couple more deeply into the mystery of the Risen Christ. It provides the milieu within which their married life is expressed, and it is a powerful expression of what the Mystery of Christ proclaims. The love of the marriage is meant to reflect the love of Jesus himself, so that the love to which it bears witness is the very love of Jesus.

This love between husband and wife sets the tone for the whole family. I remember on one occasion when I was invited to a talk on the family, given by a visiting speaker. At question time, a man stood up and asked the speaker what would be the very best thing that he could do for his children. The speaker replied: “Love their mother.” It was a stark reminder of the importance of the relationship between husband and wife. Marriage is directed not only to bringing life into the world, but also to nurturing it in a milieu of love. The breakdown of this central relationship will inevitably have an effect on the whole family.

Our society has emphasized some very important aspects of marriage. It has made us aware of the importance of a greater personal freedom in marriage. There has been a greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationship in marriage. It has promoted the dignity of woman, responsible parenthood, and the education of children. These are important values to affirm.

However, society’s message has not always been positive. An excessive emphasis on the independence of spouses, in relationship to each other, can easily undermine the relationship. A serious misconception of the authority between parents and children has sometimes separated children and parents. In our society it can be difficult for parents to pass on their values to their children. The power of society and the forcefulness of peer pressure often outweigh the influence of parents. The growing incidences of divorce, the rising number of abortions, and the development of a contraceptive mentality puts pressure on our basic Catholic values.

How can we withstand such pressures? I believe that we can do so only if we keep returning to what it is that makes us Catholic: our relationship with Jesus. In marriage, this relationship is shared sacramentally with one’s spouse: the journey to God takes on an even greater social dimension. The effort of spouses to live their faith together will strengthen them in the faith and its practice. If the faith is not shared by both spouses, the deepening of the faith by the Catholic spouse will also help to keep the love in the marriage a reflection of the love of Jesus.

In the context of our communion as believers, we should all pray for Catholic families today. The shared prayer of the community can support those within the community who face difficult times. Certainly, these are difficult times for families, not only financially, but also spiritually. We should all do what we can to work for a society in which Catholic marriage can be respected and be seen as a forceful proclamation of the love of Jesus.

* *A reflection by Bishop David Walker in April 2009*