

Marriage today

Years ago, when I was going to primary school, it was common practice for the Bishop to come to the school and examine the children on their catechism before they were admitted to the sacrament of Confirmation. The catechism had a pat answer to every religious question under the Sun. On one such occasion one nervous little girl was asked 'what is marriage'. She got her answers completely mixed up and said: 'marriage is a place where some poor souls suffer for a time before they are released to go to heaven'. The Parish priest who was standing near the bishop seemed very embarrassed that one of his children didn't know the right answer. He shouted out: 'my child that is purgatory'. The bishop looked at him and said 'will you leave her alone, she could be right.

It is interesting to note from today's Gospel that Jesus performed his very first miracle at wedding. This is an indication of the high esteem with which he held it. The Catholic Church also places marriage high on its list of priorities - it is included as one of its seven sacraments. Marriage is a very significant moment in a person's life and should not be entered into lightly. Yet a number of people do precisely that.

I often say to engaged couples that some people marry '*at the church*' whilst others marry '*in the Church*'. There is a world of difference between the two. '*At the church*' means, at the building which becomes a kind of glorified register office. The church to them is a kind of sentimental building, not a believing community of which they are treasured part. '*In the church,*' on the other hand, means that the couple, or at least one of them, are already members of the believing community and their marriage is an extension of their Catholic Faith. He will accompany them on their life journey and be with them through the various ups and downs of married life.

The couple in today's gospel made sure to have Jesus and Mary among their wedding guests. If he is part of the couple's relationship, it will, metaphorically speaking, be like turning water into wine. A watery marriage without Jesus and Mary will be dull, insipid shallow. A wine filled marriage, on the other hand, will be spirit filled, colourful and life giving drawing the couple into a closer union with Christ, with each other, and their children.

Another interesting point about today's Gospel story is that Jesus saved the day for the couple at Cana. Much to their delight he not only changed the water into any old vintage but the very best of wine. With Jesus in your marriage you will have no second thoughts about your marriage - he will not let you down when the going gets tough. Even the strains and stresses of married life will be turned to your advantage.

We hear a lot of talk today about alternatives lifestyles, such as co-habitation or civil partnerships. There is a world of difference between a partner and a spouse. You could be a partner in crime. Some people even try and put them on the same level as Christian marriage which is nonsense. These lifestyles contravene the true nature of love and are alien to the design of the Creator.

At the end of the gospel today it says that 'Jesus let his glory be seen and the disciples believed in him'. Society today, more than ever, needs couples to let the glories of their marriage be seen so that others may believe and find fulfilment in a marriage based on the gospel.

Questions

1. *'Marriage is just a piece of paper. Discuss*
3. *Is 'living together' not a serious sin anymore which deters one from receiving Holy Communion? Discuss*
4. *There is talk about teaching five year olds sex education. Is this robbing them of their childhood and harmful in the long run? Discuss*
5. *The Government has set out guidelines for Social and Personal Education in all primary schools, often at loggerheads with catholic teaching. Should catholic schools fall in line and keep their head down? Discuss*
6. *If priests were married would they be better placed to understand married and family life today?*
7. *Some couples marry 'at' the church; others marry 'in' the Church. Discuss*
8. *How can the Church best help people when their marriage fails? Is it doing enough?*