

World Marriage Day

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Luke 6:17, 20-26

I was ordained in June 1999 and two months later a good friend of mine got married. The following spring, I got a phone call from him. He did not start the conversation with small talk, but rather, he followed my “Hello,” with, “Tom, do you see the irony in all of this?” I honestly had no idea what he was referring to so I remained silent. He continued in an angry voice, “You and I chose *radically* different paths in life and yet we’re both living celibate lives!”

As many of you already know, marriage can be very challenging. In fact, it is so challenging that about 50% of marriages in the United States end in divorce. While the divorce rate among Hispanic couples is significantly lower, many of them face extraordinary difficulties such as being separated from one another due to immigration laws. World Marriage Day and our Scripture readings today give us an opportunity to reflect on *where* happiness is found in the struggles that are inherent in the Sacrament of Marriage.

The New Testament makes it very clear that Jesus did not link joy with worldly prosperity, acceptance, power, or bodily health. Rather, His words and life intimately linked joy with difficulties, suffering and poverty. For example, Jesus stated, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39), and “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). In fact, even the Beatitudes that we heard in our Gospel reading today express the uniqueness of Jesus’ message about blessedness. The message of the world is, “Blessed are the rich,” but Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor.” The world states, “Blessed are the satisfied,” but Jesus says, “Blessed are the hungry.” The Beatitudes continue to remind us that happiness and blessings are found in the difficulties and struggles of life. Why is it this way?

Joy and happiness come from our finding *meaning* in any particular situation, whether the situation is enjoyable or difficult. *Meaning* ultimately comes from our using our faith. Faith is best exercised in the midst of struggles and difficulties. While Jesus never explicitly explained the joy of struggles in this way, His life and words definitely testified to the fact that struggles are opportunities for us to express our faith in God. When we exercise our faith in such situations, it brings us meaning, and therefore, joy and happiness.

Learning this important connection between struggles and authentic joy is not an easy lesson; nor is it a one-time event. This lesson, rather, must be learned over and over with each new struggle and difficulty because we tend to keep trying to find happiness in worldly pleasures and possessions, but God keeps giving us opportunities to experience faith, meaning, and joy in difficult situations.

A married couple once came to me for counseling after experiencing the pain of infidelity. They both wondered why the affair had happened and why God was allowing them to experience such pain. They both recognized that they had not loved one another as they needed to and that they needed help to work through their pain. As they prayerfully worked through the pain of infidelity, God gave the husband an opportunity to experience what it means to forgive as Christ forgives. God gave the wife an opportunity to experience the humility and vulnerability of needing to be forgiven. They began to experience, in a very real way, the scene from the Gospel of John, chapter 21, when Jesus forgives Peter for denying Him and invites him into a

deeper love and commitment. The married couple brought their faith in Jesus Christ to a very painful situation and found tremendous meaning and joy. What has often caused divorce in marriages actually brought this couple closer together because of their faith in Jesus Christ. While this does not mean that couples should go have affairs, it does remind us that faith transforms our struggles and makes us blessed. And, it reminds us that one of the reasons why God allows us to experience difficulties and struggles in our lives is because there is no better place for us to demonstrate our faith and to grow deeper in faith.

Sickness, betrayal, accidents, money problems, rejection, being made fun of—these things make us blessed, because in them we exercise our faith in Christ. They make us more like Christ, who saved us by suffering all these things Himself. Marriage, like every vocation, is an opportunity for people to be blessed through the faith they bring to their struggles and problems. Let's pray that our celebration of this Mass and our celebration of World Marriage Day will increase our faith and bring new meaning and joy to our lives!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read John 2:1-11. The newly-married couple at Cana was in a bad and embarrassing situation—they had run out of wine. What difficult situation are you in right now in your vocation? How does Jesus want to show you His love in the midst of your painful situation? In what ways are you being invited to grow in faith because of the situation?

- ✚ Re-write the Beatitudes in your own words and make them specific to your vocation. In what ironic ways have you experienced being “blessed” despite the struggles and difficulties you’ve been through?