

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

October 2-3, 2021

Readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16

The obvious theme of today's readings centers on marriage, an instituted sacrament in the Church since the time of Christ. We pastors desire to promote and preserve this sacrament and to assist our young couples in understanding the nature of a sacramental marriage. This is so they may be prepared to enter it with full knowledge and after sufficient reflection.

Family life has changed and so have the statistical markers for marriage. Millennials<sup>1</sup> turned 40 years of age this year! We can trace significant changes in demographics through this cohort with respect to marriage, and the results pose challenges to our understanding of the sacrament.

For example, in households comprised of a married couple and child, Millennials lag farthest behind as only 30% of them fitting this category. This compares with 40% of Gen Xers, 46% of Baby Boomers and 70% of those who were born before World War II when they were the same age as Millennials are now.<sup>2</sup> In 1960, 75% of households were comprised of married couples; today fewer than half fit that category.<sup>3</sup> Wow!

Ten years ago, I began approaching my marriage preparation sessions with couples differently. I made it a point to thank these couples for seeking Matrimony within the Church. As I did that, they began sharing with me just how out of the mainstream their convictions were amongst their own peers. They appreciated the encouragement for swimming against the stream and pursuing marriage by living a healthy and holy life as a single. We all know about the effects of the sexual revolution of the 1960's. But a more recent trend has seen the separation of sexual union from love.

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<sup>1</sup> Those born between 1981 and 1994/6.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, "As Millennials Near 40, They're Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations" May 27, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the annual marriage rate stayed above eight marriages per 1000 people. It is now below 6 per 1000; it peaked at 16 per 1000 after World War II.

Social science researchers found that traditional forms of dating seemed outdated and even harmful to students' social reputation. Many were unwilling to express their deep feelings for another out of insecurity whether the other would reciprocate. Many instead chose what they perceived to be the best of both worlds- intimacy without any strings attached! This is the so-called "hook up culture" and is of grave concern. This approach to relationships has left too many feeling empty, used and missing the true intimacy of the two becoming one. It has failed.

I care about marriage because I desire the happiness and holiness of our young people. I seek to share the truth of human sexuality with others, even as I am all too aware of my own sinfulness and seek God's mercy and grace to live out my vocation more faithfully. I grieve when a young couple chooses to forego Baptism for their newborns, not seeing a value in the primordial sacrament in the life of the Church. I worry when the number of marriages diminishes both within the Church and in society.

Marriage is fundamentally good, and truly foundational to our human experience. **It is the lifelong partnership of mutual and exclusive fidelity between a man and a woman ordered by its very nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.** Marriage is described as *communion*, where "the two become one flesh," as we see in our first reading today. (Gen 2:24). It is also a partnership for life, a mutual and equal partnership, in which each helps the other to grow.

Marriage is a reality that predates any government or religious institution. Rather, it springs from the nature of the human person; male and female God created them. The love between a husband and a wife involves a free, total, and mutual gift of self that not only expresses love, but also opens the spouses to receive the gift of a child, an awesome responsibility. The complementary nature of husband and wife is expressed very clearly in conjugal love, allowing parents to welcome children and calling for the collaboration and unique gifts that each brings to the marriage.

In my marriage preparation sessions, couples are often surprised to learn that upon completion of 12 hours of pre-marital instruction, they are eligible for a discount on the marriage license fee. In Ramsey County, the \$115 fee drops to \$40. I ask them why they think this is? They are usually a bit puzzled. The state has an interest in marriage preparation precisely because stable and lasting relationships are better for society as a whole.

Do not fear the commitment of marriage; do not shy away from making commitments in life. Embrace commitment, and to quote from the lyrics of a popular<sup>4</sup> [Country song-“Buy Dirt”](#) - that is, settle in, put down roots and wait for God’s many blessings to fill your home.

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<sup>4</sup> “Buy Dirt” Jordan Davis (with Luke Bryan) premiered August 10, 2021