

Wedding Anniversary Mass, Sunday, September 9, 2012

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

Homily

I would like to tell you a story about a man by the name of John Currier. In 1949 he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm near Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter announcing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw that letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died.

Ten years went by. A new parole officer discovered that Currier never got the letter. The parole officer did a search and found that John Currier was still at the same farm. He immediately told Currier that his sentence had been terminated ten years ago. John Currier was finally a free man.

I am sure that most of you are thinking, "How does something like that happen?" Does that story make you think of any other questions, on a more personal level?

For example, would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message -- the most important in your life -- and year after year the urgent message was never delivered? I'm sure that you would say of course it matters!

It makes us think, what good is the message without the messenger? It also makes us think, what good is the messenger without the message?

That's what Jesus is getting at in the Gospel reading today. He says to all of us here, that we are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). In other words, we are messengers. Salt is a basic seasoning and light is necessary for people to see when it is dark.

Without seasoning our world would be dull. And without light we would be bumping into things and not be able to go anywhere in the dark.

Since we are salt and light, it means that we have something to offer. We have a message. But it's more than that. Jesus is saying that our very life as his disciple is a message to our world.

So we must allow our lives be salt for the earth; to give it real flavor because God does not intend for our life and the lives of others to be dull.

We also have to let our light shine. Since Jesus has shown the light of his glory in our lives, we are to reflect that light into the darkness for others so that they can walk in the same light.

We are messengers and we are part of the message. The message of Jesus is to be passed on not merely in a theoretical or abstract way, but in a personal way. That's the whole point of the Son of God being born into the world as human; a real person who is just like us, except for sin.

The Gospels teach us that real people, ordinary people had the opportunity to encounter the real person of Jesus during his life on earth. Our Catholic faith that is rooted in the Gospel teaches us that we can encounter the same real Jesus in the Church, in the word of God, in the sacraments, and in our interaction with other people.

Today, we have come together to praise and thank God for the way in which the message of his love is transmitted to so many people through the special messengers of husbands and wives who joyfully celebrate a milestone of marriage.

For some it may be your 1st anniversary, for others it may be 5, 10, 25, 40, or 50 years of married life; or it may be something more or in between those numbers.

Our diocesan director of the Family Life Office, Susan Stith, and many others who assist in pre-Cana, and marriage preparation, and marriage enrichment programs can tell you how often they hear from couples who say that even though they might not have been too enthusiastic about marriage preparation or marriage enrichment programs, they came to appreciate how important it is to hear the real message about marriage.

What is that awesome message about marriage?

First we need to remember that marriage is a sacrament. Like all the sacraments, it is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. And as unique sacrament that comes about the words of consent given and received by a man and woman in the presence of Christ and the Church, the grace of marriage is administered through the husband and wife.

They are the messengers of God's love and grace to each other. And they are also part of the message.

An essential part of God's message to the world is that our God is a God of life. A husband and wife become part of that message in a special way in the procreation of children and in the nurturing and education that they provide for their children according to the teachings of Christ and the Church.

Another essential part of God's message is that our God is faithful and committed to us. His love is everlasting and unconditional. He is with us and for us and never turns away from us. In marriage, husbands and wives have the opportunity and the challenge to remain faithful and committed to each other for life.

All of us know that such faithfulness and commitment is possible with the help of God's grace. Married couples such as those who are being honored today for their anniversaries of faithful and committed lives are an important example to our world and especially in our own culture which tells us that it's not that important to aim high in making a vow to remain together for life.

One more essential part of God's message is that our God is a God of mercy and salvation. He is always present to us through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Church, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. We know that sometimes the marriage relationship between a husband and wife may bend or even break; but we also believe that with the help of God's mercy and grace, it is possible for married couples to live a long and fulfilled life together.

You who are the real veterans here today; you who are celebrating 40 or 50 or more years of married life; we thank you for being messengers and for being the part of the message that God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

You are not just good messengers for the younger couples who are here today or those who are preparing for marriage. If you ask most priests, myself included, they will tell you how much their commitment to Christ is strengthened by the message of your married lives.

