

Thoughts from the Second Floor Front  
I Sunday of Lent  
March 10, 2019  
Matrimony – Part I

In second creation account in the Book of Genesis the author concludes with this passage:

*“This one, at last, is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
This one shall be called ‘woman,’  
for out of man this one has been taken.”  
That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one  
body.*

From the first moments of creation, evidently, the original intention by God is that women and men were made for each other. This is not just a matter of biological matching or necessity; it is the Divine plan. I often use that in a homily at a wedding. The assembled guests are witnessing the marriage and what they are perceiving, if they are paying attention for one must always pay attention to the Divine, they will recognize that the couple is collaborating with the creative power of God who is acting in the midst of the gathered assembly.

Over time there have been corruptions in the perception of what marriage is. The marital relationship is not based on dominance or pre-eminence. Some claim that male dominance is asserted in texts of the Bible. Anyone who uses Sacred Scripture as a club or a lever to gain dominance does as much damage to the Kingdom of God as the worst forces of evil. Because the liturgy speaks most clearly as to what the Church holds and teaches, the words of the celebration of the sacrament of Marriage reveal that superiority does not even enter into the dialogue. We’ve established the original intention of the Creator is making women and men for each other. However, a variety of forces in our contemporary society are attempting to redefine marriage as something not recognize in light of both Divine Law and Natural Law.

Natural Law is not popular today in large part because it demands one recognize objective reality not subjective notions given equal footing with universal truth. The moral relativism that is so common today has allowed subjectivity to have been raised to the point of being the ultimate measure of reality. The slippery slope of subjectivism leads to all sorts of problem. Have you ever heard someone say something along of the lines of: “Well, it’s true for me.” There are objective standards that supersede the supposed movable needle of truth. That objectivity exists in the sacrament of marriage.

St. Augustine is among the most influential theologians in the history of the church. In reflecting on matrimony, Augustine suggested that there are three *boni* – goods – in marriage that must be present in the relationship. Looking around at the Roman society in which he lived, Augustine saw that even pagans marry. What went into their relationships? The Bishop of Hippo posited that even pagans marry forever; so, permanence was a constitutive element of marriage. That is why it is tricky for a Catholic to engage in a pre-nuptial agreement. A “prenup,” as it is called, is a contractual arrangement to which both parties agree, so that in case of a divorce the property is split according to already agreed upon terms. A pre-nup is basically an implicit intention against permanence. Can you hear the conversation between the loving couple: “I love you honey, but sign this; in case the marriage goes south nobody gets hurt.”

The second *bonum* or good of marriage is fidelity. Again, Augustine looked around and saw that marriage is one man and one woman. That is the norm even for the pagans of Rome.

And finally, the third good is children. Before too long after the marriage begins children come along. And so the third good is and openness to life.

Augustine saw that Christian marriage was to be something different than pagan marriage; something more. When a soldier was enrolled in the Roman army he was branded on the forearm. In case he deserted he would always be recognized as a Roman soldier because of that branding – the *signum civilum* – the civil sign. Ah, says Augustine, we too have a sign, but it is not the civil sign, it is a *sacrum signum* – a sacred sign. That is what the couple become. Through their vows and their very bodies, they become the sacrament, the matter and the form. They are the sacred sign. They are recognized as husband and wife not because they can show the video of their wedding. They are recognized as husband and wife because they live the love that they announce for each other on their wedding day.

Next week we will take a look at the liturgy and see the beautiful and challenging words the Church uses to celebrate the sacrament of matrimony.

Faithfully,

Msgr. Diamond