

February 14, 2010

The second Sunday of February is celebrated by many as “World Marriage Day.” This takes on extra significance as Sunday is also Valentine’s Day.

Frequently, Pope John Paul II reminded us that the future of humanity depends on marriage and the family. What a wonderful witness married couples are to God’s love for all people and Christ’s love for His Church!

I was very blessed by the example of my parents who were married for 67 years when they died in 2002, just three and one-half months apart. Through their constant love for each other and their love for myself and my two sisters, they witnessed God’s love for us. Deeply anchored in their faith and love of God, they were always there for each other and for us children in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. While never rich in material goods, they were happy and modeled for us where a deep inner contentment is found.

Marriage is not an institution created by the state. God is the author of marriage, an exclusive and permanent relationship between one man and one woman, established by their mutual consent, and ordered toward their own good and the procreation and education of children.

Jesus raised marriage between two baptized persons to the dignity of a sacrament. Through their total, exclusive, and permanent love for one another, husband and wife are signs of Christ’s total self-gift of love for the Church. When a Christian couple enters into the Sacrament of Matrimony, Jesus dwells with them as a silent third party. He gives them strength to be faithful to each other and to their family even as challenges and crosses enter into their lives.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, husbands and wives are able to overcome selfishness and habitually extend courtesies of love to each other and to their

children. They are able to forgive one another and grow in love and respect for each other until death.

How edifying it was for my sisters and I to observe our dad sitting all day, every day, in the convalescent home with our mom during the last couple years of her life. He had no other desire than to be by her side. What an expression of selfless love!

By the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, husband and wife participate in the Trinitarian life of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit give themselves entirely to one another in a life-giving exchange of love. Our one God is the loving inter-relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Husband and wife live in the life and love of the Trinity and reflect that life and love through their own union.

It is the very nature of love to overflow, to be life-giving. So it is that married love is ordered to the procreation and education of children. As God said to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Children are the supreme gift of marriage. Through sexual union, husband and wife participate in the ongoing creative activity of God. They witness to the self-emptying and self-giving love of God.

The Second Vatican Council refers to the family as the “domestic church” because it is a community of faith, hope, and love, just as the Church is such community. Mothers and fathers are the first teachers of virtues to their children. They are the first to teach faith and show by their example how to pray and obey God’s commandments.

As we celebrate “World Marriage Day,” I would like to express gratitude to our wonderful couples throughout the diocese who give such powerful witness to God’s love for His people and Jesus’ love for His Church. Through Baptism, we

are all called to live in the life and love of the Lord and share that love with one another. Who better than devoted husbands and wives witness to God's self-giving love to each other and to their children on a day-to-day basis? I reflect upon that every time I administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. In our parishes and schools, we simply try to reinforce the values that are best taught by word and example in the domestic church of the home.

I take this occasion to call to your attention a resource for many more reflections upon marriage and the family. I invite you to connect with foryourmarriage.org on the Web site of the U.S. bishops.