

At wedding, pope says spouses make each other better men and women

By Francis X. Rocca

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY – Presiding over the wedding of 20 couples in St. Peter’s Basilica, Pope Francis celebrated marriage as the union of a man and woman playing complementary roles during their common journey through life.

“This is what marriage is all about: man and woman walking together, wherein the husband helps his wife to become ever more a woman, and wherein the woman has the task of helping her husband to become ever more a man,” the pope said Sept. 14. “Here we see the reciprocity of differences.”

The pope spoke during a wedding Mass for couples from the diocese of Rome.

In typically frank style, Pope Francis admitted married life can be tiring, “burdensome, and often, even nauseating.”

See a video from the ceremony:

But the pope assured the brides and grooms that Christ’s redemptive sacrifice would enable them to resist the “dangerous temptation of discouragement, infidelity, weakness, abandonment.”

“The love of Christ, which has blessed and sanctified the union of husband and wife, is able to sustain their love and to renew it when, humanly speaking, it becomes lost, wounded or worn out,” he said.

Pope Francis also offered practical advice for dealing with marital discord.

“It is normal for a husband and wife to argue,” he said. “It always happens. But my advice is this: never let the day end without having first made peace. Never. A small gesture is sufficient. Thus the journey may continue.”

Speaking three weeks before the start of an extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family, the pope emphasized the importance of the institution based on marriage.

“It is impossible to quantify the strength and depth of humanity contained in a family: mutual help, educational support, relationships developing as family members mature, the sharing of joys and difficulties,” he said. “Families are the first place in which we are formed as persons and, at the same time, the bricks for the building up of society.”

The newlyweds ranged in age from 25 to 56 and represented a variety of situations,

with some already having children or having lived together before marriage.

Cohabitation, though not a canonical impediment to marriage, violates the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and sexual love. Pastoral ministers helping Catholic couples prepare for the sacrament are urged to encourage them to regularize such situations prior to marrying.

At the start of the papal wedding Mass, the brides, wearing traditional white gowns, were accompanied up the aisle of the basilica by their fathers or other male relatives. The grooms entered with their mothers. One at a time, each couple read the wedding vows and exchanged rings before the congregation and the television audience.

As a thank-you present to the pope, the couples jointly contributed to an educational and recreational center for disadvantaged youth in a suburban neighborhood of Rome, to be established by the local branch of Caritas.

The ceremony was the first public papal celebration of a wedding since 2000, when St. John Paul II joined in marriage eight couples from different parts of the world as part of the Jubilee for Families. He also publicly presided over another joint wedding for a group of couples in 1994 as part of his celebration of the International Year of the Family.

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