



Annual Marriage Day Mass Homily

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton
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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
12 August 2014

I believe that this evening we are making history and beginning a tradition in this Archdiocese. We have come to the Cathedral to celebrate marriage and to thank God for the gift of this great Sacrament to the world.

The making of history part is due to us, gathering together to give thanks for those couples who celebrate a significant milestone in their married life together. This is the first time that Archbishop Costelloe and I have invited couples to come together in the Cathedral, so that the whole church can recognise the achievement, with God's grace, of living faithfully the call of marriage they received so many years ago.

The tradition which I hope begins for the Archdiocese this evening is that we will do this each year. Having couples come from our parishes to be with their bishop, to celebrate and give thanks for all the blessings they have received from God, is an important moment in our year.

The idea germinated as I celebrated the Mass last year for the Australian Family Association. Why can't we do this every year and have the entire Archdiocese be part of such an event, I thought. I am indebted to the Association for coming on board with this idea and working with our Marriage and Family Services office, the Knights of the Southern Cross and the Catenians to make this evening come together.

Marriage is as ancient as human society and it has always been the foundation of stable and healthy community. So, celebrating the gift of marriage and family seems obvious. There can be little wonder that Jesus recognised the importance of the human institution of marriage, the communion of a man and woman, and that it has been elevated to the status of a Sacrament.

From time to time, the Church has officially recognised the sanctity of married people through the process of beatification. Only once, though, has a couple been proposed to us as an example of Christian faith and heroic virtue. Yet we know of so many marvellous individuals and couples who have been inspirations to us. They are the unsung saints. They have been present to us in our families, in the circle of our friends and in our parish communities.

There was an incident I observed some years ago that I enjoy sharing with the couples I prepare for marriage. It happened one morning when I was driving to work.



While waiting at the lights near the Causeway, I realised that the drivers around me were looking over to my left. Looking across myself, I saw a very elderly couple walking slowly along the footpath. This was not too remarkable in itself. But, I think, what caught the attention of all of us was that they were walking hand in hand, like young lovers might do. By their appearance, they would have been in their late eighties. We all watched as they slowly walked, supporting one another, secure and comfortable in each other's company.

What did those drivers see and think? Did they see, as I did, a couple still in love with one another? After how many years? After how many of life's storms and trials? Were they as much in love now as they have ever been, even more? I found my answers in that simple gesture of holding hands.

When a young couple plans for marriage, particularly for the Sacrament of Marriage, their hopes are that the love they have come to know in themselves and from their partner, will flourish and grow to greater heights and depths. Their love, they hope, will be so strong that not even death will extinguish it. St Paul liked to describe the power and necessity of love in terms of being clothed completely. This image was heard earlier in the reading from Colossians. The Christian life is about putting on the qualities of our Master: sincere compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Over these, we add tolerance and forgiveness. What keeps these together and completes them is love, that great love for the other that does not expect a return.

There is a couple who lived in the twentieth century who are proposed to us for the living out fully of their Sacrament. They are Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi. They were greatly accomplished professionals: Luigi, a lawyer and public administrator, and Maria, a professor of education. However, they considered their real vocations began when they met. They were blest to have a lively and happy family life, but not without great difficulties. Maria's last pregnancy was life-threatening, but she and Luigi faced this with the help of their faith. They simply entrusted the child she was carrying to God and, happily, the mother and child survived, against the expectations of the doctors who had hectored her to abort the child.

Their home became a centre for the charity work they engaged in and the social apostolate. During the Second World War, Maria and Luigi opened their home to refugees and as a drop-in centre for anyone in need.

They used their many skills to promote education and faith formation. The result was the development of Adult Faith education, catechetics, marriage preparation and retreats. Their work was supported from the deepening love of their marriage and openness to God through their faith and prayer together.

For Luigi and Maria, the source of their seemingly tireless energy and unyielding commitment to their family and community was their Sacrament of Marriage. Christ, present with them in their marriage, faithfully provided the blessings of strength, courage but, above all, love for the others they encountered throughout their lives. The Sacrament was the source of blessing so that they could become sacraments of Christ's love for the world. They were beatified by Pope John Paul II on 21 October 2001.

This evening, we honour the many couples who are with us to celebrate a very meaningful anniversary. They have achieved much together as they have sought to put on Christ. They



have grown in their faith in God and in one another. They are witnesses to us all of the wonderful possibilities of growing together in marriage with Christ.

After the Mass, they will receive a Certificate of Blessing from the Archbishop and me. I hope they will be aware of the deep gratitude we feel for them and their persevering faith in God and in one another. I hope, too, that they continue to believe in the vocation, the call they have from God, to be the best that they can be as spouses and parents and citizens in our communities. We pray this evening that they will never lose sight of Christ standing in the centre of their relationship, their strength and source of love.