

Mass for World Marriage Day
2/11/17
Saturday of the Fifth Week of the Year

During Jubilee Year of Mercy that was concluded this past December Pope Francis published the Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, the Joy of Love. In this beautiful document the Holy Father reflected on the beautiful and joyful truth of the marriage bond. In that same spirit we gather here this morning we celebrate the enduring witness many of you have given to the joy and beauty found in the faithful, loving union of woman and man.

The first reading, this morning, from the Book of Genesis, at first glance, may seem to cast doubt on what Pope Francis and we claim about marriage. The first couple, Adam and Eve, was led to sin by the devilish serpent and suffered the consequences of their original sin. Far from being at odds with what we celebrate today, this painful moment in Salvation History still gives us much to consider.

Pope Francis began his exhortation on marriage reminding us that all of sacred scripture begins and ends in a marriage. The creation story with which the Book of Genesis begins culminates with the creation of man and woman made in the image and likeness of God. The sacred scriptures concludes with the Book of Revelation wherein the final scenes present the Church as the New Jerusalem

processing down from the heavens as a beautifully adorned bride approaching her beloved spouse, the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sins of the world.

The loving and faithful union of a man and a woman begin and complete the revelation of God's mercy to the world. Marriage, then, is not just part of salvation history. The marriage bond of woman and man is at the heart of God's revelation of his mercy. For this reason, Pope Francis was pleased to present this document on marriage, *Amoris Laetitia*, during the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The marriage bond reveals the eternal covenant God desires with humanity. As St. Paul told us, marriage shares in the great mystery of the eternal love of Christ Jesus for the Church. (Eph. 5.32)

In the first reading, Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden because of their disobedience. God communicates to them the consequences of their sinful actions. As one of these consequences of their sin God tells Eve, the man "shall be your master." This poignant conversation reflected what has been a sad reality throughout history, the subjugation of women in society. What this passage also tells is that God did not originally intend this. This is a consequence of sin in the world. The dignity of both the woman and the man are diminished when the freedom and dignity of one is not respected by the other.

When God first created humanity he created male and female in this image and likeness. Both were a reflection of the divine life and together in love they reflect the divine creative communion of the Most Holy Trinity. In creating humanity as male and female, both reflect God's beauty and are of equal dignity. Each was created to share life with the other and to create life together.

This image was marred and diminished by sin but was not destroyed. For all the bitter consequences of sin, what endured after the original sin were the creative union between woman and man and the communion of the family. This reflection of the Trinitarian communion overcame the pain of sin and would continue God's plan to create life through a communion of family love.

The first family as well as generations of families thereafter suffered the consequences of sin yet God would continue to use the marriage bond and the family as an occasion of grace. Jesus would be born into a family, surrounded the affection and piety of Mary and Joseph. All through salvation history the marriage bond would participate in God's saving plan: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Boaz and Ruth, Tobias and Sarah, Zachariah and Elizabeth, and the young couple whose marriage in Cana Jesus blessed with an abundance of new wine.

The mission of every Christian marriage is to overcome the consequences of sin by cooperating with the redeeming mercy of

Jesus. The mercy of Jesus revives the divine image marred by sin. In Christian marriage both man and woman are called to serve one another by fostering divine likeness in one another. The equal dignity of both man and woman is discovered through faithful love. As the creation story teaches, the only true dominion is God's mercy. The redeeming story of Jesus' love for the Church offered on the cross reveals that sacrifice is the only true expression of power. The faithfulness of marriage is lived out by imitating mercy and sacrifice of God.

Following the example of Jesus in the gospel, let us nourish one another and our families with the *Amoris Laetitia*, the joy of love. In this way we all grow in the image and likeness of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.