

## THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2017 - A)

Our first reading today is taken from the Book of Proverbs, and this reading contains a lovely description of a worthy wife and by implication, of marriage. In fact, this short reading summarizes what our Catholic faith teaches about marriage.

It describes the worthy wife as industrious, applying herself to her duties. It also notes that her care extends beyond her home and family to the poor and needy. Finally, and most importantly, she is someone who fears the Lord. It says this kind of wife is to be praised and she will receive a reward for her labors. That reward of course is eternal life with God.

Notice that our reading describes marriage as between one man and one woman. It also says that the husband of such a woman will entrust his heart to her (with the implication that she in turn will do the same, that she in turn will entrust her heart to her husband).

This one sentence is very important and is key to understanding the Church's teaching on marriage and here's why. The heart has always symbolized love. So, to say one has given his or her heart to another means that they have given their very selves, all that they have, and that they have held back nothing.

To give one's heart to another means that person intends to be totally faithful to the other in all things. It means there will be no one else either physically or in any other way. There will be no flirting and no hanging out with people of the opposite sex when your spouse is not around. It means that person is faithful in what they look at or watch, and also, that they will be faithful even in their thoughts which are known only to them and to God. Anything less than that is not giving your whole heart.

Our reading also notes that beauty is fleeting. Here the implication is that heartfelt love requires a lifelong commitment. That by the way is expressed in the marriage vows when both the bride and groom promise they will remain together until parted by death.

One last thing here is this. The gift of self includes the power to beget or conceive children. This too is implied when one entrusts his or her heart to the other. That's because one cannot give one's whole self and hold back that power to bring about new life. Also, one cannot reject that power when it's offered without rejecting part of the one they say they love.

So, we can find in this reading from the Old Testament, from the Book of Proverbs, all of the essential elements of marriage as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. Namely, marriage is between a man and a woman. Marriage is the only place for a sexual relationship. Marriage involves a commitment that is both faithful and life-long. And finally, marriage is open to life, to the blessings of children, to all of the children God wishes to give that couple.

Now let me switch gears here. Let me contrast our Catholic beliefs about marriage with those of our culture and our society and consider how these two ideas about our sexual relationships differ and in fact, are simply incompatible.

So first of all, our society rejects the idea that intimacy is something which belongs in marriage and nowhere else. Our society also rejects the idea that one should wait until marriage. Our society rejects the idea that children are part of marriage. Our society even rejects the idea that marriage is between a man and a woman. Instead, our society treats intimacy as a form of recreation, a kind of sport which involves no commitment and no love and certainly no children.

Now, this way of looking at things is, as they say, one way of looking at them. To put it another way, unlike our Catholic teaching on marriage, this pagan way of living doesn't require commitment, and it doesn't require the sacrifices one makes in raising children. In that sense, it's clearly easier. However, it also has some negative consequences, and here are some.

Loneliness. Fewer and fewer people are getting marriage today. Instead, they are spending their lives alone. Also, for those who do marry, the average age has now risen to its highest levels ever: 28 for women and 29 for men.

Women are having trouble finding good men. Women who tend to desire long-term, stable relationships more so than do men report that it's harder and harder to find men who measure up. In fact, over 10% of men today are not just unemployed, but they are not even looking for work. That's because they're content to live off the women they are servicing. So during the day while she is working, they just sit around watching porn and playing video games.

It has now become very clear that as a society, we are not working on building solid, stable marriages and on raising families where loving relationships are nurtured. Yet because we all want to be loved and to love, we still search for ways to express love. So we replace children with pets, and we replace wives with porn stars.

Our society has rejected Christian sexual morality, and it says that the benefit of this is that we now have all the freedom in the world to do what we want. But I would ask, with all that freedom why are so many people so dissatisfied with their lives? If this new way of living is so good, why are so many people on medication or taking drugs?

We now we live in a world where sex is cheap and where infidelity, promiscuity, sexual confusion and mass pornography have created human wreckage everywhere. Sadly, most of the people living this way don't even know what's wrong and so they don't know how to fix the problem. Until they do fix the problem, they won't ever be able to be productive members of society, and the few children they have will grow up never knowing what it means to be loved and what it means to really and truly give your heart to another.

So, have I told you anything new here? I think not. These things are not secrets. We all know about them, and that's because we see them all around us, in our families and friends and neighbors and workplaces and schools. Or, we have experienced them personally.

So what's the problem? The problem is that we are not living according to God's plan. That's the problem. We are not following God's plans for how to live a good life, and so, things aren't working out all that well for us.

Think about it this way. Suppose you used a hacksaw to comb your hair. It sort of works. It has teeth like a comb, but they aren't very deep so you really can't do much more than comb the surface hairs. A hacksaw kind of works, but not too well.

Or how about this. Suppose you used your shoe to pound nails. You can do that for smaller nails, but it kind of wrecks your shoe if you try it on larger ones. Then there's the problem of pulling out bent nails. How do you do that with your shoe?

We have a similar problem with marriage today. We are not using intimacy in the way God has intended. We're not using it for its intended purpose. You know, back in the 1960s when the pill first came along, everyone jumped onto the contraceptive bandwagon. That was when we first separated life from love in a big way. That was when we separated babies from intimacy, and it seemed like a good idea at the time. However, it had unintended consequences. For example, it cheapened sex. Men didn't have to work as hard because women required less from them for access.

Then after rejecting life, we began to reject love (where one gives one's whole heart and whole self to another). This in turn led to more and more failed marriages, and with more and more marriages failing, people became more afraid to make commitments and to entrust their hearts to each other. Instead, they held back, and now we have the Internet's replacement for love, pornography which has captured and enslaved many, many people. In fact, 43% of men and 9% of women report watching pornography on a weekly basis. Among those 18 to 39 year olds the numbers are even higher, 46% of men and 16% of women.

Now, there is a solution to this problem, and the solution is simple. We have to put love and life back together again within marriage.

We need to live our faith. We need to be proactive. We need to teach our children and grandchildren that intimacy is for love and life. We need to teach them that they can only move in together once they have exchanged their vows and then and only then can they really make love. We need to tell them that despite what our laws say, marriage is still between one man and one woman. We need to guard our families against porn which is a huge temptation today because it's so easy to view. [I have materials about this at the Church entrances. Pick up a booklet or book to find out what you can do.]

You know, we Catholics are supposed to be evangelizing the culture, but instead, the new pagans have been evangelizing us. We are supposed to be bringing Jesus Christ to the people of our age, but instead, we have been accepting every stupid thing that comes along.

We watch their movies. We listen to their music. We dress immodestly. We laugh at their jokes. When people move in together we don't say anything or we even affirm them. We support homosexual marriage. We criticize couples who have more than 2.1 kids.

Often we go along out of a sense of misplaced compassion; we don't want people to feel bad, and nobody wants to make people feel bad, and that's not what God wants either. But here's the thing. The folks who are misusing intimacy still feel bad because they are using sex like someone who combs their hair with a hacksaw. It sort of works, but not all that well. That's because it doesn't help them grow in love, and it isn't open to life. So what our culture is pushing on us is not only displeasing to God, but it doesn't work.

Jesus never said that following Him would be easy. In fact, He said that if we want to be His disciples, we must take up our own cross. Today, our cross is to uphold the Lord's teachings about love and life and marriage in the face of our culture's total rejection of these things.

So why do this? Are there any rewards? Yes. Our reward in this life will be a deep satisfaction with what we have built over the years, the love of children and grandchildren. That will be the earthly reward for our labors. However, our greatest reward will be the joy and peace God gives to those who serve Him in this life and eternal life in the next. Amen.