All of this takes me back to the story of John Currier and the question: would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message -- the most important in your life -- and year after year the urgent message was never delivered?

I have met many, many couples who would answer that question by saying they could not imagine what it would be like if they never heard the message that Christ was calling them to be married to their husband or wife.

And I have met many, many couples who have never thought that it was part of that vocation, but yet they have delivered the urgent and happy message to so many others that marriage is something wonderful, and life-giving, and really worth it.

They have delivered that message simply by being the salt of the earth and light of the world. They have delivered that message simply by living their marriage in such a way that it becomes an example and a message to others.

We have much to be thankful for today; especially for all these married couples. It is appropriate for us to praise and thank them as we praise and thank God in this celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The sacrament and sacrifice celebrated at this altar gives meaning and support to all the other sacraments, including marriage.

I have already mentioned that it is understood that marriage involves sacrifice, and mercy, and challenges; all the things that Jesus experienced and expressed in his passion and death. It is that saving mystery that we celebrate in the Holy Eucharist.

The Holy Eucharist is the source of life and the spiritual food that we need and that we are able to receive in Holy Communion. It deepens our relationship, our communion with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and it deepens our relationships with each other, including the unique relationship between husband and wife in the sacrament of marriage.

One of our Holy Father's favorite stories from the New Testament is the story of the wedding feast at Cana.

Many scripture scholars have noted that most important part of the story of the wedding feast at Cana can make us think of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharistic background because the miracle involves wine which is an essential element in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Instead of water being transformed in wine; wine is transformed into the blood of Christ.

Also, the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana is the first such manifestation of God's saving presence in the person of Jesus in this way. In every celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Mass, God's saving presence is manifested in a sacramental way.

There are other elements of the story of the wedding feast of Cana that are worth noting, but I want to mention one that Pope Benedict XVI spoke about in a message to engaged couples in September 2011 at a Eucharistic Congress in Italy.

The Holy Father suggested to those engaged to be married and those who are already married to pay attention to the small, but significant role the Blessed Virgin Mary had in the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana.

He points out that Mary was attentive to the need of the couple who were getting married that day. They ran out of wine which was an important part of a Jewish wedding celebration at that time. Mary brought that to the attention of her Son Jesus. Then she spoke to the servants who were in charge of the food and refreshments at that wedding.

Pope Benedict says that those engaged to be married and those who are married should pay close attention to the few words that Mary spoke to the servants. She pointed to her Son Jesus and said, "Do whatever he tells you."

I remember a man telling me on his 50th anniversary, the secret of his marriage. He said, "Any time my wife told me to do something, I just did it. I didn't always like it, and a lot of times I argued with her, but I did it."

What our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, is getting at in his advice to those preparing for marriage or already married is that when Mary said, "Do whatever he tells you," she was doing exactly what Jesus tells us in today's

Gospel reading: You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world. Don't waste the salt and don't hide the light of faith that you have received.

Mary was being a very good messenger and at the same time she was part of the message because she had already been doing whatever Jesus told her.

I want to thank all of you who are celebrating your wedding anniversary here today, and those who are listening at home on the radio; and I want to thank all married couples for being salt of the earth and light of the world.

I want to thank you for being messengers. I want to thank you for being part of the message of Christ and for your part in sharing his message about the beauty and goodness of marriage. It's one of the most important messages for our world and our culture to hear at this time. Thank you for doing your part so that others don't ever say, I never got that message.

For everyone else who is here for this special Eucharistic celebration, thank you for supporting these married couples who celebrate their anniversaries. Pay attention to them; do whatever they have been telling you about marriage. Even if it is not perfect in every way, the sacrament of marriage is certainly a path to perfection that builds up our families, our society, and our Church.

When they stand to renew their marriage vows, think about what it would be like if they never received the most important message about marriage or if they never passed it on to you.

Thanks be to God; they did receive that message and they are among us today and they continue to share it with others.