

May 2, 2010

At four o'clock on Saturday afternoon at Holy Angels Cathedral, I will celebrate God's love as reflected in the marriages of 20 couples who are observing their 25th anniversary of matrimony this year, 42 couples who are observing their Golden Jubilees, and 51 who are celebrating more than 50 years of marriage. This is one of the most joyous celebrations of the year.

While I will preach a homily, the lives of these couples speak louder and stronger than my words. Their nuptial relationship of intimacy, fidelity, and permanence speaks to their children and grandchildren, neighbors and friends about God's love for us and Christ's love for the Church.

In the Gospel for this weekend's Masses, we hear Jesus' very moving words to the apostles at the Last Supper before He leaves the Upper Room to suffer His agony in the garden: "I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

Jesus' words, addressed to all of us who are His disciples, are not easy to observe especially in our society characterized so much by individualism and self-interest, a "me-first" attitude. How countercultural was Jesus' love! He loved us totally and selflessly, even giving His very life for us on the cross. Only with God's help and with the strength that comes from prayer and the sacraments can we overcome our inclinations to satisfy our immediate desires before the needs of others, our temptations to ignore the feelings of others.

When a man and woman exchange their marriage vows, they do so before Christ and His Church with the sure knowledge that Jesus will be present in their

union and bless them with the divine bond of Love. Conscious of their own weakness, they know that Jesus will pour out His Holy Spirit upon them through the Sacrament of Marriage. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus will strengthen, heal, and nurture their union in such a way that they can overcome selfish inclinations and be a sign to their children and to others of God's enduring love. For that reason, we call the family begun with holy marriage a domestic church.

The family witnesses to the presence of the Lord in the union of spouses and children. The grace of this sacrament enables husband and wife to grow in unity until death and to bear good fruit in their children. The power of the Holy Spirit enables the couple and their family to transcend the limits of their home in radiating the love of God within the Church and society.

Prayer within the home and the participation as family at the Sunday Eucharist intensifies the identity of the family and strengthens each member to witness to God's love in the larger community.

Frequently in my Confirmation homilies, I urge our young people to live the commandment of love as given us by Jesus at the Last Supper. I remind them that the Holy Spirit comes to them in the Sacrament of Confirmation to empower them to overcome selfishness and self-centeredness to love as Jesus loves us. I often encourage them to draw upon the witness of their parents who day after day put their self-interests behind them in order to do what is in their children's best interest.

Our Church and our society in Northwest Indiana are deeply blessed by the witness and ministry of very dedicated married couples. I invite your prayers for all married couples that their mutual self-giving love might continue to inspire us all. I also encourage those contemplating the vocation of marriage to approach

their parishes now to begin the process of preparation which can enrich their lives, the Church, and society.