

Mass for Couples Married 50+ Years

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

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Towers ... they are built to *shield* and to *signify*. A fortress, a lookout tower, or a stronghold *shields* the inhabitants of that city or village from attack. A monument, obelisk, or steeple *signifies* a historical event or figure, or the presence of God in a Church, to all that see it. But, as Our Lord describes in today's Gospel, with inadequate or insufficient materials, one does not get a tower, but either a flimsy building that would fall over at the first wind, much less withstand a dedicated assault, or a partially constructed structure that cannot indicate anything, much less signify some great event or person. Perhaps most of us have not constructed a fortress or monument recently ... but Jesus uses this image today to speak of *discipleship*, specifically the *relationships* that His disciples have.

Whoever “does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children ... even his own life ... cannot be my disciple”.

These words hurt. Jesus seems to ask us to jettison everything we hold most dear in the world: our parents, spouses, children, even lives. Must the disciple repudiate all of that?! Christ offers the image of a tower to explain this puzzling demand: like a tower, if our relationships are constructed without the proper materials, or upon inadequate foundations, *they will fail*. God made each and every one of us in His own image; we *are* meant for community, relationship, and friendship. We image the Trinity by being parents, spouses, and children, and our very lives are a great and glorious participation in His life! So why does Jesus require us to “hate” all that?! ... Because *if we do not love Him first, we not only lose everything else – not only does the tower fall – but all those other relationships become an anti-Gospel, a broken icon of God’s love – they signify the opposite of Divine Love.*

That word “hate,” *misei* in Luke’s Greek, does not indicate an affective shaming or denunciation of someone, but refers to the willed *choice* to not put them before God in our lives. The truth is, *we are building a tower, we are choosing someone or something to give ourselves to, and our decisions put into*

action who or what we decide to love most. If that someone is not God, every other relationship will collapse before the assaults of Satan and the storms of the world, and even more insidiously, they will also fail to signify to the world the divine love that our lives are meant to symbolize.

In this regard, I recall a conversation with a lay man who told me how he had been challenged by an evangelical Christian friend some years ago as to whether he truly accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Although he went to Mass every Sunday, contributed financially to the support of his parish and lived according to the moral teachings of the Church, he had to admit that he had not placed Christ above everyone and everything else in his life. In fact, he had been experiencing some marital problems because, as he put it, he loved his wife too much. Anticipating that I would ask how it is possible to love your spouse too much, he explained that he had loved his wife more than God. The problem with making your spouse into a deity is that gods are expected to be perfect, and when the spouse whom you expect to be perfect turns out not to possess the perfection you were seeking, the relationship starts to go sour. The solution for this man was to make Jesus Christ the sovereign Master and Lord of his life, to put his relationship with

his wife into that proper perspective. He could still love his wife intensely, but only secondarily to his love for God.

The key to understanding this lesson is that we are all created to love God, and if we turn to someone or something else to fulfil that kind of love, we will come away empty, and we will probably inflict injury upon them in the process. No human person can fill the hole that exists in our heart for God's presence, *but*, if we choose God first, then our hearts are molded and shaped to properly love those that He has entrusted to our care and our charity. It is by loving Christ above *everything*, and *everyone*, that we *can* construct the human relationships that will shield us from sin and signify the victory of divine love in our lives.

In today's Gospel, after speaking such challenging words on the proper love of persons in the disciple's life, Christ also speaks of our loves in situations, and for things, and His words remain demanding:

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

"whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

This same truth applies to all of us. If we avoid the cross that confronts us in our day-to-day life, seeking ephemeral peace and success rather than

the duties and responsibilities that come with following God, we will lose our peace – our lives will crumble – and with it our evident discipleship. The same also applies to possessions. If we allow them to consume our time, money, and attention, they will enslave us – bringing down the tower of our lives – and draw us away from the witness we are called to give of reliance on God in everything.

But today we keep our focus on relationships because we celebrate today the spousal relationships exemplified by all of you who celebrate 50 or more years of married love. It is not ironic, but incredibly providential, that Our Lord's words speak directly to you today because your marriages would not have survived, much less continued, to sacramentalize the fidelity and fecundity of God's love for all those years if your love had not first been founded on God's love, and then repeatedly renewed by love of God. Your marriages *have* shielded and signified that choice of God first, and your lives together are the testament, the *tower*, built upon those foundations.

Today, it is with great joy and gratitude that we join in prayer and praise to God, as you once again entrust your spouses, and the bond you share, to His grace and providence. Choose today, again, to love God first,

and know that He will never fail to support and sustain that life you continue to build together.

May God give us this grace. Amen.