

Wedding Anniversary Mass – September 2016

I heard a story about a man in his late 80's was very close to death. The family was aware that these were his final hours of life on this earth.

Henry was in and out consciousness, and mostly unresponsive when any of the family visited him in his bedroom at home.

Suddenly he smelled the aroma of his favorite cookies; the ones his wife Agnes would bake from scratch during their 60 years of marriage. At first Henry thought maybe this is what heaven is like.

But as he opened his eyes he realized he was still at home in his bed. So he got up and staggered into the kitchen.

Henry sat on a chair at the kitchen table and stared at dozens of freshly baked cookies. He picked up a cookie that was still warm from the oven.

And just as he was about to take a bite, his wife Agnes tapped him on the arm with a wooden spoon and said, "Drop it. Those are for the funeral luncheon."

I am sure that many people here can identify with that kind of rapport between Henry and Agnes. It was probably not the first time that Henry smelled the fresh baked cookies and was stopped by Agnes.

And the image of the "tap" on the arm with a wooden spoon; do you think that never happened before. After 60 years of marriage, I think it is safe to say that the tap on the arm with a wooden spoon was truly a "love tap."

It was not something done in anger, or because Agnes did not love her husband Henry. Agnes is one of those organized persons who does things with a sense of order and purpose. It is simply a given that you don't mess with that!

And I don't think that after more than 60 years of marriage, Henry would make one last attempt to make Agnes crazy by trying to sneak a cookie!

That interaction which had been going on for 60 years is an expression of their devotion to one another:

- Agnes made cookies for weddings and 1st communion parties and funerals, but she also made cookies for Henry
- Henry knew that Agnes made his favorite cookies, and this game of trying to sneak a cookie, even though it was a risk that he would get hit with the spoon, was his way of letting Agnes know that he appreciated her cookies, and most of all that he appreciated her.

I thought of this story of Agnes and Henry as I reflected on the readings from Sacred Scripture; it made me think of that wise expression that tells us to “savor the moment.”

It’s an expression which means even over the span of 60 years, life is lived one day and one moment at a time; and we need to make every day and every moment count.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel reading, which comes from his famous Sermon on the Mount, that when we live our lives that way, when we “savor the moment,” we do it not just for our own good, but we do it because it gives glory to our heavenly Father.

The word savor, means to taste or smell something with pleasure; to enjoy it completely.

What is it that we are to savor as we gather today?

The obvious answer would be to savor the anniversaries of marriage, because it truly is an awesome thing to recognize to be married just one year, or more than 50 years, or anywhere in between.

But there is something more for us to savor. It’s found in a word that St. John uses throughout the second reading for this Mass. The word used 14 times by St. John is love; l-o-v-e; love.

The ultimate reason why we should savor that word is because, as John tells us, love is of God and God is love.

I would like to draw your attention to someone else who strongly recommends that it is important to savor not only the love that is of God, but human love that is guided and supported by God's love.

In March of this year, Pope Francis published a post-synodal apostolic exhortation on The Joy of Love. In Latin, the title is *Amoris Laetitia*.

In this apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter on "Love in Marriage." The Holy Father plainly reminds us that "Love in Marriage," is to be understood according to the idea of God's love.

But Pope Francis also reminds us that "Love in Marriage" should be authentic human love, which is something real and tangible; something that should be savored, enjoyed, and shared.

He says, "Love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of married couples and their children."

And he reminds us that the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended above all to perfect the love between husband and wife.

If you want to know what that is like, Pope Francis explains that you can see it in the humorous, and sometimes not so humorous, real-life experiences of people like Agnes and Henry.

Pope Francis reminds us that the true meaning of this married love as expressed in the story of Sarah and Tobiah in the first reading or in the description of love by St. John in the second reading really is something that is of God.

This love is revealed especially by the person of Jesus.

In his preaching, Jesus often emphasized his care and concern for the essential components of marriage, including permanence, fidelity, and openness to children.

Pope Francis explains that the word of God is not a series of abstract ideas, but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every married couple and every family that experiences difficulties, challenges, and even suffering.

But that's not all. These experiences are only part of a journey that leads to our final meeting with the Lord God who will wipe away every tear from our eyes; when death shall be no more, and there shall be no more sadness, suffering, or pain.

Pope Francis is talking about ordinary people like Agnes and Henry. We all know people like that. I am looking at them right here in front of me.

Pope Francis is talking about people like yourselves who reveal God and reveal God's love to each other and to us.

St. John refers to all these things in today's second reading when he says: "Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love."

He says, "The love of God was revealed to us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him."

And most important St. John says, "Love is not so much that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. And, if God so loved us, we also must love one another."

It's the self-giving kind of love that is seen in the lives of so many couples like Agnes and Henry, and all you gathered here.

But what about young couples who find it difficult to see that far into the future?

First, Pope Francis affirms the physical attraction that is very strong at the beginning of the relationship between man and woman, and he affirms the strong feeling of affection that is present at that stage.

But he wisely reminds recently married couples to pay attention to the future time when we will share completely in God's love.

In order to keep God's love at the center of attention, a husband and wife should assume an active and creative role in working together and for the good of each other in building the life-long relationship to which they committed themselves at their wedding.

And Pope Francis acknowledges that all married couples could use some help:

- From each other, so that neither spouse thinks that he or she has all the answers
- From a more experienced couple, like Agnes and Henry
- From all of us gathered in prayer especially today, but always praying and supporting the vocation of marriage
- From the Lord Jesus, who manifests his love in such a profound way from this altar where we enter the mystery of his saving love, his death on the cross
- From the Lord Jesus, who knows what we need and desire even more than Agnes who for more than 60 years continued to bake Henry's favorite cookies. From this altar, the Lord Jesus feeds us with the Bread of Life; his own Body and Blood in this sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, which is the most perfect sign that love is of God.

In the closing paragraph of his Exhortation, Pope Francis says, "No marriage, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed. Husband and wives and families need to grow constantly in the ability to love."

Just ask Agnes and Henry.

Your sharing in God's love is what has made your marriages signs of God's goodness and mercy and love. You really are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, as Jesus says in the Gospel today.

Thank you for savoring the moment for all of these years of married life that we celebrate today. Continue to savor the moment in the years to come.