

World Day of Marriage

What a joy-filled day this is! Family and friends here to salute parents and grandparents - Jubilarians faithful, loyal and persevering in living the vows they made a quarter and half century ago and even more. Most likely this is one of several celebrations many of you will be having to rejoice in life - life together, life fruitful and life challenged by periodic hardships and disappointments.

But this celebration is unique, special, in that it is held in the very presence of God, who called you to gather, who witnessed and graced your vows. A God who has remained ever faithful to you and has enabled you to be faithful to each other.

Our first scripture reading might seem to be inappropriate on this afternoon of joy. We are all familiar with the story of Job. Evil seems to engulf him. Overcome by sickness, sores and scales cover him head to foot. He has become an outcast, abandoned by family and friends. Understandably, Job is weary of life - work is laborious and constant, with little to show for it. What is there to live for - there is nothing to look forward to. The nights are long and filled with restless worry. He longs for the light of day but at daybreak, downcast and dispirited, he hopes for a quick nightfall.

But he perseveres, never gives up, though he is often on the brink of surrender. A good possibility that for this man, thoroughly versed in temple prayer, today's psalm came to mind: Praise the Lord, for he is good. He heals the broken-hearted, binds up their wounds and sustains the lowly.

As individuals and as married couples, each of you has experienced a Jobian moment or two in your long lives. Your presence here, together and smiling, offers

all of us inspiring reassurance of God's powerful presence through thick and thin. Your presence prompts us, with you, to praise God - for he has been strong and powerful in your lives and will show Himself to be so in our lives as well.

And at the heart of it all is Jesus Christ, no stranger to evil. Indeed, he seems to search it out, wanting to confront it and defeat it at every stage, in every form. The whole town was at his door with spiritual and physical misfortunes, depravities and calamities: the sick with every kind of disease, people possessed with demons. And then there is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. (I appreciate the many mothers-in-law here today. Still, I would dare to pass along the persistent rumor that the relationship between Peter and Jesus was never quite the same after this miracle.)

But why are these long-ago scenes reported in the Gospels, and why are they valued and treasured by believers such as ourselves? Because the Church is convinced that at the Lord's death and resurrection, he poured his new life into his Church, so that in the healing sacraments of Baptism, Confession and Anointing of the Sick, the Lord continues to demonstrate his power over evil. And in the Sacraments of Marriage and Eucharist he implants a divine love in hearts, now enabled to sacrifice ourselves for one another as he did for us on the cross.

In moments seen to come, you will rejuvenate your love for each other as you renew your marriage vows. In the Eucharist you receive, the living Christ gives you his own risen life to support you, for better or worse, in good times and bad, in sickness and health, until a bodily death that will enable you to see love itself, face to face.

A final word of thanks to you, Jubilarians, for your splendid witness to God's plan for marriage and family at a moment when we face a severe cultural deterioration of marriage as an institution. Since the beginning, Scripture insists,

God made them male and female and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.

In recent decades, individuals and groups have sought to redefine God's plan as never before, as never even imaginable. Only the intimate, unconditional love of man and woman, open to offspring can ever be worthy of the name marriage.

False, pernicious and destructive has been the 1992 claim of our Supreme Court that each of us enjoys "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.". It would seem that each of us is God, doesn't it! Disappearing is the State's necessary role to surround marriage with its traditional and lawful protections: encouraging mutual and lifelong faithfulness in marriage, defending the sacredness of human life from its beginnings, and fostering parental authority.

You, good Jubilarians have withstood the tide of individual autonomy in seeking to follow the will of God throughout your life together, for most of you in seeing children as blessings, not burdens, the rewards God gives to those who love him.

What would this world, our culture, our Church be without the witness you give! We pray that God will give you many more years to bask in his love and to inspire the rest of us. We need you. We love you. We thank you.