



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-October 7th 2018 -

Wadebridge/Tintagel

Genesis 2: 18-24, Psalm 127, Hebrews 2: 9-11, Mark 10: 2-16

‘It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate.’

Thus Holy Scripture records the opening shot in the theology of that labyrinthine complexity which is the relation between man and woman and the consummation of that profound encounter in marriage.

Marriage has been a lot on my mind recently. The news has been full of it. In the odd moment aside from cataloguing the ‘great divorce’ of Brexit, there has been a torrent of events in the arena of marital law.

First of all came a court ruling on benefits for a woman whose partner had never married her and had died of cancer. The court ruled she was entitled to the same benefits as if she had been married. Now I don’t begrudge her children a penny of the support but there is something odd here. Cancer is not like being hit by a bus. There is a bit of warning.

They decided not to regularise their union presumably. The upshot is that this neglect has now, single-handedly, provoked a change in the law, dictated by the courts (not Parliament), to assert that, in effect, marriage is no better than co-habitation.

Then the Government has decided to proceed with the speedy ‘no fault’ divorce. This sounds, in a supposedly non-judgemental society, like a

good wheeze to many. No-one wants to return to the situation my beloved mother-in-law was in where it took her husband twelve years to divorce from his brief ill-fated and childless wartime marriage, but we are now facing the reality of marriage as a disposable commodity. No reason needed. No objection sustained. It's over. Next.

As I write this the courts (again) have overruled the Government on Civil Partnerships. They are to be opened to heterosexual couples now. How quickly the wheel turns. The original legislation, massive and complex to exclude just such a possibility, was passed to enable same sex couples to confect a legal partnership to give them pension and inheritance rights equivalent to married couples. The promise, by its proponents, was that it would not be a precursor to same sex marriage. The rest is history.

Now the courts, understandably, see it as discriminatory and everyone must have this opportunity. Marriage, apparently, comes with historic, religious and gendered connotations so you can understand why an anti patriarchal post-modernist would shy away even from the Registry Office.

Three more attacks on marriage in very short order. Another assault on family life. Another round of the unfolding moral chaos of our time.

The other reasons I have been thinking a lot about marriage are very different.

My younger son is getting married to his long term girlfriend, in a couple of weeks time, and I am delighted.

But I have, therefore, been reflecting on what forty four years of marriage means to me. Because now, with many of my generation, we are entering the darker side of those immense vows. As young men and women we heard better rather than worse, richer rather than poorer, health rather than sickness and death seemed a long way off. Entering into the fullness of that commitment is a huge new challenge and test of

love and faith and patience. But we are in a covenant not a contract and Christian marriage sets the bar high.

What God gives man and woman in marriage and Jesus defends utterly in today's Gospel is an astonishing gift.

Christian marriage has certain key qualities and it is good to remind ourselves of some of them. 'The vocation of marriage', the Catechism tells us, 'is written in the very nature of Man and Woman as they come from the hand of the Creator.'

We also know, from endless Scriptural references, that God's best description of His union with His people is that of a marriage. It is the image of His overwhelming creative and redemptive love.

Out of this love come three definitive hallmarks.

Marriage is Faithful. Marriage is Unitive. Marriage is Creative.

Fidelity, faithfulness, is that extraordinary gift of absolute trust that frees us to be the person God made us to be. It gives us the safe space to grow and to grow up into the likeness of Christ. Without this unshakeable trust love is always provisional, conditional, unsundered and unfulfilled.

Christian marriage is Unitive. It is a Covenant not a contract. It speaks of the two becoming one flesh and points the two distinct persons into a near mystical union of body and soul. It is the nearest we get to a knowledge of the love that is at the heart of the Godhead where three divine persons are in indivisible unity.

Christian marriage is creative. That is about children but it is not just about children. We are invited, in marriage, to be pro-creators. God is Creator supreme and, in our physical and spiritual union, we act for Him in the pro(on behalf of) creation (bringing into being) of mankind.

But that creativity does not begin and end at the openness to family.

When God gives His Word, that we know from Genesis and John, all that is to be comes into being. Because God's gift of His Word is His very Self.

So when we give our Word, before the altar of God, to another person, we are not beating the air with romantic words or confecting a legality.

WE ARE LIKEWISE GIVING OUR VERY SELVES EACH TO THE OTHER

This is the highest doctrine of human love and the greatest hope of true unconditional, sacrificial union. It is why, when it fails, the cost is so high and the pain is so great. It is why the Church defends marriage so tenaciously, and encourages her children, following her Lord's example. Marriage is not an add-on, an experiment, a day, a throw away disposable or a simple legality. It is a Sacramentum – a promise made by us and by God binding our little human love into His.

It is the greatest adventure of love and the lifelong and mysteriously joyful journey into the heart of the other.

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