

**Homily for the Mass for
Couples Married 50 Years or More**

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B
September 23, 2018**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass for Couples Married Fifty Years or More. Your fidelity to one another for more than half of a century is a powerful witness to the entire Church of the beauty of the vocation of matrimony.

By way of introduction, you might appreciate this story. The lifelong ambition of a dedicated amateur golfer was to play a famous, oceanside hole just like professional golfers who drive the ball out over the water toward the green that jutted out into the sea on a small piece of land. He spent much time and money trying – unsuccessfully – to realize this ambition. Time and time again he sent his ball soaring out over the water, only to have it fall short, plopping into the surf. Long ago he had decided not to waste a brand-new ball on the hole any longer, always using, instead, one with a cut or a scuff. Until one time upon arriving again at his dream hole, he teed up a

battered old ball and whispered a fervent prayer. Just before he hit, a booming voice from the heavens said; “Wait! Replace that old ball with a brand new one.” While he was uncertain, the man did it, encouraged that the Lord seemed to be implying that his long-deferred ambition was finally going to be fulfilled. As he addressed the ball, the voice came again: “Wait! Step back. Take a practice swing.” He took his typical practice swing. The voice boomed yet again: “Take another practice swing.” He did. After a dramatic pause, the voice spoke again: “Put the old ball back!”

While the voice of the supposed “God” in this humorous story might appear to be somewhat heartless in deflating the golfer’s ambition, it gives us insight into what our Lord might have been feeling in the Gospel passage we heard just a few moments ago. In today’s Gospel, it is quite evident that our Lord is not amused with the ambition displayed by his disciples in the slightest. In fact, His rebuke is immediate and stern. He makes it clear that their soaring dream of honor needs to be brought down to earth; and fast.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it seems that the disciples may have missed the point that following our Lord inevitably involves both suffering and service, which ultimately leaves no room for pretension or self-promotion. In light of this realization, the question that we must ask ourselves is: Do we truly understand what being disciples of our Lord

demands of us? Or do we, like the disciples in today's reading, get distracted by worldly honors rather than focusing on the eternal honor of everlasting life?

Those of us who are gathered here today need to look no further than the couples in our midst who have been married fifty or more years for an example of the sort of self-sacrifice for the good of others to which our Lord calls us as His disciples. Throughout the half of a century or more that these husbands and wives have been married, time and again they have been called to set aside their own personal interests for the sake of their spouse as well as their family. In doing so, they have also learned to serve those around them as well.

Following up on our Fourth Diocesan Synod that was held last year on the theme of discipleship and stewardship, I recently published my third pastoral letter, *Ars vivendi et moriendi in Dei gratia*, Latin for, *The Art of Living and Dying in God's Grace*. In one portion of the pastoral letter, I reflect on marriage and family life as one of the key aspects in the traditional Catholic approach to the art of living and dying in God's grace, as described by Saint Robert Bellarmine in his book, *The Art of Dying Well*. In this work, Saint Robert Bellarmine does not give much attention to the physical circumstances surrounding one's death, but rather, he emphasizes the moral

condition of a person's soul at the moment of death. This can be seen in the seventeen rules that Saint Robert Bellarmine says are to be observed in the art of dying well.

Most fitting for our celebration today, one of the seventeen rules emphasizes the importance of loving one's spouse and children as an integral part of the life of the faithful. More specifically, he says that there are "three blessings arising from Matrimony, if it is used well: children, fidelity, and the grace of the sacrament."¹ These blessings will help one to live well so as to die well.

The sessions of our Diocesan Synod took place over a period of several months, and in between sessions a parishioner asked to see me. He said that he was happy that we were holding a synod on discipleship since he had been striving for years to become a more dedicated follower of the Lord. He told me of an insight he had as a result of dealing with some marital problems several years ago. He said that as he tried to figure out what was going wrong with their marriage, he came to the conclusion that he "loved his wife too much." Now, if you are scratching your head as I was, wondering how he could love his wife too much, he explained it this way: he said that he realized that he loved his wife more than God; in fact, he said she was his goddess. The problem with making your spouse a god or

goddess is that a deity is expected to be perfect, so when you discover your spouse is not perfect, of course you will be disappointed! He said their marriage improved when they put things in perspective, making sure that God came first, and everything else came after that, including their love for each other. The key is to make sure that God is your divine Lord and remember that the love you share comes from Him.

As we reflect upon the great gift of the sacrament of Matrimony and the place it holds in our living as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today, let us ask our Lord to strengthen the resolve of these couples to fulfil His call for them to serve each other and all of those around them.

To you, dear married couples whom we honor today, I invite you to continue to teach others what it means give of yourself to those around you through the example of your lives. If you do, you will most certainly help others to do the same and lead them to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Christ's disciple today.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ St. Robert Bellarmine, *The Art of Dying Well*, p. 114.