

October 03, 2021
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gen 2:18-24
Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6
Heb 2:9-11
Mk 10:2-16 or 10:2-12

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES!

A newly ordained priest was about to perform his first wedding, and he was very nervous. So, he asked his pastor for help. The old monsignor told him everything he needed to know and then ended with some advice. **"Father,"** he said, **"if you get lost and can't think of what to say, quote Scripture. It's always safe, and you'll never go wrong."**

With that the young priest went off to the Church and did a fine job of conducting the wedding ... until the very end, that is, when he was to pray the solemn blessing over the bride and groom. At that crucial moment, with hand outstretched and every eye upon him, he froze. He couldn't find his place in the prayer book. His mind was a blank. He had no idea of what to say. Then he remembered the monsignor's advice: **if you get lost, quote scripture.** So he ended the wedding by quoting most solemnly the only verse he could remember, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."**

Kidding aside, let me give you some statistics about our parish regarding the sacraments we administered from July 2016 to June 2021 particularly on baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

	BAPTISM	WEDDING	FUNERAL
July 2016-June 2017	49	6	39
July 2017-June 2018	38	4	41
July 2018-June 2019	30	8	33
July 2019-June 2020	23	4	28
July 2020-June 2021	28	0	30
Total	168	22	171

80% of the **22 weddings** we had were Mainland couples. Only **20%** of the couples were locals. As regards the **168 kids who were baptized**, only **20%** of the parents of the kids were married in the Catholic Church and the rest were either civilly married or not married at all.

As a community of faith, the low numbers regarding the Sacrament of Marriage should trouble/disturb us. If we don't, then we will see along the way that marriage will be watered down into **mere human companionship** and **no longer a sacrament**. If that happens, the marriage of a man and a woman will come and go, like changing car, when one of the parties feel that he/she does not need the other anymore. The person's dignity is put in a level of a commodity, easy to dispose!

I do believe we don't want that to happen to the original plan of God regarding marriage. And so, we ask: **"What possible actions can we do to raise up the percentage of Catholic couples marrying in our Church? How can we encouraged them to embrace the Sacrament of Matrimony?** For couples married in the Catholic Church, **how can we help you strengthen your journey as husband and wife? How can we help you strengthen your faith as a family?"**

It is very important to strengthen the faith of the family starting with the husband and wife. **Why?** It is simply because the strength of the Church rests/stands on families – the domestic Church. Building a strong society and a compassionate Church begin in the family. This should be in the mind and heart of couples when they embrace the Sacrament of Marriage.

There are many reasons why Catholic couples are not inclined nowadays to embrace getting married in Church. Let me give you some of the reasons.

1. Some of them don't want to get married in Church because of the paper works and spiritual preparations like the **Engaged Encounter** prior to the "big day." They want it Las Vegas style. I remember a couple talked to me in front of the Church one afternoon and asking me to marry them that very day. I said, **"I would be happy to officiate your wedding. But, let me ask you – did you do your paper works already?"** They said, **"No, Father!"** I answered and said, **"Ok come to the office tomorrow and I will help you!"** After that conversation, I didn't see them anymore.

2. Others don't want to get married in Church because getting married in Church does not guarantee it will last long. One time I encouraged a young couple to be married in Church and this was the response I got, **"There is no need to be married in Church, Father. It is not a warranty for lasting relationship. My parents were married in Church and got**

divorced.” Hearing what she said, I responded: **“Are you a copycat of your parents? I am sure you are different from them, right?”** Marriage will last long when couples put Christ in the relationship from the very start. With Christ, the very foundation of the relationship, will help the couple withstand any trials that will come their way.

3. Some of them are hesitant to have their wedding in Church because they thought it is expensive. Not really! The sacrament is always free. It is only donation that is usually ask and it is minimal.

4. Others thought of the Church wedding as the **“Big Wedding!”** and outside of it as the **“Small Wedding.”** Couples would opt for “small wedding” to stay away from big crowd and make it simple. Again, this is a misconception about Church wedding. To be honest with you, the Church wedding can be as simple as the bride and the groom, at least two sponsors, and the officiating priest or deacon. What is important, after the spiritual preparations of the couple, is their willingness to commit themselves for each other thru thick and thin, for better or for worst, in sickness and in health plus the awareness to put Christ in their midst.

5. Some of them don’t see the difference between a **“Church wedding”** and a **“Beach or Garden wedding.”** They thought that both are the same anyway. Not really! For faithful Catholics marriage has a fundamental spiritual nature. It is a sacrament. The third person in the union between the man and the woman is God. Hence, it must be in a sacred place we call – Church.

The work to recapture marriage as a sacrament is really challenging/daunting. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to accomplish. Through God’s grace, we can recapture it through prayers, witnessing and teaching God’s original plan on marriage as spelled out in the 1st reading and the gospel proclaimed.

As we continue to offer this Mass, let us pray for all married couples to be always aware of the call to put God in their relationship and love each other as God loves them. May they always see the importance of having their covenant in Church.

God bless and stay safe!